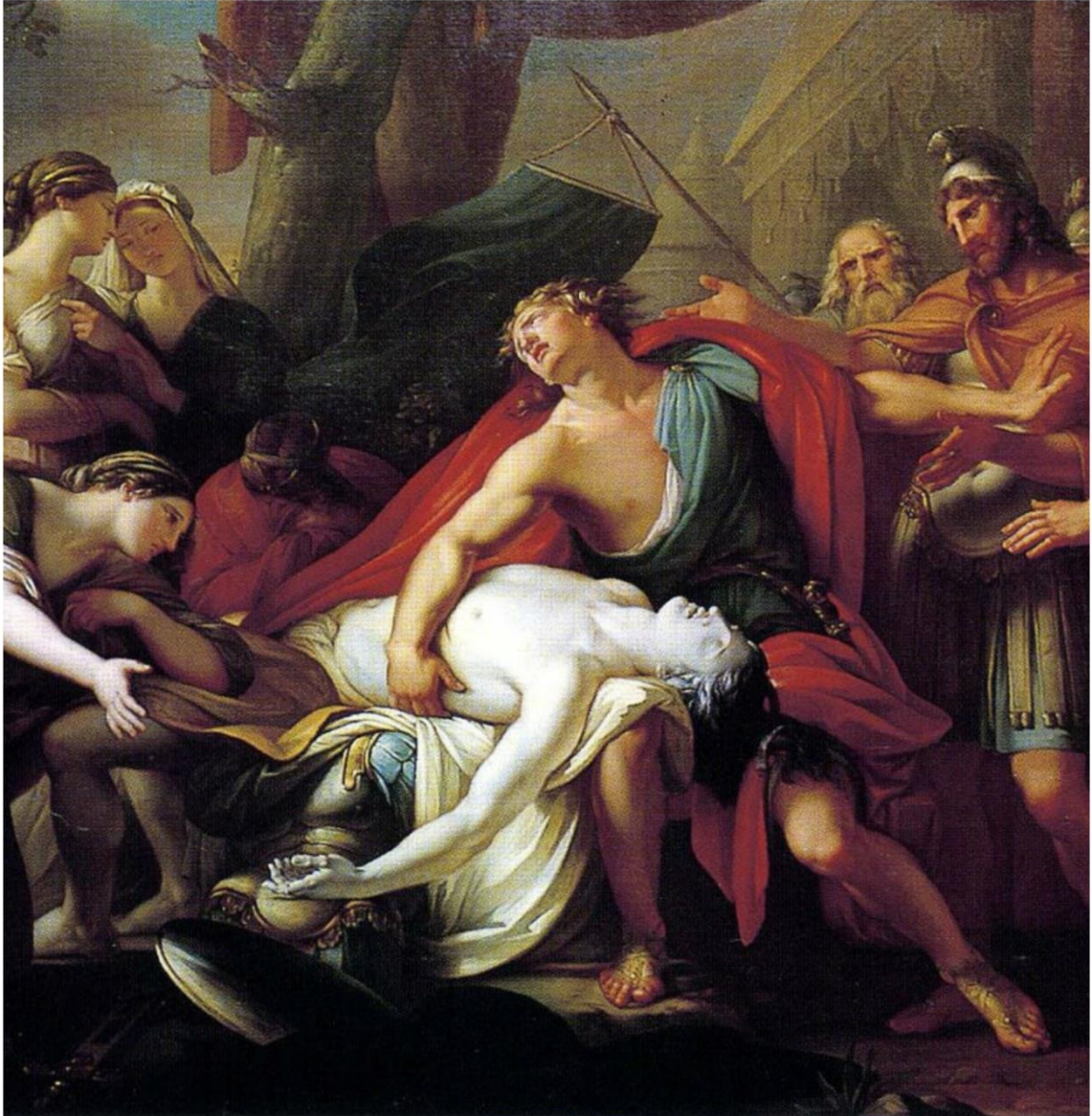


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VOLUME I:
Love and Loss in Ancient Greece

Born on a Wednesday

by Matias Travieso-Diaz

Orpheus, the peerless bard, joined the beautiful nymph Eurydice in matrimony in a ceremony presided by Hymenaios, the God of marriage. After urging mutual devotion to the couple, Hymenaios warned that their union might not last.

Orpheus questioned Hymenaios about the warning. “Is there a reason for your misgivings?”

“Grief has been written in your destiny from the day you were born,” replied Hymenaios.

“How is that?” challenged Orpheus.

“You were born on a Wednesday, the day consecrated to boundary God Hermes because it lies between the seekers of the earlier part of the week and the achievers of the latter part. As such, you will receive blows from all directions and be the subject of ill will from many.”

“Never mind that,” retorted Orpheus. “I’m the son of Apollo and will love Eurydice forever. Nothing can go wrong for us.”

“Nonetheless,” advised Hymenaios. “You should placate Hermes. Sacrifice to him, wear green in his honor, place stones on road markers.”

“Worshiping my father is enough for me” replied Orpheus dismissively and walked away.

Not long thereafter, Eurydice was bitten in a talon by a poisonous snake and died.

Orpheus lamented his departed wife with a grief that was deeper than the sea and as enduring as the heavens. He sang a heart-wrenching dirge, accompanying himself on the lyre his father had gifted him, and all beings that heard him hung their heads in sympathy.

Unable to contain his sorrow, Orpheus went to his father and asked for help in gaining entrance to the domain of the dead, to plead with King Aïdes for the release of Eurydice. Apollo agreed to do so.

“His mournful song and the plucking of his lyre moved every soul in our domain,” recalled Persephone, shedding a tear. Aïdes’ stern face softened a bit as he nodded.

“Are you going to let him take his wife away?” continued she, a barely concealed plea in her voice.

“You know my rule. Nobody who comes to dwell in my kingdom can depart.”

Aïdes’ words were unbending, but his wife detected uncertainty. She pressed on:

“Your nephew Apollo personally pleaded with you to let Orpheus visit here. The boy has not come to steal your riches or to try to seduce me. He has lost his wife and only wants to bring her back to live a bit longer. What harm can there be in that?”

Aïdes pursed his lips into a thin line and said nothing.

“His grief reaches all. Every living thing, and even the mountains and the rivers are suffering. This is the most severe winter in ages, and I fear that when I return to my mother in the spring the earth will be barren. Humans may not be able to make proper sacrifices. Your brothers and sisters won’t take kindly to your denial.”

Aïdes closed his eyes and slumped into his ebony throne, meditating. Finally, he summoned Orpheus.

“Orpheus, we have heard your plea and are inclined to grant it. You may take your wife Eurydice back to the world of the living. On one condition...”

“Yes, my Lord?”

“Her feet must not touch the ground until you are outside the entrance to our domain.”

“Thank you, my Lord. I shall carry her in my arms.”

Aïdes’ three-headed hellhound Kerberos led Orpheus up a steep path that lost itself in the dim twilight. Eurydice was insensate and rested in her husband’s grip. As they started climbing, Orpheus’ heart drummed with anticipation, but then a gelid wind began to blow, intensifying with each passing step. Orpheus embraced his beloved with all his strength, yet as they continued to trudge upward the buffeting wind sapped his energy, until he was clutching her as much to support her as to maintain his balance.

It may have been a short while, but it felt to Orpheus that he had been climbing for hours. Just as he feared he could not take another step, a pinprick of light showed itself some distance away. Orpheus drew on his last reserve of energy and burst ahead, speeding towards the entrance. As he neared the exit, he shouted: “Courage, my dear! We are almost there!” and lowered his head to kiss her lips.

Her face was drained of color and her lips were cold as ice.

He panicked.

“Eurydice, my love. Can you hear me?” He started shaking her to awaken her and in so doing loosened his grip on her body. Then, a strong gust of wind wrestled her from his arms and dropped her to the ground.

Eurydice uttered a terrified scream, turned to dust, and vanished.

Orpheus’ renewed grief surpassed what he had previously experienced. He had lost Eurydice not once, but twice, and the last time her demise was his own fault. He had found the love of his life, and had let her slip away.

His meanderings took him to the shrine of Hymenaios. The god reminded Orpheus that he had warned the couple that their union might not last because of the dark threats written in his destiny.

“But what threats were these?”

“Didn’t Eurydice tumble from your arms driven by a gust of wind?”

“Yes. So what?”

“Who sent those winds to impede you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Nothing moves in the underworld unless Aïdes directs it.”

“But why would he have done such a terrible thing?”

“Perhaps he was driven by envy. He saw the love between you and Eurydice and contrasted it to the hatred his abducted wife Persephone has for him. He could not let you get away with rescuing Eurydice and being happy.”

“So, as you predicted, I was destined to a life of woe.”

“Yet you must redirect that woe. You must turn your loss into a paean.”

Orpheus heeded Hymenaeus’ advice and, thereafter, would create joyous songs that praised eternal, undying love: love of all kinds, between beings of all ages and sexes, rich and poor, human and divine. For true love knows no barriers.

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He worked as an engineer and lawyer for nearly fifty years before taking up creative writing. Over one hundred of his short stories have been published in paying magazines, audio books and podcasts. A collection of his stories, “The Satchel and Other Terrors,” is also available.