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Alone Together: separation and unity in the reception of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice

<u>'Audience' reception: Orpheus, Camus and COVID-19</u>

'Cottard et Tarrou, qui s'étaient seulement levés, restaient seuls en face d'une des images de ce qui était leur vie d'alors : la peste sur la scène sous l'aspect d'un historien.'[1]

In Albert Camus' work of pestilence fiction <u>La Peste</u>, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is only explicitly mentioned once. When the city of Oran enters 'lockdown' following the outbreak of a plague reminiscent of the Black Death, a travelling opera company finds itself unable to leave. The only opera in their repertoire is played every Friday evening to crowds of anxious citizens, who flock back again and again. This opera is Gluck's <u>Orfeo ed Euridice</u>. However, one evening, the singer performing the role of Orfeo dies unexpectedly on stage. Suddenly taken ill, he collapses 'd'une façon grotesque, bras et jambes écartés.'[2] Camus' decision to recast Orpheus as a plague victim forestalls the opera's happy-ending and the blurs the boundaries between the illusion of stage performance and the fictional 'reality' of life in Oran. Solemnly filing out of this theatre-turned-morgue, the citizens of Oran find themselves in a hellish world in which the real and the unreal have been united.

Camus has therefore undermined the assumed 'distance' between stage and reality that is so integral to the interpretative framework with which a reader approaches any text. In turn, the slippage inherent between stage, fiction and reality may alert the reader to the allegorical function of the text. The rat-borne plague can be read as an extended metaphor for the horrors of the Nazi occupation of France during World War Two and the efforts of the French resistance.[3] That Camus intended his plague victims as allegorical victims of war and conflict does not, however, bind subsequent readers to this single interpretation of the text. The loneliness of quarantine, the loss of loved ones and the apparent failures of the authorities may all resonate eerily with our own experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, <u>La Peste</u> sales leapt up by 40% in March this year.[4] The media directed the public to this French classic as people sought out works of pestilence fiction with a horrid fascination, eager to read their own reality into these texts. For this new wave of readers, when the opera singer dies at the beginning of the novel's *Quatrième Partie,* Orpheus becomes simultaneously a victim of plague, war and COVID-19.

Thus, the death of Camus' Orpheus may be treated as a paradigm for the processes of audience reception and textual transmission. Having radically redirected the narrative of the myth through the deliberate slippage of life and art, Camus has generated multiple new

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[1] A. Camus, <u>La Peste, </u>(Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), p.196.

[2] Ibid.

[3] M. Hubac, "Une réflexion sur la condition humaine" in <u>La Peste</u>, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), p.315.

[4] A. Georges, "En pleine épidémie de coronavirus, les ventes de La Peste de Camus s'envolent", on Le Figaro <u>https://www.lefigaro.fr/livres/en-pleine-epidemie-de-coronavirus-les-ventes-de-la-peste-de-camus-s-envolent-20200303</u>, [15 June 2020].

Orphic identities, each relevant to a different audience. The literary history of Orpheus and Eurydice bears precedent to this process of reception. In his study <u>Orpheus in the Middle Ages,</u> Friedman explored these processes of transmission and reception, arguing that 'each age has fashioned Orpheus in its own image'.[5] Focusing on late antique and medieval sources, he claimed that each age 'gives Orpheus new attributes, emphasising certain of his deeds at the expense of others and even changing the course of the narrative to make the Orpheus myth conform to the values of the day.'[6] Inevitably, Orpheus becomes a shifting and protean figure, appearing in various guises and starring in narrative arcs that have often been recast, or radically rewritten. Consequently, Friedman's theory is an interesting point of departure when discussing the dissemination of classical texts and ideas over time. Firstly, Friedman demands that we are alive to the cultural and historical contexts in which the myth was retold and received. Furthermore, his theory interrogates the process by which new meanings and interpretations are generated. As exemplified by <u>La Peste</u>, the creation of difference engenders new significations. We must therefore address the dialogue between classical and later interpretive texts in order to access the new meanings created.

Attempts to study this dialogue of difference, however, are often hindered by the lack of narrative and thematic consistency in tellings of classical myth. Extant manuscripts confirm that the Orpheus myth in the Middle Ages was widely known in two forms. Both Book IV of Virgil's <u>Georgics</u> and Book X of Ovid's <u>Metamorphoses</u> describe the death of Eurydice. Considering Virgil and Ovid were contemporaries, the inconsistencies between their texts are notable. Virgil's Orpheus is justly punished for violating Proserpina's interdiction (he must not look back at Eurydice), whereas Ovid is concerned, above all, with the emotional tragedy of a man's separation from his beloved wife. Further to these two sources, interpretations of the Orpheus myth since antiquity have often been tightly bound to an understanding of the cult of Orphism. Those initiated into this cult were promised an afterlife alongside Orpheus and his fellow heroes, whereas the un-initiated would reincarnate indefinitely, the *psyche* (soul) repeatedly being born into a new *soma* (body). The death of Eurydice is side-lined, and instead Orpheus becomes a symbol of metaphysical and spiritual completion, the *psyche* no longer shifting from body to body.

Disparities in myth-telling in antiquity surely contributed to the diversity of texts in subsequent ages. The slippery nature of mythic narrative also complicates any attempt to interrogate the dialogue of difference that is so inherent to Friedman's theory. Possibly an alternative approach would be to retrace underlying structural and thematic similarities in retellings of this myth. One idea, integral both to the classical myth and the religious cult, is the theme of separation and unity. Orpheus yearns to reunite with his wife, whereas the Orphic initiate hopes to achieve 'unity' in purified body and uncontaminated soul.[7]

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[5] J.B Friedman, <u>Orpheus and the Middle Ages,</u> (New York: Harvard University Press, 1970), p.1.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Initiates would undergo a ritual purification in order to achieve salvation from bodily existence, inherited from the Titans. Once initiated, initiates were expected to lead to life free from sensual pleasures (including the consumption of meat) so as to maintain their soul's purity. Although in the afterlife, the soul would be freed from the material form, in life, body and soul both had to be in a state of purified harmony. Adam, James, "Lecture 5: Orphic Religious Ideas", on <u>Gifford Lectures,</u>

Much like the metamorphosis of Orpheus himself, notions of separation and (dis)unity have been adapted in order to address the contemporary political and social anxieties of successive societies. In the medieval translation and commentary the Ovide Moralisé, man separated from wife becomes man separated from God, while the medieval romance "Sir Orfeo" considers the implications of a king or queen's separation from their kingdom. Central to all of these texts however, is an interrogation of the role communication plays in unification. In each text, it may be argued that Orpheus (or an Orphic figure) occupies the role of communicator. As a musician and poet, the mythic Orpheus is man of verbal and non-verbal communication (music and song), capable of bringing together audiences. The shared experience of listening to a performance may provide an audience with a common point of reference, helping bind groups together. Equally, in antiquity Orphism was marked out by its preoccupation with communication and the written word. The fact that physical ritual and performance were at the heart of ancient Greek and Roman religion, makes it all the more notable that Orphism produced a body of religious texts.[8] The production of sacred scriptures was undoubtedly rooted in a desire to establish shared and common points of religious understanding, unifying initiates. Thus, the role of (Orphic) communicator may reflect a desire to establish a state of unity and harmony.

Orpheus the doctor

'La seule façon de mettre les gens ensemble, c'est encore de leur envoyer la peste.'[9]

Camus' allusion to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice does not only alert the reader to the allegorical signification of La Peste, but it also illuminates a web of thematic and philosophical concepts interwoven throughout the narrative. In particular, Camus considers the myth within the framework of his absurdist philosophies. Drawing upon Orpheus' separation from his wife, Camus transforms it into a paradigm for human disunity and emotional estrangement. In this sense, Camus' portrait of the citizens of Oran contains the absurdist notion of the ultimate solitude of the individual, which contributes to a sense of life's futility.[10] On one level, Camus exploits the tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice's separation by establishing various inferred points of comparison with the doctor Rieux. Not only does Rieux's wife have to leave Oran due to her declining health, but she then dies, far

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https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/religious-teachers-greece/lecture-5-orphic-religious-ideas, [29 June 2020].

[8] The Macedonian Derveni Papyri contain what is believed to be an allegorical commentary on an Orphic theogony, composed near the end of the 5th century BC. Adam, James, "Lecture 5: Orphic Religious Ideas", on Gifford Lectures, https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/religious-teachers-greece/lecture-5-orphic-religious-ideas, [29 June 2020].

[9] A. Camus, La Peste, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), p.196.

[10] In Camus's absurdist essay Le Mythe de Sisyphe, he compares existence to the pointless and never-ending punishment of the mythical Sisyphus. He must roll a boulder to the top of a hill, but each time he nears the top, it rolls back down again. A. Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1942).

from her husband. Both Orpheus and Rieux lose their wives twice. However, when Camus describes the separation of the citizens of Oran from their loved ones, unable to enter the city in quarantine, he does so to foreground his own absurdist theories. Wrapped up in their personal tragedies, the citizens fail to sympathise with one another: 'personne ne pouvait espérer l'aide du voisin et chacun restait seul avec sa preoccupation.'[11] They fail to emotionally connect with one another due to man's individual state of being. Accordingly, Orpheus' personal tragedy of isolation and separation, becomes the tragic isolation and loneliness of human existence.

Alternately, Camus presents the human desire and need for social solidarity and 'communal' unity as a means by which we can contest the futility of life.[12] If his absurdist theories claimed a life of suffering and estrangement, devoid of meaning, was inevitable, then in his philosophy of revolt the only way to *give* life meaning is to actively challenge your isolation, striving for a state of unity within society based on mutual aid and support.[13] Paradoxically, the physical separation of Oran in 'lockdown' requires the citizens to rally together to control the epidemic and treat the patients. It is against both the plague and inter-human estrangement that the heroes of the novel must fight. Establishing community sanitary initiatives alongside Tarrou and Grand, the doctor Rieux simultaneously treats ailing patients and contributes the sense of solidarity needed to combat the absurdity of existence. Similar themes of emotional unity in circumstances of physical separation are present in Virgil and Ovid's accounts of the Orpheus myth. Physically separated from Eurydice, Orpheus' emotional suffering binds all who hear his tragic song together in lament.[14] Yet, the state of collective unity Orpheus can establish through song is only a means to an end; Virgil and Ovid are concerned with the desire of the individual. For Ovid, Orpheus' desire is particularly insular and sexual; he 'wanted to embrace her or *be* embraced by her.'[15] In contrast, Camus shifts his focus to the state of collective unity itself, made desirable in the struggle to overcome the futility of existence.

Nevertheless, the establishment of Rieux's implicit Orphic persona and role of communicator comes into conflict with this notion of 'communal' unity. Rieux (the composer and narrator of the chronicle) and Orpheus (the composer of songs) both attempt, yet ultimately fail, to use their powers of communication to achieve (re)union and 'communal' unity respectively. On one hand, Orpheus sings in the underworld to persuade Hades to release Eurydice. When he looks back, his efforts are frustrated. On the other, Rieux writes about the collective rather than the individual. Writing in the third person, Rieux's narrative strives to accurately recount the 'curieux événements' of the epidemic, rather than focus on his own experiences.[16] The suffering of Judge Othon's dying son is described in detail, and yet the death of Rieux's wife is only mentioned in passing. Moreover, the external focus of

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[11] Ibid. 80.

[12] In a private letter to Louis Guilloux written in 1945, Camus claims that 'ce qui équilibre l'absurde, c'est la communauté.'

[13] Camus' philosophy of revolt was explored in his 1951 essay L'Homme révolté. Although La Peste was published some years earlier, it is widely recognised that it exhibits aspects of both the absurd and revolt.

[14] Not only are Hades and Proserpina moved by his sorrow, but all the shades in the House of Dis were stupefied; Ixion's wheel stops turning and Cerebus stands still, mouth agape. Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. by C. Martin (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p.342.

[15] Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. by C. Martin (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p.343.

[16] A. Camus, La Peste, (Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1947), p.8.

the narrative ensures the collective body of citizens is in the foreground. This is exemplified by the repetition of the collective noun phrase 'nos concitoyens', the prefix 'con-' emphasising notions of togetherness.[17] In turn, considering Rieux's role as a doctor, playing an integral role in the community's collective sanitary initiatives to help combat the plague, it could be assumed that he is equally depicted as a healer of the rifts between individuals in society. Nonetheless, contemporary critic Maulnier claimed that the neutral, journalistic tone of the fictional chronicle has such a profound effect that it is as if 'tout se passe derrière une vitre' resulting in 'une separation des personnages et des lecteurs.'[18] Even if Rieux may contribute to a sense of communal unity in the novel, as a narrator, striving to communicate with the reader, he fails to establish any such unification. Interpersonal unity is thus an unattainable ideal due to the impersonal and 'imperfect' nature of Rieux's communication and narration.

Orpheus goes to church

'Orpheus descended into this painful hell to seek his wife Euridice, to draw the sinful soul out of sin, which held her fast.'[19]

The 14th century prose text the Ovide Moralisé casts the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice within a different, but equally specific moral agenda. In this case, it is an unmistakeably medieval Christian one. Both a medieval French translation of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' and a work of Christian commentary, the author clearly announces their intentions in the given title. This myth is *moralised* because, through the use of allegory, it has been Christianised. Moreover, the addition of allegorical commentary to Ovid's original text makes it evident that a layer of Christian interpretation is superimposed upon the classical narrative. The anxiety of separated lovers may become the anxiety of postlapsarian man, separated from the God which once 'married our humanity to divinity' (l.45) in the Garden of Eden. In Ovid's Metamorphoses Eurydice's death is a tragic accident. When she treads on the snake, it is because she has fallen victim to fate, her wedding being blessed with 'nec sollemnia verba/ nec laetos vultus nec felix attulit omen'.[20] In contrast, the snake in the Ovide Moralisé becomes 'the devil, who tempted the first mother in pleasurable paradise' (l.67). Transformed into the transgressive Eve, Eurydice's separation from Orpheus therefore reflects the pain of man's separation from God, fearing reunion will never be possible. Conversely, the Christian desire must be to draw closer to God.

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[17] Ibid. 10.
[18] T. Maulnier, "La Peste" in Hommes Et Mondes, vol.14, (Paris : Revue des Deux Mondes, 1947), pp.157-162.
[19] "Ovide Moralisé", anon, trans. by RL, on BU Personal Websites, http://people.bu.edu/robbe/orpheus.htm (l.56) [10 June 2020]. Hereafter all references to the text will be in parentheses.
[20] Ovid, "Metamorphoses", on The Latin Library, http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.met10.shtml , (l.4) [30 June 2020].

Baswell outlines the development of the medieval Orpheus-Christus figure,[21] who, in the <u>Ovide Moralisé,</u> is sent to save the errant soul (embodied by Eurydice).[22] Not only does the soul's descent to the underworld/hell therefore allude once again to man's separation from God, but if Christ is to be regarded as the 'body', as in holy communion, then the medieval Orpheus myth is also one that treats the anxiety of the soul separated from the body. The classical Orpheus suffers as he loses his partner with whom he can achieve emotional and sexual union. However, it is Orpheus-Christus who must save the suffering soul; the soul cannot survive without the body, and neither can man live without Christ. Orpheus therefore becomes a saviour and consequently, necessitated by the Christian promise of salvation, Orpheus is no longer doomed for failure. Reunion must remain a possibility.

Adhering to medieval Christian ideas of salvation, the <u>Ovide Moralisé</u> cannot therefore present the separation of man and the divine as a tragic inevitability. Notions of disunity and separation are nonetheless bound up in the text's presentation of Christian meaning. Due to the text's status as a work of allegorical commentary, it is not the Orpheus myth itself that is used as a paradigm for Christian morality, but rather Christian allegorisations of the myth. The role of Orpheus as a communicator, doomed to fail in his quest to reunite with his wife, is thus mirrored by the role of commentator and anonymous narrator. Aspects of the myth remain starkly in contrast with contemporary beliefs. References to the power of Pluto and Proserpina jar with praise for the supremacy of the Christian God. Moreover, didactic phrases such as 'This tale may have an historical sense, and may be true' (l. 28) and 'The literal level can be interpreted allegorically, in another way' (l.64) allude to a 'distance' between myth and allegory. Thus, it is made impossible for Orpheus to assimilate into the reader's 'reality'. Orpheus himself is not explicitly presented in a new guise, but rather the author instructs the reader in the ways in which the Orpheus myth *could* be interpreted and used to consider Christian ethics.

Furthermore, the fragmented and parallel interpretations evoked by Christian allegory mean that a state of separation and disunity is innate within the text itself. According to Baswell, such medieval allegorical texts offer 'multiple and mutually inconsistent' meanings, resulting in a fractured narrative and interpretive frame.[23] Orpheus and Eurydice are both cast in incongruent roles: they occupy the roles of Adam and Eve, rational understanding and the sinful soul, the body and the soul and divine enlightenment and the sensual body. If the author of the <u>Ovide Moralisé</u> attempts to impose a universal moral Christian framework upon the myth, they instead produce disparate strands of meaning. The inability to communicate unified and coherent interpretation, may, in turn, be comparable to Rieux's inability to emotionally connect with the reader in <u>La Peste</u> and Orpheus' failure to rescue Eurydice.

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[21] Friedman uses this term to refer to an amalgamated Christ/ Orpheus figure, who first appeared in art in the late antique period. J.B Friedman, <u>Orpheus and the Middle Ages</u>, (New York: Harvard University Press, 1970).
[22] C. Baswell, "England's Antiquities: Middle English Literature and the Classical Past" in <u>A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c.1350 - c.1500</u>, ed. by P. Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 239.
[23] Ibid.

Orpheus the king

'Now King Orfeo newe coround is /and his queen, Dame Herodis, /and lived long afterward, /and sethen was king the steward.'[24]

Medieval anxieties regarding states of separation and unity extended beyond the religious and the moral. The medieval verse romance "Sir Orfeo" instead interrogates a desire for political 'unity' and stability. Transforming the heroic Orpheus into King Orfeo of Winchester, the author attaches chivalric values to the hero; he exhibits stereotypically courtly ideals with his 'large and curteis' manner. [25] Thus, the assumption is that his kingdom exists in a state of harmonious integration. However, when his wife Herodis is whisked away by a band of Celtic fairies to reside in a fantastical 'otherworld', Orfeo is left without an heir. Contextualising the "Sir Orfeo" manuscripts, Kendall has remarked that the texts of the Rate manuscript,[26] in particular, in spite of its diverse genres, are primarily concerned with anxieties regarding land and title inheritance.[27] Of course, it had been a lack of a certain heir that had resulted in the tumultuous Wars of the Roses in the 15th century. Reflecting similar political anxieties, the separation of man and wife may no longer be the emotional core of the text. Instead, emotional interest lies in Orfeo's separation from his kingdom. The sorrow of Orpheus in Ovid's Metamorphoses, becomes that of the English noblemen. They lament their king's departure, who, having left a steward in control, has placed the stability of his kingdom in jeopardy. Whereas in Ovid's Metamorphoses Orpheus himself laments, lying 'unkempt, unshaven, and unfed',[28] in 'Sir Orfeo' the sorrow of the nobles takes precedence; 'ther wepeing in the halle/ And grete cry among hem alle.'[29] The tragedy of Orpheus' individual separation from Eurydice therefore communicates the disastrous potential of Orfeo's separation from his kingdom.

Accordingly, Orfeo both desires emotional and sexual (re)union with his wife in order to produce an heir, ensuring continuity and stability. Due to the text's adherence to a conventional romance tripartite structure, this reunion is of course granted.[30] Nevertheless, a narrative shift at the end of the romance perhaps undermines this significant reunion. Virgil and Ovid both tell us that Orpheus remains so disillusioned in his separation that he rejects the love of women, seeking solace in that of young boys. Therefore, we may expect the reunion of Herodis and Orfeo to receive considerable attention. The author's choice to diverge from the mythical narrative, should, in theory, produce a definite new meaning; the

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[24] "Sir Orfeo", anon, in Middle English Verse Romances ed. D. B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), p.200.

[25] Ibid. 187.

[26] "The Rate manuscript" is officially referred to as Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61.

[27] Verse romances such as "The Erle of Tolous" are found side-by-side with legal documents including "Ryles for purchasing land."

[28] Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. by C. Martin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc 2005), p. 344.

[29] "Sir Orfeo", anon in Middle English Verse Romances ed. D. B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), p.191.

[30] The status quo initially disintegrates: Orfeo loses his wife, and Winchester loses its king. Orfeo then must face a period of testing in the fairy 'otherworld', trying to persuade the fairy king to release Herodis. Finally, Herodis' return marks a return to a state of integration and continuity.

romance genre may be expected to uphold social and political ideals, promoting societal integration. On the contrary, once back in Winchester, the focus is shifted from Herodis to Orfeo's reunion with his steward. Before Orfeo announces his return, considerable attention is payed to the fraught and melancholic steward, dramatically exclaiming 'Allas wreche, what shall I do?'[31] As Orfeo subsequently names the steward his heir, the author negates the political significance of Herodis' return. The promise of a continuous and hereditary monarchy is suddenly abandoned.

Thus, the "Sir Orfeo" narrative seems to diverge from the romance structure; there is no return to a stage of integration and political 'unity.' Kendall argues that, far from existing in a state of ideological unity with its contemporary readership, "Sir Orfeo" is in conflict with the ideals which we may expect it to advocate.[32] In no way does the poet condemn Orfeo's choice to deviate from the norms of hereditary succession. A disconnect therefore exists between the values of the society to which the text belongs, and the views propagated by the author. Departing from the conventions of the romance genre, "Sir Orfeo" loses the clear moral and political framework within which the audience may have assumed it was set- at once advocating for and undermining the succession of hereditary monarchy. Lacking a distinct moral or political agenda, meaning in "Sir Orfeo" is fragmented, much like that in the Ovide Moralisé.

The fragmented communication of meaning in "Sir Orfeo" may in part be a result of the manuscript form in which the text was transmitted. In Zumthor's Essai de poétique médiéval, he coined the term 'mouvance' as a means to formalise discussion of textual mobility made inevitable by the manuscript form.[33] The uncertain attribution of the text, and equally the possibility for the undifferentiated contributions of multiple authors, adds yet another layer of ambiguity. The notion of an original author, or an 'Orphic communicator', striving to produce a stable meaning, is thus almost entirely undermined. In fact, there are currently three known manuscripts containing the romance, dating from various points between the early 14th and 15th centuries.[34] The omission and the addition of lines alerts us to the extent of the variation between manuscripts. Voices of authors and scribes thus become intertwined, with no singular hand dictating meaning. Disunity in meaning and message equally may betray the frustrated desires of the original composer. Authorial voices strive to communicate, connecting the reader or audience with their words. However, much as with the Ovide Moralisé, authorial intent is frustrated by the author(s)' inability to communicate textual meanings- uniting text, author and reader. In the Ovide Moralisé, meaning is fractured in the struggle to marry classical myth and Christian thought, but in "Sir Orfeo", the transmission of texts in manuscript form may result in the coexistence of various, interwoven voices and authorial agendas.

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[31] "Sir Orfeo", anon, in Middle English Verse Romances ed. D. B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), p.199.

[32] E. Kendall, "Family, Familia and the Uncanny in Sir Orfeo" in Studies in the Age of Chaucer, vol. 35, (Coral Gables: The New Chaucer Society, 2013), p. 296.

[33] P. Zumthor, Essai de poétique médiévale, (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1972).

[34] These include Auchinleck MS, Harley 3810 and the Rate manuscript.

Alone Together

According to the literary critic and psychoanalyst Kristeva, we are all subject to exile and estrangement within language. Language can only compensate imperfectly for meaning lost.[35] Flawed communication, betraying the tragedy of inevitable human isolation and separation, is foregrounded in all aforementioned texts. In La Peste, Rieux's role as a healer may foster solidarity and civic collaboration, but in his capacity as an emotionally detached narrator, meaning is lost, and the state of 'communal' unity fails to encompass the reader. We can never truly hope to emotionally engage and communicate with others with language as our intermediator. Hence, Camus knowingly highlights something to which the Ovide Moralisé and "Sir Orfeo" unwittingly bear testament. The 'mouvance' inherent in manuscript transmission and the role of the Christianising commentator equally emphasise the human incapacity to communicate unfragmented meaning. Man's inability to end his isolation by way of communication can too be found in religious Orphism. In the Orphic hymns, Orpheus' voice addresses the gods, imploring the Muses to attend to the religious rites, and seeking to invoke Zeus.[36] The aim of these songs is to unite the mortal author and divine audience. The mortal desire to unite with the divine, however, will always be frustrated. By nature, the divine must always be untouchable and incomprehensible. If the living must always endure separation from the divine, then language is used as a means to (imperfectly) mend this fissure. Consequently, it may be argued that, despite different faces and fates, in both antiquity and in subsequent retellings of the myth, Orpheus comes to symbolise flawed communication and fractured meaning. A signifier for the fluidity of meaning, the Orphic communicator can, too, perhaps be seen as a reflection on the process of reception. Our inability to wholly and accurately piece together chains of reception leaves space in which meaning can be lost, fractured and altered. [37] In this way, all works of reception may appear as if written by an 'Orphic' communicator.

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[35] A. Smith, Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement, (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1996), p.17.
[36] "Orphic Hymn to Musæus", anon, trans. T. Taylor, on Theoi, https://www.theoi.com/Text/OrphicHymns1.html, [1 July 2020].
[37] In his 1993 study Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception, Charles Martindale argued that our current interpretations of ancient texts are influenced by a chain of receptions, developed over time.

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