

The following is an attempt at a literal translation of Orpheus In The Underworld undertaken by Donald W. Shirley and Manuel Komropp. They apologize for the awkward sentence structure.

BAND 1

Once long ago, there lived a youth named Orpheus. The Gods loved Orpheus so much that they endowed him with two gifts: the gift of poetry and the gift of music. And the great God Apollo gave him a golden lyre.

Orpheus sang and played with such perfection that he cast an enchantment over everything about him. So moving were his songs and the music of his lyre that he even charmed the hard rocks and the whispering trees. Streams turned in their courses to follow him, and wild beasts became gentle and gathered about

him in peace.

BAND 2

One day as Orpheus wandered through the woods, he fell in love with a nymph called Eurydice. Their happiness was as beautiful as the sky and the sea. And Hymen, the God of Marriage, flew down from Olympus in his saffron-colored robe to wed them. But the joy of their love was quickly destroyed, for on that very day, as Eurydice wandered in a meadow, she was bitten by a (poisonous) viper and died, leaving Orpheus alone in consuming sorrow.

BAND 3

Orpheus now wandered aimlessly through the land playing sad tunes and singing of his grief. At length, unable to bear his sorrow any longer, Orpheus appealed to Jupiter to grant him permission to go to the Underworld to ask Hades for his beautiful bride. Such a thing had never before been granted to a mortal, but Jupiter conceded.

BAND 4

Orpheus started at once on the long, dangerous journey to the World of the dead. In his search, he passed all kinds of desolate, shadowy beings. He saw the Griefs, Avenging Care, the Pale Diseases, and Melancholy Age. He passed Fear and Hunger. He saw Toil, Poverty, and Death. The Cruel Furies gazed at him with ugly faces.

BAND 5

The strains of the golden lyre filled the Underworld, and from every side, the shadows, as under a spell, gathered around Orpheus.

Then Orpheus, standing before them, sang a song of sorrow. "O sovereigns of the Underworld, hear the words of my breaking heart. Love has brought me here. I have not come to seek out the secrets of your dark abode, I have come only to find Eurydice, my beloved, who died before her youth was spent." Then Orpheus sang on telling of his love and his loneliness. In the end he pleaded: "And so I sing, imploring you, tie once more the thread of her mortal life. Then when she has filled her time on earth she will return to you but until then give her back to me, this I beseech you."

BAND 6

(He then tells the court the dangers he Willingly underwent in order to get to his beloved Eurydice): He passed the Monster Briareus with his hundred-whirling arms and nine-headed Hydra. Further on, he saw the terrible fire-breathing Chimaera. He even encountered Tityus, the giant whose massive body covered nine acres. Any or all of this he would gladly do again if only he could gain the court's favor to take his beloved back to the sunlit world above.

BAND 7

(After his pleading, he retires to another nearby section to await the decision of the Court.)

BAND 8

The members of the Underworld conferred, and Hades could not deny Orpheus' plea. Very majestically, they gave Orpheus permission to lead Eurydice out of the Underworld and back to the land of the living. However, there was one condition they imposed; Orpheus would lead the way and she would follow, and never once was he to look back at her until they had both reached the sunlit world. And so Orpheus and Eurydice started on their happy journey homeward.

BAND 9

At last, after many hours Orpheus saw the first faint light of day. In joy, he hurried on ahead but forgetting the warning of the Gods, he turned around. He smiled happily and held out his arms to receive her, but suddenly she began to vanish like a vision fading. He had looked around too soon. Slowly she slipped back into the darkness.

BANDS 10 and 11

After many long days of wandering, Orpheus died. At last, his spirit was free from mortal ties, and he descended to the Land of the Dead. He found his beloved Eurydice, and together they roamed the fields and hills of the land of the shadows in everlasting happiness.

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(Translators)