**\* *The Orphan in the Dark* \***

***[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/che_puro_ciel.mp3)***

♫

***Poems of Orpheus***

***by***

***Arthur Chapin***

*I am the body of elegy*

*Shot through with little lyric wounds.*

*I am the way the music sounds*

*When love bleeds in its native key.*

***[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/faure_elegy2.mp3)***

♫

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***The Orphan in the Dark***

Who am I? Open up the book.

I am the orphan in the dark

Lamenting, cupping my one spark.

How could I help but turn and look?

*Eurydice*, breathes through the cave.

An echo. A hiss. I grope my way

Back up into the light of day.

There, in the meadow, is her grave.

There, the immortal snake that bit her

Days, weeks, or was it years ago?

*Eurydice*, whispers the low

Wind in the grass, so cool, so bitter.

I lay flowers on her grave, and then

I rest. I look up at the sky.

I sleep, till I hear the wind sigh:

*It is time to go down again*.

*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/seikilos.mp3)*

♫

***The Sacrament of Song***

In the woods, in the forest of

My music, ancient animals

Move. I coax from their cries and calls

The hidden harmony I love:

The active quiet of bees humming,

The rest that is the heaving, grave

Sleep of the bear inside his cave,

Those little feet on leaves snare-drumming…

These creatures, ignorant and strong:

I lure them from their shrieks and howls

Through measured consonants and vowels

Into the sacrament of song.

I build long staves across their listening

Haunted by owls that dream of trees

That dream of owls. I fill the breeze

With little eighth-notes, blackly glistening.

I make a clearing for the moon

To see alive the struggling wood

In motives snarled, and call it good,

Because it lives inside a tune.

They are still wild as wind and fire.

The fang gleams, and the eyes glow red.

But with my music they are fed.

They quiver when I touch my lyre.

***The Young Thracian***

This is the burden of the song

   That is the poem *Orpheus*,

   The poem of Orpheus. What it does

It is. In darkness it is strong.

O red-haired, beautiful young Thracian,

  You harrow with such gentle shocks

  Of sound, you levitate the rocks

In metamorphic trance-formation!



***Instant Myth***

Running through the meadow

she startles a snake

and in a lightning-strike

he comes out of the  cave

eyes black with the dazzle

of her vanishing.

***Hermes Psychopompos***

***Shepherd of the Dead***

Cover her eyes. Steal past the dead—their souls

Are still awake—she must not see them—no,

Not yet… They are so weak, their shadows throw

Them on the walls, they have the eyes of moles.

Follow that winding strip—that frozen whirl—

Down to where magma forms a bubbling sod.

Let her trust gravity: it serves the god.

He dwells down there. That heavy heart… Poor girl.

Is that a distant echo? *Daughter, daughter!*

Now on her cheek she thinks she feels a breath.

*Come, I will bathe you in the cool, still water.*

It walks beside her now. Her heart is sad. Oh

Open her eyes, god, she must see the Shadow!

It reaches out for her. It is her death.!

******

*****His Grand Recital on the Harp***

It is your audience with the King.

  No one alive has seen Hades

  But you. Play him your melodies.

Let there be no more vanishing!

One long, thin finger seems to wear

  A ring of smoldering almandine.

  His crown is a penumbra. Fine

Bone-powder whitens his gray hair.

His throne? A sort of solid smoke.

  Next to him: Queen Persephone.

  Her face is chiseled ebony.

She is wrapped in a shadow-cloak.

How shall your music charm this Head

  That is a pale cloud in the darkness

  Around you? Glooms of rocky starkness

Speak Death. His ring glows Hell-fire red.

Evoke for him the Revelry,

The dancing of young, nimble feet,

A blue sky and the summer’s heat

Fanned by a soft breeze from the sea.

That glimmering figment of a head

  Is bowed, and down it seems to sink

  In thoughts it swore it would not think

Again. Memories of the dead

Meadows, green spots where once he dallied

  With nymphs long-gone, the fountains muddy

  Now… From the brown to the black study

His heart is moved. His face is pallid.

He would cry out, but, short of breath,

  He wheezes as he grants the boon:

*You, you will sing a different tune*

*To see her die another death.*

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/monteverdi_lasciate2.mp3)

♫

***The City of Dis***

They’re waiting for you

anywhere night vision's poor,

swindles of perception,

optical disillusionments.

Dis: city of deprivatives,

insults, assaults. A puncture

is worth a thousand words.

Retrofit your lyre with trigger and barrel.

Walk fast, shoulders

hunched looking crazy

and mean.  Ignore the blurt

of a car horn, the squealing wheels,

that gaseous burp wobbling

the manhole cover on

its rim, the down-and-outer

in the cubbyhole sucking

brain damage from a paper bag.

Glide along the wall

like moonlight. Good.

Descend.

(Should you go back the way you came,

up the subway stairs?) Someone’s

stepping out of the shadows. Look!

She disappears.

***Orpheus Insufferable***

They’re breathless with excitement! I live up

To my distinguished reputation, filling

Their ears with *melos*, brimming each dry cup.

I am a touring star. I get top billing.

One soft arpeggio… There they are, reliving

Trysts under willow trees in summer’s heat.

They weep, and (ah, the dead can be so giving!)

They lay flowers—wilted flowers—at my feet.

These are the scales I practice on the heart.

Ghosts rise to meet the notes like grass in meadows:

I mow straight through them with a keen C sharp.

It is my Grand Recital on the Harp

That wins the prize: The Emperor of Shadows

Will pin her like a ribbon to my art.

*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/monteverdi_orfeo_ecco_pur.mp3)*

♫

***Eurydice Incensed***

*Having passed the shadowy audition with flying*

*Coloratura singing and eloquent harping*

*On themes so dear to the departed—Grieving*

*In springtime—Death on the eve of the white wedding—*

*Daguerreotypes of dazzled faces fading—giving*

*Them ears composed of nothing but a listening—*

*Leading me stumbling up a mineshaft twisting*

*Toward that pin-hole radiance thronged with the living,*

*You turn, and I am that startled vanishing*

*You needed to sculpt a frieze of pure departing—*

*A soft, defeated cry stonily echoing*

*Into the tragic poem of your regretting*

*It wasn’t to see my face—Or to see me going—*

*Or gone—It was to turn—It was the turning:*

*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/gluck_dance_of_furies.mp3)*[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/mahler_1st_symphony_boulez.mp3)***Rilke: Credo***

♫

Let *things felt* be your credo, not mere feeling.

Look, always look… Be calm with Pain and Pleasure:

*Your destiny is buttress, vault and ceiling.*

*Squeeze into silence under massive pressure.*

*Spread through these stained-glass shapes, be the still bliss*

*In martyrs’ eyes when sunbeams bruise them; coil*

*Your tumult deep inside the wafer’s kiss,*

*The cool, chromatic sheen on chrism oil—*

Fling yourself out now, in convulsive waves,

And find, in Orpheus, your mouth, your breath.

Float down the river of a song no staves

Can hold—the one whole note that rings through death

And grows so vast and palpable and round

Earth dwells entirely in that single sound.

***Rilke: Château de Muzot, 1922***

It ripens to its hour; I will be spent.

I never knew that it would feel so light,

This strength the Angel gives me. You were meant

For *this*, he says. And I stand up and write.

Hearts hinder, hearths hold back… Geese-haunted skies,

O orphaned spaces shivering! Can a breath

Husband the share of all departing cries,

Bless each thing with the shape of its own death?

My tower is vigil. Patience makes me rich.

Let statesmen dig excuses from the rubble

They made. They boast of peace. There will be trouble.

America floods the emptiness with kitsch—

But our dead still belong to us. Soon Europe

Will taste its harvest: that dark, Orphic syrup.

***Traveler’s Round***

First, source. Then river. Then the vast

Salt sea. Sunlight and rain, halfway

Between the earth and heaven, play

A rainbow. Beauty cannot last.

Born of an urge to tell us why

It needed to be born, to mean

The dawn, the poem becomes the scene

In which the god begins to die.

Beginning softly, the notes wend

Their way to a climactic middle.

Like the solution of a riddle

They find a path to reach the end.

Overture to the eternity

Where changes end, the tune, nel mezzo,

Learns it was always intermezzo

And this is its finality.

Open the curtains of the rose:

There, at the center: the red heart.

You hear a mournful music start;

A voice sobs, and the curtains close.

Prelude to noontide in the valley,

Unscorched by the meridian,

The earliest aubade is wan

With thoughts of the long grey finale.

First sea, then river, across vast

Distances traveling home. Halfway,

A lake. Sunbeams on water play.

The source, high in the hills, comes last.

**

*****The River of Glass***

1.

The river leaves so much behind.

It cares not to recall its source.

Would you reverse the river’s course?

Then you must change the water’s mind.

The water can be soothed, and hear

The music that is Orpheus.

Then it is vulnerable, thus

You find the water’s inner ear.

2. *The Moving Picture of the River*

Narcissus loves it as his mirror.

His dream would be to glide along

His beauty and hear its silent song

Of praise. If he could but draw nearer!

If only he could kiss his face,

And not its image! But it slips

Away, or twists its ghostly lips,

A blurred and agitated trace.

3. *The Frozen Picture of the Water*

Now comes the moment of arrest.

A standing still, as of a glacier,

When the calm water ever-glassier

Congeals around the thought of rest.

A white opacity prevails.

Narcissus cannot see his face.

The mirror has become a place.

Resemblance is a power that fails.

He would not, but he shall stay put.

The water is solid, a base metal.

The screw is turning and the treadle

Thumping beneath a heavy foot.

Ghosts bent into the shape of a

Question mark; others, gusts of wind.

The ghastly little thing that grinned.

The walking ghost that lost its way.

The dervish ghost, his Dance of Death.

How witches in the garden caught

By witches’ globes bemoan their lot!

The scryer of water underneath

The water sees the angry dancer

But cannot call him from a Sleep

As restless as the sea is deep:

He is the question, not the answer.

Who am I? Asks the man. A ghost.

Now the ghost knows it was a man.

Narcissus from his bronze self can

Be freed. I gather in the lost.

4.

The river rages in its force.

I give the water a key, a measure.

The Song in all her steadying pressure

Reaches down from her mountain source

And calls the river. Up she gathers

The waters all into the song

She is singing, *It Will Not Be Long.*

The trees that guard her are the Fathers.

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/reverie.mp3)

***Head of Orpheus on the Water***

******

Be the note you sing.

Echo of the rising waters.

How the sea’s premonition sounds.

Sing where you will be

with the voice of where you were.

Essential now,

teach the water what the water is:

a rashness lost and retrieved

in the mirrors of its motion.

Your voice is bodiless honey

afloat on a buoyancy

that is not hope.

Become the river.

Relax into your delta flats,

develop your intricate metaphors

for a vastness that swallows all qualities.

After the final cadence

your song will sleep in the arms of singing

and the moon’s over the ocean O!

***Passing Through***

I see an image, yes, it must

  Be Orpheus: He stands before

  A mirror, as upon a shore.

He aims to charm the King of Dust.

He passes through the liquid glass

  And down into the shadows goes

  Where echoes of an otiose

Palaver of ghosts, *Why?* and *Alas!,*

Play off the empty space where should

  Be walls of what is really nowhere.

*Come to me, husband!* Lower and lower

Past stream of blood and mournful wood.

He has gone through the watery glass.

   The glassy waters barely wobble,

   They know so well by now the trouble

Passing, how it will never pass.

***♫***

[](http://inmemoriamc33.com/asilo.mp)

***Musical Selections***

**Page 2**

Fauré, *Elegy*. Gregor Piatigorsky, cello. Unnamed orchestra.

**Page 4**

*The Song of Seikilos*. The Atrium Musicae de Madrid directed by Gregorio Paniagua.

**Page 10**

Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Act I. *Lasciate i monti*. English Baroque Soloists. John Eliot

Gardiner, conductor.

***Chorus of Nymphs***

***and Shepherds***

Come down from the hills,  
come down from the springs ,  
Nymphs so comely and glad,  
and in these meadows  
in wonted dances  
let your fair feet rejoice.

Here shall the sun   
behold your measures   
lovelier far than those   
danced to the moon  
in the dead of night   
by the stars in the sky.

***Ritornello***

Come down from the hills,  
come down from the springs ,  
Nymphs so comely and glad,  
and in these meadows  
in wonted dances  
let your fair feet rejoice.

Then with fair flowers  
crown the heads

of these lovers,   
who after the torment  
of their longing.  
are happy at last.

***Coro di Ninfe e Pastori***

Lasciate i monti,  
Lasciate i fonti,  
Ninfe vezzose e liete  
E in questi prati  
Ai balli usati  
Vago il bel piè rendete.

Qui miri il sole  
Vostre carole,  
Più vaghe assai di quelle  
Ond'alla luna,  
La notte bruna,  
Danzano in ciel le stelle.

***Ritornello***

Lasciate i monti,  
Lasciate i fonti,  
Ninfe vezzose e liete  
E in questi prati  
Ai balli usati  
Vago il bel piè rendete.

Poi di bei fiori  
Per voi s'onori

Di questi amanti il crine,  
Ch'or dei martiri  
Dei lor desiri  
Godon beati al fine.

**Page 12**

Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Act II, Sinfonia: “Ecco pur ch’a voi ritorno.” English Baroque

Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner, conductor.

*Orfeo:*

Ecco pur ch’a voi ritorno,

Care selve e piagge amate,

Da quel Sol fatte beate,

Per cui sol mie notti han giorno.

*Orpheus:*

Here I return to you,

Dear forests and beloved meadows,

Blessed by that very Sun

Through whom alone my nights are day.

Trans. Gilbert Blin

**Page 13**

Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Act II, Scene I: “Dance of the Furies.” Choir and Orchestra

of the Vienna State Opera, Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor.

**Page 22**

Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Act II, Scene I: *Quest’ asilo.* Choir and Orchestra

of the Vienna State Opera, Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor.

*Eurydice and Chorus*:

E’ quest’ asilo ameno e grato del riposo il terren, è il soggiorno ridente beato del sommo

ben; non ingombra l’alma sicura pura, l’aura tranquilla gira, spira la calma piacere nel sen;

e dell’anima il dolore muore fuggendo il casto terren!

These fields are a haven of lovely and grateful rest, here repose the blithe spirits blessed

by the highest good, tranquil breezes play, passions are quieted in the soul, and all grief

dies, fleeing from the undefiled terrain.

Trans. Charles Harmon