

Myth #4 Orpheus and Eurydice

Name _____

READ CLOSELY AND SHOW EVIDENCE OF THINKING BY ANNOTATING. Annotate all readings by highlighting the main idea in yellow; the best evidence supporting in blue, and any interesting phrases in green.

As it is only fitting, Orpheus, “the father of songs” and the supreme musician in Greek mythology, was the son of one of the Muses, generally said to be Calliope, by either Apollo or the Thracian king Oeagrus. Be that as it may, we know for sure that Orpheus got a golden lyre as a gift from Apollo when just a child, and that it was the god who taught him how to play it in such a beautiful manner. Moreover, his mother showed him how to add verses to the music, and his eight aunts how to polish them to perfection, in every style known to man. So, when Orpheus was a young man, as Shakespeare writes, his “golden touch could soften steel and stones, make tigers tame, and huge leviathans forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.” Loved by many, this young man loved only the beautiful Eurydice; and she loved him back. This is the story of their tragic love.

The Death of Eurydice

Soon after the marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice, Eurydice died of a snake bite. Different authors tell different stories as to what led to the fatal encounter. According to the most repeated story, Eurydice fell into a serpent nest after trying to escape from a certain Aristaeus, a shepherd who began to chase her through the forest as soon as he laid his eyes upon her otherworldly beauty. Others, however, say that this Aristaeus didn't even exist and that Eurydice was merely strolling through the woods with the Naiads when a serpent sunk its poisonous teeth in her soft ankle. In any case, Eurydice died instantly, and her soul descended into the Underworld.

Orpheus' Descent into Hades

Orpheus Leaves the Earth

When Orpheus found Eurydice's body, he so mourned her death that, as Ovid says, he “filled the highs of heaven with the moans of his lament.” His grief-stricken song touched the gods and the nymphs so much, that some of them – possibly Apollo himself – not only suggested that he should go into the kingdom of the dead and ask back for the soul of his wife but also gave him some tips on how to reach safely its rulers, Hades and Persephone. Upon finding of this possibility, Orpheus immediately headed to Taenarum in Laconia, where he passed through one of the few earthly entrances to the Underworld. And as soon as he got there, he began to sing this song:

Orpheus' Song in the Underworld

“O deities of this dark world beneath the earth, I come not down here because of curiosity to see the glooms of Tartarus: I have come, because my darling wife stepped on a viper that sent through her veins death-poison, cutting off her coming years. You may not know Love down here, but I do: by this Place of Fear, this huge void and these vast and silent realms, renew the life-thread of my loving Eurydice! After all, one day, when grey and old and full of age, she shall be yours yet again and

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forevermore. All I ask of you is just a few years of her life as a boon. But if the fates deny to me this prayer, then I do not want to go back, and may you triumph in the death of two!"

The Effect of Orpheus' Song

Orpheus' song charmed the hearts of both Charon and Cerberus to such an extent that they allowed the poet to enter the abode of Hades and Persephone, without even worrying about the possible consequences. Needless to add, they weren't the only ones touched by Orpheus' dirge. It is said that the bloodless ghosts themselves started weeping and that Tantalus forgot all about his thirst and hunger; the Danaids ceased filling their pitchers with water, and Sisyphus could be seen sitting idly on his stone; and even the unconscious and inanimate objects were moved, so the vultures broke off eating Tityus' liver and the wheel of Ixion suddenly stopped turning, standing wonder-bound in place. And then, for the first time in all of known history, the cheeks of the Erinnyes were wet with tears. Fortunately for Orpheus, Hades and Persephone were moved to tears as well. And they couldn't bear to refuse his pleas, allowing Orpheus to take Eurydice with him back to earth on one condition only: that he should not look back at her until both of them regain the light of the sun.

Orpheus Loses Eurydice

Now, this wasn't an easy task. You see, Orpheus knew full well that no man was ever allowed to visit the Underworld twice and he was now on his way out of it. Furthermore, he hadn't seen Eurydice not once, and he didn't even know whether she was following him at all; he had to take Hades' word for it. So, as he was nearing the exit of the realm of the dead, in fear that he might once again lose his wife and anxious for a single look, Orpheus turned his eyes so he could gaze upon Eurydice. Almost immediately she slipped away, and the air was all Orpheus could feel between his arms as he stretched them out, eager to embrace and rescue the love of his life. A moment later, the walls of the Underworld echoed a whispered and sorrowful "farewell" – and then there was only silence and despair.

The Death of Orpheus

Orpheus tried to go back, but this time, not even his singing could soothe Charon, the infernal boatman. For seven days Orpheus sat at the bank of the river Styx, nourished only by his grief and tears until he became all but a voiceless skeleton. Finally, he wandered back to earth, and for the next three days, he roamed his homeland, shunning all women and spending all of his time with the young men of Thrace. It was probably because of this that the Thracian women or the Maenads, resenting Orpheus for his fidelity to the ghost of Eurydice, tore him to pieces during one of their frenzied ceremonies. The Muses gathered his limbs and buried them in Pieria; the nightingales were said to sing more beautifully upon his grave than on any place in all of Greece. They couldn't find his head though: the Maenads had previously thrown it into the river Hebrus, where it went on singing while floating down the stream, until the islanders of Lesbos found it and buried it. It is said that this was the reason why so many poets were born there during the following few centuries. Not much is said about Orpheus' shade; however, not few – and we certainly among them – would like to believe that it reunited with the shade of Eurydice in the Underworld. Because love conquers all; even death.

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WRITE A REFLECTION (3 paragraphs-5 sentences each)-This needs to be submitted through google classroom.

One paragraph that reflects on what the writer said

- Here's where you summarize the main points of the story

One paragraph that reflects on the writer's style

- How does the author use rhetorical devices (similes, metaphors, symbols etc.)
- What is the theme/author's message

One paragraph that reflects the reader's thoughts on the content of the Story

- Here's where you can discuss your reaction to the story, did it speak to you? Did you like it, why or why not?
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