

On Looking Back: What It Means to Have Loved and Lost (Again)

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Antonio Canova's *Orfeo ed Euridice* sculptures were originally created separately for the garden, but they are best viewed paired together to highlight the repeated grief of the torn-apart lovers. These statues illustrate the moment when Orpheus looks back at Eurydice, realizes his mistake, and loses her once more to Death. *Euridice*, fashioned around 1773-5, and *Orfeo*, around 1775-6 (commissioned by Falier),¹ helped to establish the young Canova's reputation as an artist while he still lived in Venice². These early garden statues aimed to satisfy the "contemporary taste of the time," and were opportunities for Canova to move past his "clumsy passages of bland modeling" and define himself as an individualistic artist.³ Despite some criticisms, the statues evoke sympathy with their impassioned expressions and body language. Canova's artistic beginnings were the basis for his progressive evolution as a sculptor, and *Orfeo ed Euridice* were the foundation from which he began to make a name for himself. The statues are faithful to the traditional myth's fundamental points. However, Canova adds his own artistic elements that stray from the most well known sources of the myth by incorporating accessories such as a strut made of smoke and the presence of another figure in the form of a lone hand. These statues assert Canova's own interpretation of the myth, one that centers on "the desire to astonish with strongly expressed emotions."⁴ The sculptures' facial expressions vividly translate the agony of repeated heartbreak and announce the injustice of their punishment. **While neither**

¹ Fred Licht, *Canova*, ed. Nancy Grubb (n.p.: Abbeville, 1983), 274.

² Christopher M.S. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California, 1998), 15

³ Licht, *Canova*, 19

⁴ Licht, *Canova*, 19

Ovid not Vergil address Orpheus’ This focus is demonstrated especially through Orpheus’s anguished reaction to losing Eurydice once more fo because of a misunderstanding, which neither Ovid nor Virgil address in the literature.

Ovid’s iteration of *Orpheus and Eurydice* is the most well known source of the myth. In Book X, he narrates the beginning and ends of the unfortunate lovers, from their wedding and her early death, to Orpheus’s search for her in the Underworld, pleading to Hades and Persephone for his wife back. Notably, Ovid states that Orpheus turned back when they were “almost to the border / of the upper earth,” not yet out of the darkness yet⁵. However, other lesser known and modern versions differ from Ovid’s in that sometimes Orpheus turns back once *he* is out, but Eurydice not yet. Ovid illustrates the deep extent of Orpheus’s love in the aftermath of the second tragedy, describing Orpheus’s depressive and “unkempt, unshaven, and unfed” state as “with naught / but care and sorrow for his nourishment”⁶. Orpheus’s physical and emotional response to this trauma underscore the intense devotion he felt towards Eurydice, so much so that the torment of having lost her for good ate away at him. Martin’s translation of the passage in which Orpheus turns to look behind him is meaningful here: he asks, in a third-person view, “And [Eurydice] now, who must die a second death / did not find fault with [Orpheus], for what indeed / could he be faulted for, but his constancy?”⁷ Indeed, Orpheus *did* cause the second death of his wife, but as Martin also points out from his translation, Orpheus cannot be blamed: he looked back simply because he loved his wife so much that he *had* to see her. Eurydice accepted that Orpheus’s actions was out of his extreme love for her, since she did not blame him (according to Ovid), and there was nothing to be blamed for. She actively speaks, bidding him a single goodbye “one last time,” because she, likewise, shares the pain in never being allowed to

⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.74-5

⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.107-8

⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.84-5

see her lover again⁸. Nevertheless, Ovid and especially Martin's translation do an exceptional job of highlighting Orpheus's suffering after his second separation from Eurydice, especially since this second death was caused by his dedication for her.

Virgil, in Book IV of his *Georgics*, portrays the *Orpheus and Eurydice* myth in a similar fashion—with Orpheus's journey into the Underworld and his anguishing over the loss of his beloved—through an equally emotional manner as did Ovid. However, Virgil's Eurydice also speaks to Orpheus, with much more to say (in words and in tone) than Ovid's Eurydice. She reproaches him for turning back, crying out “what dreadful madness hath ruined my unhappy self and thee?”⁹ Eurydice blames Orpheus for his mistake as she emphasizes how she must go back to “the cruel Fates” and how they will never be together again, since she can “stretch out to [Orpheus's] strengthless hands [] no more”¹⁰. Although there is textual evidence that suggests Eurydice is angry with Orpheus's wrongdoing, there is not enough to say that she no longer loves him, as supported by her claim that she can never reach out to his hands again to be with him¹¹. Despite Eurydice's criticisms of Orpheus's looking back because he wished to see her, Virgil emphasizes the dedicated aspects of the devotion Orpheus had for Eurydice: “wildly rag[ing]”, “sang of thee [...] of thee [...] of thee”, and even in death, “the bare voice and death-cold tongue, with fleeting breath, called Eurydice,” indicating his long-lasting love for her¹². Virgil's examples illustrate the extent of Orpheus's consuming love for his wife even in the very last moments of his own life. However, Virgil's Eurydice rebukes Orpheus's mistake, unlike Ovid's Eurydice who accepts it because she understands that Orpheus cannot be blamed for his love. Virgil's Eurydice does not seem to match his intense feelings for her counterpart, and is not

⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.86

⁹ Vergil, *Georgics* 231

¹⁰ Vergil, *Georgics* 231

¹¹ Vergil, *Georgics* 231

¹² Vergil, *Georgics* 229-233

as fitting an example for Ovid and Canova's interpretations of the couple's steadfast love.

In a scholarly journal regarding the types of love in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, William S. Anderson voices his views on Orpheus and Eurydice's marriage in a much more jaded manner. He wonders "what kind of 'love' (referring to *amans* in the original text) is meant" in terms of their relationship and reiterates the narrator's point on Eurydice's lack of complaint at Orpheus's turning back: "What could she complain about except that she was a victim of love?"¹³, a translation regarding Eurydice's lack of complaint much differently than Martin's. Anderson notes the fact that the story is "biased in the direction of Orpheus" and is thus subject to the narration of a male narrator, rather than the objectivity of a third-person looking down on both Orpheus and Eurydice's sides¹⁴. He raises a point when he argues that Eurydice did not complain, because, "It's obvious, isn't it, that this is a male narrator?", suggesting the bias of having a male representing the thoughts of the female¹⁵. Anderson might also use the same point when looking upon Canova's sculptures, since Canova, a male interpreter, is fashioning Eurydice the way *he* thinks she should be. Anderson seems to think that the relationship in Ovid's narrative would seem *more* like a relationship if Eurydice had a voice as well. In his article, his perspective strays away from the idea of Orpheus and Eurydice being a paragon of true lovers, to believing that their relationship is one-sided due to Eurydice's silence. On the other hand, he might have a different take on his points or use them to support his argument if he were to analyze Virgil's interpretation in the *Georgics*, Book IV, in which Eurydice does not remain silent before she dies again. Anderson's interpretation departs vastly from Ovid's, as demonstrated in the journal, and Canova's, whose artistic interpretation portrays the grief of both lovers extensively as they are separated again.

¹³ William S. Anderson, "Aspects of Love in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,'" *Classical Journal* 90, no. 3 (1995): 268.

¹⁴ Anderson, "Aspects of Love in Ovid's," 268.

¹⁵ Anderson, "Aspects of Love in Ovid's," 268.

Since the statues *Orfeo ed Euridice* were crafted in the 1770s, they are defined as Neoclassical works of art, even though Canova's conforming to a style of exaggerated body language also makes them Baroque¹⁶. Neoclassicism viewed ancient Greco-Roman civilization as being a perfect state with a "strong classical influence": a model that should "be emulated"¹⁷. Certainly, Classical themes were used as the subjects of works of art, and *Orfeo ed Euridice* are prime examples of such works. Canova drew on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as the focus of his pieces, and recalled the Classical Greek style of human sculpture, having already had a basis in the study of classical art¹⁸. Because he was still a young man at the time of the statues' creation, which are viewed mostly as a progressive comparison to his later works, *Orfeo ed Euridice* are prime examples of the foundations of Canova's craftsmanship¹⁹.

Euridice was commissioned and created earlier than *Orfeo* by a couple of years. Thus, she was first meant to stand alone self-sufficiently without a counterpart and therefore established herself as an independent sculpture. Eurydice existed on her own terms, and could tell her own narrative—being swept back into the Underworld—without needing something or someone else (Orpheus) to make sense of it. However, unlike *Euridice*, *Orfeo* could not exist by himself, because he is completely reliant upon her meaning. It would make no sense to illustrate the extent of the injustices of separated lovers, especially through Orpheus's mindset, by only having Orpheus without his Eurydice. Eurydice completes him, but he does not complete her.

Euridice has the Classical woman's body from Greek sculpture, yet her movements, which have "supple elegance and serpentine grace" are characteristic of late Baroque sculpture²⁰. The

¹⁶ Satish Padiyar, *Chains* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), 125.

¹⁷ David G. Irwin, *Neoclassicism* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 5.

¹⁸ David Irwin, "Antonio Canova, marchese d'Ischia," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonio-Canova-marchese-dIschia>.

¹⁹ Licht, *Canova*, 155.

²⁰ Licht, *Canova*, 155.

actions themselves could tell a story on their own. Eurydice is portrayed just as Orpheus turns back, as seen by the anguish in her expression and wistful tilt of her head, while a hand pulls her back towards the Underworld²¹. Her face and neck lean to one side, giving off a beseeching look to Orpheus, or even the heavens. Canova details the wrinkled furrow of Eurydice's brows; they tighten near the bridge of her nose and even creep into her forehead, emphasizing the agony she feels as she knows she is forced to die another death. At one angle, with the viewer looking up from under her face, her eyes give off a sense of helplessness at her companion, knowing there is no stopping fate (fig. 2). Though the corneas and irises are not visible from this perspective, the emptiness of her gaze pierces, staring off in front of her—or upwards. No words come out of her mouth, but her lips are shaped in a manner that wishes to ask something, as if to ask for any sort of divine intervention to prevent her return to the Underworld. In both Ovid and Virgil's versions, she bids Orpheus "*vale*," farewell, and yet Canova did not sculpt her with her lips pursed; this must be the split second in which Orpheus looks back at her, before she has a chance to say goodbye and die again.

From the waist up, Eurydice's body leans back, while her legs and left hand are extended outwards, as if struggling to complete the journey out of the Underworld. The upper half of her body is literally thrusting back into hell. However, the lower half seeks to rejoin the mortal world, as Eurydice's limbs are propelled forwards, in contrast to backward motion suggested by the upper half of her body. Her left hand reaches out in a manner that not only helps add onto the imploring expression on her face and mouth, but also in an attempt to reach out to Orpheus, who could prevent her from rejoining the dead. Even though, as mentioned before, Eurydice's mouth seems to seek a mediation from above, her body language suggests that she knows any help is useless, anyway. Her arm feebly sticks out farther into space than the rest of her body, as does

her right leg, and she does not make an effort to purposefully extend them farther ahead of her in a greater stride. Thus, no one, not even Orpheus (once he is added in), can reach out to her fruitless yearning and rescue her. Nor does she even attempt to escape the clenches of the hand behind her by running, using the limp, bent leg: her body has already acknowledged her fate, but her visage continues to hold on to some kind of hope for a supernatural miracle.

In regards to the hand clenching Eurydice's right wrist, it is significant to note that in no version of the myth available has there ever been a mention of any sort of figure physically drawing Eurydice back into the Underworld. This is one of Canova's own additions that help his shape his interpretation of Eurydice's departure: an outside force snatching Eurydice back. Her right shoulder slinks back softly behind her, as the anonymous figure's hand anchors itself onto her wrist. There are no muscles tensed in her arm, which would imply that she was showing resistance and fighting back against the force. Instead, it, too, limps feebly, as does her hand that hangs helplessly. However, the anonymous hand itself grips tightly—the tendons in the hand bulge, and the divots of the knuckles swell. Clearly, the lone hand is clasping itself around Eurydice's wrist tightly, possibly to serve as extra security for her return. This is obviously unnecessary, as Eurydice puts up no fight whatsoever, and the hand is even deemed as “realis[tic], though awkward”²². Her facial expression suggests she aches to return to the mortal world, and is unhappy because she knows she *must* go back to the Underworld. She begs to ask how and why she must suffer again. Canova very carefully underscores the emotional pain Eurydice must have been feeling, through her tense emotions and her limbs' surrender to Death.

Canova incorporated a series of curvilinear forms in Eurydice's statue, from her hair, to the mist of smoke to even the curvature of her figure itself, but they do not seem to add much to the overall narrative. Licht interpreted the ambiguous curls gathering around her waist and strut as

²² Licht, *Canova*, 155.

flames, perhaps because flames are quintessential to a modern interpretation of hell, but it makes more sense to see these sinuous accessories as smoke, in regards to the myth retelling of Virgil (Ovid does not say anything about Eurydice and smoke, in either the translation or the original Latin). Virgil states that Eurydice disappeared, “*like smoke* mingling with thin air,” so there is a viable reason to see the curling around her genitals and hip likewise as smoke fumes engulfing her²³. In neither interpretation of Ovid nor Virgil’s myth are flames mentioned when Eurydice passes. Canova’s inexperience as an artist may account for the ambiguousness of the decorations, but Canova also does not stray too far from the original telling of the myth with his creative additions.

The clouds of smoke behind her rise, and the lone hand appears to drag her back down into the shadows. The base is somewhat awkwardly placed and carved, but was most likely a necessary strut Canova needed to add to balance his figure. Licht, as well, feels that the strut detracts from the overall piece, and are “most indicative of Canova[‘s] experience” as a young artist²⁴. The smoke, which Licht interprets as flames, are “just as awkward” and “in unresolved contrast to the elegant torsion of the figure [...] [it] has an inarticulate massiveness that is hardly alleviated by the overly details and rhythmically uninteresting complications of the individual tongues of flames”²⁵. They are clunky additions, most likely having been established as a base for the hand to grab her back down into the Underworld. Despite Licht’s opinions on the inelegance of the column’s placement, the smoke searing up between her legs and towards her navel are an interesting inclusion. The curl of the smoke simultaneously hides yet draws attention towards her genitals, which is important once Orpheus is added. Though many of the myths do not explicitly say otherwise, Eurydice seems to die *before* she and Orpheus can

²³ Vergil Georgics 231

²⁴ Licht, *Canova*, 157.

²⁵ Licht, *Canova*, 157.

consummate their marriage. The smoke is very lewd, sneaking in between her thighs and invading the most feminine parts of her body. Another reading of the anguish on her face is Eurydice being defiled against her will, sexually (since she has never had intercourse with Orpheus), as the smoke violates and consumes her. When the statue of Orpheus is included, the smoke signifies more than just violating her. It is a double insult to Orpheus, who not only loses his wife once more, but watches her being taken not only by the anonymous figure bringing her back to the Underworld, but also by the carnal fumes that invade her: an unconsummated bride. Furthermore, having been positioned and sculpted in such a manner, Canova's *Euridice* is also sexually set up for the viewer, who has complete access to looking at her in all her vulnerability. Orpheus, on the other hand, only sees her for a fleeting moment. Canova attempts to illustrate how it is unfair for Orpheus to see Eurydice leave again in such a horrifying manner, tying back to the idea of how Canova believes it is unjust for lovers to be apart from each other. He further emphasizes the couple's grieving separation in creating these statues, since the viewers are able to look at Eurydice as long as they would like, but Orpheus cannot.

Orpheus, too, should be examined separately even though he was purposely made as the counterpart for Eurydice. Canova sculpted Orpheus in the climactic moment of turning back to look at his wife, and then realizing, in horror, the mistake of his actions (fig. 2). Orpheus's body is partially twisted; while his right leg strongly strides forward out of the Underworld, the rest of him is angled backwards in an effort to gaze at his beloved. Orpheus's head turns back. He wears a laurel headband around his temples (fig. 2). In that case, given its symbolism, Canova's inclusion of this plant is interesting and ironic. Laurels were symbols of "peace, eternity, victory, unrequited love, and the supreme ruler"²⁶. Its meaning also transmitted into death, "where the

²⁶ Dragana Rogic, Jelena Andelkovic Grasar, and Emilija Nikolic, "Wreath – Its Use and Meaning in Ancient Visual Culture," *Journal of the Center for Empirical Researches on Religion* 10, no. 18 (December 2012): 343.

most important thing was the victory over it”²⁷. The laurel around Orpheus’s head (if we are to assume it *is* one) therefore mocks nearly all the virtues it is meant to symbolize. First of all, Orpheus, as Ovid explains in Book X of the *Metamorphoses*, is never at peace with having lost his wife a second time, so much so that he “had fled completely from the love of women [...] because the pledge that he had given / to his Eurydice was permanent”²⁸. Eurydice could be the only true lover for him. Although he does turn to men, his grief is still very much there.

Nor does Orpheus gain victory over Eurydice’s death. His task was to lead her out from the Underworld into the mortal world, and yet he failed in doing so by turning back to look at her, thus causing her second demise at his own hands. This is an ironic twist of fate, since the laurel-adorned Orpheus *should* be victorious over death. And perhaps he is for himself, having then escaped the clutches of Death Eurydice could not avoid. However, Orpheus was not victorious over Death to save Eurydice, and the laurel therefore simply serves as an accessory devoid of the significant meaning it carried. Lastly, the laurel can also symbolize unrequited love²⁹. Although both Ovid and Virgil make Orpheus’s love distinctly clear, with their literary depictions of his constant grief to his own descent into the Underworld, the fact that Eurydice is not physically with him to reciprocate his love makes it somewhat unrequited. As Anderson pointed out before, the reader views Ovid’s myth through a male narrator, Orpheus. Eurydice speaks briefly, but only to say goodbye. Therefore, the audience can only see one perspective of the story through Orpheus’s point of view—which, through the representation of the realization on the statue’s face—speaks to his loss of losing his love again. However, his love for her is not as jaded as Anderson makes it out to be; even Ovid notes that Eurydice accepts his mistake forgivingly. Canova expresses that love through Orpheus’s emotional awareness. Orpheus’s act of turning

²⁷ Rogic, Grasar, and Nikolic, "Wreath – Its Use and Meaning," 343.

²⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.113; 115-6

²⁹ Rogic, Grasar, and Nikolic, "Wreath – Its Use and Meaning," 343.

around to see her until she dissipates before him into nothingness illustrates how his unrequited love cannot be returned if she cannot be with him.

Though Orpheus turned around because his love for Eurydice was so overwhelming that he looked back, the literary myths suggest that his actions could also be due to his lack of self-control and trust in her. It is clear through his decision to even venture into the Underworld and attempt to take her back, along with the aftermath of swearing off any other woman for the rest of his life, that his love for Eurydice was resolute. However, in the myth, Orpheus also demonstrated through his erring that he lacked the self-control necessary to *prevent* himself from overcoming his urges to see her and his task to the end: that they should both be out of the Underworld together. Though it can be said that his lack of self-control illustrates the extent of how much he wished to look upon her, the same point can apply to the opposite reading—how his lack of self-control underscores that his love was not strong enough to bear through his solitude even a little longer. Virgil describes the beginnings of Orpheus’s undoing in the *Georgics*: “a sudden frenzy seized Orpheus, unwary in his love”, which causes Orpheus to look upon Eurydice³⁰. Furthermore, his turning back also hints at a possible lack of trust in her. Ovid states that Orpheus, once he was at the border, was “afraid / that she would fail him”, thus placing all the responsibility on Eurydice not following through on the journey outside, rather than himself when he looks back³¹. He believes that *she* will be her own downfall, and then is proven wrong when he realizes it is he who succumbed to his urges of “want[ing] to embrace her, / or *be* embraced by her”³². Indeed, Eurydice made no mistake, whereas Orpheus’s lack of trust in her ended up in her death for a reason in which she had no blame.

However, Canova’s interpretation does not follow either Virgil or Ovid’s interpretations of

³⁰ Vergil *Georgics* 231

³¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.75

³² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.79-80

the myth. He illustrates this physically. In a contrast to Eurydice's nakedness, except for the smokescreen covering her groin and hip, Canova sculpts Orpheus wearing a sort of animal pelt around his groin that trails onto a tree trunk. The pelt trails on over his thigh and grazes the top of a tree trunk, which Licht finds "seriously impinges on the silhouette of the figure and renders the composition [...] unclear and hesitant", an addition "most indicative of Canova's inexperience"³³. However, the installation of the tree trunk proves itself significant, since it demonstrates that Orpheus is already *outside* of the Underworld and back in the mortal world where he belongs. Canova clearly shaped earth-made rocks resembling the ground (fig. 1, 2), while Eurydice's base is devoid of those kinds of stone. In Ovid's narration, they are both at the outskirts of the cave ("they had come almost to the border / of the upper earth"), Orpheus not having left the boundary yet³⁴. In Virgil's myth, too, they only went up "the very verge of light"³⁵. Despite Licht finding the trunk awkwardly placed, Canova's inclusion of it and the rocks are important, and demonstrate that he represented the myth with Orpheus unaware that Eurydice had to be in the mortal world with him as well (a departure from Ovid and Virgil's interpretations). Orpheus was unfairly punished for the loss of his wife even though he made it out of the Underworld, because he did not realize she had to be outside as well—a cruel condition. While he still has his laurel and tree trunk (all once living, just like Eurydice), she, naked and with none of those things, is left for dead once more. Though the literary texts in which Orpheus turns back can be seen as mistakes because of his own faults, *Orfeo ed Euridice* illustrate that the cause of her death was simply due to Orpheus's misunderstanding of the guidelines set out by the Underworld.

Licht points out the "emphatic pathos" in both Orpheus and Eurydice's emotionally striking

³³ Licht, *Canova*, 19.

³⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.74-5

³⁵ Vergil *Georgics* 231

expressions, which help draw a poignant connection for the viewer³⁶. An example of such emotionally fueled looks is one in which Orpheus brings his hand to clasp at his head in a show of sudden realization. At one angle, Orpheus's fingers are slightly tightened and curled, partially weaved into the curls of his hair, as if he is grasping at the roots during his flurry of shock (fig. 1). Looking closely, the viewers can even see small tufts peeking from between the corners of his fingers, like Orpheus is running a hand through his hair in a fashion emphasizing his contrition. Furthermore, from a frontal angle, the palm of Orpheus's hand rests on his forehead (fig. 3). The additional pressure on his skin also creates those small folds on the forehead along with those from his eyebrows, and physically emphasize his maelstrom of emotions.

Additionally, Orpheus's face screams more indicatively of his storm of emotions. His eyebrows, too, are furrowed upwards dramatically; sharp crinkles are visible between the bridge of his nose and up towards his forehead and palm. They illustrate his acute awareness, that sudden moment in which he realizes he has made a terrible mistake, and form his expression into a mixture of fear (at losing Eurydice) and bitter consciousness. Though his eyes are also difficult to see in detail, the ends sharply slope downwards and crease at the outer corners (fig. 3). This is a look of expressive pain, and his eyes alone reveal so much about the turmoil of his emotions looking back at his wife (what should have been a happy occasion, had they both made it outside). The corners of Orpheus's mouth are also sloped downwards into an expression of anguish. His mouth hangs half-open, and he seems paralyzed in the moment: no words are coming out. Like the marble statue, an appropriate medium to use for this moment, Orpheus is frozen in place in the moment that brought his wife's second downfall. It does not seem like Orpheus tries to speak at all. Rather, it is simply a look of realization and shock. The creases from the ends of his nose also repeat the slanting downwards. Those kinds of grooves are only

³⁶ Licht, *Canova*, 18.

that prominent when the mouth is tilted into a frown, such as his. The shadow illustrates how caved in the folds are, which shows the degree of his torment at this very moment. Canova truly portrays a lover's grief through Orpheus's face, and how Orpheus's overwhelming love for Eurydice, to the point where he looked back at her, destroyed her once again. The emphases on the sorrowful reactions to the event further exemplify Canova's interpretation on how genuine lovers like Orpheus and Eurydice should not have to face the punishment of separation.

Meanwhile, Orpheus's left hand provides three different readings to convey his emotional state: one, held out in space, like he wants to stop the event from happening, another, reaching out for Eurydice's hand, and the last, as if waving her goodbye, depending on the viewing perspective (fig. 1, 2). At one angle, Orpheus's hand is directly in front of the viewer and extended out from his body (fig. 2). Given that this is the exact moment in which Orpheus turns around and realizes what he has done, his hand is stretched out in a manner that suggests like he wants to prevent her departure from happening, or at least is the physical reflex once he sees the curls of smoke from the Underworld engulfing her. The hand indicates to the viewer the unconscious mistake he wants to take back, but knows that not even he can avoid the outcome.

The second reading, from the same angle, can be seen as Orpheus reaching for Eurydice (fig. 2). In this configuration, Orpheus's body twists and his arm stretches out into space, as if ready to grab onto something, like her own extended hand. But, the fumes take her away just before Orpheus can fully turn around and clasp her hand, as he is stopped halfway before he can save her.

The final reading seems the most poignant and distressing as a goodbye between lovers (fig. 1). In this perspective, Eurydice looks like she is bidding Orpheus farewell, while he, fully aware of his consequences of looking back, lifts his left hand up weakly, like he is waving goodbye

towards her. His lips, as mentioned before, are fixed in a position where he does not and cannot seem to form any words, and thus his only goodbye to her is indicated by the hand giving her an equal *vale* (fig. 1). Having already seen the smoke approaching her after his turning, Orpheus's feeble hand attempts to have one last chance to say his farewell.

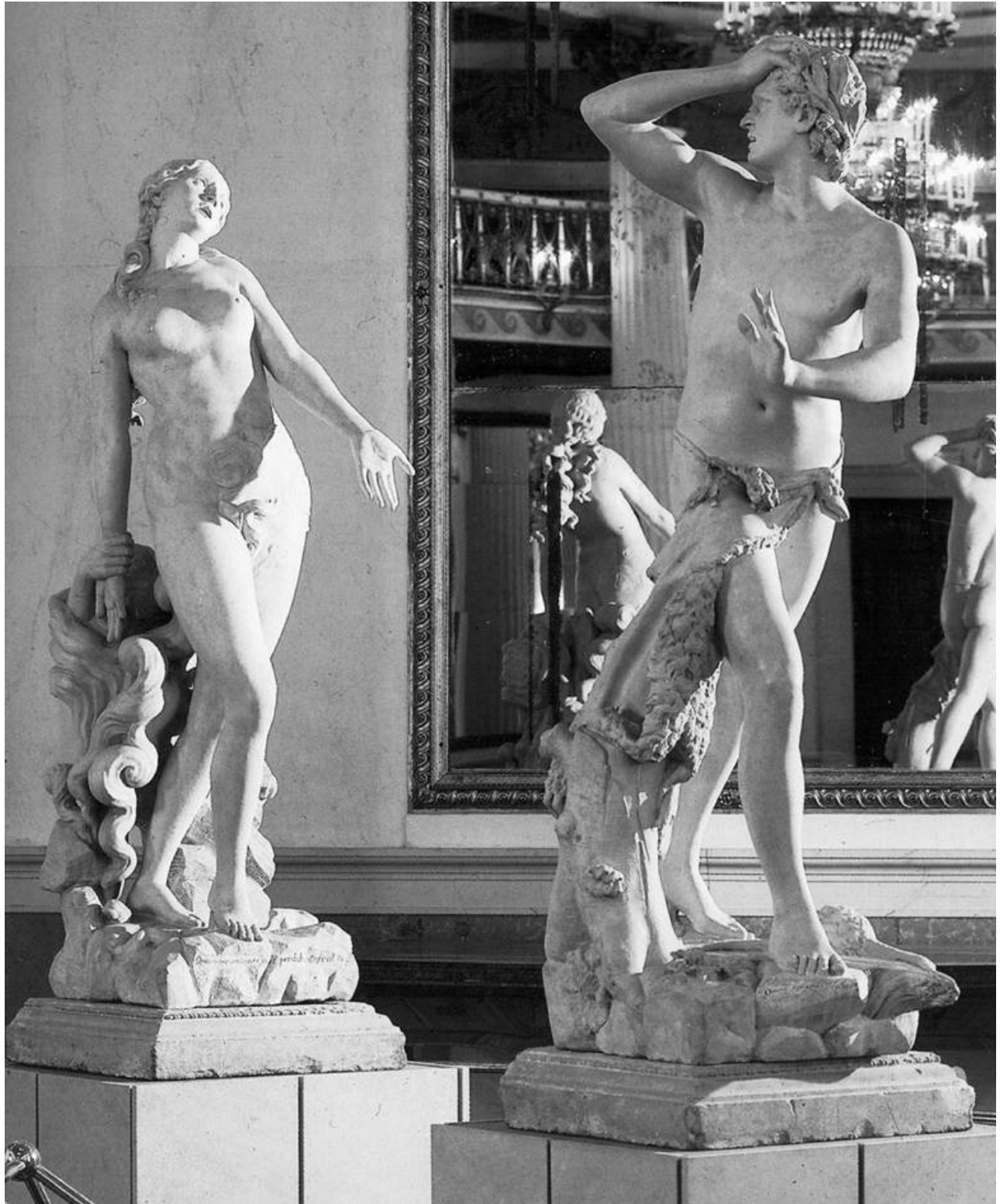
Orfeo ed Euridice, once both were created, were prime examples of Canova's early journey with art. Critics regarded their composition together as "[un]satisfactory" and "difficult to see the figures in conjunction," attesting to Canova's beginning development of his artistic style³⁷. It is unclear in what position they were originally meant to be placed in, since positioning and viewing *Orfeo ed Eurydice* at any given angle can drastically alter the interpretation and analysis of the work. Licht agrees on the ambiguous setup of the statues, pointing out that "the *Orpheus* in particular offers no single point of view that might provide a clue as to its proper installation", so the placements of the statues by the Museo Correr are also under the interpretation of the exhibit designers themselves³⁸. Not knowing the intended positioning is a mixed blessing. It does not let the viewer observe the works together as Canova wanted them to be placed, but allows the viewer him/herself to interpret the myth from the statues as s/he pleases. The installation of the first figure is established differently than those of the fourth and fifth, but even those set-ups have different readings since they are seen from particular angles. The first figure's reading gives off the sense of Orpheus managing a weak farewell to Eurydice, with his hand limply raised. The fourth figure provides an unobstructed angle for imagining Orpheus's hand reaching out to grab Eurydice's, but is too late. Lastly, the fifth figure focuses the most on Orpheus's realization and his attempt to stop the event from happening, with his raised hand. Each of these angles provide several viewpoints from which to understand better Canova's work, the myth, and to highlight

³⁷ Licht, *Canova*, 157.

³⁸ Licht, *Canova*, 157.

the idea of the unfairness of losing a loved one *because* of love for that person. Canova's artistic retelling in *Orfeo ed Euridice* thoroughly epitomize, through Orpheus and Eurydice's expressions and body language at their second departure, that to keep loyal lovers like them away from each other is unjust. Orpheus's only flaw in looking back (when he thought they were both outside the Underworld), in regards to Canova's interpretation, was that his love for Eurydice overwhelmed him. After all, what could Orpheus be blamed for, except that his love was resolute³⁹?

³⁹Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.84-5



**Fig 1: Antonio Canova, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, marble, 1773-6
Museo Correr, Venice**



Fig 2: Antonio Canova, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, marble, 1773-6

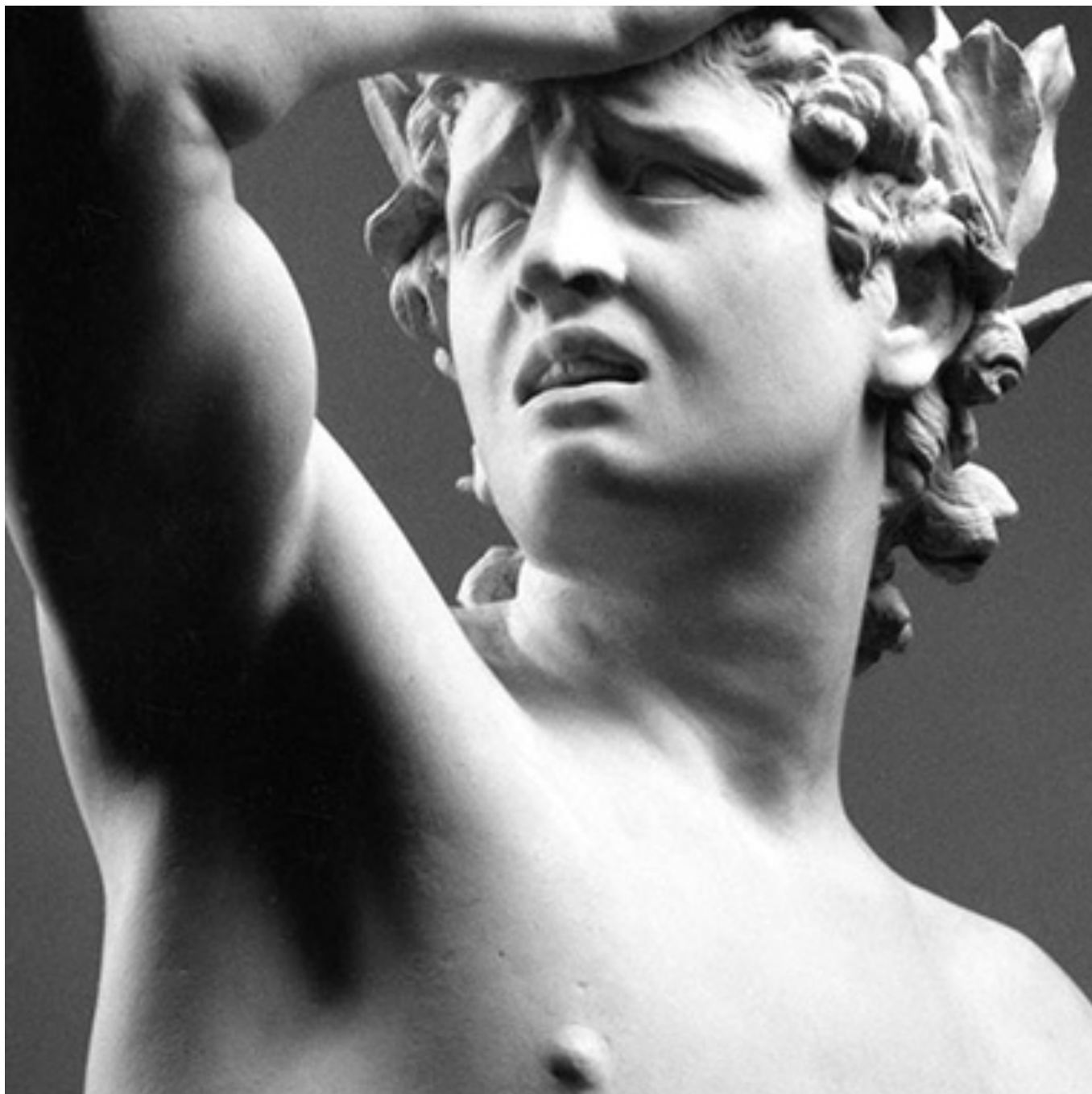


Fig 3: Antonio Canova, *Orfeo*, marble, 1775-6



**Fig 4: Antonio Canova, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, marble, 1773-6
Museo Correr, Venice**



**Fig 5: Antonio Canova, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, marble, 1773-6
Museo Correr, Venice**

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