The Ghost Story in Spenser's *Daphnaïda*

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Abstract

This study of Spenser's *Daphnaïda* responds to David Lee Miller's contentions that (1) this elegy is a purposely bad poem; (2) that *Daphnaïda* is more suitable to historical consideration than formal analysis; and (3) that the reader is meant to see Alcyon, the mourner in the poem, as primarily a figure for mockery. This essay complicates the work of mourning in the poem by considering its subtle tonal shifts and changes of register throughout Alcyon's lament and offers a formal reading of the poem that considers the effect of the poet-narrator's introduction on our subsequent evaluation of Alcyon and the poem as a whole.

Overview

> Who so else in pleasure findeth sense,
> Or in this wretched life dooth take delight,
> Let him be banisht farre away from hence:
> (8-10)[1]

The beginning of Spenser's *Daphnaïda* requires the reader to struggle with and probably discard the poet-narrator's perspective in order to continue reading. Banishing anyone who likes pleasure or takes delight in "this wretched life" (9) and inviting in only people who desire to

increase their cares, Spenser's narrator erects a barbed wire fence around this poem: the poem does not want me, and, the opening of the poem suggests, I will not want it. And lest the reader be tempted by an uninviting, but otherwise beautiful poem, the narrator further disinvites the Muses, lest they "breede delight" (13)—instead passing divine sponsorship to the Fates, "those three fatall Sisters, whose sad hands / Doo weave the direfull threds of destinie" (16-17).

The primary spark for this essay is David Lee Miller's claim that *Daphnaïda* is a bad poem on purpose, an absurd, bathetic portrayal of Arthur Gorges, written out of resistance to a request by Ralegh to "write a poem in support of Gorges" (246). Miller takes *Daphnaïda*'s badness for granted in his essay, which opens, provocatively, with the question, "How could Spenser have written a poem as inexplicably bad as *Daphnaïda*, and why did he publish it?" (241). He describes *Daphnaïda* as "what must be [Spenser's] worst poem" and refers to its "extravagant badness" in setting up his historical argument, also noting William Oram's characterization of the poem as one of Spenser's "most experimental and least-loved works" (Oram 487). Miller suggests that the poem be taken at its word; we should simply stop reading this bad poem at the poet's say-so.

Miller's central contention—the element that makes this a lousy poem in his reading—is that Alcyon's grief is over-the-top, repetitive, and unsophisticated in expression, as in the below example, from Alcyon's lament:

> I hate to speak, my voyce is spent with crying:
> I hate to heare, lowd plaints have duld mine eares:
> I hate to tast, for food withholds my dying:
> I hate to see, mine eyes are dimd with teares:
> I hate to smell, no sweet on earth is left:
> I hate to feele, my flesh is numbd with feares:
> So all my senses from me are bereft. (414-20)

Miller adds that "eighty-one stanzas like this one would dull anyone's ears" (243).[2] But we do not have eighty-one stanzas like this one: Miller takes this stanza from a four-stanza set piece in the fifth section of a complex, seven-part lament. Sampling the poem here, at the very center

of a particularly low moment, a moment of grinding, plodding, and despairing on the part of the speaker, not only gives an inaccurate sense of the poem as a whole but also gives the wrong notion of the work of mourning this stanza is part of. I do not mean to suggest that the repeated "I hate" lines here is anything but excessive, but rather that well-written verse may not be Spenser's goal at this moment, here in the depths of lament.

In considering the warning sign the poet places on the poem at the start, Miller says that, according to the poet, he

> has written an elegy from which Horation [sic] *dulce* is excluded by design. The poem is deliberately unpleasing. If this unpleasingness is not inadvertent, then it calls for another order of explanation. Why deliberately write—and publish—*twice*—a bad poem? (244)

The pivot that Miller makes between "unpleasing" and "bad" is where I want to start my argument. Miller's one example of badness takes aim at Spenser's prosody, the "heavy-handed" quality of the verse that "would dull anyone's ears"; but more significant is his sense that the poem's content is oppressive and alienating. More importantly, his characterization of "eighty-one stanzas like this one" suggests that he reads the poem as a monolithic block of shrill, static moaning, without "consolatory gestures" like "the elegant and amusing *Book of the Duchess*" (243).

I also want to consider whether Spenser's warning at the poem's start might be read as an authorial tactic to arouse interest, to heighten an exciting sense of trespass, or to reveal something important about the narrative voice responsible for that warning. One might be reminded of the eerie dedication, "This is not for you" that rejects the reader on the first page of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, or Lemony Snicket's gloomy warning in the first line of the first book of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, "If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book" (1). These gestures push the reader away, and in so doing, may create interest in the narrative voice—as an alienated or wounded figure who rejects readership, or in the text as a juicily forbidden piece of writing.

Attempting to argue "good poem" versus "bad poem" is a fool's errand, and the goal here is not to convince the reader (or Miller) that they ought to enjoy *Daphnaïda* if they do not. I do, however, want to resist the characterization of *Daphnaïda*, particularly Alcyon's lament, as a single, unsubtle, and static entity, but instead to carefully unpack its movements, its unsuccessful gropings, for closure. We may desire consolation at the end of a poem that depicts such bleakness and keenly respond to its absence, but that ought not to be the end of formal analysis of this complex, disturbing, and resonant poem. Elegant and amusing are not really the goals of *Daphnaïda*.

Like Miller, I also take seriously the poet-narrator's strident warning as the poem begins: not because Spenser thinks I ought to put the poem down, but because the poet-narrator's disclaimer is part of an imaginative contract made with his audience. In venturing past the threshold of this poem, the reader ostensibly agrees to its terms of use, to the understanding that the poet's preferred audience is "the dreadfull Queene / Of darkenes deepe come from the Stygian strands, / And grisly Ghosts to hear this dolefull teene" (19-21). In proceeding, the reader is encouraged to see him- or herself as a member of that ghostly audience, or, at least, to try on that mantle, to hear with those dead ears, for the purpose of reading *Daphnaïda*.[3] We may, in the end, come to reject the notion that dead things have anything to gain from this poem, to at least partly exorcise those ghosts. But part of the work of this poem is to have the reader enter into this ruminative, cyclical text, reading it from an alienated, ghostly perspective—indeed, the depressed perspective of the poet-narrator—for a while. Alcyon's grief is not primarily impious or sacrilegious, something to be rejected out of hand, but, instead, a representation of a slow and painful mourning that is nevertheless complex and productive, not static.[4]

Complaints and *The Doleful Lay of Clorinda*

Daphnaïda was published in 1591, the same year as Spenser's *Complaints* volume, a volume that shares themes, language, and images with the

standalone poem, and which provides a useful lens through which to consider the nature of *Daphnaïda*'s "badness." The most obvious contrast with *Daphnaïda* from the *Complaints* volume is *Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubberds Tale*. Like *Daphnaïda*, *Prosopopoia* has a narrator in the throes of a "wicked maladie" (9) which seems less like a physical sickness than emotional anguish, noting his "woe" and his "griefe" (14, 15). To attempt to alleviate the narrator's trouble, a group of friends offer pleasant chivalrous narratives which seek to "deceave" (23) the narrator's sense, which, according to the narrator, "the delight thereof me much releeved" (32). By contrast, the tale of Mother Hubberd—the tale that the vast majority of *Prosopopoia* occupies itself with—is described as wholly unaesthetic at the outset of the narrator's relating it and at the conclusion:

> No Muses aide me needes heretoo to call;
> Base is the style, and matter meane withall. (43-44)
> […]
> And bad her tongue that it so bluntly tolde. (1388)

Prosopopoia, then, asks us much the same question as *Daphnaïda*: if the poem at hand is unaesthetic, why relate it? Why does Mother Hubberd's tale get preserved as the center of *Prosopopoia*, rather than the chivalric tales of the narrator's friends which are full of delight? As in *Daphnaïda*, the narrator of *Prosopopoia* is not interested in aesthetic delight as much as verse that is effective at responding to grieving. This may be distressing, unpleasant, ugly, repetitive, and blunt, but for the narrator of *Prosopopoia*, it provides something less enjoyable and more salutary.

Another poem in the *Complaints* volume is *Virgils Gnat*, Spenser's translation of *Culex*. This poem also takes as a central theme the idea of the value of its own content—in this case, not because of the quality of its verse, but because of its theme—the death of a gnat with no particular claim to greatness, an everyday, unremarkable death of a tiny creature. What gives *Virgils Gnat* its power, and what likely was attractive to Spenser in choosing to translate it, is the way in which the gnat's

death, though trivial as such, on the microlevel, becomes aestheticized as the dead gnat is cast into a huge network of mythology and history, and shown to in fact participate meaningfully in a complex web of interlaced narratives. From one perspective, the story is trivial and pointless; from another it is aesthetic. This is very much the same move that the closely related poem *Muiopotmos* makes in the same volume, in which the death of a butterfly—when seen the right way—participates in a deep network of mythological narratives that transforms a rather ugly death into something beautiful. Not, of course, from Clarion the dead butterfly's point of view, but from a larger, macrolevel view of the reader. I do not mean to suggest that the verse of *Daphnaïda* ought to be compared with the quality of the verse of *Muiopotmos*, but rather to note that, like these poems from the *Complaints* volume, *Daphnaïda* explicitly seeks to linger on what may seem unaesthetic or an unlikely subject for good verse.

The Doleful Lay of Clorinda, published in 1595, offers a very useful contrast with the complex structure of *Daphnaïda*. *Clorinda*, only 96 lines long, similarly depicts a distraught mourner, here grieving the loss of Astrophel.[5] This poem opens analogously to *Daphnaïda* in its attempt to define its audience:

> To heavens? ah they alas the authors were,
> And workers of my unremedied wo: (7-8)
>
> To men? ah they alas like wretched bee,
> And subject to the heavens ordinance: (13-14)

The speaker determines to address instead "my self [...] / Sith none alive like sorrowfull remaines" (19-20). Part of the work of this opening is to establish its readers as "wretched" and therefore unable to provide her any comfort, since they themselves "need comforted to bee" (18).

The work of grieving that Clorinda's lay depicts has a clear trajectory, beginning by describing how the world has diminished now that Astrophel is gone: "Woods, hills and rivers, now are desolate" (25). She then moves from descriptive to imperative in her desire to have the world's beauty decline to match her own sorrow: "Breake now your

gyrlonds"; "Never againe let lass put gyrlond on"; "Ne ever sing the love-layes which he made" (37, 40, 43).

This move to push beauty away intertwines with an incorporation of the audience—the reader—of the poem. Although Clorinda has before claimed that she speaks only to herself, as her lament goes on, she gradually folds the readers into it, first by imagining Astrophel's death as "great losse to all" (35) and then by adding "you" to her cries:

> Death the devourer of all worlds delight,
> Hath robbed you and reft from me my joy:
> Both you and me, and all the world he quight
> Hath robd of joyance, and left sad annoy.
> […]
> Oh death that hast us of such riches reft [...] (49-52, 55)

Moving from "my selfe" to "you and me" and to "us" sets the poem up to find its consolation in its realization that Astrophel's spirit "is not dead, ne can it die, / But lives for aie, in blisfull Paradise" (67-68)—thus reinviting the "heavens" that Clorinda excluded from her poem at the outset. Naturally the relative brevity of *Clorinda* compared with the extremely lengthy mourning of Alcyon helps the shorter poem avoid the charge of tedium in its mourning, but the shape of Clorinda's mourning, and her presence within her community, more than its brevity, serves this function as well. The poem concludes with the introduction of communal mourning and song, represented by Thestylis, and "full many other moe" who "Gan dight themselves t'expresse their inward woe" (103; 104-05). *The Doleful Lay of Clorinda* here moves from alienation to consolation, from solitariness to community, from the rejection of beauty to the inviting of song.

In contrast to *Clorinda*'s teleological structure, *Daphnaïda*'s form is more circular, more unstable. Although many of the elements of *Clorinda* are present in *Daphnaïda*, its refusal to temper grief by pointing to potential healing at the end makes it fascinatingly frustrating to grapple with. Oram characterizes the structure of the poem as rooted in "the contrast between the narrator of the elegy and Alcyon. The narrator is grieving when he meets the mourner, but he puts aside his own sorrow

in an attempt to help his friend where Alcyon seems incapable of such self-forgetfulness" (Oram 490). That is, according to Oram, the fundamental structural element of the poem must be our perception of the narrator's movement from despair to charity; as we move from the beginning of the poem to the end, we respond to his attempt to reincorporate Alcyon back into the community, a move much like Clorinda's. The narrator was

> sore griev'd to see his wretched case.
> [...]
> I him desirde, sith daie was overcast,
> And darke night fast approached, to be pleased
> To turne aside unto my Cabinet,
> And stay with me, till he were better eased (553, 556-59)

However, the narrator's hospitality and pity at the end of the poem is temporally *followed* by the narrator's melancholy warning-off at the start of his poem. That is, the poet has not reached an end point in his own process of grieving, provoked by his interaction with Alcyon, but just a momentary pause, followed by his alienated warning to the reader to flee from the tale of "sad *Alcyon*" (6). The language of the very end links the pitying conclusion to the spiky introduction. The "heavie plaint" and "heaviest plaint" (540-41) that the poet calls Alcyon's lament returns us to the "heavie minde" and "rufull plaint" (1, 4) warned of at the start; Alcyon's expression as if he had met "hellish hags [...] upon the way" (566) may also recall the "fatall Sisters" whom the poet invokes at the start of the poem. The narration of the poem opens "in gloomie evening" (22), and by the end we are reminded that "darke night fast approched" (557); however, the poet's opening address to the reader seems to also place us in this growing darkness with its invitation to "the dreadfull Queene / Of darkenes deepe" (20-21). The cyclical nature of the poem is certainly prepared for by the narrator's description of his ruminative sorrow, "which dayly dooth my weaker wit possesse" (30).

Smaller loops, too, are crucial to the structure of the poem, including the "dayly" depression the narrator struggles with (30), the two near-

deaths (188) and recoveries of Alcyon (545), and the repeated requests to the narrator: "Weepe Shepheard weepe to make my under song" (245). In the light of the importance of looping, the anaphoric structure of the three stanzas that Miller quotes from ("I hate [...] I hate") can be seen in its full aesthetic context. The work of *Daphnaïda*'s looping structure, then, is to evoke a ruminative, haunted feeling to Alcyon's and the narrator's grief.[6] Far from the repudiation of mourning that Miller calls it (see 249), *Daphnaïda* offers mourning that wrestles with itself. There is no direct path towards consolation, as in *Clorinda*, but a halting and frustrating process of mourning, with discoveries and insights gained and lost, and gained and lost—in fact, a process not dissimilar to the actual process of mourning.[7]

The Fruit of Heaviness

Our first view of Alcyon is that of a man keeping his sorrow wholly within, unwilling to share his grief. He is long-haired and unshaven, and he looks down; he groans, but "inly" (48). In seeking to have Alcyon tell his sorrows, the narrator invokes the principle that "griefe findes some ease by him that like does beare" (67). The nature of shared grief here is simple: grief is treated like a burden that can be uniquely shared only by a fellow sufferer. The grief will not disappear; it is "committed" (70) to the ear of the narrator; it is a load borne by both of them—and by the reader, also ready to receive that burden as a fellow sufferer. Alcyon, however, rejects this sense of grief, saying that his sadness "cannot be tolde" (72).

Note the quick shift in Alcyon's perception of what his grief can accomplish rhetorically. From a flat rejection of the notion that his grief can be shared at all, he moves to a qualification that "no tongue can well unfold" (74) his pains—which seems a very different claim. He similarly transitions from pronouncing that he seeks "alone to weepe, and dye alone" to offering his story because the narrator "seemst to rue my griefe" (92): "Then hearken well till it to ende bee brought, / For

never didst thou heare more haplesse fate" (97-98). Far from the poet-narrator's claim that the appropriate audience for Alcyon's tale is a man who wishes to increase grief—accompanied by grisly ghosts—Alcyon agrees to tell his story to the poet because the poet shows sympathy and love. The difference between the poet's characterization of "what this poem is good for" and Alcyon's own claim ought to make the reader wary of taking the poet's description at face value. As the lament begins, Alcyon considers not only his stark sorrow, but also the aesthetic possibilities of the story of himself, particularly as he opens his narrative with an extraordinarily poetic description of his "lovelie Lionesse" (137).[8] At any rate, what we get from Alcyon is not at all only the "sobs and grones" promised by the narrator or the absence of the Muses (14) but a lament in which weeping can be transformed into song, an image exemplified in Alcyon's repeated requests to the narrator that he "Weep Shepheard weep, to make mine undersong" (245).[9]

An apt image for Alcyon's surprising production of poetry as part of the process of coping with his internal agony appears in the metaphor of the narrator's sudden birth of an "Infant" as he begins his evening stroll. He begins his walk with a clear mind, "to breath the freshing ayre" when, after finding himself in a field of frost-killed flowers,

> There came unto my minde a troublous thought,
> Which dayly dooth my weaker wit possesse,
> Ne lets it rest, until it forth have brought
> Her long borne Infant, fruit of heavinesse. (29-32)

The speaker is not specific about the thought that provokes this mood, although his location suggests thoughts of death and, more generally, "this worlds vainnesse and lifes wretchednesse" (34). The thought is characterized as productive of an infant—a fruit of "heavinesse," but a fruit nonetheless. The poet's pain brings something forth: in this case, clearly the poem *Daphnaïda,* beauty created from pain. The heaviness of the child links it with Alcyon's heavy "minde" (1); "eyes" (46); "case" (96); "plight" (170); "thought" (465); and "plaint" (540, 541). That is, the narrator's thoughts are cyclical, ruminative, but also productive: at a

certain point, the labor pains end, and the child—as much as the poem—is delivered.[10]

Alcyon's seven-part elegy to his love opens with a preface that addresses these questions of the relationship between pain and beauty. He begins by allegorizing his relationship with and the death of his Daphne as his taming of a "faire young Lionesse" (107) whom he met as he tended his "little flocke on westerne downes [...] / Not far from whence *Sabrinaes* streame doth flow, / And flowrie bancks with silver liquor steepe" (100-02). The language of his apprehension of the beauty of the lioness is lush and evocative:

> It there befell as I the fields did range
> Fearelesse and free, a faire young Lionesse,
> White as the native Rose before the chaunge,
> Which *Venus* blood did in her leaves impresse,
> I spied playing on the grassie playne
> Her youthfull sports and kindlie wantonnesse,
> That did all other Beasts in beawtie staine. (106-12)

It is difficult to read these lines like a ghost—that is, it is difficult to read them cut off from pleasure, agreeing that the Muses really have been wholly exiled from the poem. Alcyon's first impulse in sharing his sorrow is to create a story, to aesthetisize, to see his experience as making "new matter fit for Tragedies" (154), which is a very different impulse from making "Fit matter for [...] cares increase" (3).[11] Alcyon chooses to mythologize even the horrific moment of his love's death, by saying "A cruell *Satyre* with his murdrous dart" killed her (156). The ghostly reader should be aesthetically unmoved by Alcyon's lyrical evocation of Daphne, his "lovelie Lionesse" (137), instead preferring the alternate version of this story: when the narrator fails to understand Alcyon's allegory of the lioness, Alcyon repeats the point with agonizing spareness, in one sentence, all the poetry wrung out of it: "Then sighing sore, *Daphne* thou knewest (quoth he) / She now is dead; ne more endured to say" (184-85).

These two versions of Daphne's death serve two purposes. First, they set up the poles between which Alcyon's lament will resonate, between

the lavish and the stark, between the urge to create poetry from his experience and the urge to strip the world of adornment forever.[12] And second, they make the reader question the terms under which they have entered the poem; if the poem shows us pleasure, joy in its verse, then imaginatively, we revive and reject the ghostly mantle—we, like Alcyon after his awakening by the narrator, recover "life that would have fled away" (188).

The Seven-Part Lament

The first three sections of Alcyon's lament make a *Clorinda*-like move to universalize the death of his beloved, and to attempt to find comfort in Daphne's dying words. He begins by accusing the heavens of injustice in stealing away such a pure woman, claiming that they

> […] so unjustlie doe their judgments share;
> Mongst earthlie wightes, as to afflict so sore
> The innocent, as those which do transgresse,
> And does not spare the best or fayrest more [...] (199-202)

He eventually begins to grapple with this paradox by contending that her very purity makes her "Not mine but his, which mine awhile her made: / Mine to be his, with him to live for ay" (235-36): her purity makes her more fit for heaven than earth. He is struggling with Daphne's own dying words to him, in which she reproves Alcyon for his sadness, wondering "why should he that loves me, sorie bee / For my deliverance" (278-79):

> I goe with gladnesse to my wished rest,
> Whereas no worlds sad care, nor wasting woe
> May come their happie quiet to molest,
> But Saints and Angels in celestiall thrones
> Eternally him praise, that hath them blest [...] (282-86)

These lines are the precise center of *Daphnaïda* and offer Alcyon and the poem as a whole a potential way to pivot from despair to healing, by way of considering both the beauty and goodness of the deserving deceased. This is the tactic used by *Clorinda*, as the speaker moves from

horror at divine injustice—"Ay me, can so divine a thing be dead?" (66)—to recognition of his joy in heaven: "Ah no: it is not dead, ne can it die, / But lives for aie, in blisful Paradise" (67-68).[13]

If this were *Clorinda,* the poem would end there. *Clorinda* uses that moment of celestial insight and comfort to transition to communal mourning and song; *Daphnaïda*'s response is more resistant and tentative. Alcyon's recognition that Daphne will live with God "for ay" is followed by his insistence on divine injustice: "For age to dye is right, but youth is wrong" (243). We also hear this tension in his "Lionesse" preface: "Out of the world thus was she reft awaie, / Out of the world, unworthie such a spoyle; / And borne to heaven, for heaven a fitter pray" (162-64), even as he resists that comfort by seeking her "throughout this earthlie soyle" (167). Her dying words offer him a possible way to end his despair, words that he returns to several times in different contexts, trying them out to consider their efficacy—and their central placement in *Daphnaïda* seems to glance at their potential as a poetic organizing principle. However, ultimately, if we move on to part three of his lament, it is clear that her words do not create closure, instead serving as just one waystation in Alcyon's painful rumination, a part of the loop of grieving he finds himself caught in at this moment:

> So oft as I record those piercing words,
> Which yet are deepe engraven in my brest
> [...] With those sweet sugred speeches doo compare,
> The which my soule first conquerd and possest,
> The first beginners of my endles care [...] (295-96, 299-301)

The possible comfort of Daphne's dying words comes with a terrible, unavoidable sting: in order to be soothed by the notion of Daphne's merciful escape from a life full of "dolor and disease, / Our life afflicted with incessant paine" (274-75), one must accept that sense of life as agony. As such, her "sweet sugred speeches" must be reinterpreted not as a happy memory but as provokers of sorrow.

Poetically, this awful realization offers *Daphnaïda* the opportunity for an interesting twist on a traditional complaint theme. We have already

seen *Clorinda*'s transition from the descriptive—"Woods, hills and rivers, now are desolate" (25)—to the imperative—"Breake now your gyrlonds, O ye shepheards lasses" (37). Oram notes the classical roots of this trope of "passionate desire for a world overturned" (506n), tracing its origin in Theocritus' first *Idyll* by way of Virgil's eighth *Eclogue*.[14] *Daphnaïda*'s innovation is to have Alcyon's demands for all the joys of the world to end stem from his need to make Daphne's dying words be true: if there is good in the world, then Daphne's death cannot wholly be understood as a merciful blessing.[15] It is not that Alcyon can no longer perceive joy through his filter of depression, but that every instance of possible joy must be squashed, "to make the image of true heaviness":

> Let birds be silent on the naked spray,
> And shady woods resound with dreadfull yells:
> Let streaming floods their hastie courses stay,
> And parching drougth drie up the christall wells
> Let th'earth be barren and bring foorth no flowres,
> And th'ayre be fild with noyse of dolefull knells,
> And wandring spirits walke untimely howres. (330-36)

Alcyon lurches back and forth from quiet apprehensions of beauty and tenderness in the world to harsh rejections of that beauty: he considers how Daphne "trimly" would "trace and softly tread / The tender grasse with rosie garland crownd" (311-12); he considers the "wandring troupes" and the "virelayes" of the "Shepheard lasses" (316-17); the bagpipe "that may allure the senses to delight" (323); the shepherd's "oaten quill [...] that provoke them might to idle pleasance" (325-26); and "my little flocke, whom earst I lov'd so well, / And wont to feede with finest grasse that grew" (344-45).

Moments like these most successfully respond to Miller's claim that the poem "unmistakably treats hatred of the world as an utterly false posture" (250). Miller's reading requires that the reader maintain a wholly ironic perspective on Alcyon's lament, and, moreover, treats Alcyon's mourning as essentially static, a tongue-in-cheek, over-the-top performance meant to be seen through, when, in fact, the lament is

more groping and tentative than such a characterization would make it out to be. Indeed, Alcyon does not sustain this mode of lament for long. We might very schematically see his shifts in this section as follows:

1. There is good in the world, but the gods are cruel and steal it away.
- "Why did they then create / The world so fayre, sith fairenesse is neglected?" (205)
- "so unjustlie doe their judgments share; / Mongst earthlie wightes, as to afflict so sore / The innocent" (199-201)
2. The world is a terrible place, and heaven is merciful to rescue the good.
- "Our daies are full of dolor and disease [...] why should he that loves me, sorie bee / For my deliverance" (274, 278-79)
3. The world contains good, but let it no more be so.
- "Let ghastlinesse / And drery horror dim the chearfull light" (328)
4. The world contains good, but it is removed from wicked people, who thus experience an earth devoid of good.
- "The good and righteous he away doth take, / To plague th'unrighteous which alive remaine" (358-59)

In coming to the conclusion that Daphne's death not only means her worthiness but his own unworthiness, too, Alcyon pulls back from his desire for all joy to end, and, instead, focuses on increasing his own pain, his own sorrow, and, finally, his own death. This is the moment that Miller cites ("I hate [...] I hate [...] I hate [...]"), but in tracing Alcyon's progression of thought, we can see this poetic moment as more than badly-written solipsism; instead, it is a very self-conscious bargaining with death, as a means of exerting control over the uncontrollable. As such, Alcyon comes to the conclusion that the most significant meaning of Daphne's death is that "with her lacke I might tormented be" (368) and therefore deliberately increases his misery in paying "penance to her according to [the gods'] decree" and doing "to her ghost [...] service day by day" (370-71).[16]

Whereas the gods are harsh (but just) to men like Alcyon, the dead Daphne on her "celestial throne" (380) will intercede for him, "for heavenly spirits have compassion / On mortall men, and rue their miserie" (384-85). Alcyon's nadir of woe, in which he rejects the world and himself entirely, is far from the "travesty" Miller calls it; his words resound with surprisingly hopeful conviction that

> […] when I have with sorowe satisfide
> Th'importune fates, which vengeance on me seeke,
> And th'eavens with long languor pacifide,
> She for pure pitie of my sufferance meeke,
> Will send for me; for which I daylie long,
> And will till then my painfull penance eeke: (386-91)

Part of the beauty and the sadness of Alcyon's adamant faith is seeing the growing distance between what she said and what he believes she said. Here, Alcyon believes Daphne must send for him out of pity or mercy; later, he makes the stronger claim that she explicitly instructed him to stay (in this world of suffering) and that she assured him that she will take action to rescue him: "My *Daphne* hence departing bad me so, / She bad me stay, till she for me did send" (454-55). He compares his wandering through the earth to "the mother of the Gods, that sought / For faire *Eurydice* her daughter deere / Throghout the world" (463-65), combining the story of Orpheus' quest for Eurydice and Ceres' search for Proserpina—but also casting himself much more in the role of the trapped soul than the rescuer.

What Daphne did say, in her dying breath, is "adieu, whom I expect ere long" (292), with no intimation of her sending for him. The distance between her words and what he wants those words to be is the story he needs to tell himself to make his suffering make sense; if his suffering can be interpreted as self-inflicted penance, including his refusal to accept the poet's comfort and hospitality at the very end of the poem, then it has a function—penance leads, after all, to absolution. Alcyon is not seeking to deceive either himself or his listener—we learn about Daphne's actual dying words from his report, after all: this is the story he needs to tell himself as he mourns.[17]

Lament My Lot

The final section of Alcyon's seven-part complaint offers his acknowledgement of his grief's aesthetic function. We have already seen him cast his grief as a song, by calling for the poet to "weep [...] to make my undersong" throughout. But in part seven he explicitly recognizes that even though Daphne must die, the poetry he has created—poetry which serves as a testament of her goodness and his love for her—will live.

Alcyon opens this section by claiming that "hence foorth mine eyes shall never more behold / Faire thing on earth, ne feed on false delight / Of ought that framed is of mortall moulde" (491-93) and suggests that people who perceive "riches, beautie, or honors pride" (498) will be the victims of "fortunes wheele" because "nought of them is yours, but th'onely usance / Of a small time" (503-04). Nevertheless, his closing stanzas are very different from his monotone "I hate [...] I hate" rejection, but instead an imaginative readmission of love and truth into the world. He imagines and speaks to "ye true Lovers" who have been "exiled from your Ladies grace" (505-06), but he also imagines

> […] ye more happie Lovers, which enjoy
> The presence of your dearest loves delight,
> When ye doo heare my sorrowfull annoy,
> Yet pittie me in your empassiond spright, (512-15)
> [...]

These happy lovers addressed directly by Alcyon, and invited to join in his sorrow by hearing his song, are a rather different audience than the man of grief that the poet invites into the poem at the start: Alcyon's woe has become more universal in scope, an invitation, perhaps, to appreciate present joy, because it is not permanent. Alcyon's tone is tender here, especially when contrasted with his numb "I hate all men, and shun all womankinde" (421).

In closing his song, Alcyon acknowledges that there is such a thing as light and joy in the world—for some people—speaking to his "fellow Shepheards, which do feed / Your careless flocks on hils and open

plaines, / With better fortune" (519-21) and to "ye faire Damsels Shepheards dere delights, / That with your loves do their rude hearts possesse" (526-27). This is one of the only places in his lament at which Alcyon imagines an audience apart from the narrator—he speaks in the second person to fond men, true lovers, happy lovers, fellow shepherds, fair damsels, and poor pilgrims.[18] Notably, he sees a place for himself and Daphne in this world of lovers, shepherds, and pilgrims—in poetry, in song, in mourning; he addresses this group in second person, but he also clearly anticipates a wider audience and an afterlife for his words: "Lament my lot, and tell your fellow swaines" (524); "rue my *Daphnes* wrong, / And mourne for me" (537-38). In so requesting, Alcyon imagines himself and his grief eventually transformed into both spoken and written poetry, his endless suffering eventually sublimated into verse, as he imagines pilgrims coming his burial site, instructing them that "passing by ye read these wofull layes / On my grave written" (536-37). Unlike the poet-narrator's warning away of reader, Alcyon's words seem to invite readers in; indeed, his publically accessible words here stand in contrast to his own former, more private, characterization of his memory of Daphne's dying words as "deepe engraven in my brest" (296). In imagining a shared woe as his lament ends, Alcyon may make us think of the communal mourning at the end of *The Doleful Lay of Clorinda*, in which "everie one [...] / Gan dight themselves t'expresse their inward woe" (104-05) as part of the Clorinda-speaker's reintegration into the living world, although Alcyon is careful to note that he himself cannot return to the living.

From the poet's point of view, we have heard the story of a man who resists comfort entirely; the poet revives him from a death-like swoon twice (see 185-88; 542-46), but he seems to resent being dragged back to life each time even as he is "disposed wilfullie to die" (552). The poet tells us that Alcyon recoils from the poet's offered hospitality and rest, choosing instead to continue his wandering, looking as if "death he in the face had seene" (565). However, this is not just a cliché to Alcyon: he has in fact looked death in the face, having had his lover die in front of him. The overall effect of the poet's concluding remarks is to attempt

to have the reader shake their head at Alcyon's rejection of comfort, to stand in horror before his overwrought behavior—he "Did rend his haire, and beat his blubbered face" (551). The readers are invited to shake their heads at Alcyon's stubborn and ill-mannered "casting up a sdeinfull eie at me" (549) when the poet revives him. Still, in the context of having experienced the story Alcyon has created about the possibility of being called to rejoin Daphne in heaven, his tears at returning to the world of the living are more comprehensible, and feel less like the tantrum that the poet seems to suggest it is.

In returning to the poet's opening stanzas after concluding the poem, after reading Alcyon's lament, and considering its shifts, its tensions, its rejections and false steps, we may not wholly agree with the poet's characterization of it, his call for a ghostly audience, or his claim that the only function of the poem is to find "fit matter" for "cares increase." The poet's reading, I suggest, is insensitive to the subtle variations in Alcyon's mourning, hearing it, as in Miller's argument, as composed only of the stark moment of "I hate [...] I hate" without acknowledging Alcyon's, and the poem's, gropings and struggles in different directions. It is an easy trap to fall into: indeed, it is *the* trap of depression, that feeling that everything is bad, and it will remain that way forever.

In particular, the poet's division of his potential hearers into those who desire "cares increase" and those who "in this wretched life dooth take delight" does not leave any room for someone who would take delight in a perfectly nice life, or someone who suffers greatly, but desires healing, for example. Perhaps the poet's own misery ("I of many most, / Most miserable man" he says of himself) blunts his own response to Alcyon's lament, and it is critical, I think, to avoid reading Alcyon uncritically through the poet's opening warning—to exorcise, at last, the ghosts.

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NOTES

[1]Quotations of *Daphnaïda* are from *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser.*

[2]In making this claim, Miller echoes Francis Palgrave's "pan" of the work saying that the poem's lack of sincerity is "intensified by the pastoral form here used without any specific appropriateness, and prolonged through more than eighty stanzas" (*Variorum Spenser* 7.429). For additional context, see Lambert.

[3]The lines "and let the dreadfull Queene / Of darkenes deepe come from the Stygian strands, / And grisly Ghosts to heare this doleful teene" might be read as meaning that the "grisly Ghosts" are simply located within the Stygian strands ("the dreadful queen of darkness deep and grisly ghosts.") However, the proximity of "to heare" next to "Ghosts" suggests that we read the line as a direct invitation to ghosts—a reading that this poem particularly invites in its later consideration of the immediacy of ghosts (see ll. 265 and 371).

[4]See Harris and Steffen, who call Alcyon's mourning "an instructional example, a personification of excessive, blasphemous grief" (20). For a related argument, see Gibson. Glenn Steinberg, however, argues that "the distaste that readers feel for Alcyon perhaps reflects our own embarrassment at bodily expressions of grief" (128-29).

[5]I accept Pamela Coren's and Danielle Clarke's respective attributions of the *Doleful Lay* as Spenser's work.

[6]Oram, in his introduction to *Daphnaïda* in the Yale edition, argues that the poem "may in fact be didactic: as a somewhat older man who may by this time have lost his own first wife the poet could be quietly suggesting to Gorges that grief can be carried too far" (490-91). Oram's influential argument suggests that the reader is invited to perceive Alcyon's mourning as "over-the-top" and eventually rejected in favor of the poet-narrator's more moderate helpfulness at the poem. Also see Oram (*Daphnaïda* and Spenser's Later Poetry) for further discussion of the didactic quality of the poem. My own argument considers the notion that it is the *poet-narrator*'s viewpoint, particularly his opening lines, that must be eventually rejected.

[7]The most recent studies of prolonged grief (PGD) speak to this oscillating, ruminative quality of particularly intense bereavement. Notably for *Daphnaïda*, Jordan and Litz observe the bereaved's "aversion to seeking support from new individuals [who] may constrict a person's behavioral repertoire" (181). See also Nolen-Hoeksema, et al. While rumination (self-focused, cyclical, negative thoughts) would be expected to "exacerbate and prolong distress following loss," grief theory suggests that attempting "to understand one's experience of loss and to assimilate it into one's view of the self leads to positive adaptation to loss" (856). We see Alcyon engaged in both of these modes throughout his complaint.

[8]Donald Cheney, too, sees the aesthetic dimension of Alcyon's mourning, noting that the poem is "at once a criticism and an endorsement of Alcyon's relentless grieving" in which we see "the solitary brooding that is essential to his art" (128-29). Cheney also offers some useful suggestions about the name "Alcyon" and its

resonances in Chaucer and Ovid, particularly its echoes of "halcyon days that provide a brief respite to the winter's storms" and the myth of Alcyon's "triumph over mortality and seasonal death [which is] a triumph of the conjugal bond" (130-11).

[9]For a different reading of this moment, see Kay, who regards Alcyon's request as a defense of the primacy of explicitly professional poetry in responding to grief (see 52).

[10] Melissa Rack argues that Alcyon's plaintive complaint is "one of stasis rather than progress," suggesting that his rumination is not productive, but in fact "reflexive and self-negating, engendering a silence" which "mimics the absence of the beloved" (672). I agree with Rack's argument that the poem insists on resisting the portrayal of grief as "a melodic and evocative song," instead choosing to point the reader squarely at mourning's "powerlessness" and "chaos" (684).

[11]G. W. Pigman observes that, "while she was alive, Alcyon cared for Daphne as a possession, a tame animal which enhanced his stature among his fellow shepherds; he did not love her as a person with an independent existence. Alcyon turns his courtship into lion-taming. No wonder Daphne is glad to be freed from wretched long imprisonment" (78). I am less certain that we are intended to hear this scene as bluntly as that; while Pigman is right to note the binding of the lion, the language of their love is often touchingly mutual, noting how "she in field, where ever I did wend, / Would wend with me, and waite by me all day" (127-28); further, the shepherds' praise is for the lioness, not Alcyon, who is not praised, but blessed for his "good fortune" (147). The epithalamic language that Alcyon quotes from Daphne's dying words suggests that he would be the first to agree, however, with how limited his earthly love was compared to the divine love Daphne has departed to. For more on this moment, see Schenck.

[12]See Lynn Enterline's consideration of the nexus between poetry and grief; and Peter Sacks for a contrasting view.

[13]Mathew Martin notes the commonplace of the Renaissance elegy's shift from "presenting the deceased in relation to the public sphere" to the "metaphysical realm of God the Father in its celebration of the deceased's new heavenly location" and therefore "demands that the living acquiesce to this ultimate reinscription of the father in the culture's symbolic order" (160). As in Spenser's poem, Jonson's elegy resists this movement to acceptance by choosing "withdrawal [...] to live henceforth as if what he loves may be snatched away at any moment" (165).

[14]Oram specifically cites Virgil 8.52-60, and Theocritus 1.132-36.

[15]Pigman claims that "Alcyon's self-absorption leads him to a view of Daphne's death which contradicts her own. For her, death is deliverance from wretchedness; for him, punishment of himself" (79). By contrast, I argue that Alcyon's desire to deprive himself of joy is precisely an attempt to make literal her words of comfort.

[16]See Pigman 79. He asks, "Why should Alcyon do penance to Daphne rather than the gods unless he feels that she is the one who is tormenting him?" I suggest that penance does not go hand-in-hand with torment, but instead a desire to heal, to transcend and correct sin. A modern psychological reading of Alcyon's grief might consider the extent to which Alcyon's perception of himself as wicked (and

thus causing, indirectly, Daphne's death) gives him a a locus of control over the otherwise unimaginable randomness of death. Norton and Gino observe that ritual—including religious ritual (like pilgrimage or penance)—can serve as a "compensatory mechanism designed to restore feelings of control after losses and that this increased feeling of control contributes to reduced grief" (266). For a related view, see also Eisma, et al.

[17]Steinberg notes that "Alcyon's grief is [...] hardly the excessive grief of one without reason or faith. Rather, it is the overpowering sorrow of a spiritual exile who has glimpsed paradise for a brief moment and longs for the permanent realization of that paradise on earth" (135).

[18]The other such section of second person address is between 316-53, at which he similarly addresses "ye Shepheard lasses" and then "you my sillie sheepe."

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