

WORKBOOK

1.8

Journeying to the Underworld Rome

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – plot, characters, the underworld in Roman belief, and how the two cultures saw what waits below.

NAME

SET / FORM

TOPIC 1.8 · ROME

What's in this booklet?

A guided study of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10.1–64 – the prescribed Roman text – with comparison to the Greek view of the underworld at the end.

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- A** **Key vocabulary** – the terms you must know.
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- B** **Context** – who Orpheus was, who Ovid was, the *Metamorphoses*.
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- C** **Cast of characters** – Orpheus, Eurydice, the gods, and the famous punished dead.
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- D** **The text: lines 1–17** – the wedding, Eurydice's death, the descent.
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- E** **The text: lines 18–39** – Orpheus's song and appeal to Pluto.
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- F** **The text: lines 40–58** – the song's effect, Eurydice released with one condition.
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- G** **The text: lines 59–64** – the fatal turn and Eurydice's second death.
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- H** **The underworld in Ovid** – how the prescribed text portrays it.
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- I** **The wider Roman underworld** – including Aeneas's descent in Virgil's *Aeneid*.
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- J** **Comparing Greek and Roman attitudes** – what each text shows about its own culture.
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- K** **Topic check & exam practice** – recall questions plus exam-style questions.
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AT A GLANCE

TOPIC

1.8 Rome

SPEC AREA

Myth & Religion

PRESCRIBED TEXT

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

LINES

10.1–64

SECTIONS

11 sections

FOUR SPEC AREAS

1. The myth and its plot
2. Portrayal of characters
3. Portrayal of the underworld
4. How the text reflects ancient culture

SECTION A

Key vocabulary

Eight terms central to Ovid's text and to Roman beliefs about the underworld. Learn the word, what it means, and what it refers to in the story.

lyre	A stringed instrument plucked with the fingers. Orpheus's lyre was a gift from Apollo and could move gods, beasts and even stones.	Hymen	The god of weddings. He attends Orpheus's marriage but the omens are bad — his torch will not light properly.
Taenarus	A cave at the southern tip of the Peloponnese, traditionally one of the gates to the underworld. Orpheus enters here.	Avernus	A lake near Naples thought to be another entrance to the underworld. Ovid uses the 'vale of Avernus' as the threshold out.
shade	A Roman word for the soul of a dead person — a faint, bloodless version of the living being.	the Furies	Three goddesses of vengeance dwelling in the underworld. Their faces are moved to tears by Orpheus's song.
naiad	A water nymph — a minor goddess of springs and streams. Eurydice walks with naiads when the snake bites her.	Styx	The principal river of the underworld. Orpheus 'dared to go down to Styx' through the gate of Taenarus.

Exercise A.1 – Match the term

Match each term to its definition. Write the correct letter in the box.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hymen | A. A cave in the Peloponnese; one of the gates to the underworld. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avernus | B. The faint, bloodless soul of a dead person. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> shade | C. A lake near Naples; another entrance to the underworld. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taenarus | D. The god of weddings. |

Exercise A.2 – Quick recall

1. What is a *shade*, and what is its connection to Eurydice in the text? [2]

2. Who are the *Furies*, and how do they react to Orpheus's song? [2]

SECTION B

Context: Orpheus and Ovid

Three things to understand before reading: who Orpheus was, who Ovid was, and how Romans pictured the underworld.

Who was Orpheus?

Orpheus was a legendary Thracian musician and poet. His father was either the Thracian king Oeagrus or the god **Apollo**; his mother was the muse **Calliope**. Apollo gave Orpheus his *lyre* and taught him to use it; Calliope taught him to sing. His music was said to enchant gods, humans, animals — even stones and trees were said to be moved to tears.

During his life he sailed with the Argonauts on Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, and famously saved the crew from the Sirens by drowning out their voices with his lyre. Ovid's text picks up after this, when Orpheus has returned home and married Eurydice.

Who was Ovid?

Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC – AD 17/18) was one of Rome's greatest poets. His *Metamorphoses*, written around **AD 8**, is a long epic poem in 15 books, retelling Greek and Roman myths from the creation of the world to his own time. The unifying theme is *transformation* — characters changing form (humans into trees, animals, stars, and so on).

Roman attitudes to death

Romans inherited most of their underworld beliefs from the Greeks but renamed many of the key figures (Pluto = Hades; Proserpina = Persephone). The underworld was a real, geographical place — *Avernus*, near Naples, was thought to be an actual entrance to it. The dead lived on as *shades*, weak versions of their former selves, and proper burial mattered to ensure safe passage there. The story of Orpheus reflects the Roman conviction that love and music could move even the powers of the dead.

KNOW THIS

- Orpheus — son of Apollo / Oeagrus and Calliope
- His lyre is a gift from Apollo
- Ovid wrote in Latin, around AD 8
- The *Metamorphoses* is 15 books long
- Theme of the work: transformation
- Romans renamed Greek gods (Pluto, Proserpina)

THE ARGONAUT CONNECTION

Before this story, Orpheus had sailed with Jason and saved the crew from the Sirens. Pupils may have met him already in stories of heroic journeys.

SECTION C

Cast of characters

Ovid's text features the central pair, the underworld gods, the messenger of the wedding, and five famous punishment figures that pupils will recognise from Greek myth too.

Orpheus

'the poet of Rhodope', 'Thracian'

Legendary musician. Son of Apollo (or Oeagrus) and the muse Calliope. His lyre can move stones, beasts and the gods of the underworld themselves.

Eurydice

'the newly wedded bride'

Orpheus's wife. Killed on her wedding day by a snakebite. Spends most of the text as a silent shade among the recently dead.

Pluto

'the lord of the shadows', 'king of the deep'

Roman name for Hades. King of the underworld. Moved by Orpheus's appeal to release Eurydice on one condition.

Proserpina

'his royal bride'

Roman name for Persephone. Queen of the underworld. Orpheus reminds her of her own abduction by Pluto to appeal to her sympathy.

Hymen

God of weddings

Attends Orpheus and Eurydice's wedding but brings bad omens — his torch will not light, smoking and producing tears.

The Furies

Goddesses of vengeance

Three female deities of the underworld who pursue and punish wrongdoers. Even *their* faces are wet with tears at Orpheus's song — the first time this has happened.

Tantalus & Ixion

Punished dead

Two of the famous sufferers in Tartarus. Tantalus reaches for water that retreats; Ixion turns on a fiery wheel. Both pause while Orpheus sings.

Tityus, Sisyphus & the Belides

Punished dead

More famous sufferers: vultures normally eat Tityus's liver; Sisyphus rolls his rock; the Belides (Danaids) fill bottomless jars. All stop to listen.

A ROLL-CALL OF THE PUNISHED

Ovid names **five** famous figures of the underworld — Tantalus, Ixion, Tityus, the Belides (Danaids) and Sisyphus — without explaining who they are. He assumes his Roman audience already knows them from the Greek tradition.

SECTION D · THE PRESCRIBED TEXT

The text: lines 1–10 – the wedding and Eurydice's death

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- The bad omens at the wedding – what does Hymen's torch do?
- How Eurydice dies
- Where Orpheus enters the underworld
- What Orpheus dares to do that others cannot

OVID, METAMORPHOSES 10.1–10

- 1 Hymen, called by the voice of Orpheus, departed, and, dressed in his saffron robes, made his way through the vast skies to the Ciconian coast: but in vain. He was present at Orpheus's marriage, true, but he did not speak the usual words, display a joyful expression, or bring good luck. The torch, too, that he held, sputtered continually, with tear-provoking fumes, and no amount of shaking contrived to light it properly. The result was worse than any omens.
- 8 While the newly wedded bride, Eurydice, was walking through the grass, with a crowd of naiads as her companions, she was killed, by a bite on her ankle, from a snake, sheltering there. When Thracian Orpheus, the poet of Rhodope, had mourned for her, greatly, in the upper world, he dared to go down to Styx, through the gate of Taenarus, also, to see if he might not move the dead.

YOUR NOTES

SECTION D · CONTINUED

The text: lines 11–17 – arrival before Pluto

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- Who Orpheus passes on his way
- How the underworld is described
- Whom Orpheus comes before
- How he begins his appeal – with words, or music?

OVID, METAMORPHOSES 10.11–17

- 11 Through the weightless throng, and the ghosts that had received proper burial, he came to Persephone, and the lord of the shadows, he who rules the joyless kingdom. Then striking the lyre-strings to accompany his words, he sang:
- 15 ‘O gods of this world, placed below the earth, to which all, who are created mortal, descend; if you allow me, and it is lawful, to set aside the fictions of idle tongues and speak the truth, I have not come here to see dark Tartarus, nor to bind Cerberus, Medusa’s child, with his three necks, and snaky hair.’

YOUR NOTES

SECTION D · ANALYSIS

Analysis: the wedding and descent

Use the text on the previous two pages to answer the questions below.

Exercise D.1 – Comprehension

1. Which god is called to the wedding? [1]

2. Give **two** bad omens at the wedding. [2]

3. How does Eurydice die? [2]

4. Where is Orpheus when she dies? [1]

5. Through which gate does Orpheus enter the underworld? [1]

6. How does Ovid describe the underworld in the opening of Orpheus's song? [2]

7. What does Orpheus deny that he has come for? Give **two** things. [2]

SECTION E · THE PRESCRIBED TEXT

The text: lines 18–39 – Orpheus’s appeal to Pluto

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- The reason Orpheus gives for his journey
- The line about Love that ends his first argument
- What Orpheus swears by
- The bargain he offers at the end

OVID, METAMORPHOSES 10.18–39

18 ‘My wife is the cause of my journey. A viper she trod on diffused its venom into her body, and robbed her of her best years. I longed to be able to accept it, and I do not say I have not tried: Love won.’

22 ‘He is a god well known in the world above, though I do not know if it is so here: though I do imagine him to be here, as well, and if the story of that rape in ancient times is not a lie, you also were wedded by Amor.’

30 ‘I beg you, by these fearful places, by this immense abyss, and the silence of your vast realms, reverse Eurydice’s swift death. All things are destined to be yours, and though we delay a while, sooner or later we hasten home.’

35 ‘Here we are all bound, this is our final abode, and you hold the longest reign over the human race. Eurydice, too, will be yours to command, when she has lived out her fair span of years, to maturity. I ask this benefit as a gift; but, if the fates refuse my wife this kindness, I am determined not to return: you can delight in both our deaths.’

YOUR NOTES

SECTION E · ANALYSIS

Analysis: the appeal to Pluto

Use the text on the previous two pages to answer the questions below.

Exercise E.1 – Comprehension

1. What reason does Orpheus give for coming to the underworld? [1]

2. How does Orpheus describe how Eurydice died? [2]

3. Why does Orpheus mention Amor (Love)? [2]

4. Give **two** things Orpheus swears by in his appeal. [2]

5. What argument does Orpheus make about Eurydice eventually returning to the underworld anyway? [2]

6. What does Orpheus say he will do if his appeal fails? [2]

SECTION F · THE PRESCRIBED TEXT

The text: lines 40–58 – the song’s effect, the bargain

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- Who is named among the punished dead
- What happens to the Furies – described as a ‘first time’
- The condition Pluto sets – and the consequence of breaking it
- How Ovid describes the path back up

OVID, METAMORPHOSES 10.40–58

- 40 The bloodless spirits wept as he spoke, accompanying his words with the music. Tantalus did not reach for the ever-retreating water: Ixion’s wheel was stilled: the vultures did not pluck at Tityus’s liver: the Belides, the daughters of Danaüs, left their water jars: and you, Sisyphus, perched there, on your rock.
- 45 Then they say, for the first time, the faces of the Furies were wet with tears, won over by his song: the king of the deep, and his royal bride, could not bear to refuse his prayer, and called for Eurydice.
- 49 She was among the recent ghosts, and walked haltingly from her wound. The poet of Rhodope received her, and, at the same time, accepted this condition, that he must not turn his eyes behind him, until he emerged from the vale of Avernus, or the gift would be null and void.
- 54 They took the upward path, through the still silence, steep and dark, shadowy with dense fog, drawing near to the threshold of the upper world.

YOUR NOTES

SECTION F · ANALYSIS

Analysis: the song's effect and the bargain

Use the text on the previous two pages to answer the questions below.

Exercise F.1 – Comprehension

1. What do the 'bloodless spirits' do as Orpheus sings? [1]

2. Name **two** of the punished dead and explain what each one stops doing. [2]

3. What happens to the Furies, and why is this remarkable? [2]

4. Why does Eurydice walk 'haltingly'? [1]

5. What condition must Orpheus obey to bring Eurydice back? [2]

6. Give **two** details Ovid uses to describe the path back to the upper world. [2]

SECTION G · THE PRESCRIBED TEXT

The text: lines 59–64 – the fatal turn

AS YOU READ, LOOK FOR...

- Why Orpheus turns — what is he afraid of?
- Eurydice's tone in her final words
- How quickly the consequence happens
- What Ovid's ironic question is

OVID, METAMORPHOSES 10.59–64

59 Afraid she was no longer there, and eager to see her, the lover turned his eyes. In an instant she dropped back, and he, unhappy man, stretching out his arms to hold her and be held, clutched at nothing but the receding air.

61 Dying a second time, now, there was no complaint to her husband (what, then, could she complain of, except that she had been loved?) She spoke a last 'farewell' that, now, scarcely reached his ears, and turned again towards that same place.

YOUR NOTES

SECTION G · ANALYSIS

Analysis: the fatal turn

Use the text on the previous page to answer the questions below.

Exercise G.1 – Comprehension

1. Why does Orpheus turn to look back? [2]

2. What happens to Eurydice the instant he turns? [1]

3. What does Orpheus try to do, and what does he end up holding? [2]

4. Ovid asks an ironic question about why Eurydice cannot complain. What is the answer he suggests? [2]

5. What is Eurydice's last word, and how is it described? [2]

SECTION H

The underworld in Ovid

One of the four spec areas for this topic is the portrayal of the underworld. Ovid's text shows far more of the underworld's geography than the Hymn did – almost everything you need is named directly in the lines you have just read.

- **Reached through real geographical places.** Orpheus enters through the cave at *Taenarus* and must lead Eurydice up through the *vale of Avernus* – both were real locations in the Roman world believed to be entrances to the underworld.
- **Named as 'Styx'.** Ovid uses the river-name directly: Orpheus 'dared to go down to Styx'. The river is treated as standing for the whole realm.
- **A 'joyless kingdom'.** Pluto is 'the lord of the shadows, he who rules the joyless kingdom' – explicitly described as miserable.
- **The dead are 'weightless throng' and 'bloodless spirits'.** Ovid pictures shades as faint and insubstantial – the very air receding when Orpheus tries to hold Eurydice.
- **Already-buried souls are distinguished from the newly-dead.** Orpheus passes through 'the ghosts that had received proper burial' – an echo of the importance of burial we saw in Topic 1.7.
- **Cerberus is named.** Orpheus disavows wanting to bind 'Cerberus, Medusa's child, with his three necks, and snaky hair' – confirming the three-headed dog at the entrance.
- **Tartarus is named.** Orpheus says he has not come 'to see dark Tartarus' – the deepest pit, where the punished suffer.
- **Five famous punishment figures appear by name.** Tantalus reaches for the retreating water; Ixion's wheel turns; Tityus has vultures plucking his liver; the Belides carry their water jars; Sisyphus sits on his rock. All pause for Orpheus's song.
- **The Furies are present.** Goddesses of vengeance whose faces are wet with tears 'for the first time' – a striking detail showing the song's extraordinary power.
- **It has rulers with a household.** Pluto is called 'the king of the deep' and Proserpina 'his royal bride' – a married royal couple ruling over the dead.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Ovid's underworld is much more *furnished* than the Hymn's. He names the rivers, the punishment figures, the guardians and the regions all within sixty-four lines – assuming his Roman audience already knows them from the Greek tradition.

SECTION I

The wider Roman underworld & Aeneas

The Romans inherited their underworld almost wholesale from the Greeks, but with some changes of name and emphasis. The fullest Roman picture comes from another descent journey – Aeneas's, in Virgil's *Aeneid* Book 6.

RENAMED GODS

- **Pluto / Dis** – the Roman Hades
- **Proserpina** – the Roman Persephone
- **Orcus** – another name used for the underworld and its king
- **Manes** – the deified spirits of the dead

REAL ROMAN ENTRANCES

Romans believed the underworld could be entered at real geographical places – including **Lake Avernus** near Naples (Ovid's 'vale of Avernus'), the **cave at Cumae**, and various other caves and lakes. These were treated as holy sites.

SAME GEOGRAPHY, SAME FIGURES

Romans kept the Greek rivers (Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon, Lethe), the guardians (Charon, Cerberus), the three judges, the three regions (Elysium, Asphodel, Tartarus) and the famous punishments. Ovid's text confirms this by name-checking five of them.

WHY AENEAS MATTERS FOR THIS TOPIC

Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 is the fullest Roman portrayal of the underworld and is flagged by OCR as supplementary reading. It both confirms the inherited Greek geography and adds something distinctively Roman – the underworld serving the destiny of the Roman state. Aeneas's mission is national; Orpheus's is personal.

AENEAS IN THE UNDERWORLD

In Virgil's *Aeneid* Book 6, the hero **Aeneas** descends to the underworld to meet the ghost of his father **Anchises**. The journey is guided by the **Sibyl of Cumae**, a prophetess. To enter, he must first find the **Golden Bough** – a magical branch of mistletoe.

Like Odysseus in the Greek tradition, Aeneas crosses the Styx (Charon initially refuses him, since he is alive), passes Cerberus (drugged with honeyed cake), and sees Elysium, the punished in Tartarus, and famous shades of the dead.

A ROMAN TWIST: PROPHECY

What sets Virgil's underworld apart is that **Anchises shows Aeneas the future heroes of Rome**. The dead souls in Elysium are awaiting rebirth as great Romans – Romulus, the kings, Julius Caesar, Augustus. The underworld becomes part of Rome's national destiny.

SECTION J

Comparing Greek and Roman attitudes

Complete the comparison table below. For each aspect, write the key details of how the underworld is portrayed in each tradition. Use the prescribed texts and what you have learned about the wider Greek and Roman underworld.

ASPECT	GREECE — THE HYMN	ROME — OVID
<p>Geographical detail How much of the underworld's geography does the text describe?</p>		
<p>The ruler How is the king of the underworld portrayed?</p>		
<p>Who descends Who goes down to the underworld — and why?</p>		
<p>The driving force What motivates the journey or events?</p>		
<p>What the myth is for What does each text seem to want to teach?</p>		
<p>Mortal access How easy is it for mortals to reach the underworld?</p>		

SECTION K

Topic check

Recall questions across the whole topic. Test what you know before moving on to exam-style practice.

Exercise K.1 – Topic check

1. Who wrote the prescribed Roman text, and what is its overall title? [2]

2. Name **two** Greek gods and their Roman equivalents. [2]

3. Who were Orpheus's parents? [1]

4. Name **three** of the famous punishment figures Ovid mentions. [3]

5. Why is Aeneas's journey to the underworld useful for understanding Roman beliefs? [2]

6. Which two real Roman places were thought to be entrances to the underworld? [2]

7. What is the condition Pluto sets when releasing Eurydice? [2]
