

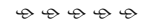
RAY SOULARD, JR.



ORPHEUS
&
EURYDICE:
Making the Lyre

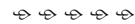


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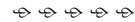
RAI BOOKS NUMBER ONE

ORPHEUS
EURYDICE:
Making the Lyre



RAY SOULARD, JR.

ILLUSTRATED BY
BARBARA A. BRANNON



MALDEN, MASSACHUSETTS



SCRIPTOR PRESS
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To
RAINER MARIA RILKE,
who taught me that a life devoted to Art
can never long be bereft
of love & hope.

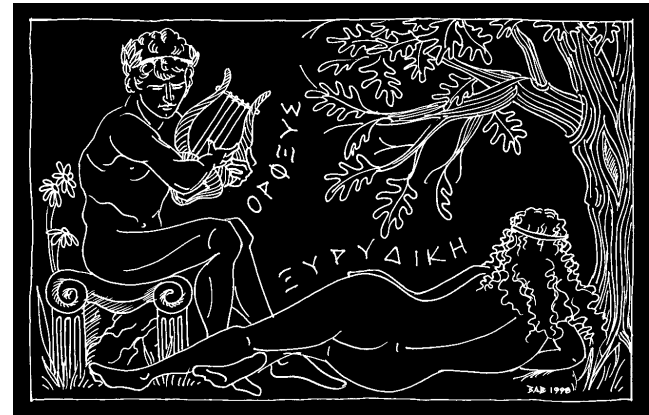
ORPHEUS & EURYDICE:
MAKING THE LYRE

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PART ONE *Making the Lyre*



*“Behold, oh innermost man, your
innermost maiden,
fought for and won from
thousands of natures, she that was
only won up till now, and never
as yet
a creature beloved.”*

Rainer Maria Rilke,
“Turning Point,” 1914.

i.

Secret unfoldings of pulse amidst
 the crude, talking surfaces;
 A dream cruising along coalescence
 blood, youth, dimensions of sensation;
 Stripped of movement, merely a girlgodd,
 merely a star, a waiting, a live meal:

I want to taste her lips as they are tasting
 I want to follow her into evanescence.

ii.

She flings the thrill of wet stars
 across what is hard;
 She dapples difficulty, steers thrust,
 conceals her absence among shadows;
 But forgetting, and falling, she becomes
 again a language conceived for acquiescence:

She is bitten, eaten, chewed, but
 nothing changes, everything burns down.

iii.

Toward midnight she is less rising eyes
 and swimming smiles, taut implosion;
 Her dew is drying, making ready, finding
 the larger cups, the durable reservoirs;
 She is the snap of metal, hands
 measuring the fence's limits, doubts faced to the wall:

What shall be shall be, her flesh has long been told
 Her back is stoical, but her blood is tickled with peeping
 dreams.

iv.

Unwrapped in the darkness,
 she chases the moment's desire;
 Contrived to open, to receive,
 she fits among hands and mouth;
 She waits for the universe's eyes
 to approve her, hovers lightly near falseness:

Something about to bloom in this world.
 Something about to die.

v.

Her lover, levitating, amongst
 her forest of pinkcheeked dream-music;
 The urge to caress, the power to ripen,
 the compulsion to own, to cage & burn
 To say 'you are her' & 'you are not her'
 & 'I love you' & 'bend back more':
 To find her last shadow, her heart trembling,
 dress her in acquiescence, & a new name.

vi.

She moans breezes of notes
 a bruise being, a struck thing;
 A cage of whim & laughter;
 No blood stirring where not bone-directed;
 She is a feline convulsing from
 buttermilk & conquest:
 Revived when pelvises lock & blur
 Now sinking, now revived when newly clutched.

vii.

Morning. Resurrection. Consequences of Dream.
 Nude. Soft. Her sister on a canvas.
 Remembering. Love. Her door is bright again.
 The young day. Open hands. Covered in eyes again.

Her body is still young. Its surface unmarked.
 She is learning to ride the Universe.
 It will play her henceforth.
 She will learn to be played.

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

PART TWO *Variation*



I, i.

Eurydice, Pale Torso, Arriving

Desire brushes along her shoulder, and passes on.
 Sway of the crowded train like a ferry, a blowing grove.
 Sinking into tunnel, small roses fill the darkness.
 Darkness swaying, roses falling, watchful bright plains.
 Voices float in the early morning, she turns & doubts.
 Desire splinters. She is becoming invisible. As low as a thing, named.

I, ii.

Eurydice, Remembering, Taken Amongst the Leaves

She has heard this song before.
 Love fragments her, & she is possessed.
 There is a stream young & noisy
 twisting prideful through her forest.
 It resists the lyre's preachings of the new.
 It watches the trees & rocks, all lonely, bend.
 It is nightfall before the stream is taken.
 The lyre has smiled, & agreed to relent.
 Its music is settling softly, elsewhere.
 The stream watches. The stream listens. Considers freedom.
 This song is for her, about dreams noone knows.
 She is never sated now. Love has no bottom.

I, iii.

Eurydice in the Underworld, Blankness beyond Color

She spreads her girlhood upon the ground,
 & upon it her icons. Afternoons of stillness.
 Blinking, impatient dreams. Partly unfurled wishes.
 But new song scratches at her blood.
 New song taps her secret blouse, her within's within.
 New song plucks her slowly, eyes to heart to toes.
 She is stretched until her girlhood threads snap.
 Her hands awake, as from a young life's cage.
 Her future now holds not leaning but standing.
 Her future is a squalling icon, waiting to be taken.

I, iv.

Eurydice in the Underworld, Exhaling. Again.

She is leaving time, & her need for light.
 She continues to see. Seeing & following is her habit.
 Though she keeps looking up, there is only blankness.
 Her memories are the only stars here.
 Something he'd said. About love. Called her his music.
 Something he'd said. About love. He'd been wrong.
 The blessed noise of love has not followed her here.
 Her stars are still twinkling as darkness descends.
 Her stars are still shining, but saying goodbye.

I, v.

Eurydice in the Underworld, Letting Go

She feels a light snap when the love disappears.
 The ragged break of a bone that had never hardened.
 A lost sense of eternal watching. Of hope.
 The freedom of a final goodbye. Moaning.
 The falling & healing that was life will not continue.
 First moment bereft of older brothers & younger sisters.
 First moment when the fountain is not fed. Broken.
 Broken because no longer a moment. Bright, blindness.
 Where she walks, cities no longer rush.
 Where she walks, no trees, no tears.
 Stillness. The snakebite of mortality is over.
 The broken bone is merciful. Leaves no dust.

I, vi.

Eurydice in the Underworld, All Not as it Seems.

Letting go involves a final choice.
 A release of the singing. A release of her song.
 Denying mortality its last prayer.
 Denying that faith, even here, approaches.

You have been seen, where you stand not seeing.
 You have been heard, though your face seems gone.
 You're being approached, in this silent aloneness.
 Hope hums around you. Hope bothers your death.

Not quite an I begins to cry out.
 Not quite an I convulses dead melody.
 Letting go involves a final choice.
 The melody strikes my blood again.

She is young again. He will find her. He begins to run.



II, i.

Orpheus Encountered, Still Amongst His Songs

There is no grave. There is no underworld.
 Music doesn't know of silence, or of falling.
 Her colors have not faded yet.
 She's still on this side of time.

I continue to play our wedding song.
 The rocks & leaves continue to vibrate.
 She continues to await my hands, and tongue.
 The birds await our resumed happy noise.

There are soft figures & crowded talk.
 I continue to wait. I continue to play.
 Her sisters have taken her to find fresh colors.
 They make me impatient. I rile the trees.

Some songs are not so gentle. Will not end.

II, ii.

Orpheus Takes Up His Instrument Again

The world rattles dryly upon its mount.
 I strum again and not even the bones move.
 I try again & the music snaps free of the day.

The music has atrophied to one sickly note.
 The music has dried into a scorched noise.
 The world lies next to its dead mount.

There once was a dance among a cafe of trees.
 That day blue eyes floated in a rippling space.
 The world was two soft arms. The world recovered its first note.

I strum once more, for the world cannot end today.
 I look to the birds. They listen, shift, huddle.
 I cannot stop playing. The world cannot end today.

The music is too young. I cannot die.

II, iii.

Orpheus, Arriving in the Underworld.

Here one stops falling. Here one ceases.
 What's left is just presence. Not good nor evil.

There is no path. There is no will.
 Those around me neither crowd nor give way.

I think: "Eurydice." I repeat: "Eurydice."
 But I have always been here. I am compelled from without.

Something doesn't want me here. Something potent is frightened here.
 It's my hands. They disturb. They vibrate.

I speak: "Eurydice." I sing: "Eurydice."
 This word means nothing. I begin to fly.

Something flashes before my eyes. My hands vibrate faster.

II, iv.

Orpheus in the Underworld, Searching for His Wife

I sing to another Eurydice, blank-eyed
 maiden, one who has forgotten her
 womanly music, her girlish
 daydreams, the way she felt
 amongst the temples at midnight,
 the way lilac bushes in bloom erupted
 in her heart a never-slow-enough
 dance, and her several sweet admirers,
 never knowing she sought the truth behind
 their howling shows of strength.

They will not show me my Eurydice,
 these silent moving powers here,
 so I choose to send a message
 by ripples, a denial of the
 denial of Beauty here, of dawns
 that do not end, and the ever-renewing
 virginity of life, called first love,
 true love, any love, the music
 of hopeful spiritus, the ringing
 of today's first chimes.

II, v.

Orpheus in the Underworld, Writhing Forth

I remember watching the palace cat savage
its half-dead prey. Its paws curious,
but dissatisfied, lazy. For a moment,
however, the victim fought back. Chose
to engage in its own death.

No twitter of birds, shiver of leaves. No colors
to play to, eager children of the light.

No groves of noise in which to find songs.

Only a tired waiting, resolved now into floors & walls.

I remember singing Eurydice unto sleep,
even following a little way in, curious,
wondering what sentiments her new knowing
& her servant-dreams would exchange,
wanting to hear my music there, her within's new master.

It was still daylight, but I had plans
for my young wife, involving moonlight
& a sloping hill, involving more knowledge.

They recognize that kind of arrogance here.
They touch my face with curious paws.

II, vi.

Orpheus in the Underworld, Singing for His Wife's Return

I do not tell the truth — though
there is conjured wind in
my song, and a blonde spectre
blows through it; no, there is
no truth here, & nothing lost as
of yet, there is the skill that
makes afternoon fancies, no more.

I begin to tell the truth — release
some of the golden breath I've held
til now, the blonde spectre now
has a face, a smile, speaks a
word; the invisible powers here
rearrange themselves; nothing
happens; nothing moves.

I'm no longer sure of the truth —
my blonde spectre is fading again
& I remember but thinly
our wedding day; I remember better
her lawn of paint-pots &
brushes, her head leaning forward
as she made my songs into colors.

Inside the truth, there is no preaching;
there are still the doubts besetting all men;
but wearing a stinging belt of hope,
one begins to work; my espousing
flames are now oak trees; my
blonde spectre is now a woman,
her underworld bondage a small passing.

The truth radiates a cold flaring here.
The truth adjusts in its throne. Does not smile.

III, ii.

*Returning from the Underworld:
the Secret's Fire, the Within's Within*

Something else, Eurydice. Another way than your
 lazy forest life, and the iniquitous crowdings
 of men in cities. Men, trees, godds:
 the latent governance of ecstasy.

Are you listening, Woman, in your following silence?
 When you were a child, humming, a bud,
 I watched you; yes, & surrounded you
 with sourceless music, full of suggestions,
 and spells. One spell.

There was a covenant. My lyre was anointed
 in dream & blood. I could play my heartbeat!
 I could play a stone's heartbeat! Something
 fine & potent had begun. Wife, I failed to
 tell you any of this.

Something else, Eurydice. Yet I couldn't
 be sure of you, sure that you would
 agree. Protecting you, composing my
 ascending song. The musician has taken
 a wife, a nymph, a mystery driving in &
 revealing the fruits of his heart.

I'm still playing heartbeats, even now,
 even while conducting you, promised,
 back home. The song is the viper's.
I have to end it now.

III, iii.

Returning from the Underworld: Revelation, Now

Playing my lyre yet making no sound
 yet because of it I was granted
 my Eurydice.

Wanting to recall her face but
 run off from this memory by scythes
 in a field of wild colors.

Thinking: my lyre is a stringed corpse
 and strumming it brings neither song
 nor even shapely noise.

Then, as tho learning the modulations
 of silence . . . I recognize a blood-pulse
 . . . know now how it's lapped up my songs!

Climbing within listening . . . gauged
 its frequency . . . this pulse allows our
 movement . . . recedes not fully spent . . .

I do believe, my wife, that our marriage
 has taken place mostly along
 this path to life . . . riding
 the recession of each pulse with
 my instrument . . . I contrive
 your pulse before me . . . and learn to
 send along it, back to you, little musical
 strums of love . . .

And the crosseyed games of infinity . . . the elect
 dreams of men & godds & trees . . .
 I leave them in the burntblack
 end of these thinning waves.

There is only our love, now.
 There is only our art, hereon.
 There is only liberation in
 embracing one's native ground
 & building its latent chapel.

III, iv.

Returning from the Underworld, Eurydice's Song

Nothing has changed, Orpheus, but
 you will not know this. They're allowing
 you to fail thus for you will finally
 relinquish them your jewel.

The crowds do not listen to a man
 for his words but for his roar.
 They look for the blood-eyed animal
 in his voice & gather close to feed.

The music you play most men see as
 weakness; necessary to array for war,
 harness sugar to conquest, quickened
 heartbeat to quickened marchstep.

Love is spent in the taking. Invading. Burning.
 Flooding. I was how they fell you,
 husband. The woods are burnt out!
 Even your stones are inert!

You could have let me go & proved
 useless to them. Your music the very blood
 & fire of pain! Now you will sing only
 about failure. A slave to it. A legend.

III, v.

Returning from the Underworld, but Flailing

How much of a difference, wife, between
 above & below? Where ends the drying horror
 of life among men? How much did music
 brighten me blind? I was never lost before,
 Eurydice, because I played, in faith, each step.
 Will you lead me when we arrive?

I remember my fear seeing you amongst
 your kin. Men are not like trees.
 They squirm into each other's shadows, squeak softly.

Will you lead me when we arrive?
 I can hardly play to your following silence
 anymore. Are you really there?
 Are you with me still? Does it matter?

There is no song here anymore. This fails.

III, vi.

*Returning from the Underworld:
No More Chasing, No More Falling*

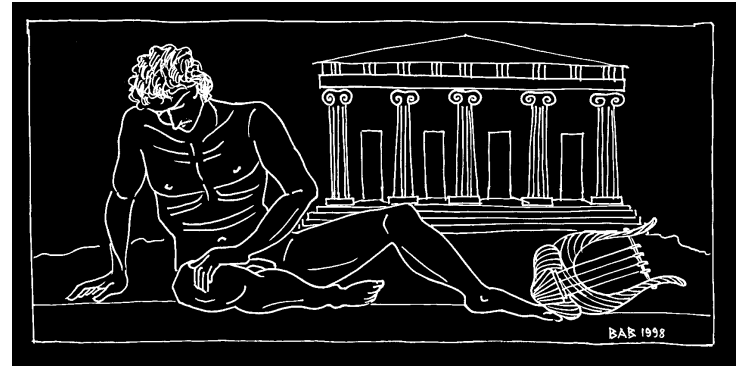
I never lived inside my music timidly,
worried that this string meant remorse,
and that one chagrin. I didn't live to charm
men or seduce stones. I never played for
the flames or for the gods.

Eurydice, you were my music's secret legend,
the cosmic playmate for which it strove,
its dream of completion, & continuance.
My wife, you were the child, the freedom,
that my music slaved archly to preserve.

How quickly we won! How quickly we won.
Love, divine love, does not move each day
back to the trough, to the hearthside.
Divine love watches its several loosing hands
& floats plainly into the blue dusk.

So I have taken sight of you once more,
play a single note on my lyre,
frame a word, & let you complete it.
I take you in, my wife, as you received me.

No more chasing. No more falling. Only love.



IV, i.

Orpheus in the Sunshine, Swirls & Swirls

They think I'm flat with mourning &
they become my crowd. They give me
a feast & wait for me to chew. They
will help me to remember you, in a
public way, the butchery of mirrors,
fires on the beach.

No matter: I carry our castle always now,
the one that pathetic lost crowds of
tangled stretching arms will never know.
Crowded croaking eyes of death. The excess
for whom there will be no mercy.
Smiling orifices of needless flesh.

Rooms sweep through our castle, Eurydice,
but I stay in one small room most-times.
I look at my beautiful hands &
I love you. I dream fresh dreams of
love & I love you. In the midst of
midst we are amidst & I love you.

IV, ii.

Orpheus Teaches the Children to Sing

The little ones follow me like a
 shepherd. My songs attract them
 like the sun attracts them, & fruit,
 & small animals. They follow me like a
 shepherd because I seem to know the way,
 into the garden, through the corridor,
 into the castle. They follow me like a
 shepherd because I do not question freedom,
 do not even wonder over it.

The little ones have skin that shines,
 sweet heads, clean teeth. I let them
 a little way into the castle but soon
 they crowd me. They want to know what
 I can do because my songs make promises
 to them. Calls of shepherd to his flock.
 But I'm no leader, Eurydice. So I try
 to show them the places I cannot go. I point
 their shiny heads toward dreams I can no longer bear.

The little ones have finally left me,
 Eurydice. Wherever I allowed them, they
 filled the castle with fruit. Loving me now
 like their primal mother, they sang my
 songs back to me. They needed no lyre.
 Alone now, Eurydice, with you alone.
 The castle listens after your step, and
 sometimes I send my songs like small animals
 scattering through it. The sunshine will return.

IV, iii.

Orpheus & Capitulation

I play to the castle stones but they do not
 move, I do not let them, I hold them archly
 still, the songs must begin to end.
 In dreams my songs are weeds along the path,
 are endless caution for noone, give in as the
 winter comes, are snowflakes, glow at night.
 Someone asked me about my castle. I said
 I don't know it, friend, I'm just a musician
 trying to give away his music's claws.
 There is nothing to this anymore, wife, I can't
 mourn you forever, can't torture the stones
 because they will not lie.

So today I let the castle go. I tried to let it go.
 But the stones began to sing to me, move me,
 make me dance, move me here,
 to your native oaks, surround me now
 with your sisters . . . I was welcomed
 not because I lost you, but because we'd loved;
 not because of my songs but that I am their singer.

Perhaps there is something left though
 love has tripped & gone. Enough for now
 to look on living images of your face,
 to give the stubborn stones their due,
 to show your sisters our sepulchral valentine.

IV, iv.

The Residual Aspect of Eurydice, Explained

What he doesn't know is that I drape over
 his every moment, that the second body
 I was briefly given shadows before & after him,
 that there are more stars in his view of the sky,
 that I'm helping him to mourn me by making him better. . . .

Orpheus limps. He cannot see a bright thing or
 a young thing or a woman smiling without
 renewing his pain. So I went among his dreams
 & he saw me as a castle. He bears it about
 him as our home, as where I went. . . .

I try to entangle his attention, by
 blowing hard through him, by liquifying
 the floor. But I have no stability,
 and he walks through my messages,
 weeping and calling for me. . . .

Now I stand over him, the remnant
 of a woman. He's dreaming his castle is empty,
 that he's failed again. I try to lay myself over
 you, husband, but I break up again. You grope
 for what you can. You're roaming your castle again.

IV, v.

Orpheus, Annihilating [part one]

To make a final song for you, from moonshine
 & these castle ruins, one that ebbs & flows
 with my heartbeat, one that finds in itself
 no end.

Before the screaming women take me.
 Before the screaming bitches take me.

Your sisters listen to this song & cry, for in it
 you are returned, in it you're not even a bride,
 in it you're their youngest leaf, again, & I am
 still cloaked & far away.

The screaming women bind their sex in cobwebs.
 The screaming bitches seek their woe with long teeth.

My song will bring you back, long ago, to the day
 when I first saw you, a small blonde creature
 talking to her oaks, her animals, the still-sentient
 sunshine.

The screaming women can't maul the past.
 The screaming bitches can only flood now with barren
 spasms.

When you are safe from me, Eurydice, I will
 have my peace. You need not die so young.
 You can live to create the glorious god of
 your own cause.

The screaming women want to bring down your song.
 They don't know what I'll do. They don't know how much
 I love you.

IV, vi.

Orpheus, Annihilating [part two]

They're going to kill you, Orpheus, because
 you prefer my spectre, because you sing
 about a love that cannot be displaced,
 because the children watch you in groups
 from a distance.

They're going to kill you & keep screaming for days
 afterward, because you've made my final song &
 now you don't care, because the children
 begin to sing it too, because young girls
 like my sisters long for someone unyielding too.

You never noticed the screaming women when we walked
 together, never saw them follow us; despise the songs
 you gave me; wish, perhaps, for a viper's sting
 to divide us; be willing to take me from you,
 take your manhood from you.

Now they stone you & you sing, fall
 to your knees, order my sisters away —
 Do you understand what's happening here?
 You gave yourself back then for immortality —
 now you offer what's left for freedom.

Morning. Unsinking, your head floats upon
 the river. Unsinking, singing. Your lyre
 plays of its own will, does not know how
 to stop. We are singing together again, Orpheus.
 Again, you help me shape my notes for Beauty's greater gain.



V, i.

The Death of Orpheus: A Child's Song

I follow the other children among
 the marshgrass & dragonflies. We're
 following the head of Orpheus & calling
 back to it when it sings. When it talks
 we listen. The bigger boys shout the words to us.

He tells us about his Eurydice but we already
 know about her. Some of the girls like the story
 though. "See how he cries for her! He's only
 a head but still he cries!" And we all know
 his song for her & sing it with him.

The day gets hotter & sometimes he looks like
 two heads. He's saying he sinned with
 the gods but none of us know how you
 could do that. "I told the oak nymphs
 about it! Eurydice's sisters! Talk to them!"

The water runs too fast & takes him away
 from us. But I see his lyre stuck among
 the marshweeds. While the others chase
 after his head still, I wait, & then
 I wade out to retrieve it.

During the nights I take it out to
 a secret place I know, to listen to
 its voices sing. I know they are
 Orpheus & Eurydice. They feel lost.
 They want to go home.

So this morning I went to the pretty
 oak nymphs & showed them my prize.
 They listen to the song & thank me.
 They whisper a secret to me, for no other child.
 "You'll be the first to know. Others will find out later."

Tonight, I watch the stars from my secret place.
 Tonight, the stars sing to me in my secret place!

V, ii.

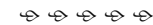
Final Love Song of Orpheus & Eurydice

We slip together into the awaiting moment,
 the awaiting eternal spring, beyond stones
 & stars, into the greater force contained
 inside the smallest touch.

Our eyes reflect the universe, how depthless into it
 we are now, how much of it has always been
 mingled with nothingness; in death we subtract
 from this nothingness; we learn how.
 That terrible underworld is barely a hill,
 life's last bitter trick on frightened souls, &
 there is almost desire to free them, but
 we just leave our symbol, & trust it will subvert.

What's left of you, Eurydice, is the lingering fragrance
 of your soul, scattered flashes of your youth grown
 into our love, smiling blonde music evanescent,
 & the arrival of your fully-formed presence.

What remains of you, Orpheus, is a clear musical note,
 the very one belonging to the universal host,
 the note containing us; this & my shed
 torso, my music you needed & sought —
 the final music I helped us both to sing.



PART THREE *Unmaking the Lyre*



*“At last they killed you and broke you
in pieces while
your sound kept lingering on in lions
and boulders,
in trees and in birds. There you are
singing still.”*

Rainer Maria Rilke,
Sonnets to Orpheus, I, xxvi
Château de Muzot, February 1922.

i.

Begin with newness, with youth, with every
nuance of newness, the way each limb
& portion of her body produces a separate,
clean note, no universe has played her yet,
& she has never contorted her single notes
to produce a single song.

She is enigmatic like a tree to study.
As you take her down, what you most want disappears.

ii.

Capture her from the windless field but
use no cage to keep her. Let her fly about
your room. Leave her food & water in
high-up places. You've become like the Master.
You wait for her to shine & sing. There must
be reward for your waiting patience.

You study her until she has a name.
You will contain her then make her greater.

iii.

The subtlety & the beauty will not appear.
She holds your shoulders as you take her.
She has no choice but submission. She becomes
quiet in lieu of choice. Her bird's wings,
now a girl's arms, splay out like her legs.
You begin to chase what the world is losing.

Leaving power behind, you pursue her stolen music;
Leaving the arched virgin behind, you pursue her fecund source.

iv.

"What will make my music immortal?" you'd often
question the Master. "Shall I beseech
the stars, romance the witches? Is there
a potion? An ancient spell I can summon?"
The Master called you storm-worthy but green wood,
playing melodies of arrogance & control.

"Become like those virgins you devour!" he'd roar.
"You ruin their bodies but never touch their potency!"

v.

Now you sacrifice your very heart to retrieve
that potency. You rankle the spectres &
the thorns of the bygone world to allow you
back her dawn's first blood. No longer protected,
refusing to utter your Master's name as charm,
you draw her back to the living, fallen world.

You are becoming the virgin's newly recovered blood.
You will enact the universe's prime impulse, to love.

vi.

Death, you discover, tastes of failure & shock.
Death comes around in time. Death does not hurry.
While waiting you sing, no Master, no hope.
You remember the wings of the creature you
did not catch. Yes, & you tried to heal
her. Then you knew that you loved her.

You learned to let go. Your music ripe
around you, you learned to let go.

vii.

Tonight the Master watches the stars.
The dead pupil, the pupil's brief bride,
they are both new sparkles in the cold, ancient sky.
Their youths too bright for earth's threshing ferocity,
their mortal passions ride winged objects with the
calm & savage delight of birds.

Eternal as starlight, endless colors, infinite songs,
they are healed, they will love, nothing else remains.



July 24, 1998
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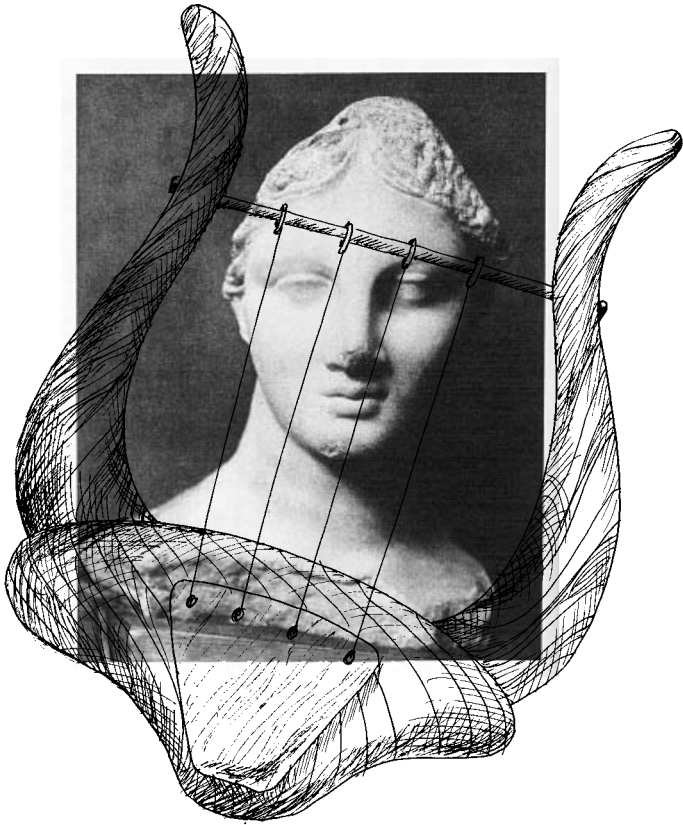
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