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Title

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is a tragic love story. According to *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Orpheus was a very gifted musician, and all creatures loved his music. He met Eurydice, and they fell in love and were married. After the wedding, Eurydice was in a field with her bridesmaids and suffered a fatal snakebite. Orpheus became so grief-stricken that he went to the Underworld to get his wife back, charming everyone along the way with his music. When he met Hades and Persephone, the king and queen of the Underworld, they were moved by his sad song. They agreed that Eurydice could leave and have life again. She would follow Orpheus back on the long journey to the world of the living. The one condition was that he could not turn to look at her until they were both out of Hades. If he did look at her before that time, he would lose her forever. As they were just about to reach Earth, Orpheus turned. As soon as he did this, Eurydice began to fade away, and her last word to him is “farewell.”

The poem “Orpheus 1.” by Margaret Atwood,  this myth in a very interesting way. The speaker is Eurydice, and in the first stanza, she implies that going back to the land of the living may not be a good thing. As she puts it, it once killed her (4). She says that “the return / to time was not [her] my choice:” (7-8). In the myth, Eurydice's feelings are not considered, just those of her lover. For Atwood, however, tThe love of Orpheus is a “leash,” which immediately conjures an image of a subordinate being pulled along (14). It is almost as though his love is really just control. Her “[L]iving again” (19); is what Orpheus “wanted / [her] to become:” (18-19) His idea—or “image” (17)—of her was the only thing that mattered, and she was his “hallucination;” (21)—she was not real. In the end,

she knew it would hurt him, but she “fold[ed] like a gray moth and let go:” (37), consigning herself to the underworld.  While the same events occur, the tone of the poem is so different than the myth.  ~~Eurydice as the speaker is a fascinating approach, and it gives a whole new take on this story.~~ 

Works Cited

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