

Orpheus:

A Closet Drama in Three Acts

## The Characters

Orpheus, a musician  
Eurydice, an oak nymph and his intended bride  
First Shepherd  
Second Shepherd  
Third Shepherd  
First Ciconian Woman  
Second Ciconian Woman  
Third Ciconian Woman  
A Guide  
Charon, the ferryman of Styx  
Hades, the king of the underworld  
Persephone, his queen  
Calliope, mother of Orpheus  
First Woman of Lesbos  
Second Woman of Lesbos  
  
The Sister Wood Nymphs of Eurydice  
The Eight Sister Muses of Calliope

## Act I

### Scene I

*[lights up on Orpheus reclining with his lyre in the woods of Thrace – he plays and sings, listened to by wood nymphs and the first and second shepherds]*

Orpheus:

*When Phoebus set this gold lyre in my hand,  
Each note did seem to me as stranger's speech,  
Each lyric line a sweet phrase out of reach,  
And music's art a loved but foreign land;*

*And said I sadly such, but god replied:  
"Thy mother shall thee teach the ways of words:  
From foremost Muse the rich verse shalt thou learn  
Whilst my own wisdom serve as perfect guide*

*"In bending to the strings thy fingertips –  
And thus mightst thou transform to bard divine  
Beneath a living sun and sacred skies:  
A font welling with beauty, from whose lips*

*"All heaven's songs with glory shall proceed.  
And therefore languish not, dwell not in gloom:  
My music shalt thou play until thy doom,  
Whene'er it come – the mournful melody*

*"And gladsome strains alike." So of good cheer  
My heart swelled; and that lock which sealed the door  
'Twixt me and poetry aligned its wards,  
And through that first gate stepped I, free of fear:*

*A prince of Thrace, and pupil of those chords  
And rhyming turns which startle and bewitch.  
The lucid lessons sped without a hitch;*

*The eagle of my art flapped high and soared,*

*For bold Calliope from morn 'til eve  
And Phoebus eke taught ever by my side,  
Showing the paths to where sweetness abides,  
Those golden paths where souls, o'erwhelmed, shall weep*

*Upon their trek to bright Elysian groves  
After the scythe hath swept their lives from earth –  
Those tears which stain the land that breeds rebirth,  
Those tears which gorgeous asphodel shall soak*

*Amidst the feet of poets true who live  
And entertain the blessed ones on those swards.  
No lover took I while I plied my chords,  
No scions to the future did I give,*

*For ever always music proved my love,  
And sweet perfection in my melody  
My only longing: errors made me weep,  
But to such constant course I closely stuck,*

*Until at last the student was released,  
Now past his years of youthfulness' full bloom.  
Apollo said: "Oh take thy song and tune,  
And seek a worthy peace and worthy ease,*

*"Now thou hast mastered all: a wife and home,  
A place where children shall, in time, attend  
Those happy notes thy throat and taut strings lend –  
Some place to be the last verse of thy poem.*

*"Go, Orpheus, and seek!" And so I left  
My mother and the god, with rich sounds crammed  
In brain and fingers. O'er the silent lands  
I played my way... 'til here I came to rest:*

*This selfsame bower, this shepherds' paradise,*

*This haunt of all ye nymphs – ye pleasant souls! –  
And made this idyll-copse my fair abode,  
Extracting from all listeners such sighs*

*As should keep leaves and stalks in constant sway  
And waft wide Thrace's stretch with loving breath.  
But my own sighs joined not with thine – unless  
I should meet one who snatched my heart away...*

*As did indeed – oh glad event! – transpire:  
There lives one nymph, one goddess-shape, who's stol'n  
My love from being music's all alone:  
Now meek Eurydice, as well my lyre,*

*Hath ownership o'er inmost citadel  
Which forms the stronghold of my fleeting years.  
One month it's been since first I fondly peered  
Into her bashful eyes – and down a well*

*Did seem to plummet, towards I know not where –  
Except, where'er it be, she also dropped.  
But hush, oh bard! and let thy strains be stopped –  
To look towards love's strange depths, I should not dare.*

First Shepherd:

See, Orpheus, thy oak nymph comes in haste,  
Fain to repair her tardy audience.

[*enter Eurydice*]

Eurydice:

I am too late! I see it in these eyes –  
Shepherds' and sister nymphs' – which stare at me,  
Chiding my dilatory daisy-bed,  
My sluggard ears which heard not song begin  
Beneath sleep's quilt – e'en though the one who sings  
Is mine intended, and I ought have been  
The first here settled.

Orpheus:

Think not that these eyes –  
Not mine, at least – do chide thee: no, they smile  
At how breathless thou art, how thou upbraid'st  
Thy blameless self for sleep's blank innocence.

Eurydice:

It was the poem, I know, thou wrot'st of late  
With lavish diligence – it told thy youth,  
How thou didst learn the ways of strains and lyre:  
Thou told'st me thou wouldst sing it late this morn –  
And yet I come too late. I blame the grape;  
I blame Sleep's tight embraces.

Thy soft lines

Even through slumber startled me: I ran  
And saw the woodland beasts far off ahead  
Move towards thy notes, as fain as I to list,  
By virtue of four legs more swift than I,  
Though love impelled my speed. Then, I declare –  
If dream-thought lingered not past when I woke –  
I saw while I was dashing, plants and trees  
Run madly towards thy song! Aye, first they strained  
And bent, as though a wild wind pressed them down,  
Eager to move towards music – desp'rate, crazed –  
Stretching their limbs and twigs, until at last,  
Frustrated they were anchored, 'gan they then  
To pull up roots from earth which clung so fast –  
And with those feet, they hastened where we went,  
Outpacing me! – and seemed it quite absurd,  
Bested by yew, by ficus, tamarisk! –  
Hoping to hear as much, as close they could,  
Those leafy things thy stanzas.

Far behind

They left me, beasts and shrubs, somehow so fleet,

While I, thy love, seemed hindered in the knees,  
And somehow slow and hampered... as when we  
In dreams grope towards some good so clumsily,  
By unknown checks restrained, made lost, or slowed –  
Or when, indeed, we flee some terror's grasp,  
Some torment close behind us... but mid-run  
Our legs and feet 'gin falter steadily,  
'Til soon the horror's breathing on our neck.

Orpheus:

Thou must have dreamt these things, my love – no beasts  
Nor walking flora's come: either thou sawst  
Such strange sights whilst thou lay'st yet in thy bed,  
Sleep's phantom land observing – or thou kept'st  
Some remnant of its spell within thy brain  
While thou didst run, and thought'st such prodigies  
A real part of the world.

Eurydice:

It must be so –  
I feel abashed... now doubly.

Orpheus:

I might guess  
Our matrimony, so near to begin,  
Confounds thee somewhat, and thy nervous heart  
Imparts thee sweet confusions.

Second Shepherd:

As my eyes  
Confound me bravely – 'less in truth arrive  
Three raving women through this yonder grove:  
Three devotees of Bacchus, drunk with lust,  
Whose fiery aspect something ill portends.

*[enter the Ciconian women]*

First Ciconian Woman:

Roving the hills, imbibing, loose of robes,  
Swearing our love of pleasure, came to us  
Such melodies of strings we ne'er have heard  
For subtle beauty, and such voice and poem  
Could not release our senses: ravished thus,  
We've hastened here, unable else to do,  
So mad desiring close to draw our ears  
To lyre's music – and how hard we groan  
That measures cease!

Second Ciconian Woman:

Why dost thou not play more,  
Man with thy instrument? Thou lured'st us here,  
And now dost torture us? leav'st us bereft  
Of such exquisiteness?

Third Ciconian Woman:

We heard thy tale,  
Musician – and we see how handsome thou'rt,  
Thy skin and face like Youth's divinity,  
Thy form a perfect song-shape to the eye –  
Such that we somewhat less mourn stanzas' end,  
Now that our glimpse of thee redeems the loss.

Orpheus:

What have ye in your heads? You loom too close,  
Ye libertines of woodlands.

Second Ciconian Woman:

In our heads?  
What have we ever else but riot, drink,  
And our own pleasure?

Eurydice:

Heavens! They intend  
To steal my love away!



Third Ciconian Woman:  
A rival! Oh,

Let's beat her!

First Ciconian Woman:  
Grab her hair!

Second Ciconian Woman:  
Tear at her face!

*[they approach Eurydice – Orpheus moves to protect her]*

Orpheus:  
*[to shepherds]* My friends – your fists and staves!

*[the shepherds chase off the women, while the nymphs hide for terror – the lovers find themselves alone]*

Eurydice:  
I feared they'd bear  
Thee off by force, and have their way with thee.

Orpheus:  
*[teasing]* What way, my love?

Eurydice:  
Lascivious, and wrong.

Orpheus:  
Wrong in itself? Or wrong since I have pledged  
Myself to thee alone?

Eurydice:  
Now thou dost play  
Philosopher, as well thy strings?

Orpheus:  
I play

Whate'er I play, only to play with thee:  
Thou art my favorite harp; the one the god  
Set in my fingers hath not thy delights,  
Not half thy sweet responses.

Eurydice:  
Yet I am

Oft out of tune, and harsh.

Orpheus:  
Even thy jars

Have more the world in them than strings which charm  
These hinterlands to slumber.

Eurydice:  
Now thou find'st

Too much in one fond girl... I think I must  
Not see thee 'til the wedding.

Orpheus:  
Thou mightst leave

And see me not – yet then I might thee blame,  
For even absent thee, my mind presents  
Thy constant figure, and if thou seest not  
Poor Orpheus likewise, I'll 'gin to doubt  
Whether thou lov'st me.

Eurydice:  
Now, no more of wit:

Keep thy tongue silent, and keep to thyself  
'Til morrow. We'll meet here again at dawn  
To solemnize our hearts' bent.

Orpheus:  
Thou mightst leave;

I shan't – this very plot I'll sleep upon,  
Impatient of the morning, restless e'en  
While sinks my soul in rest.

Eurydice:  
Adieu – and play  
Upon thy harp now; I'm an instrument  
Gone from thy hands – until I shall be set  
Once more in them, forever.

*[exit Eurydice]*

Orpheus:  
*[sits and plucks his lyre absent-mindedly]* Hymen, teach  
This new song to me – one I only start  
To learn with feeble mast'ry. I shall be  
Thy studious pupil, if thy lessons reach  
This heart in tumult, anxious to acquire  
All that thou know'st: somewhat my eagerness  
Misserves me in its zeal, and I misfoot  
Thy steps of strange progression...

But, no mind.  
Some skills demand our practice – while some else  
Merely our suff'ring heart, forbearing's strength,  
And soul which can with its mad self sit still.

*[he stretches on the grass and falls asleep – lights down]*

## Scene II

*[lights up on Orpheus – he wakes]*

Orpheus:  
Just ere the dawn... Is this how seemed the world  
When first created: gold and soundless, pure –  
A newborn of time's womb? This stillness breathes  
More fine than any descant. Every song  
And lyre I lay aside before its grace,  
Before the sky's throne, winds and bright-rimmed clouds –

Before this strange dark silence, shade which lives  
Yet in the west. Nothing seems to stir  
Except myself. The birds keep yet abed,  
The robin rests his throat – though I might swear  
I've heard his song, the starling's too, these hours,  
Sparrow's and lark's. It seems so solemn now,  
So eerie-somber, while the great skies pass  
In this full quiet – as though sadness bids  
The land keep voiceless, mute with its gold thoughts  
In dreams' cold kingdoms.

*[he plays softly – enter First Shepherd]*

First Shepherd:  
*[aside]* Now's the last I'll see  
Of this man while his thoughts yet breathe full young,  
For I bring grievous news. He's not aware  
I'm near yet... I shall let him play his tune,  
His wordless song which praises gentle earth,  
Praises his life. I'll linger on this hill,  
Letting him yet believe that all is well.

*[Orpheus finishes his music]*

Oh say, friend, list to me.

Orpheus:  
How dost thou, man?  
Are thy companions risen?

First Shepherd:  
List, poor man...  
Listen to doleful words.

Orpheus:  
Doleful? What dole  
When this day I shall marry, and all ye  
Of fields and woods shall celebrate sweet rites

Of joyful union?

First Shepherd:  
Words which shall undo  
Such revelries.

Orpheus:  
Speak then – though I now dread  
Why thou hast come.

First Shepherd:  
When thou hast heard, thou'lt swear  
The Fates have pledged themselves thy foe.

Orpheus:  
Speak out.  
These ears can bear to hear thee.

First Shepherd:  
Then, I say –  
Thy love is dead.

Orpheus:  
She – dead? Eurydice?

First Shepherd:  
Is't so.

Orpheus:  
Tell me what fell.

First Shepherd:  
The hap was cruel –  
A stray blow from fiend Fortune. When she woke  
One hour ago, I was already up,  
Sound sleep eluding me most of the night.  
I watched her some ways off... She'd made much wreaths  
And wedding crowns and bracelets all last day

Together with her sisters – these lay strewn  
All o'er the grassy plots where they had slept,  
Sweet flower-circlets. Now, I heard her speak  
Somewhat with sister nymphs, saying they'd need  
Of more for celebrations – for from far  
All 'round would cousin dryads come that day:  
Many the guests, and all would have their need  
Of handsome decoration: so she 'gan  
In one rank field to pluck all flow'rs she found,  
Her kin elsewhere, on other swards. All still,  
Soundless the land, I heard her every step,  
Each swish of dress, each rip of bloom from stalk,  
Her humming aimless ditties.

Suddenly

A cry she gave – and flowers fell from hand.  
She straightened up, looked down. Her form 'gan sway,  
As when a ship doth list; and I approached,  
Wond'ring what was. She seemed to touch her foot,  
But straight collapsed; and then I rushed to her  
And saw her in the grass. Her breath came quick,  
Her skin grew pale; and though she looked at me,  
She could not move her lips.

I saw a snake

Wriggle away through flow'rs – and suddenly  
The realization struck. From out her foot  
Four small red holes seeped blood. I held her in  
Mine arms while closed her eyes.... I need not speak  
What happened then.

Orpheus:

Where is she?

First Shepherd:

Where she lay,  
Among soft weeds – but while we speak, the hands  
Of my two fellows wrap white cerements

Around her sadly. None knows yet but they,  
And thou, and I, what's happened.

[*kneels*]  
This bitter news far, wide.

Orpheus:  
Soon shall spread

First Shepherd:  
All those who'd thought  
A marriage festival would grace this morn  
Will look upon her corpse, and sadly set  
Their wedding gifts around her.

Orpheus:  
Even now  
Her soul flits down to where the boatman waits,  
But shall not pass 'til she's within her grave.

First Shepherd:  
What dost thou wish?

Orpheus:  
No company. No talk.  
I'll hide some hours.

First Shepherd:  
I dread the rising sun  
Which shall reveal to all the grim event.

Orpheus:  
Go thou, tend to my love.

First Shepherd:  
Thou wilt not come  
To look on her?

Orpheus:  
I could not bear the sight,

Not now.

First Shepherd:

Go where thou know'st thy pain shall get  
Some balm of solitude. I will go back  
To join my fellows who attend the nymph  
And tell the dismal tale as folks arise.

*[exit shepherd – Orpheus moves aimlessly – he leans against a tree]*

Orpheus:

I'd lie down, but an anxiousness forbids  
My rest or sleep. I must move here and there,  
Or lean and deep respire... Is this thing grief,  
This trembling and this helpless wandering?  
Some of that poison sure hath breached my veins  
Which killed Eurydice.

Oh! Just the name,  
And seems she here before me! Real as life,  
But only figment – figment which yet glints  
As though in radiant heyday.

Past the god  
Who gave my instrument – beyond his tier  
Within the heavens – I have sensed there lives  
Some quiet tenderness upon the sky:  
A gaze, a mind, a heart, an unthought thing...  
But farther vastly than the sea floor's reach  
Or utmost height of mountains. My love was  
To me a little mouse, a little hare,  
The gentlest thing beneath the wide, wide vault  
Which is, at last, a coffin's lid o'er all.  
The meek things die; they suffer while that gaze –  
Which might not e'en be gaze – moves not a whit.  
I breathe, I breathe... my life's within me yet –  
But oh! how frail this shell which keeps it in!



*[enter the Guide, a nondescript young woman]*

Who art thou, girl?

Guide:  
I have a name, but I'll  
Not tell thee straight away.

Orpheus:  
Be gone, I wish  
No company.

Guide:  
Thou wilt say otherwise  
When thou learn'st where I'll lead thee.

Orpheus:  
I would stay  
Just where I am, and pass not 'fore the sight  
Of all the pitying world.

Guide:  
We'll not walk down  
A road where most souls go – at least not while  
They care to pity any but themselves.

Orpheus:  
What mean you?

Guide:  
Man who sorrows, I shall take  
Thee to a place thou mayst see thy beloved.

Orpheus:  
Leave me alone. I'll not.

Guide:  
E'en if thou mightst,

By going to her, bring her back with thee?

Orpheus:

The place her soul has gone, one may not hope  
To bring her back.

Guide:

If thou wert anyone  
But such a bard as thou'rt, it would be so.  
If thou com'st with me, I will show a way  
Thou'lt have thy love again.

Orpheus:

Much I misdoubt  
Such thing... yet what else might I think to do  
In my condition: short of breath, afraid,  
Unable to sit still?

Guide:

Enfold thy hand  
With mine – I'll lead thee slowly down this way,  
Which is, thou seest, a smooth and sloping path  
Down to a calm, bright country.

Orpheus:

Past that way  
There are the lower vales, ambiguous space,  
And dark mists circling rocks.

Guide:

That is the place  
Thou mightst recover her.

Orpheus:

Somewhat I fear  
Those ridges, edges of that darkling tract,  
Those sharp rocks, knife-like mountains, and such drops  
As toward deep shadows plummet.

Guide:

Fog and smoke

And fumes and ghaselier breeze groan and lament  
While pass they through the towers of stone which rise  
Like pillars 'neath the world.

Orpheus:

Already thou

Begin'st to lead me, tugging at my hand.

Guide:

All that thou seest, and I see, is that stretch  
So light and golden, leading down to dark.

Orpheus:

There's naught within mine ears now but a voice  
Which saith: "Thou goest the way thy dread demands."

[*exeunt*]

## Act II

### Scene I

*[lights up on the entrance to Hades, a dim and sinister portal – enter Orpheus and his guide]*

Orpheus:

I feared our coming hither – now I quail  
E'en more 'fore what thou show'st me. In this pit  
All's quiet, save a low, unnerving moan  
Which is wind's warning: "Move not towards this door;  
It swallows thee." Down, down we went, and now  
We stand halfway to horrors. Oft in dreams  
Viewed I this threshold: frame and lintel look  
Designed by mighty fate and stark decree,  
The counterpart to heaven – hard as truth,  
Inevitable as reason. Bronze-hard laws  
Proclaim the uselessness of trek we've made,  
For demons gibber: "All who pass this way  
As ghosts, shall not return."

My love hath been  
Interred by now, and so her soul hath crossed  
That flood whose farther shore no living wight  
Has ever viewed. The bitter deluge cleaves  
Her shade from mine.

Guide:

Did not I say thou hast  
Good cause for hope – more so than any soul  
Else 'mongst the world, who might be parted from  
Their most beloved?

Orpheus:

Explain then. What repeals  
Harsh pitiless ways of gloom-land?

Guide:  
Why – thy harp.

Thy very harp in hand.

Orpheus:  
I did forget  
I carried it... But, how –

Guide:  
Thou dost know how.  
What bars thee from thy love? The boatman wards  
All those unburied, with no coin on tongue,  
From passing o'er his river – but if thou  
Conduct'st thy strings and voice such way as charms  
Sweet fellows of the woods, and speak'st thy plaint  
In doing such, with sorrow in thy chords  
Such as no music's known – on earth, below,  
Or in the heavens – then thou mayst just jab  
Enough his dark soul that he'll punt thee 'cross  
And set thee on far margin.

Orpheus:  
It may be  
Just as thou sayst... But what of terrors past  
That Stygian swell? those horned things of much teeth,  
The many-headed, ravenous for meat,  
Who breed and hide in holes, torment the dead,  
And would my trespass punish?

Guide:  
Trust as well,  
If thou keep'st at thy art, they shall submit,  
Baffled and mollified. Did not the nymph  
Who was so near thy bride, tell that wild beasts  
Did long to hear thee? Brutes as well as gods  
Thy magic harmonies, so subtly strummed,  
Can soften to admiring – loosen hate,  
Restrain their rage: for anything which thinks

And aught that feels, somewhere inside its life,  
Hath pity and beauty's mem'ry.

Orpheus:

If I go,

Wilt thou come with me? For I'd hardly know  
My way, e'en if, as sayst, dark things should drop  
Before my harp's bright beams.

Guide:

It must not be,

Sweet man – for look thou what's been sternly traced  
Upon this granite slab above the door:  
“Relinquish Hope, all you who'd enter here.”  
And therefore must I never cross this gate,  
E'en though this far I've led thee.

Orpheus:

I cannot

Climb up such steep as just now we've gone down,  
E'en were I bride to find, and break her bonds.  
The dark inhabits all... Yet, I am calm,  
As was I not when first Eurydice's  
Sharp fall to lowest gloom was told. I breathe  
And stand in utter stillness – harp's as light  
As sunshine in my hand, and glows as doth  
A torch of pure gold dawn.

Guide:

It shall thee lead

To where the lord and lady of this keep  
Shall hear thy plea.

Orpheus:

My soles attach themselves

By turns to lower, lower steps which yearn  
Towards utter blackness... Now the doorsill yawns  
And I descend.

Guide:

Thy helplessness hath brought  
Thee thus far, and shall bring thee farther still.

*[exit Orpheus – lights down]*

## Scene II

*[lights up on the shore of Styx – enter Orpheus]*

Orpheus:

I am alone. I'd thought a grievous crowd  
Of those not buried sure would wander here,  
Imploring their sad need into mine ear,  
Since I, still living, might when once above  
Find corpses and, with blankets of the earth,  
Wrap close those bodies. But it is a beach  
All blank of consciousness... The ripples press  
With pulse against the shingle, while the walls  
Of granite and of darkness soar above –  
The stone behind me, and infinitude  
Black o'er the river.

Waves hypnotically  
Pour on from out of nothing. I do fear  
What apparition might this stream produce  
From shadows: all the silence seems to wait  
In expectation of a ghastly thing.

*[enter Charon in his ferry]*

Charon:

What's this? A man with glowing lyre in hand –  
And still alive. Thou wishest death, perchance,  
But not to slay thyself? 'Tis common, that;

Though few think here to travel, and few find  
The proper route this way while yet they breathe.

Orpheus:

Thou'rt not so terrible. I'd feared a shade  
Of flaming eyes and lacking any flesh:  
Robed skeleton, fell wraith. But thou look'st mild,  
Mysterious – like soul weary with years,  
But keeping all he's seen concealed, unsaid.  
Thou'rt ashen gray all over, as though dust  
And cinders cloaked thee finely, cloth and skin.  
I am a living man, but thou mistak'st  
My cause – I do not come t'embrace that dark  
Shrouding each region yonder: I would claim  
One back from this dim pit, for she fell down  
Just when her joyful dawn 'gan turn mid-morn  
And ought she have enjoyed her bloom of day,  
And I with her.

Most cruel, undue, unfair,  
How Fate hath ta'en her! At her bridal hour,  
Plucking those very blooms would grace the nymphs  
Her sisters, who'd her nuptials attend,  
A viper of the weeds, unseen, her foot  
In innocence disturbed – then venomed tooth  
Lashed out in brutal instinct, sent its ill  
Fast swirling through her veins, undoing life  
Of almost-bride, undoing bliss of groom,  
Revealing monstrous face behind that mask  
Which Nature wears – her peace and beauty all  
Disguise that cloaks her horrid head! her eyes  
And nose which hunt for prey, and fangs which feed  
On her own children!

Ogress Nature I

Thy lord and lady shall plead to constrain –  
Reverse her awful deed, cast back that one  
So late clamped in her jaws, for pity's sake.



And for to ransom her who has my love,  
I'll gladly sound these strings, which charmed the earth  
And undid natural law.

Charon:  
Such law undid?

How so?

Orpheus:  
Thou look'st upon the very hands  
And harp which drew wild animals to list  
To harmony and concord, when ere this  
The untamed and unbeautiful blood-feast  
Was all their world – somehow my lyre's sound  
Entered like silver needle through the brain  
Of each fierce creature, and made understand  
What's savage, something higher. Such heard I  
From my own dear intended; what is more,  
She claimed the trees and foliage moved swift  
To gather towards my notes... I disbelieved,  
Thinking her dreaming – but no more misdoubt,  
For somehow, I know strumming shall sedate  
All fiends I find here – and if such as ye  
Might fall before these golden sounds, why not  
Mere flora and the brutes?

Charon:  
Thou think'st I'll fall  
Before thy instrument, as though it were  
Some sword to fright the dead or those who guard  
Grim paths to Hades' kingdom? Thou'lt not cross  
This gloomy tide; 'tis law, by him decreed  
Who drew worst lot of three.

Orpheus:  
I think I'll play  
And watch for thy response.

Charon:  
Play on, and sing.

Orpheus:

*[plays and sings slowly]*

*The steps lead ever downward past this sea,  
Down sloping stones and drops to bitter shelves  
Where long ago the carnal-greedy fell,  
Where whirlwinds and tourbillions cause them grief.*

*A million souls impaled lie in a briar,  
And oh! how fondly would I join their pain  
With mourning loud, if love I can't reclaim:  
Bleeding for woe, pinned fast to central fire.*

*Immensities of space! – through night, so swift  
Fly gibbering faces, heads propelled by wings,  
And devil-shapes which flutter in thick rings  
Above the castle towards which sorrows drift.*

*A terror stalks this earth, stalks seas and skies.  
The mountains worn by rain, the stars which spend  
Their flame, flow ever onwards towards some end –  
Which is an endless, endless, muted cry.*

*[Charon has slumped in his ferry]*

He sleeps – or rather, in a trance he's leant  
Against his punting pole. My harp hath charmed  
This foremost sentry... Now, if I move soft  
In how I enter boat, disturb not guard,  
Move hands of his – I might just take his stick  
And push us both across the black-foam tide.  
I'll act his office, enter where she weeps,  
My tear-eyed sweet one, somewhere 'midst this dark.

*[lights down as Orpheus pushes off in the ferry]*

Scene III

*[lights up on the throne room of Hades and Persephone – enter Orpheus]*

Hades:

Who comes before us?

Orpheus:

One who'd have thine ear,  
Oh prince of Erebus.

Persephone:

Thou dar'st approach  
Us dreadful pair?

Hades:

Few living, and none dead  
Make bold as thou dost.

Persephone:

Seest thou flames and spires,  
Oh rash man? Hear'st thou cursing, gnashing mouths,  
This terror all around thee?

Orpheus:

I do hear  
And see, dire queen.

Hades:

He bows low toward the ground  
For horror, and for meekness.

Persephone:

I would call  
My ministers of torment.

Orpheus:

They are here

Already: everywhere, they follow me.

Hades:

Thou bear'st in hand a lyre.

Orpheus:

'Tis the means

By which I crossed that gulf of boundless black  
The boatman keeps – and by which Cerberus  
Was made to cease his bark, and nod three heads  
In stupefied enchantment.

While I walked

And played, and sang, the dark forms of this world  
Drew close to listen: flying shapes like birds,  
Or bats or insects – but not quite such things –  
Landed upon my shoulder, or hopped round  
As trod I gently 'cross the barren floors,  
By plucked chords fascinated; while all those  
Chimeric foot-beasts, ground's subconscious crowd,  
Likewise did trail me, giving up their growls,  
And followed me in innocence like whelps  
Trailing a parent. Fiends turned gentle things  
Within my circle – imps which should have lunged  
To thieve my spirit dawdled in their dens,  
Enchained by guiltless ardors, blissful dreams;  
And each blaspheming creature, mad, grotesque,  
Did seem to slip his cruelty.

Thus I came

Down spiraling stairways, leaving beasts behind  
As steps grew narrow, slipp'ry – all this way  
(Long years of walking, seemed it) until shone  
This castle's fires, far distant. Now I kneel,  
Revealing key by which I turned thy door:  
One humble soul, one simple man of song  
Who strong implores compassion.

Hades:  
For thyself?

Fear'st thou some torment after thou shouldst die  
For heinousness in life – and so thou begg'st  
Forbearance, while yet fleshed?

Orpheus:  
Aye, for myself –

And for one else: compassion, though not 'gainst  
Such agonies as here the wicked dure  
In endless retribution: no, I plead  
For mercy for an innocent – and for  
Her innocent beloved, who with her grieves  
That they are sep'rate.

Persephone:  
Thou speak'st of a death  
Of one was precious to thee.

Hades:  
Some mischance  
Now binds her to our bleakness.

Orpheus:  
Nature seemed  
So vernal-mild, like spring... yet in each sleeve  
And fold she hides a dagger: One such sting,  
So well concealed – e'en on that first of days  
Of happiness forevisioned – from its sheathe  
With causeless rancor drew she, and she struck  
One named Eurydice.

Persephone:  
Below she clings  
Fast to a stone, and weeps.

Orpheus:  
Why should this world

Give life to love? Why slay us? crush our necks,  
Cast us below, to darkness?

Persephone:  
Well thou weep'st...

I weep as well.

Hades:  
This gloomy land thou seest  
Hath lived forever: since the world was made  
These doors and halls have stood here. Fire may surge,  
Or ocean flood, or frost, and sweep those realms  
Of passing life above – but souls who sigh  
And soft lament here, ever shall endure  
'Neath adamantine roofs.

Orpheus:  
I'll not believe  
Thou tell'st me truly.

Hades:  
Even I, a god  
And king of subjects, like a fleeting wraith  
Pass through this emptiness.

Orpheus:  
Whate'er thou beest,  
Or whate'er truth may be, I would put forth  
My anguish and my wish.

Hades:  
Thou wouldst reclaim  
Thy love.

Orpheus:  
For just that term she ought have lived;  
Then she'll be thine again.

Hades:  
My law is set,  
And not for pity moves.

Orpheus:  
Thou hast a heart:  
Against my expectation, thou didst speak  
Somewhat in sympathy... If thou art king,  
Thy law is thine own will, and thou mayst break  
Thine orders, as thy heart breaks.

Hades:  
Should it break,  
This crown I would renounce, flee castle's chair,  
Be god of nothing. Love I understand,  
And pity – but they serve the sorrow here,  
And labor as my subjects.

Orpheus:  
Thou shalt not  
Let even one, most innocent in life,  
Pass from thy chains some merest fleeting time –  
Some years, some months – ere to the dark returns  
Her gently glowing spirit?

Hades:  
It shall glow  
More brightly here – her sorrow is her soul;  
Thy sorrow, thine.

Orpheus:  
Thou art the horrid type  
Of all man's cruelties: tyrants, murderers  
From thee learn wickedness.

Hades:  
It is the world,  
Its origin immortal, which doth teach

This suffering unending.

Persephone:

Husband, think

How bold this man must be – what tender, sweet,  
And awful strength divine he holds in him  
To brave our kingdom. If he were to play  
And sing to thee, thou surely wouldst relent,  
Just as relented minions and those guards  
Spaced 'cross our fearful empire.

Hades:

What song might

Sway eons-old remorselessness? I reign:  
I say, musician, that thy love shall stay  
'Til e'en the dark shall crumble.

Orpheus:

Oh relent,

Ye awful night! A thousand million years  
Might pass, and disappear – and still I'd not  
See her I love again.

Hades:

I view that hell

What yawns below thee.

Orpheus:

Useless is this harp,

Useless this music!

Persephone:

Husband – thou mayst reign,

But I as well bear scepter. Whilst I bide  
These months beside thee, sitting on grim throne,  
And coldness blows above, my word shall lift  
An equal height to thine.



Hades:  
'Tis true I reaped  
Thy springtime self, my sovereignty to cleave  
For winter's term – say on what thou dost wish  
For sad musician... But if we divide  
In our decrees, I fear one rod shall snap  
And one crown break and tumble.

Persephone:  
I proclaim  
He take his love with him.

Hades:  
This realm shall quake  
And cave – thou bidst a thing unnatural.

Persephone:  
Yet hear the rest: he shall not claim unearned  
So dear a treasure. Let him prove how great  
The love within him yearns, and he shall live  
Once more with his intended.

Orpheus:  
Whate'er be  
Thy test or trial – speak.

Persephone:  
[*to Orpheus*] When thou walk'st back  
The way thou cam'st, back towards the realms of light  
And sky and weather, as thou tak'st thy bride  
Thou must not glimpse her. You shall go before  
And she behind; and neither mightst thou speak  
To her, nor she to thee. When thou hast reached  
The sun or stars once more – and she as well –  
Then thou mayst look upon her form again,  
And greet her as a soul renewed to life,  
And have thy love... But if thou once but look'st  
On sweet Eurydice ere she's emerged

From lair of shadows – then shalt thou have lost  
Thy sweet one for all time.

Hades:  
This sentence I  
Shall not oppose.

Orpheus:  
I love thy word, oh queen:  
How shudder all my nerves, how throb my veins –  
How desp'rate was I! Oh, where doth she stay?  
Where might I find her? And, another thought:  
Thou sayst, queen, we mayn't speak while we depart  
And neither might I turn to look on her –  
But how, then, might I know she follows me,  
And that 'tis not illusion, this bright hope,  
This keen and anxious joy?

Persephone:  
Thou know'st not one  
Thing in this world. Just follow what I've told,  
And look back when 'tis safe.

Hades:  
We've granted more  
Than thou hadst right to hope for.

Persephone:  
Once begin'st  
Upon thy leave, keep vision straight ahead.  
Thy road goes winding, narrow, steep, and long.

Orpheus:  
I shall do this, and trust she tracks my steps.

*[Hades and Persephone vanish – lights down]*

Scene IV

*[lights up on Eurydice, sobbing in a dark place – enter Orpheus]*

Orpheus:

Am I asleep? I look on thee again,  
And do begin to think these worlds unreal –  
Yet wondrous in so being! I'd accept  
A thousand dreams o'er waking.

*[he approaches]*

Eurydice:  
Love of mine?

Art come? How is this?... Oh, I fear, I fear –  
Thou must be –

Orpheus:

No, I live. My harp I took  
Across great granite regions, fields of stone  
Where no man lives, and entered through that door  
Thou took'st when thou wert taken from sweet light;  
And as a living man did brave that night:  
Firm front against the cold, mantel wrapped round,  
Passing the eerie slabs.

Vast sea of hell  
I played my lyre to cross, subduing him  
Who asks for coin; and 'fore that awful pair  
Who here hold sway, I did present myself,  
Not fearing fire, not fearing what they'd bid  
I must endure for thee, or for such rash  
And reckless trespass. Ere I came to them,  
I saw, sprawled 'cross the acres 'fore their tower,  
Tityos: he who dared, on Hera's urge,  
To try to Leto ravish. Now he howls  
While vultures tear his liver; and all time  
So shall he scream, enchained to blood-stained ground,

His torture all his being.

Sisyphus,

I saw him too – frustrated by his rock  
That will not sit – it seeks the lower ground  
Each time he perches it: He chased his stone,  
Unhappy, cursing, toiling, chained somehow  
To task that he might leave, if he but chose –  
His grumbling filled my ears, and where I thought  
At first to offer kind and soothing words,  
I let him be, and hastened on my way,  
Not trusting such deep sorrow as he spoke  
Would chain me not as well.

These were the sights  
Did nearly cast me back – what mind might dream,  
Enact such tortures, even 'pon those souls  
Most vile while living? Crimes last not for aye:  
The body heals, or dies... the mind forgets...  
For what, such torments? ceaseless, crammed with hurts  
Which shall not close? I feared such pain whilst I  
Made past the threshold towards high double throne,  
For I did challenge Death itself, and dared  
Dark boundaries to rupture.

Eurydice:

Yet thou'rt here,  
Alive and whole, thy lyre not e'en scratched,  
As beautiful as when I saw thee last –  
Nay more so, for now boldness makes thee gleam,  
And courage lends its luster to thy brow,  
And love hath made thee angel-shining, grand:  
More beauteous than gods. My hands I must,  
Though they are cold and ghostly, hold thee with,  
And use to press thee to me.

[*they embrace*]

Orpheus:

I still feel

The blood and heart inside thee: thou'rt not dead –  
No, not at all! How many shades who live  
In these dim regions throb still with their life,  
As thou dost, warm and soft: a pining wight,  
Gentle and yearning? Clasp me once again;  
Clasp me amidst this gloom.

Eurydice:

I would embrace

Thee ever – fold thy soul into mine own –  
And I begin to.

Yet, how long mightst thou  
Remain with me? Though space and distance close  
To naught at all – yet still, a wall's between  
Our spirits: From this place I must not leave;  
No, not e'en from this corner: 'tis decreed  
By cruel king and his consort – no one goes  
Who once hath been enslaved.

Orpheus:

Oh no, but hear

Concession I have won e'en from that lord  
Who seemed as firm as steel: his lady swayed  
His stubbornness, for she took pity on  
Our anguish, and she argued well with him,  
And did extract exception in our case:  
This chance, this chance so excellent: thou mayst  
Come back with me to life!

Eurydice:

How might it be?

Stern Fate undone?

Orpheus:

'Tis so.

Eurydice:  
Doth even that  
Foundation of all things buckle and bend,  
Upsetting nature – spilling back its dead,  
Reversing time, untying knot which binds  
All flesh, all spirit?

Orpheus:  
One small rip in things –  
Which shall be mended after thou shalt pass  
Back into summer's sweetness: that is all  
Hath been permitted. Firm remains that hall  
Which is three sisters' home; and strong yet stands  
That tower of nature, destiny, and law.

Eurydice:  
Then I may quit this gloom – walk hand in hand  
With thee to sunlight?

Orpheus:  
Yes... but I must tell  
What terms the queen emplaced: I'll go before,  
And thou shalt follow, for I must not look  
On thee before thou com'st unto the light;  
And neither might we speak 'til then. If I  
Or thou do break these things, thou shalt remain  
Where thou art now, no more to be reclaimed.  
Such said the queen.

Eurydice:  
Why so?

Orpheus:  
Such hardship is  
The price we bear for how fate hath been rent:  
My proof of faith, submission of our souls,  
Endurance of our hearts, our wracking nerves.  
But I do trust that naught shall go awry:

I'll not look back 'til I am well outside  
And thou must be as well... Clap hands o'er lips  
And do not lose me.

Eurydice:  
Walk with steps so slow  
I cannot help but dog thee.

Orpheus:  
And mine eyes  
Shall swerve not from strict path.

Eurydice:  
So then – turn round,  
And trust in how Fates guide us.

Orpheus:  
I shall look  
Once more on thee once trial's gone behind,  
And thou'rt restored to gladness.

Eurydice:  
Lead, and pray  
With every step, 'tis true, our miracle.

*[Orpheus turns and exits, followed by Eurydice – lights down]*

## Act III

### Scene I

*[many years later – lights up on the second shepherd, an old man, weeping in the woods – enter the first shepherd, also old, and the third shepherd, a young man]*

First Shepherd:

Oh friend, thou weep'st. Thy fountain-face doth wet  
Two rose-red patches.

Second Shepherd:

If I weep, 'tis for  
Most worthy cause the gods know.

First Shepherd:

Gods may know,  
But we do not.

Second Shepherd:

Look ye in yonder swale,  
In whose deep gully winds the Hebrus stream,  
Just past this screen of poplars, rich with sun  
On this rich day, when none might evil think  
Hath crushed life's jewel of sweetness.

First Shepherd:

I shall see. *[exits]*

Third Shepherd:

Thou art o'ercome.

Second Shepherd:

There is no comfort now:  
Not here, on surface, seeming bright and glad –  
Nor in the gloomy shade, nor under rocks



And all dark places.

[*a distant sound of wailing*]

Third Shepherd:  
Faintly, there blows in  
On wind, some strange lamenting.

Second Shepherd:  
It arrives  
From past the poplars.

Third Shepherd:  
Slightest hint of sound –  
So slight, I thought I dreamt it.

Second Shepherd:  
Women's howls:  
The agony of grief.

Third Shepherd:  
Such noise as one  
Would think to hear at hell's door – sure, not here  
Amidst these rustling branches.

[*enter first shepherd, carrying Orpheus's lyre*]

First Shepherd:  
Oh bewail!  
Bewail such loss!

Third Shepherd:  
What is't?

First Shepherd:  
Bewail such end  
Of life of best 'neath heaven!

Third Shepherd:  
Tell me what

Thou sawst.

First Shepherd:  
A sight which seems from hell misplaced:  
Arms, legs, strewn all about – nearby, the chest,  
The stripped trunk – and all flowers flecked with blood,  
The grass soaked deep. No head did I descry;  
But this I found, and it doth tell me whom  
Those grieving women murdered.

Third Shepherd:  
It was those  
Lamenting in the woods, committed such  
Appalling act?

First Shepherd:  
With every sob, they spoke  
Their guilt, and cursed themselves.

Second Shepherd:  
The lyre thou bear'st...  
It doth recall the very voice and strains  
Of he who played it when we two were young,  
And in his sadness, vanished.

Third Shepherd:  
Whom mean'st thou?  
Why was he slain?

Second Shepherd:  
His name was Orpheus;  
And those who slew him, those who e'en now wail  
In agonized repentance, I did view  
Destroy him for his sating not their lusts,  
But holding high, aloof, from loyalty  
To his long-dead beloved.

First threw they stones  
And sticks at him, demanding that he lie  
In their embraces – but such objects hurled  
Themselves away from him, for so they loved  
The staves he ever warbled, strains he played,  
And so would hurt him not.

Then those who'd thrown –  
Ciconian women, drunk with Bacchus' grape,  
And now more drunk with fury – heaved themselves  
Upon that man oblivious to them,  
Who still did play, lost look upon his face,  
As though he cared not what him might befall  
So long as when he died, his fingers touched  
Those strings which were his last love on this earth –  
Did hurl themselves, I say, so long denied  
That handsome man through life, then 'gan to tear  
Within an instant – so swift, I'd no chance  
To intervene – his body, as she-wolves  
Might rooster tear, their prey. All hands him seized;  
His head, wrenched off his neck, flew from fierce hands  
Of lust-mad raving ones, tumbled through grass  
Then lost was in the curling Hebrus wave,  
While all the rest of him a rag doll looked  
As when dogs tear such toy.

Limbs strewn about,  
The weeds and flowers steeped in gore, that scene  
Of sudden silent turned... and, horror-struck,  
Wood nymphs 'gan wail; and soon did join their sound,  
As gradually they took in what they'd done,  
Those rueful lusting women.

Third Shepherd:  
Woeful 'tis –  
So sick'ning-woeful. I'll not go that way  
To view such sight.

First Shepherd:  
The man played aching sweet:  
Fair in his face, past handsome in his songs.  
But life to him was only sweet in morn;  
Not midday, no – nor eve.

Third Shepherd:  
His name I'd heard,  
And something vaguely of how much was loved  
Before my time. Of how his midday gloomed  
And led to such a dusk, I fain would hear.

First Shepherd:  
Young friend, know first: he had, when 'bout thine age,  
A love, as thou mightst. Named Eurydice,  
She was an oak nymph doting on her beau,  
All innocent of fangs which nature hid,  
Who, on the morn when married was to be,  
And gath'ring blossoms, bought too soon her bed  
In hall which is our common final inn –  
For viper's tooth her found.

This sweet young bard,  
Heartsick, with lyre's aid those thresholds crossed  
Barred 'gainst all else – for music was his charm,  
His heartsick music, casting gentleness  
And drowsy rapt'rous transport 'pon fierce heads  
Which would oppose him... And from king and queen  
Who sit at death's own heart, its beating core  
Spuming with blood and flame, he won this chance  
To bear his love with him: that if she walked  
Behind him on their trek to outer light  
Up from her dungeon, while he not once glanced  
Behind him, 'til the sun shone on her face  
With all death's dark behind her, then he'd win  
His love to be with him – at least 'til when  
Such proper time as she'd be called to gloom:  
Her old-age passage down to where we rest.

Now, the saddest thing thou e'er shalt hear  
Is what befell next: High ascent once climbed  
And doorsill crossed, musician stood outside  
Amongst the happy wilderness which knows  
The blue vault for its roof: he waited long,  
Walking a goodly space from prison's door,  
So that his love had plenty time to pass  
Into the sun as well, ere he should look  
To welcome her revival.

But for all

His cautiousness, when eyes he turned upon  
That portal in the rock – to his deep grief,  
He found his sweet one yet beneath that shade  
Which lingered 'neath the door: the lintel still  
Hung o'er her head; and with an anguished look  
But not a sound, she vanished from his sight,  
Retreating back to shadows.

Long he walked

And long he mourned, poor bard: this place he left,  
Wand'ring the world; and nothing heard we here  
Of Orpheus or what his deed might be –  
Until such time we noted he'd returned,  
And heard vague word he'd journeyed in the north,  
Singing amongst the Hyperborean race:  
Those giants who age not, know not disease,  
And live frozen in health and happiness –  
And heard we too he had with Jason sailed  
Upon that charmed ship that sought the fleece,  
Strumming his strings and warbling with much verve  
To drown out sirens' voices while they crooned  
From three isles to enchant bold sailors' hearts  
And dash their quest on shore rocks.

Nothing more

Came to our ears – not news, and not that lush

Heart-aching art of his, though he lived near,  
Somewhere amongst the beasts and flora wild,  
Hid 'midst the leaves. Of late, his song returned  
So faintly, in the twinkling of the eve,  
Or sometimes of a dawn – much softer then,  
Like music of a bird which would not show  
Its shape to any man; and words he sang  
No ear could then discern.

Now song is done,  
Voice ended, music's apex toppled low,  
Crumbled and crushed; and harp I hold in hand  
The only relic of that poet's staves:  
That beauty of sweet heaven, chanted, strummed.

[*enter the sister wood nymphs of Eurydice – they sing*]

Wood Nymphs:

*Ye three who mourn, we mourn as well for him  
Who from death's pit our sister nearly gained  
To live with him – but think not staves he sang  
Forever have been lost to regions dim,*

*For heard we, when 'gan bobbing head to roll  
Upon the winding flood, his soft lips chant:  
That voice which charmed each human, beast, and plant –  
Though stranger now were lyrics which he told*

*Than any song before... The head spun round  
While on the foam it floated; then not long  
It was 'til those now harpless notes had gone,  
Had vanished round a bend – such soothing sound*

*As we did miss, for it had softened grief.  
The dream-like river bears that singer still:  
Sharing his music while it gathers rills,  
Floating his music towards the briny reefs,*

*Swirling a gorgeous thing, a god-like man,  
Which soon shall gurgle in the sea's white froth –  
Unless, could be, 'tis borne up and 'tis tossed  
Unto a shore, unto another land.*

*[exit wood nymphs – the land darkens slightly]*

Third Shepherd:

I seem to see, from out the sky's deep wells,  
Nine forms who bear the starlight for their dress  
Descend to us.

*[enter Calliope and her eight sister muses]*

Calliope:

Oh ye who loved that man  
So bloodily destroyed – brush tears away,  
Undo your mourning. Orpheus yet lives:  
Lives he amongst us, 'mongst we goddesses  
Where inspiration's waters flow and foam  
On Helicon's pure height. His spirit dwells  
Within our golden temple; and that god  
Who taught him how to play, to sing, compose,  
Dwells with him, by his side – together they  
Bring melodies to rooms and sacred halls  
Such as no mortal's heard, nor ever shall.

*[exit the muses except Calliope]*

They go to gather him – to lift his limbs  
In tender arms, and bear him, dream-like slow,  
To foot of Mount Olympus, where his grave  
Shall hear the nightingales every age –  
Hear gentle songs which speak of love for him.

First Shepherd:

This is a joyous word... Yet, what of her  
Whom he did nearly rescue? Shall for aye

Those two rest sundered, one placed 'midst the tops  
Of high celestial beauty, while his wife,  
Or nearly wife, remains a des'prate shade,  
Confined to ceaseless darkness? Seems this none  
Of heaven for the poet – though may be,  
Heaven in truth is lonely, and our loves  
To fade are always fated, leaving naught  
But some cold, bright endurance.

Calliope:  
It must be:

It hath been ordered. By the clock of sun  
And moon and stars – by body of the earth –  
By waking of those meek things under light,  
By innocence, by joyous lives they lead,  
By deaths they die – it shan't be otherwise,  
Such melancholy fate. Give tears, give tears...  
My son shall ever pine for her he loved,  
And she for him.

Oh shepherd, give his lyre.

*[she takes it]*

This golden harp, brave gift of Phoebus' grace,  
Within the sky I'll set, and it shall be,  
Of nights, a monument to star-bright bard,  
E'en while his head yet sings upon this earth –  
E'en while it ceases, closes lips, breathes not.

*[lights down]*

## Scene II

*[lights up on the shore of Lesbos – a woman is pulling in a fishing net – she discovers the head inside, and takes it out to examine it]*



First Woman of Lesbos:  
Oh sister, come and see what I have found!  
Thou'lt not believe 'tis true.

*[enter second woman of Lesbos]*

A handsome head!  
Some fiend did murder on this sweet-faced youth –  
Aye, murder, for I'll not believe 'twas just,  
His execution.

Second Woman of Lesbos:  
Could be any isle  
From 'round this sea he's floated. Still so fresh  
And white his countenance, I'd say he's been  
No more than five days perished.

First Woman of Lesbos:  
Strange to say,  
But little while ago, I thought I heard  
Some singing, faint and sweet, upon the main,  
Far off upon the swell. The sea I searched,  
But no boat saw.

Second Woman of Lesbos:  
The same thing I discerned,  
But thought I dreamt it.

*[they gaze at the head in thought]*

First Woman of Lesbos:  
'Tis sent by the gods,  
I am convinced.

Second Woman of Lesbos:  
My piety doth urge  
We treat it gently.

First Woman of Lesbos:  
Come – I know a place,  
Not far, where we shall tuck what we have found  
Within a little cave – half-seal the door,  
Then build a rock shrine over.

Second Woman of Lesbos:  
And I'll tell  
The isle our deed, and singing strange we heard.

First Woman of Lesbos:  
A priestess shall I urge to keep that spot,  
And listen closely, through dark hours and bright,  
To hear what sounds inspire her – and if sweet,  
Like music, may she riddle out what words  
Come softly to her ear.

Suchwise she'll list  
To what the Fates and what the gods might send  
Inside her brain: suchwise she'll prophesy  
Such golden meaning as this head might sing.

*[lights down]*

Finis

