'King Orphius'

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Introduction

The legend of Orpheus, the peerless musician who ventured into hell in search of his lost wife Eurydice, has exerted a strong influence on the cultural life of Europe throughout the centuries. Variants of the myth have also been found in Manchurian and Polynesian cultures and amongst American Indians (Eliade 1957:195, 219, 281, 331, 351–2). In its currently best-known form the story derives from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* X and XI, Virgil's *Georgics* IV, and the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* III, metre xii, of Boethius. King Alfred's translation and elaboration of Boethius (Sedgefield 1908:116–18) was the first English version of the legend (Severs 1961:187–209). In Scotland, Henryson tells us in his haunting poem of Orpheus and Eurydice that he has worked from Boethius' 'gay buke of consolatioun' (Henryson 1968:129–48) through the moralising medium of the late thirteenth- to early fourteenth-century English Dominican scholar,

> . . maister trivat doctour nicholass
> quhilk in his tyme a noble theologe wass (ll. 421–3).

In all these versions of the story, Orpheus suffers the loss of Eurydice in his moment of triumph on the very threshold of life because he has looked back to see his love behind him.

There is, however, another, older version of the legend in which Orpheus' journey is not in vain and he succeeds in restoring Eurydice to the world. This was the dominant version in the classical world until the first century B.C. (Bowra 1952:113 and Heurgon 1932). Euripides (*Alcestis*, 357 ff.) and Isocrates (*Oratio* xi, 7) both allow Eurydice to be reunited with her husband. By the second century A.D. the story had undergone a Christian metamorphosis. The catacombs of Calixtus show Orpheus playing his flute to the animal creation, in his role as Christ the Good Shepherd. In the Patristic period there is the suggestion, in a hymn of Prudentius, that a parallel is being drawn between the descent of Orpheus into Hades to redeem his bride, Eurydice, and Christ's descent into Hell to redeem His bride, mankind. This parallel is given clear expression in the twelfth-century sequence from Saint-Martial 'Morte Christi Celebrata' (Dronke 1962: 198–215). There exist also three eleventh-century Latin poems relating to the story of Orpheus in which the hero's search has a happy ending (Dronke 1962:198–215).

It is this 'happy ending' version of the myth that seems to have provided the source

of the now-lost Breton lai of Sir Orfeo which is referred to in the late twelfth-century romance of 'Floire et Blanceflor' where the minstrel

> Une harpe tint en ses mains,
> Et harpe le lai d'Orphey (Meril 1856: ll. 70–1),

and later in the 'Lai de l'Espine' (Zenker 1893: ll. 233–55) and the 'Prose Launcelot' (Sommer 1909: l. 290). This Breton lai, probably through the medium of a now-lost French translation or adaptation, provides the source for the Middle English 'Sir Orfeo' (Bliss 1966). There are today three texts of this remarkable poem. It is capable of an arrestingly pictorial quality, as in its description of the fairy company seen by Orfeo in his wanderings; of a moving pathos, as in the description of Orfeo's change from joy and wealth to wretchedness in the wilderness; and of building up suspense, as in Orfeo's testing of his steward; and at the same time is consistent in the skill with which the story is evolved and in the economy of its vocabulary. The three texts are the Auchinleck manuscript (the earliest and best), dating from around 1330 and probably originating from the London area; MS Harley 3810, written in Warwickshire early in the fifteenth century; and MS Ashmole 61, in a North East Midland dialect and probably written down after 1488 (Hibbard 1924:195–213).

The English 'Sir Orfeo' displays many features which may have been in the Breton lai but are not to be found in the Classical versions of the Orpheus myth mentioned above. Among these features is the idea that the English Heurodis does not enter the otherworld in the traditional manner in which having

> . . strampit on a serpent vennemuss (Henryson, l. 105) . . .
> In peisis small this quenis harte can rife,
> and scho annone fell on a deidly swoun (Henryson, ll. 118–19).

This natural death is not Heurodis' way of entering the otherworld. Rather, she falls asleep under a tree in a May garden, is visited by the fairy king who summons her to his kingdom and, despite her own reluctance and her husband's armed guards, is spirited away to a strange, twilight realm where she alternately languishes in the attitude in which she was taken from the world, among a grisly throng of others similarly arrested in attitudes of violent or tragic seizure, or joins in the activities of the fairy company, as is the case when Orfeo glimpses her riding with the fairy host. (Allen 1964:102–11).

In the Classical story, Orpheus reacts to the loss of Eurydice by setting out to recover her and Henryson sends his hero to beg his father Phoebus,

> Len me thy lycht, and lat me nocht go leiss,
> To find that fair in fame that was never fyld,
> My lady quene and lufe, euridices (ll. 171–3).

He is directed in search of her through the heavens where he learns the music of the spheres, over all the earth and even 'attour the gravis gray' (l. 244), until, after twenty days, he reaches 'unto the yet of hell' (l. 250). The hero of Calderon's *El Divino Orfeo* and Lope de Vega's *El Marido Mas Firme*, armed only with the magical charm of his

music and spurred by his faithfulness to his wife, undertakes a similar deliberate quest (Cabañas 1948:87, 239). In the *Metamorphoses* it is not until he has lost Eurydice the second time that Orpheus wanders distraught on the bank of the Styx (x, ll. 73–4). In 'Sir Orfeo', however, when Orfeo loses Heurodis he abandons his kingdom and retires to the wilderness to wander in ceaseless lamentation. It is only when, after many years, he chances to catch sight of her with the fairy throng that the possibility of searching for her occurs to him and he follows her into the otherworld.

These changes in the Orpheus legend—the manner of the heroine's loss and the hero's reaction to it—are seen as the effect on the myth of Celtic lore and tradition (Smithers 1953:61–92). The Irish tale of the Wooing of Etain, preserved in the ninth-century *Yellow Book of Lecan* and the *Book of the Dun Cow* (Dillon 1948:53–7) seems here to be the probable source of influence. In this story, Etain, wife of Eochaid Airem king of Ireland, is mysteriously spirited away by the fairy prince Midir, despite the armies of Ireland placed round his palace by her husband to guard her (Cross and Slover 1936: 82–92). In his wanderings in the wilderness, Orfeo has much in common with the Celtic wild man of the woods (see Jackson 1940:535–50), while the belief that sleeping under a tree puts a mortal into the power of the fairies is also Celtic (Allen 1964:102–11). Orfeo's glimpse of his lost wife among the fairy host, also foreign to the classical story, may have been derived from the story told by Walter Map in *De Nugis Curialium*, Distinctio IV, cap 8, of the 'Filii Mortuae', in which a knight of Lesser Britain, grieving for his dead wife, sees her in the midst of a company of women in a lonely valley and boldly carries her off to resume their happy married life as if she had never been lost to him (James 1914; Loomis 1936; Severs 1961:187–209).

There remains another element in 'Sir Orfeo' which, if not exactly unknown in the Classical tale (that is, the version with the happy ending), is at least of far less significance in this version. This is the account of the return to his kingdom by Orfeo and his queen. In the Middle English poem, Orfeo's recovery of his former position, including as it does his testing of the steward in whose charge he had left his kingdom, is given a prominence which sets the episode up as a counterbalance and corollary to the episode of the recovery of Heurodis, without which Orfeo's rehabilitation could not take place.

The latest survivor of the Orfeo legend is the ballad of 'King Orfeo' (Child No. 19) which has been recorded in Shetland in the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (Child 1882:217; Bronson 1959–72: I, 275; IV, 455–6). This ballad covers in outline the same story as 'Sir Orfeo', with the primary emphasis being laid upon the hero's skill in music:

> And first he played da notes o noy,
> Scowan ürla grün
> An dan he played da notes o joy.
> Whar giorten han grün oarlac
>
> An dan he played da göd gabber reel,
> Dat meicht ha made a sick hert hale. (Child: 217, A. 7–8)

It seems a strange and lengthy voyage from the Middle English 'Sir Orfeo' to the Shetland 'King Orfeo' and one can only speculate as to intermediary versions of the legend now lost.

One of these lost intermediaries however has now come to light, or rather, two portions of it have reappeared. From amongst a pile of miscellaneous fragments in a manuscript of around 1585 in the Scottish Record Office (see Stewart 1972)—fragments whose provenance it is now impossible to trace and which are sadly ravaged by time, damp and mice—I have managed to piece together the following lines of a new and original version of the Orpheus legend, a Scottish 'King Orphius'. This transcript from RH 13/35 is made with the kind approval of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland.

Text

. . Sen scho maid ws allwayis blyth
and we saikles soe mot I thryfe
yis day is gain all haill
euer ye plisance of portingale[1]
and fra ye king orphius glaidnes
hes gain for ewermair I vis
yai tuik hir wp v^{t}outtin mair
and to ye chalmer yai hir bair
and softlie laid hir in hir bed
yat was w^{t} cumlie claythis ouerspred
and laid be yat yis ladie doun
it vas neir ye tyme of none[2]
ye menstrallis playis into ye hall
ye lordis vas cumit bay^{t} greit and small
ye king to vesche maid him boun
foir to serwe him com mony ane man
lauaris off gold com yair bedein
ye king speiris quhair is ye quein
yan anserit ane fair ladie
scho kneillit doun and said trewlie
ye quein is no^{t} disposit at all
yis day to dyne into 3our hall
ye king anserit w^{t} . . eit cheir
yis day at morne scho vas haill and feir
and yis bly^{t} sall I no^{t} be
my soverane lady quhill I see
. . to hir chalmer is he gone
his lordis followitt him ilk ane

als schone as he wes cumitt yair
he fand his ladie grainand sair
greit pittie may be sein
quhan ye king luikit on ye quein
he said alace quha did yis deid
how is it hapinit I will it wit
. . lam it no^{t} I vill it vit
yan anserit ane ladie cleir
and askit mercie oft bot veir
ye quein ye day airlie at morne
scho went to ye gairding as biforne
and sat doun in arbour grein
and leind hir to ane fair laurein
or euer we vost scho gaif ane skirll[3]
and ay sensyne scho vas deidlyk
. . be yai had tellit yair taill
ye quein vas bay^{t} van and paill
scho said my soverane I 3ow reid
3e vyd na ladyis of my deid
ye king of pharie vill me haif
yair may na erdlie thing me saif
bot va var me to pairt 3ow fra
and I my^{t} . . .

. . . . . .

. . quhat neidis ye harberie ask att me
and yair so fair ane thing w^{t} ye
I merwell yat sick ane cairle as yow
soe fair ane lady for to wow
sa meiklie orphius anserit yan
sir I am sib to gentill men
sumtym I haue sein ye day
yat gentill men vald w^{t} me play
ye burgess anserit to orphius
and in haist he said to him yus
I did it to 3ow foir ye best
sall na man do 3ow deir
noir 3it yis ladie yat is 3our feir
bot I vald vis ye yis
quhat war 3our craft and 3our office

yan orphius anserit sickarlie
yair is non bot my hairp and I
to find me and my ladie cleir
to my hairt yat is so deir
bot I am cumit in yis contrie
yis varld for to sie
foir to play into his hall
gif ony revaird may to me fall
ye burgess anserit to him blyᵗlie
I sall ȝow tell trewlie
ye morne quhair ȝe sall him meit
Into ye middis off ye streitt
to pray for orpheus ye king
and Issabell ye worthy quine
he begouithe to weip wᵗ yis
yat was ye vorthiest I wis
yan orphius tuik his hairp vᵗ yis
for to comfort ye burgess
and sa he did into yat stound
ye hairp it gaif sick ane sound
yan all ye folk thankit him of his play
yat ewer hard him be nyᵗ or day
syne wpone ye morne
he met ye king ye streit biforne
orphius kneillit wpone his knie
and said sir king for cheratie
gif ȝe pleiss I sall ȝow tell[4]
yat I may play into ȝour hall
and now ane menstrall me to mak
foir orphius ȝour eimis saik
ye king command ane squyr
to haif him to ye hall bot veir
and he commandit vᵗ reverence
yat nain to him suld do offence
sone efter ye king vas set
and he vas serwit of his meit
the menstrellis playitt and did noᵗ ceis
sall na man play ye king said yan
bot ȝonc auld hairritt man
than orpheus tuik his harp in hy
ye king beheld him fellonlie

he knew ye hairp vondrus veill
and said auld man I haud sum feill
yow tell me foir yi vrisone
quhidder yow gat yi hairp in . . or toun
throw ane vilderness com I
and treulie yair yis hairp gat I
foirsuithe yair ye hairp I van
besyd ye banis of ane ald man
he changit culeur on ye kingis face
yat was orphius my . . em allace
yat maid me king in his steid
now vait I weill he is deid
god vait gif ye king maid . . orthe
wt yat he weipit full sair . . .
ye buird and all couth doun couth cast
he said to god ane vou I mak
I sall newer lauch yat men may sie
quhill yat his bainis baireist be
yan orphius can to him ga
he tuik him in his armis tva
he said lat be and veip na mair[5]
I am ye man yow veipis foir
vpone his knie he fell doun
and sone biheld his . . . .
and said to him in all degrie
deir vellȝum yow artt hame to me
yan all yat was into ye hall
wpone yair kneis yai couthe doun fall
and thankit god of his cuming
and knew him foir yair richtious king[6]
vt claithe off gold yai him cled
and wt ane knyf yai schuif his hair
yan was he ewin as he vas ay
yan fetche ye quein wtout dillay
scho bydis neir hand by
yan start yai wp bayt mair and les
and gatherit all in presence
yan bellis rang throw ye citie
yan all ye toun vas fain
and foir ye finding of ye quein
yat lang bifoir tint had bein

yan all ye contrie far and neir
war bly[t] and glaid and maid guid cheir
ye king and als god wait
restoirit var to yair awin estait
and wan ye joy of hewin so hie
god grant ws all yairin to be.
finis huius fabulae.

Commentary

It is most noticeable that while what is here left of 'King Orphius' is very close to 'Sir Orfeo' in content and development, in detail the two are as different as two versions of the same story can be. In the Auchinleck Manuscript (Bliss 1966, from which I take all quotations of 'Sir Orfeo' unless otherwise noted) Heurodis and her maids sit together in an orchard 'vnder a fair ympe-tre' (l. 70), the queen falls asleep and her ladies dare not waken her so that she slumbers on 'til after none' (l. 75). On waking, the queen appears to go mad, tearing at her face and clothes, so that her ladies, terrified, rush off for help which they get in abundance:

Knigtes vrn & leuedis also,
Damisels sexti & mo.
In þe orchard to þe quene hye come,
& her vp in her armes nome,
& brougt hir to bed atte last,
& held hir þere fine fast: (ll. 89–94).

The impression made in this passage is of the extreme violence of the demented queen which is such that the crowds of attendants have great difficulty in restraining her:

Ac euer sche held in o cri,
& wold vp, & owy. (ll. 95–6).

Naturally, Orfeo hears the commotion and comes with ten knights to her chamber where he begs her to tell him what is wrong that

'Þi bodi, þat was so white y-core,
Wiþ þine nailes is al to-tore'. (ll. 105–6).

The same events are related in 'King Orphius' with multifarious minor differences. The loss of the early portion of the text makes it impossible to know if Issabell's affliction is described as is that of Heurodis, or if the first explanation for her 'grainand sair' is the account given by the frightened maid to the angry and mystified Orphius. In our fragment we are told simply that the queen has gone into a garden as was her habit. A note of impending tragedy is struck in the midst of this happy scene, however, with the lines:

and fra ye king orphius glaidnes
hes gain for ewermair I vis (ll. 5–6).

The queen is carried, apparently docile or in a fainting condition, by a vague 'yai' and gently laid on her bed, the splendour of which is particularly noted:

yai tuik hir wp v^{t}outtin mair
and to ye chalmer yai hir bair
and softlie laid hir in hir bed
yat was w^{t} cumlie claythis ouerspred
and laid be yat yis ladie doun (ll. 7–11).

There is no mention of the wild hysteria of Orfeo's queen or of the vast and impressive array of court officials who attempt to restrain her. The tone is here more subdued and the mood is one of tender concern for the suffering queen.

Orphius is all the while ignorant of the fate of his lady, unlike Orfeo who is summoned directly by the clamour. In 'King Orphius' there ensues an interlude of normality in which the busy scene in the hall is described as minstrels play, the lords gather for the approaching meal, dishes are carried in and the king washes and prepares to eat. The cheerful ignorance of the king in this scene heightens the suspense for the poem's audience, knowing as it does that some dread affliction has overtaken the queen and forewarned that 'glaidnes' has already gone 'for ewermair' from the unsuspecting king. The suspense is further heightened when Orphius, unaware of the impending tragedy, asks for his wife. The ambiguous reply of one of her ladies:

ye quein is no^{t} disposit at all
yis day to dyne into 3our hall (ll. 21–2)

is not enough to fob him off and he refuses to eat without her company, secure in his misplaced confidence in her wellbeing:

yis day at morne scho vas haill and feir
and yis bly^{t} sall I no^{t} be
my soverane lady quhill I see (ll. 24–6).

After this scene of festivity the audience can share the king's sudden shock when he enters his wife's chamber and finds his lady 'grainand sair'.

In his bewilderment, Orphius seeks an explanation and a frightened maid tells how

ye quein ye day airlie at morne
scho went to ye gairding as biforne
and sat doun in arbour grein
and leind hir to ane fair laurein (ll. 38–41).

The enchantment is swift and terrible. There is no intervening slumber and no exaggerated raving on the part of the queen whose very silence is the more moving and dreadful:

or euer we vost scho gaif ane skirll
and ay sensyne scho vas deidlyk (ll. 42–3).

The first words spoken by the queen point the awful finality of her fate:

> ye king of pharie vill me haif
> yair may na erdlie thing me saif (ll. 48–9),

and the human sadness of her inevitable separation from Orphius:

> bot va var me to pairt 3ow fra (l. 50).

Perhaps the following lines, now lost, contained something like the beautiful passage in 'Sir Orfeo' in which Heurodis 'stille atte last' (l. 117) expresses her love for her husband and Orfeo declares his refusal to be parted from her:

> 'Whider þou gost ichil wiþ þe
> & whider y go þou schalt wiþ me.' (ll. 129–30).

We shall probably never know.

The story of King Orphius in this fragment is resumed after his return from the realm of the fairy king, accompanied by his rescued wife. Here again while 'King Orphius' follows 'Sir Orfeo' exactly in its subject matter and in the manner in which this is unfolded, there is striking dissimilarity in detail. In 'Sir Orfeo' the king of the otherworld is unwilling to grant Orfeo his request because he thinks them too ill-assorted a pair:

> 'A sori couple of 3ou it were,
> For þou art lene, rowe & blac,
> & sche is louesum, wiþ-outen lac:
> A loþlich þing it were, forþi,
> To sen hir in þi compayni.' (ll. 458–62).

This contrast between the lovely queen and her grim and haggard consort is put in 'King Orphius' into the mouth of the burgess who shelters the wanderers:

> I merwell yat sick ane cairle as yow
> soe fair ane lady for to wow (ll. 54–5)

—a comment that draws from Orphius the dignified retort:

> sir I am sib to gentill men
> sumtym I haue sein ye day
> yat gentill men vald wᵗ me play (ll. 57–9).

a masterly understatement, coming from a man described at the beginning of 'Sir Orfeo' as one whose

> . . fader was comen of King Pluto,
> & his moder of King Juno,
> Þat sum-time were as godes y-hold (ll. 43–5).

There is no equivalent in 'Sir Orfeo' of this entertaining little exchange with its shrewd insight into character—the supercilious questioning of the burgess, Orphius' dignified reply and the burgess's hurried excuse for his rudeness showing his eagerness not to

offend what is obviously not the beggarly rogue he had thought but, rather, a nobly born gentleman:

ye burgess anserit to orphius
and in haist he said to him yus
I did it to 3ow foir ye best
sall na man do 3ow deir (ll. 60–3).

In 'Sir Orfeo', when the hero returns to the world he seeks refuge on the outskirts of Winchester in a beggar's hovel where he passes himself off as 'a minstrel of pouer liif' (l. 486). In response to his guest's questioning, the beggar relates the tale of Heurodis' disappearance ' & hou her king en exile 3ede' (l. 493), and tells him how the land is held at present by the steward. The next day Orfeo borrows the beggar's clothes and wanders around the city where all men marvel at his travel-worn appearance:

'Lo! Hou his berd hongeþ to his kne!
He is y-clongen al-so a tre!' (ll. 507–8).

By chance he encounters his steward and begs his aid. The steward welcomes him for Sir Orfeo's sake and the hero enters the hall where a meal is in progress:

Miche melody þai maked alle,
& Orfeo sat stille in þe halle
& herkneþ: when þai ben al stille
He toke his harp & tempred schille. (ll. 523–6).

King Orphius also reaches the king's hall but his progress there is rather different. He seeks refuge with a respectable burgess giving rise to the amusing dialogue already mentioned. Orphius' assertion that he is 'sib to gentill men' does not entirely still the suspicions of his host who is determined to know a bit more about his unlikely guests:

bot I vald vis ye yis
quhat war 3our craft and 3our office (ll. 65–6).

Orphius says that he relies only on his harp for a living and that it is his desire to play in the king's hall. The burgess, with typical officiousness, tells Orphius where he is likely to meet the king:

ye burgess anserit to him blyᵗlie
I sall 3ow tell trewlie
ye morne quair 3e sall him meit
Into ye middis off ye streitt
to pray for orpheus ye king
and Issabell ye worthy quine (ll. 75–80).

The grief reserved to the faithful steward in 'Sir Orfeo', and later to be shown by the regent in 'King Orphius', has its first appearance in the person of the burgess who is a character in the story in his own right as opposed to Orfeo's vague beggar figure whose presence is purely functional. The tears of the sorrowing burgess give Orphius an opportunity to display the traditional magical, soothing quality of his music.

Next morning Orphius meets the 'king'—who, we are told, is his nephew (l. 117)—in the street as the well-informed burgess had told him he would. Orphius begs to be allowed to play in the hall 'foir orphius 3our emis saik' (l. 96). In this version of the story it is the minstrel who invokes the name of the musician king when begging for an audience rather than the ruler explaining his charity by reference to his lost master, the musician king, as is the case in 'Sir Orfeo'. Such minor differences in detail are in themselves insignificant but their very multiplicity lends them importance. In 'King Orphius', the musician does not wait patiently for a lull in the harping of the other minstrels to tune his harp, unbidden, and ravish the ears of the steward and his courtiers with his divine melody as in 'Sir Orfeo'. Here the 'king' commands the other minstrels to give way to the playing of the fierce looking stranger:

sall na man play ye king said yan
bot 3one auld hairritt man (ll. 104–5).

We are not even told that Orphius struck a note for at once the 'king' recognises his harp and demands to know how it has come into the possession of the minstrel.

To return to 'Sir Orfeo'. Surprisingly, the enchanting music of the harper does not reveal his identity but the steward does recognise his harp and asks,

'Where hadestow þis harp, & hou?' (l. 533).

Orfeo tells him how he had found the instrument ten years before in the wilderness by the body of a man sadly mutilated by wild beasts:

'Wiþ lyouns a man to-torn smale,
& wolues him frete wiþ teþ so scharp;' (ll. 538–9).

The steward is horrified at the fate of his lost king,

'Þat him was so hard grace y-3arked
& so vile deþ y-marked!' (ll. 547–8),

and promptly faints. This obvious distress has proved to Orfeo the loyalty of his steward and so he can begin his own gradual unmasking. He postulates to the steward a situation which is his own in fact, suggesting that such a part might be played by the king returned in disguise 'For-to asay þi gode wille' (l. 568) which being proved, 'þou schust be king after mi day' (l. 572). Eventually the faithful steward recognises his master and his joy is such that

Ouer & ouer þe bord he þrewe (l. 578).

There ensues general rejoicing at the safe return of the king.

Orphius, on the other hand, does not conjure up such a dramatic picture of his own assumed death in the wilderness, simply saying that he has found the familiar harp in the wilderness 'besyd ye banis of ane ald man' (l. 115). Orphius' nephew's distress is thus caused not by the horror of the mutilation of the body of the dead king but by the fact that he sees this as final proof that his uncle has indeed perished in the wilds:

now vait I weill he is deid (l. 119).

He does not faint as does Orfeo's steward, but he weeps and makes a solemn vow:

> he said to god ane vou I mak
> I sall newer lauch yat men may sie
> quhill yat his bainis baireist be (ll. 123–5).

'King Orphius' contains no hint of Orfeo's careful deception to test the loyalty of his steward being revealed in an elaborate hypothesis. Instead we have the abrupt, unexplained, fairy-tale return from beyond the grave of the hero. All those present in the hall are filled with joy and gratitude at the return of their king:

> wpone yair kneis yai couthe doun fall
> and thankit god of his cuming
> and knew him foir yair richtious king (ll. 135–7).

Even in the last few lines of the 'happy ending' the two poems diverge in detail. Orfeo's courtiers

> To chaumber þai ladde him als biliue
> & baþed him, & schaued his berd
> & tired him as a king apert (ll. 584–6).

The return of Heurodis, whose loss has occasioned the whole story, is passed over briefly as unremarkable beside the wonder of her husband's safe return to his kingdom (ll. 587–9). King and queen are recrowned and the faithful steward is rewarded '& seþþen was king þe steward' (l. 596). The Auchinleck version ends with a postscript explaining how this story was made into a lay:

> Harpours in Bretaine after þan
> Herd hou þis meruaile bigan,
> & made her-of a lay of gode likeing,
> & nempned it after þe king.
> þat lay 'Orfeo' is y-hote:
> Gode is þe lay, swete is þe note. (ll. 597–602).

Although the Harley MS 3810 (Bliss 1966) ends without this explanatory note, Ashmole 61 (Bliss 1966) echoes Auchinleck:

> Herpers of Bretayn herd [anon]
> How þys a-ventour was be-gon,
> And made a ley of grete lykyng,
> And callyd it after þe kyng (ll. 590–3).

'King Orphius' ends rather differently. The king is treated by his delighted subjects much as is his English counterpart by his rejoicing people:

> vt claithe off gold yai him cled
> and wt ane knyf yai schuif his hair
> yan was he ewin as he vas ay (ll. 138–40).

The queen is fetched and her return is marked by great rejoicing:

yan start yai wp bayt mair and les
and gatherit all in presence
yan bellis rang throw ye citie
yan all ye toun vas fain
and foir ye finding of ye quein
yat lang bifoir tint had bein (ll. 143–8).

Something of the miracle of her return from the mysterious otherworld is hinted at here and one is reminded that it is the loss of the queen that is at the heart of the legend. The stress at the end of 'King Orphius' is on a return to the natural and divine harmony of the Mediaeval world. King and queen and their subjects are once more in their rightful places, a state pleasing to God and necessary for the smooth functioning of society:

ye king and als god wait
restoirit var to yair awin estait
and wan ye joy of hewin so hie
god grant ws all yairin to be. (ll. 151–4).

There is no mention of reward for the king's nephew who has ruled in his uncle's absence. In this he has simply been filling the role expected of his station, and his future and that of the kingdom is as God decrees: it is necessary only that the natural order, disrupted by the abduction of Issabell by the king of the fairies, should be restored by the resumption of their rightful positions in society by Orphius, his nephew and his queen for the future to be secure. Nor is there any word at the end of 'King Orphius' as to the source of the story. There is only the conventional 'finis huius fabulae'.

What conclusions can be drawn from these remarks on 'King Orphius' and its relation to 'Sir Orfeo'? So much of the Scottish poem has been lost that any suggestions can only be tentative. I would suggest that 'King Orphius' is derived not from any of the known versions of the Middle English 'Sir Orfeo' (for the point of this comparison, what has been said about the Auchinleck version applies equally to Ashmole 61 and Harley 3810), but rather from an independent version of the story. If the Auchinleck 'Sir Orfeo' is a translation of a French version of the original Breton lai, may not 'King Orphius' be so as well? This would explain the extreme closeness in theme and development of the two poems but the complete lack of verbal echoes that would be present if one version was derived from the other, and also the way in which a different aspect of each situation is emphasised in each poem.

This idea raises fascinating issues: which is the earlier version, or was the French poem being absorbed into the literatures of Scotland and of England simultaneously? Certainly the poem has lived on in the folk literature of Scotland—witness the ballad still sung in Shetland in the present century—long after it has died in England where the latest version is the late fifteenth-century Ashmole 61. It is for the linguists to determine the

likely date of composition of 'King Orphius' which has obviously been copied from a manuscript by a scribe who would no longer have been speaking or writing many of the phrases he was copying. Whatever its claim to antiquity may be, this lost poem of 'King Orphius' has been a work major in conception, sustained in execution, and rich in character, pathos and humour. One can only hope that more of it may yet come to light.

NOTES

1 *portingale* (l. 4), meaning 'Portuguese', is found in the Treasurer's Accounts in 1497 (I. 383) 'Item . . to the Portingales in almous, xviij s' and in 1591 (36 b) 'To his maiesties self to play at the cairtis ane portingale ducat'. I can find no reference to the word applied to a type of garden.

2 *none* (l. 12) is probably to be taken here to mean and to sound 'noon' since it is to rhyme with 'doun' (l. 11) as in the 1567 edition of the *Gude and Godly Ballatis* where we find 'Priestis change 3our tune / And sing into 3our mother tung, / Inglis Psalmes and 3e impugne / 3e will dyne efter none'.

3 *skirll* (l. 42) may be a scribal error for 'scrike' meaning 'screech' as it should rhyme with 'deidlyk' (l. 43). This would seem to be the older version of the word as in *Lancelot of the Laik* (around 1500) line 1881 'For-quhi the woice It scrik[i]th vp ful ewyne' and in Douglas's *Aeneid* II viii 83 (around 1513) 'With dulefull scrike and waling.' By the latter portion of the sixteenth century when the scribe was copying the poem the form 'skirl' seems to be prevalent as in the *Complaynt of Scotland*, p. 40, line 10 'he cryit vitht ane skyrl' (around 1549) and in the *Poems of Alexander Montgomerie, Supplement*, p. 167, line 486 'they skirlde ilk ane' (around 1585).

4 *tell* (l. 93). As this does not provide a satisfactory rhyme for 'hall' (l. 94) and as the line reads awkwardly and seems to lose its sense in the middle, it may be that the scribe, having confused the order of the words and thus finding himself with a word at the end of the line which bore no resemblance to that at the end of the ensuing line, changed that word to the nearest approximation to the sound required. Thus the line might have read 'gif 3e pleiss ask 3ow I sall' which was wrongly written 'gif 3e pleiss I sall 3ow ask', the 'ask' then replaced by 'tell'. Other than the confusion in the sense of the line the reading 'tell' would be acceptable as there are numerous instances of slightly defective rhymes throughout the poem—lines 5, 6 'glaidnes' and 'vis', lines 27, 28 'gone' and 'ane', lines 56, 57 'yan' and 'men', lines 83, 84 'yis' and 'burgess', lines 97, 98 'squyr' and 'veir', lines 101, 102 'set' and 'meit', lines 110, 111 'vrisone' and 'toun'.

5 *mair* (l. 128). As this is intended to rhyme with 'foir' (l. 129) it might hint at faulty transcription by a Scottish copyist working from an English source, the original word being 'more'. A similar Scottish version of an original English word could be seen in 'mak' (l. 95) which in this version provides a defective rhyme for 'saik' (l. 96).

6 lines 137–46. The rhyme scheme within these lines appears to have been abandoned and the result is more akin to prose than to verse. Other departures from a fixed rhyme pattern can be seen in lines 120–5, and occasionally a line is interpolated into the regular rhyme scheme as is the case in line 33, line 62, lines 79–80 and line 103.

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