

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of the Liberal Arts

**THE DEAD BELOVED IN ENGLISH PETRARCHISM**

A Dissertation in

English

by

Jayme Peacock

© 2019 Jayme Peacock

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2019

The dissertation of Jayme Peacock was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Patrick Cheney  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English and Comparative Literature  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

David Loewenstein  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English and the Humanities  
Director of Graduate Studies

Marcy L. North  
Associate Professor of English

Sherry Roush  
Professor of Italian

Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.  
Liberal Arts Professor of English

\*Signatures on file in the Graduate School.

## The Dead Beloved in English Petrarchism

### Abstract

This dissertation seeks to expand current critical understandings of English Petrarchism by presenting it as a generically transformative mode that Renaissance writers deployed through the figure of the dead beloved. From Greek tragedy forward, the Western canon is littered with dead women, and Petrarch's Laura becomes the central figure of amorous loss for the English Renaissance. Yet this recurrent figure remains unstudied. This dissertation attempts to resolve this oversight by examining Petrarchism's impact on literary form and authorship through the figure of the dead beloved in the poetry and drama of the English Renaissance. Petrarch's Laura was the most influential dead beloved for Renaissance writers, and both drama and poetry (with the notable exception of sonnet sequences) take up this figure. I therefore examine the dead beloved through a lens of Petrarchan tropes and features. In particular, I argue that the dead beloved functions as a crucial mechanism of change for the genres and forms represented in and by a given text. Through her, Petrarchism can interact dynamically with multiple other forms within a single work, resulting in generic disruptions and reformulations. Chapter One presents this process in Spenser's *Daphnaïda*, in which the shepherd-poet Alcyon wallows in Petrarchan grief for the dead Daphne, resulting in a warping of elegy and pastoral. Chapter Two argues that Marlowe's *1 Tamburlaine* makes Zenocrate the point of origin for the hero's reconciliation of epic and amatory modes, and that her death in *2 Tamburlaine* divorces this reconciliation and subverts notions of epic immortality. Chapter Three turns to Shakespeare's Ophelia, arguing that her death and affinity with lyric poetics make her an Orpheus figure. As such, her death points to the failure of poetry to overcome mortality, a truth that undermines the poetic aspirations that Hamlet declares at her funeral. Chapter Four turns to two Stuart revenge tragedies, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, which both literalize Petrarchan tropes and weaponize the corpse of the dead beloved as an instrument of

revenge. Both plays express a nostalgic longing for the idealized Petrarchan figure, yet both rely on her death to carry out revenge, and both conclude without any surviving Petrarchan characters, suggesting a cultural readiness to dispense with the mode. Not only do these texts confirm the dead beloved as a major figure in English Renaissance literature, they also suggest that writers understood her as a powerful tool for generic manipulation.

## Contents

Introduction: The English Afterlife of Laura.....	1
Chapter One: Spenser <i>in morte</i> : Petrarchan Grief and Pastoral Elegy in Spenser's <i>Daphnaïda</i> .....	16
Chapter Two: Petrarchan Poetics, Epic Conquest, and the Death of Zenocrate in Marlowe's <i>Tamburlaine the Great 1 &amp; 2</i> .....	57
Chapter Three: Ophelia and Orphic Failure in <i>Hamlet</i> .....	104
Chapter Four: Revenging the Beloved: Repurposing Petrarchism in Middleton's <i>The Revenger's Tragedy</i> and Ford's <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i> .....	144
Conclusion: Reimagining the Dead Beloved.....	177
Works Cited.....	183

## Introduction:

## The English Afterlife of Laura

Me thought I saw the grave, where Laura lay,  
 Within that Temple, where the vestall flame  
 Was wont to burne, and passing by that way,  
 To see that buried dust of living fame,  
 Whose tumbe faire love, and fairer vertue kept,  
 All suddeinly I saw the Faery Queene:  
 At whose approach the soule of Petrarke wept,  
 And from thenceforth those graces were not seene.  
 For they this Queene attended, in whose steed  
 Oblivion laid him downe on Lauras herse:  
 Hereat the hardest stones were seene to bleed,  
 And grones of buried ghostes the heavens did perse.  
 Where Homers spright did tremble all for grieffe,  
 And curst th'accesse of that celestially theif.

—Sir Walter Raleigh, “A Vision upon this conceipt of the *Faery Queene*”<sup>1</sup>

In 1590, Sir Walter Raleigh announces the *second* death of Petrarch’s Laura in his commendatory sonnet to Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. She first dies midway through Petrarch’s *Rime Sparse*, but the remainder of his sequence (*Rime* 267-366) keeps her very much alive through the narrator’s continued longing. “Laura’s death,” writes Robert Durling, only “frees his [Petrarch’s] fantasy all the more, and he imagines her coming down from Heaven to sit on his bed in all her beauty” in “a kind

---

<sup>1</sup> In *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 721.

of fantasy earlier identified as dangerous nonsense.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as the premier beloved behind Renaissance love poetry, the figure of Laura undergirds both Continental and English traditions of Petrarchism that recast and re-present her again and again. English Petrarchan poets rename the beloved Stella, Delia, Elizabeth, and even “Dark Lady” and “Fair Youth,” in the case of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. Yet in none of the major sonnet sequences of Renaissance England does the beloved die. Accordingly, much of English Petrarchism can trace its origins only to the *in vita* section of Petrarch’s *Rime*, at the exclusion of the *in morte* section. Raleigh’s sonnet is therefore all the more remarkable for its extended attention to the dead Laura.

Couched as praise of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Raleigh’s commendatory verse focuses overwhelmingly on a sense of poetic grief for the loss of Laura, now dead twice over by way of the “Oblivion” that replaces her body.<sup>3</sup> Displaced by the approach of the “Faery Queene,” Laura loses her place as the dominant symbol of authorship and of a literary tradition, and as the epitome of the beloved. The “death” of her displacement and erasure effects two important shifts in literary form in the sonnet. First, it shifts the sonnet form, typically amatory in tone, to an elegiac register. Second, it expands the sense of loss from a Petrarchan context to an epic one. In the volta of the final couplet, Raleigh’s poem declares that even the long-dead Homer grieves at Laura’s disappearance. Beneath its praise for *The Faerie Queene*, the sonnet fixates on literary grief for Laura and orients that grief with respect to the same forms that it uses to delineate Spenser’s poetic achievement, declaring a sense of loss and forgetful deterioration for both amatory and epic poetry. As the “Faery Queene” obliivates

---

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), 359, 345.

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of clarity in this Introduction, I assume that Laura’s “Oblivion” confers a second death in that it brings an end to her immortalizing fame by means of forgetting. But while such forgetting may constitute a version of death, it should not be understood as uncomplicatedly equivalent to death. On this topic, Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. notes, “In the Homeric and Virgilian traditions, to be forgotten is a kind of death,” emphasizing that “forgetfulness . . . cannot be summed up by or contained in death” and “should not . . . be seen as either a subset of, or as the erasure of meaning produced by, death.” See *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 30.

Laura, so Spenser obviates Petrarch. Raleigh's sonnet thereby performs in miniature the argument of this dissertation: the Petrarchan dead beloved signals a change in genre, at once generative and degenerative, that indicates an accompanying change in authorship.

This dissertation presents a study of the ways in which early modern authors use the figure of the dead beloved to invoke or effect shifts in literary form. Through this figure, they explore the influence of Petrarchism *in morte* on other modes and genres. Though Laura is certainly not the first dead beloved in the Western tradition, as the woman at the center of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* she is the originary dead beloved for the English Petrarchan tradition. Alive, she inspires love and figures authorial ambition and accomplishment, as she does for Petrarch, and by her very presence in a text she invokes Petrarch's *Rime* and its English inheritance. In death, she suggests Petrarchism as a transformative literary force. As English sonnet sequences present the beloved exclusively *in vita*, the texts analyzed in this dissertation were selected in part because they centrally feature a beloved *in morte*. Though "Renaissance poets, beginning with Wyatt, erase the *in morte* poems from the English sonnet sequence," the plays and poems covered here attest to the heretofore overlooked fact that several of the period's major authors, including Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Middleton, and Ford, directly or indirectly, recall the fate of Petrarch's Laura.<sup>4</sup> And in making the dead beloved the axis about which their explorations of love, fame, genre, and poetics revolve, they remain true to their Petrarchan roots.

The dead beloved also signals a shift in models of authorship. Petrarch ties his pursuit of the laurel to his love for a woman who dies midway through the *Rime*, and Raleigh's sonnet implies Spenser's upstaging of Petrarch through his replacement of a dead mortal woman with a living, "celestial" (14) one. The dead beloved in Raleigh's sonnet thus signals the waning of Petrarchan authorship and the rise of Spenserian authorship. The texts examined in this dissertation follow a

---

<sup>4</sup> Ramie Targoff, *Posthumous Love: Eros and the Afterlife in Renaissance England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014), 4.



similar pattern. The beloved's death catalyzes changes in literary form, which, in turn, indicate changes in authorship models. Often, this involves a Petrarchan disruption of the generic teleology or expectations of other literary forms, such as elegy or epic, but the dead beloved can also suggest the disruption and even discontinuation of Petrarchism itself (as Chapter Four will show). Fictional portrayals of authorship, so closely tied to programmatic authorial careers in the early modern period, turn, I suggest, on the interactions between Petrarchism and other forms.<sup>5</sup> Marlowe, for instance, depicts his eponymous hero in *Tamburlaine* uniting Petrarchan and epic poetics and thereby shapes a new authorship model from the hero's response to the Petrarchan beloved.<sup>6</sup> As the beloved carries Petrarchism into a text, her death disrupts neighboring genres, transforming the models of authorship depicted in a text's author figure(s).

This dissertation seeks to situate Petrarchism more centrally in current critical understandings of English Renaissance authorship. While studies of authorship make genre a central feature of authorial careers and self-presentation, they often treat Petrarchism as a mode peripheral to constructions of literary careers.<sup>7</sup> Though critics commonly acknowledge the popularity of Petrarchism in the Renaissance, they typically limit such conversations to the sonnet tradition.<sup>8</sup> Yet Petrarchan is far from constrained to sonnets and love lyrics in the Renaissance, and it contributes to ideas of authorship in other ways than the imitation of Petrarchan verse. By tracking the

---

<sup>5</sup> I borrow the notion of "fictions of authorship" from Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008). For different models of authorial careers as programmatic, see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983); and Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Cheney documents Marlowe's union of epic and amatory poetics in *Marlowe's Republican Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 110-12.

<sup>7</sup> For key studies of authorship, see Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981); Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates*; and Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight*. Richard A. McCabe also offers a helpful overview in "Authorial Self-Presentation" in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 462-82.

<sup>8</sup> Cheney establishes the importance of Petrarchism to authorial careers in "Shakespeare's Sonnet 106, Spenser's National Epic, and Counter-Petrarchism." *ELR* 31 (2001): 331-64; "Halting Sonnets: Poetry and Theater in *Much Ado About Nothing*" in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 363-82; and "Petrarch," in *Edmund Spenser in Context*, ed. Andrew Escobedo (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016): 235-45. In "Petrarch," Cheney notably accounts for Petrarchism in Spenser's career beyond the scope of love lyrics.

principles, tropes, and dynamics of this mode in Renaissance fictions of authorship beyond the sonnet tradition, this project reveals that Petrarchism occupies a more central, complicated, and fraught role in contemporary understandings of authorship than critics have yet posited.

Further, I suggest that Renaissance writers understood Petrarchism as generically hostile to other forms. As a mode based on the paradoxical coexistence of irresistible desire and unattainable fulfilment, it constantly threatens to frustrate generic expectations and authorial aspirations. The beloved commands the attention of the poet-lover figure, who then struggles to pursue his authorial aspirations when confronted with Petrarchism's tendency to overwhelm its subjects. Aware of the mode's popularity and troubling premise of irresistibility, English Renaissance authors, I suggest, used other literary forms to expose, contain, or overcome the threat of Petrarchism within fictional representations of authorship.<sup>9</sup>

English Petrarchism inherits and modifies much from the *Rime sparse*—too much to account for in this brief Introduction. For the purposes of this project, I will engage such Petrarchan features as the problem of unrequited love and the poet-lover's subsequent suffering, the divinization and aestheticization of a chaste and beautiful beloved, the exposing of the poet-lover's interior condition, and a desire for poetic fame and immortality. The blazon, that anatomical catalogue of the beloved's features, also appears in many of the chapters here, though its emergence in English poetry derives more from Clément Marot than Petrarch.<sup>10</sup> I also address Petrarchism's "metaphorical descriptions of the beloved's . . . shining eyes, radiant smile, and physical beauty," its "exuberant wordplay and figurative conceits," and the "expressive paradoxes and oxymorons" that it often uses to convey the

---

<sup>9</sup> For key studies of Renaissance literary form and genre, see Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973); Barbara K. Lewalski, *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986); and Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> I. Silver, T.V.F. Brogan, and C. Alduy, "Blazon" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), 150-1.

painful pleasure of unrequited love.<sup>11</sup> These characteristics serve as a baseline by which we may track English Petrarchism's deviations and modifications. Several of the texts examined here, for instance, portray the requital of Petrarchan love, casting death as love's ultimate impediment. Elsewhere, some English writers exaggerate Petrarchan characteristics as a critique of the mode, as John Donne does in "Love's Diet," which famously opens, "To what a cumbersome unwieldiness / And burd'nous corpulence my love has grown."<sup>12</sup> And while some Petrarchan writers seek to reform and perfect the mode, as Spenser does in *Amoretti*, others do not constrain themselves to the realm of amatory poetry at all.<sup>13</sup> Poets and playwrights alike insert Petrarchan characters or features into other forms, as is the case with all the works addressed in this study. The English tradition's frequent innovations, exaggerations, and appropriations of Petrarchism attest to the mode's versatility as a site of formal inquiry and exploration.

Studies of Petrarchism have long attempted to differentiate between its discourses and its anti- or counter-discourses, yet even the latter term's capaciousness still implies a firm division, if not a direct opposition, between Petrarch and his Continental and English successors.<sup>14</sup> But, as William J. Kennedy demonstrates, such a profusion of authorizing commentaries and editions of the *Rime sparse* were circulating in Renaissance Italy that "Petrarch" could not have been constructed by the culture as a single, unified literary identity.<sup>15</sup> And though Petrarch's *Rime* was available to English writers—indeed, many translated sonnets from the Italian—they were also influenced by Continental Petrarchism. Further, as Heather Dubrow points out, there can be no counter-discourse

---

<sup>11</sup> W. J. Kennedy, "Petrarchism," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 1030-2, 1030.

<sup>12</sup> *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins, 2 vols., (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Aileen A. Feng's recent study of Latin humanism's appropriation of Petrarchan imagery interrogates what happens when the discourse of love is coopted in a primarily non-amorous communications among intellectual peers. See *Writing Beloveds: Humanist Petrarchism and the Politics of Gender* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995); and Christine E. Hutchins, "English Anti-Petrarchism: Imbalance and Excess in 'the Englishe straine' of the Sonnet," *Studies in Philology* 109 (2012): 552-80.

<sup>15</sup> *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Ithaca: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003).

that does not arise from within the discourse it seeks to counter.<sup>16</sup> For these reasons, in part, I do not term the texts I examine “counter-Petrarchan;” rather, I identify them as texts that exhibit Petrarchan characters and features. I also avoid terminology like Dubrow’s because the Petrarchism of these texts never operates in isolation; it is always interacting with the other modes and genres present in the formal atmosphere of the larger work. Dubrow argues that “Petrarchism, however imitative its style may be, is grounded in attempts at differentiation,” and that “rejections of that discourse are often expressed by invoking a range of alternative genres.”<sup>17</sup> Dubrow’s study, however, attends almost exclusively to (counter)Petrarchan poetry. In contrast, this dissertation presents Petrarchism as already embedded within other forms. Often the dead beloved disrupts those other forms in which she appears, but that disruption is also generative in a way that exceeds the bounds of a conversation focused on degrees of Petrarchan-ness. Different literary forms converge and clash, deteriorating and mutating around the dead beloved. As charted in this project, Petrarchan principles catalyze shifts in form, such as the shift from epic to tragedy that appears in Chapters Two and Three. The language of discourses and counterdiscourses, with its insistence on opposition, focuses too narrowly on authors’ similarities to or differences from Petrarch; it limits interpretative possibilities to versions of *imitatio*, overlooking Petrarchism’s capacity to exert a generic force on other forms.<sup>18</sup>

Traditionally, studies of the figures of Petrarchan love prioritize the poet-lover, his struggles with desire, spirituality, representation, and interiority, attending to the beloved as secondary in importance (“Laura” appears only rarely in the indices of critical books on Petrarch and Petrarchism) and only in her capacity to reflect the poet’s literary achievement and interior

---

<sup>16</sup> *Echoes of Desire*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Echoes of Desire*, 11, 9.

<sup>18</sup> On the tradition of *imitatio*, see Colin Burrow, *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019).

condition.<sup>19</sup> Over the last few decades, however, the Petrarchan beloved has begun to receive more sustained attention. Feminist criticism has exposed the mode's troubling power dynamics between the male poet and the female beloved.<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Stephens and Aileen A. Feng bridge traditional understandings of the beloved as a literary figure with this feminist foundation by demonstrating, through very different methodologies, that the beloved *as a figure* can provide insight into female interiority, sexuality, and social dynamics.<sup>21</sup> None of these studies, however, suggests a relationship between the beloved and the development of genre. Dubrow contends that counter-Petrarchan discourses often operate by invoking other genres, but since her book attends predominantly to English Petrarchan poetry, it follows its objects of analysis in leaving behind the beloved *in morte*. This dissertation, therefore, provides not only the first sustained examination of the dead beloved as a figure, it also broadens current understandings of Petrarchism's engagement with other genres. Such engagement must generate open-ended explorations of what Petrarchism *can do* in the context of a given form, and it must understand that Petrarchism shapes and is shaped by other forms with which it coexists in a text.

Prior to Petrarch's *Rime*, the beloved represented a force of distraction for male protagonists of Western literature as early as Virgil's *Aeneid* (and perhaps even earlier). Virgil's epic is defined, in part, by the way it promotes epic nation-building at the cost of romantic love. Both Creusa and

---

<sup>19</sup> See John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 34-40; Marguerite R. Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980), 27-104; Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982); Peter Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet: An Introduction to the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989); Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 22-108; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993); Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994); and Gordon Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 265-79; and Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Stephens argues that the figure of the beloved helps create what she terms a "conditional erotics" that, in turn, exposes feminine interiority. *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative: Conditional Pleasure from Spenser to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Feng, on the other hand, examines how men and women in Renaissance Italy coopt Petrarchan love and the figure of the beloved in the service of Latin humanism. See *Writing Beloveds*.

Dido, Aeneas's first wife and sometime lover, respectively, had to die so that he might pursue his divinely ordained destiny. For Virgil, then, the construction of epic relies on the beloved's death. Ovid, of course, remembers this in Dido's epistle in his *Heroides*. While Ovid is not in the habit of killing off women in his strange epic, the *Metamorphoses*, he nevertheless depicts them as symbols of and subject to masculine art. Women in Ovid's works routinely represent amorous distraction, but Ovid takes a more playful approach to this problem than Virgil, physically transforming lovers and beloveds. Both of Virgil and Ovid influence Dante, who recuperates love by creating Beatrice, the divine—and notably *dead*—beloved who guides the character Dante through Paradise. Rather than an attractive distraction, Beatrice guides Dante closer to the divine: “loving her leads to the godhead.”<sup>22</sup>

Dante, in turn, influences Petrarch in his writing of the *Rime sparse*, in which he creates his own dead beloved, Laura, as a response to Dante's Beatrice.<sup>23</sup> Like Beatrice, Laura is associated with divine virtue and beauty, but unlike Beatrice, Laura cannot redirect the poet-lover's affections. Rather, Petrarch's narrator is caught in an unending battle to turn his attention away from his beloved and toward spiritual matters. He acknowledges that her death should enable him to resume an untroubled focus on the divine, yet he remains plagued by earthly love and grief for the woman whom death has made forever inaccessible to him. While he inserts a handful of poems with epic resonance (such as *Rime* 186 on Homer, Virgil, and Scipio), the focus of Petrarch's narrator remains on his dead beloved, and he worries over the impact of insurmountable grief on his poetry and

---

<sup>22</sup> Peter Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet: An Introduction to the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 98.

<sup>23</sup> On Dante's influence on Petrarch's *Rime*, particularly with respect to laureate authorship, see Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet*, 98-100; Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Laurels* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1992); and Robin Kirkpatrick, *English and Italian Literature from Dante to Shakespeare: A Study of Source, Analogue and Divergence* (London: Longman, 1995), 26-39; Andrew Laird, “Re-inventing Virgil's Wheel: The Poet and His Work from Dante to Petrarch” in *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception*, ed. Philip Hardie and Helen Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 138-59. On Petrarch's struggle between his love for Laura and his love for God, see Cheney, “Petrarch.” For a comparison of Petrarch's Laura and Dante's Beatrice, see Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet*, 165-7.

reputation. Petrarch thus returns the dead beloved, whom Dante had recuperated, to a context in which she threatens poetic endeavors, even as she serves as the inspiration for his laureate pursuits.<sup>24</sup>

The dead beloved thus arrives in the English Renaissance through Petrarch's *Rime* as a figure historically invested with an anxious concern for the impact of love on authorship and literary form. This dissertation attends to the ways in which this figure precipitates the reconfiguration of genre and authorship by analyzing one funeral elegy by Spenser and dramatic tragedies by Marlowe, Shakespeare, Middleton, and Ford. I have chosen these works in part because the exemplary status of their authors attests to the contemporary centrality of the phenomenon I track; in part because they build genre into the figure of the beloved in markedly different but intersecting ways; and in part because together they display an evolution of English approaches to Petrarchism outside of the sonnet sequence and over time. From the poet-lover of Spenser's *Daphnaïda*, who finds himself trapped in Petrarchan grief, to the lascivious Soranzo of Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, whose Petrarchan abuses are revenged in the form of his wife's corpse, the dead beloved exerts a dangerous influence upon fictional author figures, moving from a force that disrupts the authorial project of grief to one that constitutes the material and symbolic implement of revenge. Poet and playwright alike import the (dead) beloved as a generic tool, and mortality is the mechanism that lends this tool its power. Michael Neill contends that tragedy is the premier genre by which early moderns explored and reconceived the meanings of death, and indeed, four of the five works to which this study attends are tragedies, while the fifth, a funeral elegy, is a tragic genre.<sup>25</sup> If the scope of works presented here upholds Neill's thesis, it also modifies it by establishing the beloved as a primary figure by which death enters a text, and through which a specifically Petrarchan mortality reshapes literary form.

---

<sup>24</sup> On Laura and the laurel, see Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet*, 135-53.

<sup>25</sup> *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997).

The texts presented here draw to varying degrees on Petrarchan language, tropes, and conceits, and several incorporate classical notions of love, as well. Though Laura subtends this figure, her Renaissance incarnations are by no means exact copies. Neither do they appear in English sonnets sequences. Rather, the dead beloved appears in poetry and dramatic tragedy as a figure laden with generic import and the weight of a variety of literary traditions. This dissertation explores the beloved's role as a symbol of authorship and fame and as a tacit invocation of the Petrarchan tradition from which she emerges. Her body (or its absence) may serve as a means of locating Petrarchism in relation to other genres, as is the case with Raleigh's "A Vision," as indication of generic disruption and poetic failure, or even as a materially constitutive implement of form. She is a primary figure by which Renaissance poets and playwrights register, manipulate, and interrogate the modes and genres in which they write, and as such she demands the attention of a focused study.

Chapter One takes up Spenser's *Daphnaïda*, a poem much maligned by modern critics, and argues that Spenser crucially uses this funeral elegy to expose and explore the dangers of what I term Petrarchan grief to the form of pastoral elegy and to the authorial pursuit of poetic futurity. Alcyon, the poem's embedded narrator and Petrarchan mourner who takes his name from the suicidal grieving widow in Ovid's tale of Alcyone and Ceyx (*Metamorphoses* XI.410-748), mourns his wife Daphne in notably Petrarchan terms. The name Daphne, of course, evokes the mythological woman's metamorphosis into a laurel tree and Petrarch's extensive appropriation of this image in the *Rime*. Other sections of *Daphnaïda* also allude to Petrarch's *Rime*, suggesting that Spenser had the *in morte* section on his mind when composing the elegy. A primary function of elegy is to comfort the bereaved, and in this regard *Daphnaïda's* narrator fails spectacularly. The grieving Alcyon rejects Christian and pastoral comfort in feeling and form, and insists on wandering the earth repeating his lengthy lament. He thus constitutes a Spenserian author figure, but one whose progress into higher



genres, as per the Spenserian career model, is suspended.<sup>26</sup> I read Alcyon's repetition of his lament as an inversion of pastoral cyclicity and a simultaneous drive toward poetic immortality that can never be achieved precisely because the poet Alcyon rejects elegiac comfort. Because Spenser had previously established a precedent of elegiac comfort in the *November* eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, and because he grapples with the dangers of Petrarchan desire throughout his career, I contend that *Daphnaïda* establishes the theme of Petrarchan grief as a major topic in Spenser's oeuvre, and that it marks his earliest extended interrogation of the topic.

Chapter Two takes up the figure of Zenocrate in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays. Marlowe establishes her as the origin of Tamburlaine's amorous-epic discourse, placing her at the opening of the scene of Tamburlaine's first appearance in both plays and constructing their initial conversation around ideas of love and war. She thus facilitates a reconciliation between these classically opposed genres, and inflects the hybridized result with Petrarchan tones. Tamburlaine thus derives a unique, Petrarchized, amorous-epic poetics from his love for Zenocrate, herself an image of divine beauty and empire. In loving and wooing Zenocrate, Tamburlaine confronts and overcomes the amorous desires that are conventionally debilitating to masculine figures. Having conquered desire and won Zenocrate, Tamburlaine then wields the language of Petrarchism as a tool for martial, homosocial persuasion, retooling Petrarchan dynamics to support a rhetoric of conquest. Martial men in both plays reflect this transformed Petrarchism back upon Tamburlaine in their blazons of his body as a form of epic praise. But because Zenocrate is the original inspiration for and continuing symbol of an empire constructed by epic conquest and amorous fulfillment, her death in *Part 2* initiates the disintegration of amatory and epic poetics. Though Tamburlaine attempts to maintain her image and corpse as imperially supportive symbols, her death drives him into the "raving, impatient, desperate, and mad" (2.4.112) state of the Petrarchan lover that he had confronted and overcome in *Part 1*. In

---

<sup>26</sup> On Spenser's career model, see Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight*.

allowing Tamburlaine to wed the discourses of love and war, Marlowe puts on display his own capacity as an author to unite these historically opposed modes.<sup>27</sup> And Zenocrate, who dies at the very center of *Part 2*, is the crux around which Marlowe displays his authorial virtuosity and by which he transforms epic into tragedy.

Chapter Three draws out the tension between language and action in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by understanding Ophelia as an embodiment of Petrarchan lyric and as a figure of Orpheus, the legendary lyric poet who moves stones and trees with his song. In the *Rime*, Petrarch sees himself as a failed Orpheus because his song cannot retrieve his beloved Laura from the afterlife.<sup>28</sup> Neither can Shakespeare's Ophelia retrieve her dead father from beyond the grave. Her song does not possess the Orphic potency of action, and her death bears a striking resemblance to that of Ovid's Orpheus in the *Metamorphoses*: both float away downriver while singing. I read Ophelia's resonance with Orpheus onto her other poetic moments in the play as a means of understanding her significance as a Petrarchan poetic figure and as a Petrarchan poet herself. Throughout the play, she undergoes and participates in a process of lyric and Petrarchan aestheticization that eventually reduces her to the opaque image of a madwoman muttering verses whose meaning is inaccessible and whose language comes unmoored from stable signification. But if Ophelia's mad verses are incomprehensible, Getrude's recounting of her death makes her final song entirely inaccessible. Ophelia's death, like that of Orpheus, signals a crucial failure of poetic language, and that failure is reflected in Hamlet's impulsive outburst at her grave. As he rails against Laertes's grief for his sister, declaring in epic terms his own superiority as a poet, he manages to ignore the staged corpse of Ophelia, much as Petrarch's *Rime sparse in morte* eclipses Laura with the narrator's attention to his own grief and art.

---

<sup>27</sup> Colin Burrow makes the case for generic hybridity in English Renaissance texts in *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> On Petrarch's use of Orpheus in the *Rime sparse*, see Thérèse Migraïne-George, "Specular Desires: Orpheus and Pygmalion as Aesthetic Paradigms in Petrarch's *Rime sparse*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 36 (1999): 226-46.

The juxtaposition of the Ophelia's corpse and Hamlet's epic aspirations suggests, via echoes of Ovid and Petrarch, an Orphic failure of language in the face of death and anticipates for Hamlet a failure of epic ambition and poetic immortality. For Orpheus, Ophelia, and Hamlet, poetic words fail to produce action and preserve life. While some critics hold that *Hamlet* stages a tragic loss of heroic values, I conclude by suggesting that *Hamlet* presents Shakespearean tragedy as a failure of both lyric and epic, the two major genres of Western literature, to achieve the immortality that these genres traditionally anticipate for their subjects and authors.

Finally, Chapter Four turns to two Stuart revenge tragedies, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, to demonstrate how dramatists purge Petrarchism from the stage by taking up the dead beloved as a cause for and implement of revenge. Both of these plays present Petrarchan dynamics as materially powerfully and as susceptible to misappropriation for purposes of seduction and personal gain. Given the appearance of these plays after the death of Elizabeth, and given especially the allusion to Elizabeth in *The Revenger's Tragedy* that critics have discussed at length, I suggest that these plays display a complex reaction to the decades-old Petrarchan discourse that was so dominant in Elizabeth's court. First, they depict the corruption of that discourse by characters like the Duke and Lussurioso in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Soranzo in *'Tis Pity* for the ends of sexual fulfillment. Such corruption of Petrarchism leads powerful men to revenge themselves upon the chaste beloved who refuses to submit to their desires by killing her. Second, they perform an homage to the idealizing Petrarchan discourse that other characters corrupt by revenging the wrongful death of the beloved. Finally, they purge the Petrarchan dynamic from the play by returning the respective realms to a social order in which no romantic unions remain. With this shift in the treatment of Petrarchism, the dead beloved becomes constitutive of the genre of revenge. Not only does the death of Gloriana in *Revenger* and the planned death of Annabella in *'Tis Pity* initiate a cycle of revenge, but the corpses of these women become the implements by which

their avenging lovers mete out punishment. Further, those punishments are carried out as gruesome literalizations of Petrarchan tropes, thus channeling the power of Petrarchan love into a dramatic form by which it may correct its abuses. This process of transforming Petrarchism into revenge marks a significant shift away from serious authorial endeavors in the once-popular mode. Revenge tragedy, I suggest, allows Middleton and Ford to experiment with purging from the literary imagination the Petrarchism that ascended to prominence and stayed there over the forty-five years of Elizabeth's reign.

Consequently, this project aims to plot a rough progression from Spenser, who uses the dead beloved to sketch an early model of Petrarchan grief, through Ford, a playwright who in the 1630s struggles as much as Middleton does in 1605-6 to relinquish a mode of writing that very nearly worships the idealized beloved of the author's own creation (a problem that plagued Petrarch himself), and for whom the dead beloved served as a means to simultaneously celebrate and excoriate her removal. In between, Marlowe puts the dead beloved to work as a force that subverts conquest and empire, and Shakespeare uses the figure to question the capacity of language itself. Throughout these works, the body of the dead beloved remains conspicuous in its power as a symbol and as a material body, and even in its absence, it suggests just one of many ways in which the dead Petrarchan beloved presents a means of exploring the connections between poetry and drama. I conclude this project with a brief discussion of Milton's Sonnet 23, a poem that reworks Raleigh's commendatory verse by removing both the upstaging figure of the "Faery Queene" and allegorical figure of "Oblivion." Like Middleton and Ford, Milton grieves and honors the lost beloved, but unlike them, Milton refuses to forget.

## Chapter One

Spenser *in morte*:Petrarchan Grief and Pastoral Elegy in Spenser's *Daphnaïda*

*Daphnaïda* has long been acknowledged as an elegy that does not work as an elegy should. Though Spenser wrote the poem in 1591 for Arthur Gorges upon the death of his wife, Douglas Howard, it offers no obvious comfort to Gorges, represented by the grieving shepherd-poet Alcyon, for his loss, nor does it assuage the more general anxiety about mortality that it evokes. Though the poem presents Daphne, Alcyon's dying beloved and Spenser's figure for Howard, anticipating a heavenly afterlife, neither *Daphnaïda* nor its central mourner seriously engages the notion of consolation. Alcyon performs a lament that rejects not only spiritual consolation, but also such conventional pastoral comforts as community and a return home. The lament only perpetuates his grief, and the poem's framing narrative does not correct his mournful indulgence. Despite *Daphnaïda*'s identification as "An Elegie" on its title page, Spenser's strange poem remains stubbornly un-elegiac, refusing the conventional comforts associated with its form of Christian pastoral elegy.<sup>29</sup>

Critics commonly explain the un-elegiac feature of unresolved grief in *Daphnaïda* as either the central failing of an already bad poem or as Spenser's exercise in negative exemplar, but such a dichotomy obscures the poem's exploration of literary form.<sup>30</sup> *Daphnaïda* is not simply a disfunctional elegy, nor is its disfunction accidental. Rather, its un-Spenserian failure to perform

---

<sup>29</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Spenser quotations are taken from *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> See primarily William A. Oram, "Daphnaïda and Spenser's Later Poetry," *Spenser Studies* 2 (1981): 141-58. Oram makes similar arguments about *Daphnaïda* in "A Mirror for Arthur Gorges" in *Spenser at Kalamazoo* (1978), 238-53; "Daphnaïda," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990), 208-9; and *Edmund Spenser* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 156-60. Additional examinations of *Daphnaïda* as a negative example of grief include Duncan Harris and Nancy L. Steffen, "The Other Side of the Garden: An Interpretive Comparison of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and Spenser's *Daphnaïda*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1978): 17-36; G. W. Pigman, III, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 75-82; Ellen E. Martin, "Spenser, Chaucer, and the Rhetoric of Elegy," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 17 (1987): 83-109; Mark David Rasmussen, "Complaints and *Daphnaïda* (1591)" in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 218-36. On *Daphnaïda* as a satirical performance of grief, see David Lee Miller, "Laughing at Spenser's *Daphnaïda*," *Spenser Studies* 26 (2011): 241-50; and Rachel E. Hile, *Spenserian Satire: A Tradition of Indirection* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2017), 46-63.

elegiac comfort is a direct result of Alcyon's hyperbolic grief—a grief that is distinctly *Petrarchan*. His mourning, and to a lesser extent his wooing, evokes the suffering condition of Petrarch's poet-lover in the *Rime sparse*, who, in the *in morte* section of the poem, wanders the earth reciting his sorrowful verses and wishing for death, all while imagining the impact of grief on his poetry and fame. The *Rime's* narrator tries again and again to turn away from his painful, earthly love of Laura and to reconceptualize her loss and ascension to heaven as spiritually elevating, yet he remains fixated on his own sense of grief, reflecting on its paradoxically generative and limiting impact on his verses. *Daphnaïda* evokes similar dynamics of mourning. As the poem gives voice to the depths of Petrarchan grief, it also exposes that mode's stubborn attachment to feelings of loss and isolation. And like the *Rime*, *Daphnaïda* reflects a concern for the impact of grief on poetic fame and futurity. Informed by the *Rime's* dynamics of love and mourning, *Daphnaïda* gestures to the crippling effects of Petrarchan grief upon a poetic career, generating a version of authorship that runs parallel yet counter to that which Spenser establishes in other works. More than a negative example of grief, *Daphnaïda* demonstrates the distorting impact of Petrarchism *in morte* on the construction of form and authorship.

Both pastoral and elegy regularly accommodate generic experimentation in Renaissance texts, and both routinely serve as a backdrop for coded discourses of authorship.<sup>31</sup> Within pastoral, “the funeral elegy is the most formal expression of aspiring careerism,” and Spenser follows Virgil (whose fifth eclogue offers the consolation denied in Theocritus's first idyll) in revising pastoral elegy to include consolation.<sup>32</sup> Although this genre does not conventionally require consolation, Spenser introduces it as a laureate standard in the *November* eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*,

---

<sup>31</sup> See Dennis Kay, *Melodious Tears: The English Funeral Elegy from Spenser to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 6-8.

<sup>32</sup> Celeste Marguerite Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 93. Also see Ellen Z. Lambert, “elegy, pastoral” in *Spenser Encyclopedia*, 234-5.

thereby shaping one strain of English elegiac tradition.<sup>33</sup> As the earliest printed pastoral elegy in English, Colin Clout's elegy for Dido in *November* establishes Christian consolation as a popular standard for elegiac poetry. Prior to the *Calendar*'s publication, "Renaissance authors of poetics," like Julius Scaliger, "counsel[ed] the combination of lament with praise and consolation," but it is *November*, with its depiction of Dido's apotheosis, that initiates Christian consolation as a literary trend.<sup>34</sup> Further, because Spenser's author figure, Colin Clout, provides elegiac comfort to other shepherds, *November* also establishes public consolation as a premier feature of Spenserian laureate authorship.<sup>35</sup> As *Daphnaïda* refuses comfort and distorts authorship, the poem is not just un-elegiac, but un-Spenserian.<sup>36</sup>

Why, then, would Spenser write and publish a poem that counters some of his central tenets of elegy and authorship? As a form that traditionally accommodates generic experiment, pastoral elegy allows Spenser to embed Petrarchan dynamics into a premier mode of "aspiring careerism."<sup>37</sup> In *Daphnaïda*, England's laureate explores the implications of Petrarchan poetics—particularly under the condition of the beloved's death—not only for the futurity of the poet and his work, but also for the form of pastoral elegy that plays host to it. Amatory poetry was, after all, a major component of Spenser's authorial project, and Petrarchism was the amatory mode extraordinaire for Elizabethan England.<sup>38</sup> While Spenser would present his major revision of Petrarchism and assign it a clear role in his professional career in *Amoretti*, in *Daphnaïda* he explores how this popular mode disrupts the

---

<sup>33</sup> On laureate national mourning in *November*, see P. Cheney, "Dido to Daphne: Early Modern Death in Spenser's Shorter Poems," *Spenser Studies* 18 (2003): 143-63.

<sup>34</sup> Pigman, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy*, 42. On Spenser's elegiac imitators, see Kay, *Melodious Tears*, 68-78.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Cheney, "Spenser's Pastorals: *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 79-105, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Oram notes that the poem "overturns our generic expectations" in "*Daphnaïda* and Spenser's Later Poetry," 141. Others make similar observations, though none link this phenomenon to Petrarchism. See Harris and Steffen, "The Other Side of the Garden," 27-8; DeNeef, *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982); and Hile, *Spenserian Satire*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric*, 93.

<sup>38</sup> On Spenser's Petrarchism, see P. Cheney, "Petrarch" in *Edmund Spenser in Context*, ed. Andrew Escobedo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 235-45.

conventions of a careerist form, constrains generic progression, and prevents the project of authorial fame from achieving transcendence in immortality.

Spenser derives his authorial career model, with its interest in fame, primarily (though not exclusively) from Virgil, modifying and Christianizing it to suit his Renaissance sensibilities.<sup>39</sup>

Whereas Virgilian authorship progresses from pastoral to epic in pursuit of national laureateship and fame, Spenser moves through “pastoral, epic, love lyric, and hymn,” in pursuit of poetic fame and spiritual transcendence.<sup>40</sup> For Spenser, fame should lead to what Patrick Cheney terms “Christian glory,” contributing to the spiritual growth and salvation of both the author and his readers.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas Petrarch’s *Rime* depicts a poet caught between earthly fame and Christian glory, Spenser’s oeuvre constructs a model of authorial immortality that encompasses both poetic fame and spiritual transcendence, incorporating amatory poetry within a genre-based progression toward fame and glory. But while Spenser’s model of authorship attempts to resolve Petrarch’s dilemma, *Daphnaïda* presents a notable exception, echoing the *Rime*’s fraught aspirations to love, fame, and spiritual transcendence.

Throughout the *Rime sparse*, Petrarch’s narrator seeks poetic fame for his verses on his love of and suffering for Laura, the woman in whose very name the laurel is inscribed.<sup>42</sup> Both before and after her death, he repeatedly tries and fails to turn his attention away from earthly desire toward spiritual matters. At its core, then, Petrarch’s sequence is a “work of mourning for Laura,” and its

---

<sup>39</sup> See Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983) and P. Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> P. Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight*, 7. On Spenser’s approach to fame, see Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 384-410.

<sup>41</sup> P. Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight*.

<sup>42</sup> On Petrarch and fame, see Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 379-83, and Gianni Guastella, *Word of Mouth: Fama and Its Personifications in Art and Literature from Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), 221-5.



narrator an “icon of endless, inconsolable mourning.”<sup>43</sup> Impediment to love underpins the *Rime* as well as the English tradition that develops from it.<sup>44</sup> While much of this tradition revolves around an impediment *to* love (such as non-requital or death), for Petrarch’s narrator, as for Spenser’s Alcyon, love itself becomes an impediment because it prevents the poet figure from prioritizing the divine over the earthly.<sup>45</sup> The *Rime*’s narrator mourns not only Laura, but his own failure to relinquish his concern with the earthly, represented in his pursuit of Laura and the laurel, for the spiritual. In contrast to Spenser’s model, Petrarch’s ideas of love and fame conflict with his aspiration to spiritual transcendence. In this regard, Spenser’s Alcyon is more Petrarchan than Spenserian: he aspires to earthly fame for his grief-stricken poetry, but he ignores the proffered comfort of a heavenly afterlife with Daphne in favor of continuing to perform Petrarchan suffering in the enactment of his mournful despair.

Critics, however, do not acknowledge Alcyon’s grief as Petrarchan, and authorship critics routinely neglect to place *Daphnaïda* within the larger scope of Spenser’s career.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, by the time of *Daphnaïda*’s publication, Spenser had already progressed from the humble beginnings of pastoral in the *Calender* to his announcement of laureate authorship in the epic *Faerie Queene*. He would not publish in his next major genre until *Amoretti* in 1595, four years after *Daphnaïda*. Why would Spenser return to pastoral before continuing his progression from epic to love lyric? P. Cheney claims that in *Daphnaïda*, “Spenser is attempting to portray a new type of poet—one who shows

---

<sup>43</sup> Ronald L. Martinez, “Mourning Laura in the *Canzoniere*: Lessons from Lamentations,” *Modern Language Notes* 118 (2003): 1-45, 5. Joseph Parry, “Petrarch’s Mourning, Spenser’s Scudamour, and Britomart’s Gift of Death” in *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.1 (2005): 24-49, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Linda Gregerson, “Sexual Politics,” in Hadfield, *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, 180-99.

<sup>45</sup> P. Cheney, “Petrarch” in Escobedo, *Edmund Spenser in Context*.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Cheney, however, briefly suggests that Alcyon’s grief “points him toward” a “Petrarchan form of poetic creativity,” but he does not assess that grief itself as Petrarchan. “Spenser’s Fortieth Birthday and Related Fictions,” *Spenser Studies* 4 (1983): 3-31, 11. Also see D. Cheney’s “Grief and Creativity in Spenser’s *Daphnaïda*” in *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 123-32. Regarding authorship criticism, both Helgerson’s *Self-Crowned Laureates* and P. Cheney’s *Spenser’s Famous Flight* overlook the *Daphnaïda* in their larger arguments about Spenser’s poetic career.

more kinship with figures from Elizabethan tragedy than with those from pastoral elegy,” but I suggest that Spenser revisits pastoral in *Daphnaïda* to portray an old type poet—the *Petrarchan* poet—in order to explore the dangers of the mode he would next attempt.<sup>47</sup> He returns to the “initiatory” genre of pastoral elegy to experiment with incorporating the particularly troubling amatory poetics of Petrarchism into a literary career.<sup>48</sup> *Daphnaïda* is not so much an outlier in Spenser’s canon as it is a experiment in which Spenser assesses what he must overcome when he sets out to revise Petrarchism in *Amoretti*. He tests this amatory mode under the most extreme circumstance, confronting the beloved’s death as the ultimate impediment to spiritual transcendence and the model of authorship designed to inspire it.

In this chapter, I demonstrate Alcyon’s grief as Petrarchan, particularly with respect to the *in morte* section of the *Rime*, and I argue that Petrarchan grief in *Daphnaïda* reshapes Spenserian authorship according to Petrarchan principles in the following ways: 1) It disrupts the conventions of pastoral elegy, particularly consolation, that Spenser had established in *November*, thereby countering the laureate function of public mourning that Colin Clout performs in that eclogue; 2) It presents a poet figure who anticipates a truncated poetic career based on loss, echoing the concerns of Petrarch’s narrator *in morte* regarding his diminished poetic style and fame; 3) Its poet figure expects earthly fame while fixating on earthly loss, thereby preventing him from achieving the Spenserian authorship dynamic of Christian glory; and 4) The author figure’s lament projects poetic futurity as Petrarchan living death rather than the-transcendent immortality of Spenserian authorship. Whereas Spenser elsewhere lays claim to laureate status through the attainment of

---

<sup>47</sup> “Dido to Daphne,” 153, emphasis removed. As Spenser was composing certain sonnets of *Amoretti* as early as 1580, he may have been writing his counter-Petrarchan sonnet sequence and *Daphnaïda* at the same time.

<sup>48</sup> On the “initiatory” poetics of pastoral elegy in Spenser and in Virgil, from whom he draws, see Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric*, 41-53.

earthly fame and Christian glory, in *Daphnaïda* he explores the limits poetic achievement when a Petrarchan author is confronted by mortality.

The first section below outlines the dangers of Petrarchan love, particularly with respect to mourning, and provides an overview of Spenser's various engagements with the mode. Though Spenser deploys Petrarchism throughout his career, no sustained study of Spenser's (counter)Petrarchism yet exists. This section therefore selectively traces that Spenser's use of the mode from the *Calender* to *Four Hymnes*. His approach to Petrarchism in *Daphnaïda*, however, remains unique in his canon for its extended interrogation of its dynamics in relation to grief. The second section establishes Alcyon as a figure of the Petrarchan poet-lover, tracking the similarities between Spenser's Alcyon, Petrarch's mourning poet-lover, and other Petrarchan figures in Spenser's canon. The third section demonstrates the ways that Alcyon's Petrarchan grief defies conventions of pastoral elegy. The grieving shepherd rejects both pastoral and elegiac comfort, and refuses or reverses many of the conventions of both forms. The fourth section demonstrates how Alcyon's Petrarchan grief interferes with a careerist progression through genres and the accompanying aspiration toward fame and immortality. As a poet, Alcyon moves from love lyric to pastoral complaint, but, contrary to the expected Spenserian shift into epic, his commitment to grief ushers him toward, but prevents him from fulfilling, higher genres. He perpetually digresses into Petrarchan grief, trapping him in pastoral and signaling his unsuitability for the role of Spenserian laureate. The concluding section attempts to situate *Daphnaïda*, in all its weirdness, in Spenser's career. Published the same year as Spenser's translation of *Rime* 323, in which Petrarch repeatedly metaphorizes Laura's death, *Daphnaïda* develops alongside Spenser's repetition of the dead Laura. For all of Spenser's efforts to surpass Petrarch, he cannot shed his attachment to a dead beloved that represents the intersection of poetry, poetics, and literary fame.

Petrarchism traditionally poses many dangers to both poet-lover and beloved. Though Petrarchan poetry nominally takes the beloved as its subject, it is most often associated with a narcissistic focus on the poet's own desire for and violent objectification of the beloved, and the intense suffering he claims to undergo as a result of her rejection of him. It relies fundamentally on an impediment to the poet-lover's desires: "love unrequited, love requited but unfulfilled, love so fleetingly fulfilled as merely to make suffering keener, love thwarted by the beloved's absence or aloofness, her prior possession by another, her mortal decline and death. . . . Without impediment, the lover would have no need to resort to poetry; he would have something better to do."<sup>49</sup> Petrarchism relies on resistance and tension, which manifest as paradoxical tropes (e.g., the hackneyed freezing/burning aspect of the poet's suffering).<sup>50</sup> With its basis in absence, error, failure, and lack, Petrarchism typically constructs an intensely self-centered poetics that attends monoptically to the narrator's interiority and suffering rather than the nominal subject of his beloved. Through performing this fraught emotional process, "the poet invents a vocation. That vocation is at once a compensation for erotic longing and an aggravation or reenactment of it."<sup>51</sup>

The *Rime*'s narrator carries over many features of the *in vita* section to the *in morte* section of the poem, including his self-centered focus on his own suffering, his praise of Laura's beauty and virtue, his sense of injustice at love unfulfilled, his aspiration toward laureate status, and his failed attempts at relinquishing earthly desire for spiritual concerns. But in his mourning for Laura, the

---

<sup>49</sup> Gregerson, "Sexual Politics," in Hadfield, *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, 181.

<sup>50</sup> Heather Dubrow explores Petrarchism's implicit tensions and contradictions in *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Gregerson, "Sexual Politics," in Hadfield, *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, 182. On Petrarch and Petrarchism, see John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 34-40; Marguerite R. Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980), 27-104; Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982); Peter Hainsworth, *Petrarch the Poet: An Introduction to the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989); Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 22-108; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993); Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994); Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*; Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative: Conditional Pleasure from Spenser to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

poet transforms the pleasurable pain of love unrequited into the bitter grief of love inexorably prevented. As he writes his suffering in the *in morte* section of the *Rime* (sonnet 268 and following), the poet expresses resentment toward a personified Death for leaving him alive, at Love for his continued affection for Laura, and at himself for his repeated failure to relinquish earthly love for heavenly love. Nature, which once verdantly reflected the poet's love for Laura, now reflects his mourning, and even "[t]he grass is bereaved" (RS 320). The poet associates the dead Laura with his art, "gathering up her scattered leaves" (333) as he would the leaves of a book and recalling the fame he had won for the "collections [that were] made of his poems" (360) while his beloved yet lived. He worries that fame has departed, and that grief has diminished his poetic "style" (*Rime* 332, 344, 354, 360). He feels isolated and alone (*Rime* 321, 359), and wanders the earth in search of Laura (*Rime* 360), wishing for death (*Rime* 332, 333). And he frequently worries that grief impedes his poetic efforts *in morte* (*Rime* 313, 322, 354).

Spenser seems keenly aware of the threats this amatory mode poses to poetic and spiritual pursuits. Throughout his substantial body of work, Spenser exhibits a persistent and persistently fraught engagement with Petrarchism. In the *Calender*, he casts Colin, his principal figure of authorial self-presentation, as a Petrarchan poet-lover in a pastoral landscape whose melancholy over the unrequited love of Rosalind convinces him to hang up his shepherd's pipe. *The Faerie Queene* is littered with episodes that seem to comment on the dangers of Petrarchan desire, including the suicide of Sir Terwin in the Cave of Despayre (I.ix.21-54) and that of Amavia, who follows her husband Mordant into death as a result of Acrasia's sinister seduction (II.i.35-55); Amoret, who is seen carrying her heart in a basin (III.xi.9-17); and the False Florimell, whose physical form is constructed of Petrarchan tropes and inhabited by a "wicked Spright" (III.viii.5-10). Sometimes, Petrarchan desire in *The Faerie Queene* is converted to requital, love, and marriage, as in the case of Calidore and Pastorella (VI.ix.2-46, x.5-30), but more often than not, characters in the throes of

desire land themselves in all manner of trouble. In *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, Spenser reforms Petrarchism by writing a poet-lover whose desires evolve into a requited love, contained and consummated within the sacred bounds of marriage, for a woman who embodies the divine. Further, he envisions the writing of love lyric as temporary and restorative to his poetic career, anticipating his return to the epic form with renewed energy and vigor.<sup>52</sup> Yet, however neatly Spenser reforms and repurposes Petrarchan desire in *Amoretti*, he seems to remain troubled by the mode, since the second installment of *The Faerie Queene*, published only a year after *Amoretti*, continues to interrogate it in the actions of Radigund (V.iv.18-28), Mirabella (VI.vi.16-44), and Scudamour (IV.x.11-58), to name a few. And in *Fowre Hymnes*, published in 1596 in the same volume as the second edition of *Daphnaïda*, Spenser again attempts to correct the Petrarchan attachment to earthly beauty and love, this time through a Neoplatonic fusion of *eros* and *agape* from which “Christ emerges as the true Petrarchan lover suffering selflessly for man.”<sup>53</sup>

Between Spenser and Petrarch, two options arise by which the poet might reconcile his conflicting desires: requital and marriage, or the death of the beloved, respectively. Spenser applies the former option in *Amoretti*, and, following Petrarch, he applies the latter in *November*. In the *Rime*, “the lady’s death is the turning point in the poet-lover’s life and in its poetic record. That death makes possible, or symbolizes, the resolution of a war between the antithetical inclinations of body and spirit that has wracked the lover during the lady’s lifetime.”<sup>54</sup> While Petrarch is finally unable to

---

<sup>52</sup> P. Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight*, 182-4.

<sup>53</sup> See McCabe’s headnote to *Fowre Hymnes* in *Shorter Poems*, 706. An exhaustive listing of Petrarchan moments in Spenser’s corpus would be too long to include here. *The Spenser Encyclopedia* addresses the topic in many of Spenser’s works, including *Prothalamion* and *Complaints* in addition to those already listed above, but even this is not, as we might hope, exhaustive. For a fuller catalogue of Spenser’s extended engagement with Petrarchism, see P. Cheney, “Petrarch” in Escobedo, *Edmund Spenser in Context*. Also see Louis Adrian Montrose, “‘The perfecte paterne of a Poete’: The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shepheardes Calender*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979): 34-67; Wofford, “Britomart’s Petrarchan Lament: Allegory and Narrative in the *Faerie Queene* III, iv,” *Comparative Literature* 39 (1987): 28-57; William J. Kennedy, “Petrarch, Petrarchism” in *Spenser Encyclopedia*, 539-40; Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*; Gregerson, “Sexual Politics,” in Hadfield, *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*; and Zajac, “Containing Petrarch with Pastoral.”

<sup>54</sup> Montrose, “Poetics of Courtship,” 54.

reconcile his opposing desires even after Laura's death, Spenser crafts a more successful model in Colin's elegy for Dido in *November*. Dido's apotheosis (166) following her death enables Colin to forgo "remorse" (167) and to urge her Petrarchan shepherd-lover Lobbin to do the same (167). He imagines Dido's "blessed soule" "Walk[ing] in Elisian fieldes so free" (178-9) and anticipates joining her there. In *November*, Spenser achieves what Petrarch could not: a model of mourning that accepts and celebrates death, allowing for a reconciliation of Petrarchism's "antithetical inclinations."<sup>55</sup> It is the job of the (aspiring) laureate poet, through his pastoral author figure, to assist others in the process of mourning. But while Colin is a Petrarchan poet, the lady he mourns is not his beloved Rosalind, but Lobbin's Dido. Spenser thus resolves Petrarch's fraught mourning for Laura only by divorcing grief from love. With Lobbin absent from the scene, the grief of Dido's Petrarchan lover remains unaddressed. But if *November*, Spenser's first major elegy, sidesteps the problem of Petrarchan grief, *Daphnaïda*, his second major elegy, takes the problem head on.

*Petrarchan Alcyon*

Spenser establishes Alcyon as a pastoral, Petrarchan poet figure early in *Daphnaïda*. Before Alcyon can recount his wooing of Daphne, the narrator contrasts the shepherd's present condition, a "sory wight . . . / Clad all in black, that mourning did bewray" (39-40), with the memory of his earlier music-making that brought pleasure to the shepherd community. Though the narrator does not immediately recognize the disheveled shepherd before him, he finally identifies him as Alcyon, that "jollie Shepheard swaine, / That wont full merrilie to pipe and daunce, / And fill with pleasance every wood and plaine" (54-6). Having recognized Alcyon, the narrator initiates the transaction of shared mourning that serves to alleviate grief in the pastoral mode:

Griefe findes some ease by him that like does beare,

Then stay, Alcyon, gentle shepheard stay,

---

<sup>55</sup> This is the main thrust of Montrose's argument about *November*. See "Poetics of Courtship," 53-8.

(Quoth I) till thou have to my trustie eare

Committed, what thee dooth so ill apay. (67-70)

Spenser embeds in the phrase “ill apay” both the source of Alcyon’s pain, that which “dooth [him] so ill apay,” and, if we insert an apostrophe, the narrator’s offer of compensation and community that ought to relieve it, “what thee dooth so *I’ll* apay” (emphasis added). This line activates a principle of exchange designed to alleviate the sadness of both the narrator and Alcyon himself. This setup recalls that between Thenot and Colin Clout in *November*, in which Thenot promises the shepherd Colin “yond Cosset for thy paine” “if thou wilt bewaile my wofull tene” (41-2). But whereas Colin’s elegy for Dido eventually succeeds in comforting the grieving Thenot, Alcyon’s lament bewails the loss of Daphne without arriving at a place of consolation for either the narrator or Alcyon himself. The phrase “ill apay” thus conjures a third meaning. As Alcyon’s lament for Daphne brings no comfort to himself or his shepherd community, the bereaved shepherd may be said to “ill apay” the narrator’s request for shared suffering and relief. Almost as soon as the narrator identifies Alcyon as a pastoral poet, that formerly “jolie Shepheard swaine,” he foreshadows the violation of pastoral convention.

But before Alcyon “ill apay[s]” pastoral comfort with his grieving lament, he first establishes his former prowess as a Petrarchan poet. He recounts his successful wooing of Daphne through an inset allegory in which he tames a young lioness, representative of Douglas Howard. He describes her in conventional terms of innocence, beauty, and a blushing new awareness of love: “White as the native Rose before the chaunge, / Which Venus blood did in her leaves impresse, / . . . / [she] did all other Beasts in beawtie staine” (108-12). Much here is standard fodder for the Petrarchan poet: the contrast between white and red, between youthful innocence and the “chaunge” of amorous awakening; the flower simile; and the claim of beauty so great that it spoils all other forms of itself. Spenser also connects this desire of pure, untainted beauty to authorship; as Venus reddens the



petals of the rose and, by implication, Daphne's cheeks, she "impre[s]" their image into "her leaves." In "leaves," Spenser ties Daphne's virtuous chastity (the white rose) to her burgeoning desire (the red of her blushing cheeks), and uses this transition to establish a principle of authorship through which he might publish his beloved's beauty in the "leaves" of a book.<sup>56</sup> The terms of his wooing bear this out, as he

gan to cast, how I her compasse might,  
 And bring to hand, that yet had never beene:  
 So well I wrought with mildnes and with paine,  
 That I her caught disporting on the grene,  
 And brought away fast bound with silver chaine.  
 . . . . .  
 Yet I her fram'd and wan so to my bent,  
 That shee became so meeke and milde of cheare,  
 As the least lamb in all my flock that went. (113-26)

Spying the white lioness on the green, Alcyon seeks to capture her with "mildnes and with paine," suggesting not only Alcyon's gentle manner and careful exertions, but also the pain that the Petrarchan lover finds in the beloved's resistance. Further, his choice of "wrought" suggests his poetic endeavors, as the word denotes both creation ("to make, create, produce") as well as martial

---

<sup>56</sup> The connection Spenser draws here (and elsewhere) between desire, authorship, and the female body closely resembles that of the myth of Daphne, as portrayed by Ovid and taken up by Petrarch as a foundational premise of the *Rime sparse*, in which Apollo's lust is thwarted by Daphne's transformation into a laurel tree. In compensation for the pleasure that Daphne denied him, Apollo makes the laurel into a symbol of masculine poetry. For an extended analysis of Petrarch's use of the myth of Daphne as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, particularly with regard to poetry's relationship to the female body and voice, see Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 91-124. See also Sonnet 1 of *Amoretti*, in which Spenser's narrator apostrophizes the "Happy . . . leaves" of his published volume that they might please his beloved as "captives trembling at the victors sight" (1-4).

conflict (“to wage (war, a war”), with the latter being a common metaphor for the Petrarchan beloved’s resistance to her lover’s advances.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to Alcyon’s language that suggests Petrarchan wooing, his taming metaphor further evokes Petrarchan convention. The Petrarchan trope of taming, seen in both Petrarch and his English successors, allegorizes the resistant beloved as an animal, usually a doe, who requires taming before she will submit to the lover’s desires. Made popular by Thomas Wyatt’s “Whoso list to hunt,” which is itself a translation of *Rime* 190, the taming trope became one of the most common in English Petrarchan poetry, and Alcyon’s use of it here places him squarely within that tradition.<sup>58</sup> Alcyon’s taming narrative, however, is exceptional in that it casts the beloved as a lioness rather than a doe. The Petrarchan poet struggles, usually unsuccessfully, to tame the doe (Spenser will reverse this in *Amoretti* 67), but Alcyon succeeds in taming an even wilder beast. Since the Howard coat of arms centered on a lion, Spenser chose this animal to represent Douglas Howard’s noble lineage as “an auncient Lions haire” (122), but the change from deer to lioness may also have poetic implications. In *Rime* 256, Petrarch refers to Laura as a lion, but not flatteringly. Rather, he seeks to “take vengeance on her who . . . like a fierce lion . . . roars over my heart at night, when I ought to rest” (1, 7-8).<sup>59</sup> Petrarch casts Laura as a lion not in order to tame her, but rather to portray her as a threat to the poet, depriving him of sleep. Given Spenser’s frequent engagement with the Petrarchan tradition and his translation of *Rime* 323 (titled *Visions of Petrarch* in the *Complaints* volume) in such close proximity to *Daphnaïda*’s publication, the echoes of *Rime* 256 here are unlikely to be coincidence. Rather, Spenser modifies the taming metaphor to anticipate Alcyon’s later

---

<sup>57</sup> “work, v.”. OED Online. December 2018. Oxford UP.

<http://www.oed.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/view/Entry/230217?rskey=Z9rxlU&result=1> (accessed February 24, 2019). For examples of this martial metaphor in Petrarch, see *Rime* 21, 110, and 140.

<sup>58</sup> On the trope of the hunt in Renaissance literature, see Catherine Bates, *Masculinity and the Hunt: Wyatt to Spenser* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013). More specifically, on the hunt in Wyatt’s Petrarchan poetry, see pages 44-108.

<sup>59</sup> All Petrarch quotations from *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems*, trans. Robert M. Durling.

predicament. In casting Daphne as a lion, Alcyon portrays himself as an exceptionally successful Petrarchan poet, having wooed such a noble beast, but with *Rime* 256 in the background, the figure of the lion carries an implicit threat, foreshadowing Alcyon's later calls for vengeance (352) and his overall inability to find peace and rest.<sup>60</sup>

If much of Alcyon's wooing and "taming" of Daphne/the lioness is standard Petrarchan fare, his winning of her is not. Petrarchism requires an impediment to love, but Alcyon's success removes impediment: the lovers marry and have a child together. Further, Alcyon tames his lioness so well that, "though by kind shee stout and salvage were, / . . . / shee became so meeke and milde of cheare" (121, 125) that "where ever I did wend," she "Would wend with me, and waite by me all day" and "of my flock would take full warie keepe" (127-33). In fact, Alcyon's lioness becomes somewhat of a local phenomenon. He tells of how shepherds and shepherdesses would "Daylie resort to me from farre and neare, / To see my Lyonesse, whose praises wide / Were spred abroad" (144-6). It may be that Alcyon had a hand in spreading those praises abroad, much as Spenser publicizes his praise of Douglas Howard, since they commend both the lioness and Alcyon's "good fortune" (147). If the "rude report" (146) does reflect Spenser's publication of Howard's virtues in *Daphnaïda*, the shepherds' response fulfills the conventional aspiration of Petrarchan poets to fame and immortality for the subject of their verses and, by extension, for themselves. Within the space of a few stanzas, then, Alcyon seems to have overcome Petrarchan impediment: he has tamed his lioness, achieved mutual love with Daphne and poetic fame for his praises of her. If, as Zajac argues with regard to Calidore's wooing of Pastorella in *Faerie Queene* VI, Spenser attempts to render Petrarchism innocuous by embedding it in pastoral, Alcyon's fable of the lioness may represent an earlier attempt at such a modulation of modes. But if Alcyon, the pastoral-Petrarchan shepherd-

---

<sup>60</sup> Spenser makes the threat of the beloved-as-lion explicit in *Amoretti* 20, in which the poet-lover cannot tame his mistress, whom he describes as "more cruell and more salvage wylde, / then either Lyon or the Lyonesse" (9-10).

poet, seems safe from the threats of Petrarchan desire by way of his successful wooing, the introduction of a fresh impediment to his union with Daphne suggests otherwise.

With the death of Daphne, Alcyon comes to inhabit a more intense and relentless Petrarchan “paine” (117) than he had before. This is the condition in which the narrator (and the reader) finds him at the start of the poem. He evinces the fragmentation and effeminizing penetration associated with the Petrarchan lover in his “empierced brest,” which “Sharpe sorrowe did in thousand peeces rive” (6-7). His sighs give further evidence of his condition: “He sighed soft, and inly deepe did grone, / As if his heart in peeces would have rent” (48-9). And he describes Daphne’s final words to him (in which she tries to comfort him with the promise of heaven) as “piercing” and “deepe engraven in my brest,” “wound[ing] my heart and rend[ing] my bleeding chest” (295-8). He even faints twice over the course of the poem, once after declaring to the narrator that Daphne “now is dead” (184), and again after he completes his lament, falling into a “stonie swound” (545). And while Daphne is the ostensible object of Alcyon’s mourning, it is his grief and the art that it fuels to which he is truly attached, as indicated by his request that “true Lovers . . . / Helpe me to wayle my miserable case” whenever they hear him “Lamenting lowde my Daphne’s Elegie” (505-10). Like a true Petrarchan lover, Alcyon eclipses his beloved with his artistic description of her; his descriptions of Daphne, with the exception of his brief blazon of her corpse (which I address in the following section), focus vaguely on her abstract “worthinesse” (145), while he characterizes his own grief at greater length and in exhausting repetition and detail. In Alcyon, Spenser transforms the Petrarchan poet-lover into a poet-mourner, adapting the tropes and attitudes of the mode to grief rather than desire.

Alcyon’s mourning also echoes many of the sentiments of the narrating poet-lover who grieves for Laura in Petrarch’s *Rime*. Daphne anticipates reunion with Alcyon in heaven (292), and Petrarch imagines Laura’s eyes promising a similar reunion in *Rime* 328. Alcyon, intent on his

mourning, searches the earth for Daphne in “wandering pilgrimage / Throughout the world from one to other end” that he might “wilfully increase [his] paine” (372-8), despite having witnessed her death. Petrarch, too, searches for the dead Laura, referring to her in *Rime* 302 as she “whom I seek and do not find on earth,” and expressing similar sentiments in 306 and 331. As Alcyon experiences life without Daphne as death (“So doo I live, so doo I daylie die,” 435), so Petrarch claims his life ended when Laura’s did (*Rime* 358). And as Alcyon constantly wishes to die (“is it so uneth / To leave this life, or dolorous to dye?” (447-8), Petrarch, too, longs to follow Laura into death (*Rime* 324, 331, 333, 357-8). Even the “gloomie” environment of *Daphnaïda*, with its frost-bitten flowers (22-8), may resemble the disappearance of the sun and the “sweet laurel” from Petrarch’s view in *Rime* 327. If none of these are direct references to Petrarch, the similarities are clear and numerous enough to suggest that Spenser had Petrarch’s grief in mind as he constructed his own grieving poet figure.

In addition to echoing many of the sentiments of Petrarch’s grieving narrator of the *Rime sparse*, Alcyon calls to mind two figures from *The Faerie Queene* that Spenser associates with Petrarchan pain and death: Sir Terwin and Despaire. In Book I, Redcrosse encounters a knight called Sir Trevisan fleeing a villain named Despaire who, Trevisan informs him, has convinced his companion, Sir Terwin, to commit suicide. Sir Terwin, we learn, suffered from a characteristically Petrarchan affliction:

He lov’d, as was his lot, a Ladie gent,  
 That him againe lov’d in the least degree:  
 For she was proud, and of too high intent,  
 And joyd to see her lover languish and lament.                   (I.ix.27)

Spying Terwin's Petrarchan pain, Despaire convinces him to cut his own throat with a "rustie knife" (45).<sup>61</sup> Though Alcyon may not resort to such drastic measures, he nevertheless repeatedly expresses a death wish when death divides him from his beloved: "And life I hate" (425); "cruell death doth scorn to come at call" (356); "why seeke I to prolong / My wearie daies in dolor and disdaine?" (439-40); "Why doo I longer live in lifes despight?" (442). If Spenser literalizes Petrarchan despair in Sir Terwin's suicide, Alcyon embodies that despair, though he does not act on it the way that Terwin does. Suicide, of course, would make an even stranger topic for an elegy. Oram suggests that Alcyon "embodies with almost allegorical clarity the desire to grieve," and points out the shepherd-poet's similarity to the figure of Despaire himself, whose "greasie lockes, long growen and unbound, / Disordered hong about his shoulders round / And his face" (I.ix.35).<sup>62</sup> Alcyon cuts a similar figure, with "carelesse locks, uncombed and unshorne" that "Hong long adowne, and bearde all over growne" (43-4).<sup>63</sup> Sharing traits with both Terwin and Despaire, Alcyon may serve as a conflation of the two. In Alcyon, Spenser presents the embodiment of a specifically Petrarchan despair. Yet Despaire, Spenser shows us, cannot die: "He chose an halter from among the rest, / And with it hung himself, unbid unblest. / But death he could not worke himself thereby" (54.4-6). Terwin and Despaire represent opposing capacities—one cannot die, and the other cannot help but die. Alcyon reflects this contradiction, longing for death even as he insists on an endless "wandering pilgrimage" until the end of his days (372). His desire for death sits at odds with his plan of lifelong hopeless wandering, yet both generate a resistance to the conventional comforts of pastoral elegy.

*Rejecting Comfort, Resisting Literary Form*

---

<sup>61</sup> P. Cheney identifies this as a "Petrarchan suicide" and claims that, for Spenser, "Petrarchan love violates Protestant faith." "Petrarch," 240.

<sup>62</sup> "Spenser's Later Poetry," 143. Oram takes care to distinguish Alcyon's apparently secular grief from Despaire's sacrilegious one, noting that "Alcyon's melancholy lacks a religious dimension," 156n5.

<sup>63</sup> Harris and Steffen contrast Alcyon's overgrown hair and beard with the more conventional, shorter beard of youth usually portrayed in pastoral. Such a comparison points to Alcyon's unsuitability for the pastoral mode. "The Other Side of the Garden," 27-8.

In his Petrarchan grief, Alcyon resists both the pastoral and elegiac modes in which *Daphnaïda* and his lament are set. He refuses to acknowledge the pastoral comfort offered by the narrator as well as the elegiac comfort of Daphne's ascent to heaven and the promise of their eventual reunion there. Further, his lament rejects the seasonal cyclicity and renewal implicit in pastoral—the same aspect from which *The Shepheardes Calender* derives its sense of closure. In contrast to Colin Clout, the Petrarchan shepherd-poet who offers comfort through elegy in *November* and wishes his flock well as he bids farewell to poetry in *December*, Alcyon neither accepts nor offers elegiac comfort in the promise of heaven, nor does he wish well for his flock or his fellow shepherds. Instead, he rages against pastoral community and responsibility, against the cosmos, and against life itself. Instead of the continuity and poetic immortality assured at the end of the *Calender* (“It shall continewe till the worlds dissolution,” Epilogue 4), *Daphnaïda* offers an almost parodic version of both. In concluding with a stunned narrator whose offer of companionship has been rejected and a poet figure who bases his future fame on Petrarchan grief, *Daphnaïda* suggests an inverted continuity that relies on formal conflict and perpetual grief.

At the midpoint of *Daphnaïda*, embedded in Alcyon's lament, Spenser presents Alcyon's recollection of Daphne's death. This is Alcyon's second telling of the event, and unlike the first in the fable of the lioness, which aestheticizes her death in the language and imagery of pastoral and ascribes a cause to it (“A cruell Satyre with his murdrous dart, / . . . / Gave her the fatall wound of deadlie smart,” 156-8), the second version is stripped of Alcyon's explanation and aestheticizing lens.<sup>64</sup> He speaks her words from memory, yet her voice breaks free from the sullen framing of the rest of the lament:

---

<sup>64</sup> In fact, Douglas Howard died of an illness that had plagued her for two years prior to her death. See Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 284.

I, since the messenger is come for mee,  
 That summons soules unto the bridale feast  
 Of his great Lord, must needes depart from thee,  
 And straight obey his souveraine behest:  
 Why should Alcyon then so sore lament,  
 That I from miserie shall be releast,  
 And freed from wretched long imprisonment? (267-73)

Daphne's words of comfort constitute the proper response to and consolation for death. In her performance of *contemptus mundi*, she asserts that the world is only a place of temporary suffering, and that by dying she goes to reunion with Christ at "the bridale feast." She does not linger on the notion of life as "miserie" as Alcyon does; rather, Daphne casts death as the comfort of heavenly transcendence beyond the earthly realm. And if the promise of heaven were not enough, she goes on to promise two additional comforts:

Yet ere I goe, a pledge I leave with thee  
 Of the late love, the which betwixt us past,  
 My yong Ambrosia, in lieu of mee  
 Love her: so shall our love for ever last.  
 Thus dear adieu, whom I expect ere long:  
 So having said, away she softly past. (288-93)

In her final words, Daphne offers Alcyon a multivalent comfort for her death. She reminds him that death will usher her into the glory of heaven, and that such an ascent should be considered a happy occasion. She reassures him that she looks forward to her new life among "Saints and Angels in celestiall thrones," where she will join them to "Eternally him praise" (285-6). Her employment of *vanitas* and her forecast of the afterlife recall the comfort that Colin urges in *November*. "Dido nis



dead, but into heaven hent. / . . . / Why wayle we then? . . . / . . . / She raignes a goddesse now among the saintes” (169-75). But Daphne offers more than just the assurance of heaven. She confirms her love of Alcyon by leaving him with their daughter, Ambrosia, declaring the child a “pledge” of her “late love” (290). Ambrosia is both proof of their love and of Daphne’s promise to remember it even in the afterlife. But Ambrosia, as the child of Alcyon and Daphne, represents the additional comfort of an earthly immortality for them both. She will remind Alcyon of his Daphne, but she will also ensure his own earthly continuity. Reproduction was often invoked as a kind of immortality in the Renaissance (famously so in Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets), and Daphne presents this model of immortality alongside the promise of eternity in heaven to console her husband. But perhaps most striking of Daphne’s offered comforts is that of *reunion* in the afterlife.<sup>65</sup> Colin’s elegy for Dido certainly does not provide such a radical solution to the pain of separation. With this expectation of an amorous reunion in paradise, Daphne provides a possible solution to Petrarch’s conflict between love of Laura and love of God. In “whom I expect ere long,” Daphne seems to suggest that Alcyon can have both. She thus offers him a remarkable tripartite comfort—earthly, heavenly, and amorous—making his rejection of such comfort all the more remarkable in that it denies love, familial duty, and Christian doctrine.

True to form, Alcyon resists the comfort Daphne offers in a Petrarchan manner, focusing not on her words but on the pain they inflict. He “record[s]” her words as “piercing” weapons that, like “swords,” “Did wound my heart and rend my bleeding chest” (295-8), calling up the linguistic violence of the Petrarchan idiom. In contrast to Daphne’s “sweet sugared speaches,” “The which my soule first conquerd and possest” (299-300), her final words are “deepe engraven in [Alcyon’s]

---

<sup>65</sup> Renaissance depictions of lovers reunited in the afterlife are exceedingly rare. See Ramie Targoff, *Posthumous Love: Eros and the Afterlife in Renaissance England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014). Though she does not address *Daphnaïda*, Targoff sees in certain sonnets of the *Amoretti* an “eschatology” that “positions poetry as the agent of their [the narrator and his beloved] mutual resurrection” (151).

breast” (295-6). His comparison of Daphne’s words thus transitions from the conquering rhetoric of Petrarchan wooing to the metaphorical violence inflicted by language and by the impediment of death. The inscription of her words in his “breast” evokes the Ovidian connection between Petrarchan violence and authorship, except that Alcyon takes on the role of the violated female who, like Ovid’s Daphne, comes to symbolize the foundational, gendered violence of the male poetic tradition.<sup>66</sup> Further, this image of language as a violent inscription on the body recalls the Busirane episode in *Faerie Queene* III, in which Spenser literalizes the Petrarchan violence of language in Busirane’s writing of spells in Amoret’s blood in an attempt to coerce her love. Whereas Busirane removes Amoret’s heart from her still-living body, Alcyon, not his beloved, experiences the “rend[ing]” of his “bleeding chest” (298). He experiences Daphne’s words of comfort as penetrative, and therefore feminizing, and the impediment of death threatens to tear him in two, evoking the Petrarchan danger of fragmentation. Alcyon’s entrenchment in the Petrarchan mode results in a doubling up and refocusing of violence; he experiences both the penetrating wound of impossible love, as well as the rhetorical violence of bodily fragmentation usually reserved for the beloved.

Continuing his Petrarchan resistance to comfort, Alcyon performs a blazon of Daphne’s corpse that deteriorates the image he has created of her in his mind:

And when those pallid cheeks and ashy hew,  
 In which sad death his pourtraicture had writ,  
 And when those hollow eyes and deadly view,  
 On which the clowde of ghastly night did sit,  
 I match with that sweet smile and chearful brow,

---

<sup>66</sup> Critics commonly acknowledge Alcyon as problematically feminized through his Ovidian namesake Alcyone, who tries to kill herself after learning of her husband Ceyx’s death. For Ovid’s tale of Alcyone and Ceyx, see *Metamorphoses* XI.410-795. On Ovid’s Daphne as a symbol of the originary violence of masculine poetry, see Enterline, *Rhetoric of the Body*, 67-70.

Which all the world subdued unto it;

How happie was I then, and wretched now? (302-8)

Alcyon's first and only blazon of his beloved takes as its subject not her living body but, shockingly, her corpse. This striking variation on blazon convention is consistent with Spenser's attention to Alcyon's Petrarchan grief (rather than his love for the living woman). If the traditional blazon performs a kind of violence on the beloved through its rhetorical dismemberment of her body, Alcyon's blazon of a corpse necessarily loses that sting.<sup>67</sup> A corpse, after all, presents little need for sexual control or rhetorical subjugation.<sup>68</sup> Rather, Alcyon's blazon acts as a gruesome point of contrast to his image of the living Daphne, with her "sweet smile and chearful brow," which exists in his memory. The corpse's immunity to pain and amorous anatomization stands in contrast to Alcyon's bodily pain and fragmentation. It also overturns the Petrarchan dynamics of the lioness fable by negating the shepherd-poet's taming power (a corpse needs no taming), and by prohibiting any further worldly renown for the shepherd-poet based on his relationship to or poetic description of the beloved. In Alcyon's phrase of comparison, "I match with that sweet smile and chearful brow, / Which all the world subdued unto it," the grammatical subject of "subdued" remains ambiguous. It may be that the "sweet smile" performs the subduing, but it is also possible that "I" serves the same function, while both take as their object "all the world." Alcyon may "match" the power of Daphne's living "smile" with that of his art, and thereby "subdue" "the world," but her death cuts short his praise poetry. Thus, Alcyon's comparison of the living to the dead Daphne is really a comparison of his pre- and post-mortem poetic powers. Her beauty may have had the power to conquer the world, but Alcyon propagates that beauty in verse. With Daphne's death, however,

---

<sup>67</sup> On the blazon as an image of the violent dismemberment of the female, see Vickers, "Diana Described."

<sup>68</sup> Alternatively, Alison Cornish asserts a common subtext of necrophilia in both the *in vita* and *in morte* sections of the *Rime*. See "Embracing the Corpse: Necrophilic Tendencies in Petrarch" in *Dead Lovers: Erotic Bonds and the Study of Premodern Europe*, ed. Basil Duffalo and Peggy McCracken (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006), 57-70.

the shepherd-poet has lost his subject, his love, and the vehicle of his renown. Her death, then, must serve as the new (and final) subject of his poetic endeavors.

Having turned away from the elegiac comfort of heaven and embraced the pain of his loss, Alcyon leans into his Petrarchan grief and begins a lengthy and hostile breakdown of pastoral. He calls for a stop to all pastoral music, demanding, “Let Bagpipe never more be heard to shrill, / That may allure the senses to delight; / Ne ever Shepheard sound his Oaten quill” (323-5). He directs the shepherdesses to “convert [their] joyous playes” to “plaints” (321). With this generic shift to “plaints,” together with his demand that “th’ayre be fild with noyse of doleful knells (335), Alcyon replaces the musical “delight” and “pleasance” of pastoral with the “dolefull knells” of his own grief, represented in the lament in which these phrases appear. Alcyon also rejects the didactic subtexts that typically accompany pastoral in rejecting “delight” and “pleasance,” a sentiment forecast by the narrator in his declaration that Alcyon’s “ruffull plaint” is not for those who “in pleasure findeth sense.”<sup>69</sup>

Having called for the silencing of pastoral, Alcyon goes on to demand the cessation of the seasonal cyclicity of nature itself. He bids growth, generation, and productivity to come to a full stop:

Let streaming floods their hastie courses stay,  
 And parching droughth drie up the christall wells;  
 Let th’earth be barren and bring foorth no flowres.  
 . . . . .  
 And Nature nurse of every living thing,  
 Let rest her selfe from her long wearinesse. (332-8)

---

<sup>69</sup> Miller reads the narrator’s assertion as a rejection of the Horatian formula *utile et dulce*. “Laughing at Spenser’s *Daphnaïda*,” 241.

DeNeef points out Alcyon's foolishness in thinking he can change the immutable seasons, but this misses the point.<sup>70</sup> Of course Alcyon cannot affect the seasons. Of course the rains and the flowers will return in spring. Colin declares in *December* that "after Winter commeth timely death" (150), and the error of this statement is readily recognizable to the reader. Both Alcyon and Colin reject the cyclical renewal of pastoral, but the *Calender* operates on a structural principle of renewal in which Colin, who performs in *December* the same condition of Petrarchan dejection with which he began in *Januarye*, unwittingly participates. Similarly, Alcyon exits *Daphnaïda* in the same condition of grief in which he entered the poem, but without the reassurance of renewal and continuity provided in the epilogue of the *Calender*, Alcyon's lament may forever be frozen in the onset of winter in which the landscape, like Alcyon himself, is always dying, yet never quite dead.

Rather than implying a desire for stasis, Alcyon's continued ill-wishing reframes and reverses pastoral cyclicity through the inversion and corruption of its tropes. He calls for "wandering spirits [to] walke untimely howres" (336) and for Nature to produce only "hideous monsters," reducing pastoral beauty to "ugliness" (340), inverting its conventional setting from daytime to "untimely howres" (*Daphnaïda* opens at sunset), and redirecting the elegiac trajectory of the dead from the afterlife back toward earth. Mourning will not bring Daphne back, but perhaps she may return among the "wandering spirits" (335). In the meantime, Alcyon will undergo repetitive "[p]enance," and "to her ghost doo service day by day" (370-1). He thus replaces the pastoral cycle of life and renewal with one of death and repetitive mourning. This shift to a new cycle centered on death is borne out in Alcyon's endless "wandering pilgrimage" in which he plans to walk "Throughout the world from one to other end" (372-3). If Alcyon calls for a cessation of cyclical renewal, he replaces it with his own model of movement that, as I shall show, turns out to be closed, recursive, and only partially productive.

---

<sup>70</sup> DeNeef, *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor*, 49.

Alcyon patterns his hostility toward pastoral after the injustice he feels he has experienced. He wishes death upon his flock: “Feede ye henceforth on bitter Astrofell, / And stinking Smallage, and unsaverie Rew” and hoping that the sheep become “the pray of Wolves” (346-9). The death of Alcyon’s flock would be in keeping with his understanding of divine injustice, in which “The good and righteous he away doth take, / . . . / But the ungodly ones he doth forsake, / By living long to multiplie their paine” (358-61). Alcyon cruelly imposes a similar injustice on pastoral, inverting his responsibility to his sheep by wishing them a painful death and abandoning his shepherd vocation for an endless “wandering pilgrimage.”

Further, Alcyon’s isolated wandering also reflects a rejection of the shepherd community, a primary means of comfort in pastoral elegy. Early in the poem, he indicates his desire to “seeke alone to weepe, and dye alone” (77). Toward the end of his lament, he again projects his wish for solitude:

But soone as day doth shew his deawie face,  
 And calls forth men unto their toylesome trade,  
 I will withdraw me to some darksome place,  
 Or some deepe cave, or solitarie shade;  
 There will I sigh and sorrow all day long,  
 And the huge burden of my cares unlade. (484-9)

Alcyon’s plan to daily withdraw himself from the sun operates, as we might expect, as another instance of Petrarchan grief’s disruption of pastoral. The sun’s rising, which typically occurs at the beginning of a pastoral poem, draws “men unto their toylesome trade,” demonstrating pastoral’s valuing of communally productive labor. In his sighs and solitude, hiding in “some darksome place” away from the sun, Alcyon rejects his pastoral community. Rather than sharing in his fellow shepherds’ labor, he will spend the day unburdening himself of his “cares.” Like his daily penance,

his rejection of community is also cyclical, based on the daily repetition of the rising sun. The continuity of his anti-pastoral, cyclical mourning dooms Alcyon to repeat the actions and attitudes that make comfort impossible.

Alcyon's final rejection of pastoral community comes at the end of the poem. The narrator, who now seems enough removed from his own melancholy to "recomfort" (546) the swooning Alcyon whose "sprights began to faint" (524), finds that Alcyon "no waie recomforted would be" (547). Nevertheless, the narrator is determined to try, and when Alcyon's "Pang was somewhat overpast," the narrator suggests that he "turne aside unto my Cabinet, / And staie with me, till he were better eased" (554-9). Alcyon refuses speechlessly, and "without taking leave, he foorth did goe / With staggering pace and dismall lookes dismay" (563-4). He walks away from the narrator and out of the poem having rejected pastoral's comfort of community with which to share one's grief.<sup>71</sup> The narrator offers no help to the reader in interpreting Alcyon's departure, saying only "what of him became I cannot weene" (567), and the poem ends on this refusal of closure. As a Petrarchan griever, Alcyon resists or reverses pastoral and elegiac comforts, yet he remains a Spenserian poet figure. His model of authorship is not, as we might be tempted to believe, unproductive. Rather, as he seeks to move on from pastoral, he projects a model of a poetic career that takes the death of the beloved as its very foundation.

### *The Forms of Petrarchan Grief*

*Daphnaïda* invokes a variety of forms and genres in its presentation of grief. While its title page declares it to be an "Elegie," the majority of the poem registers as complaint, the "dominant mode of [Spenser's] shorter verse."<sup>72</sup> More specifically, that complaint takes on a Petrarchan attitude and is set in the pastoral mode, but, as I have shown, these modes do not coexist peacefully in

<sup>71</sup> In contrast, "the concept of 'home' . . . concludes ten of the *Calender* eclogues," P. Cheney, "Spenser's Pastorals," 82.

<sup>72</sup> Colin Burrow, "Spenser's Genres," in McCabe, *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, 403-19, 417.

*Daphnaïda*; Alcyon's Petrarchism, couched as complaint, proves hostile to key elements of pastoral and prevents him from accepting elegiac comfort. Alcyon's Petrarchan grief works to reshape pastoral elegy and leads into genres that may be more habitable to such grief, including tragedy, epitaph, and perhaps romance. In his morbid poetic generativity, Alcyon sketches a literary progression toward fame that runs counter to Spenser's Virgilian career path. He pursues a kind of poetic immortality, but because Petrarchism lies at the core of his project, he will never ascend from pastoral to epic, and he will never attain the Christian glory that crowns the Spenserian career.<sup>73</sup>

In splitting *Daphnaïda*'s generic identity between complaint and elegy, Spenser embeds in the poem a tension between consolability and inconsolability. A "highly emotional lament that reveals the complainant's specific grievances against . . . injustice," complaint is, at its core, a "poetry of unconsolated grief."<sup>74</sup> Elegy, by contrast, takes acceptance and consolation as its goal, allowing for a period of grief while ushering the reader into comfort, usually through assurance of the Christian afterlife.<sup>75</sup> Confirming the title page, Alcyon calls his lament for Daphne an "Elegie" (509), but the narrator refers to it five times as a "plaint." The repeated identification of Alcyon's song as complaint is consistent with Alcyon's perception of Daphne's death as an injustice ("The good and righteous he away doth take," 363), and signals to the reader not to expect comfort. Complaint, with its suggestion of inconsolability, echoes the narrator's opening description of a suitable audience for Alcyon's lament:

---

<sup>73</sup> On Spenser's construction of his literary career, see Richard Helgerson, "The New Poet Presents Himself: Spenser and the Idea of a Literary Career," *PMLA* 93 (1978):893-911 and *Self-Crowned Laureates*; P. Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight*. On Spenser's representations of fame, see Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 384-410;

<sup>74</sup> W. H. Race and J. Diaz, "Complaint" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), 287; Mark David Rasmussen, "Complaints and *Daphnaïda* (1591)" in McCabe, *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, 218-36, 223.

<sup>75</sup> On Renaissance elegy, see Pigman, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy*; Sacks, *The English Elegy*; Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric*; Kay, *Melodious Tears*.



What ever man he be, whose heavie minde  
 With grieffe of mournfull great mishap opprest,  
 Fit matter for his cares increase would find:  
 Let reade the ruffull plaint herein exprest.       (1-4)

The narrator's formal identification of Alcyon's song as complaint informs the reader that not only will Alcyon not be comforted, but also that the only suitable reader is one who does not expect comfort. Yet Alcyon calls his lament an "Elegie" (509); never does he use the word "complaint" to refer to his own song. Thus, while the title page anticipates comfort, the narrator immediately denies that possibility, and Alcyon, the eternal mourner, reintroduces it. What are readers to make of this layered process of generic reversal?

Alcyon's lament locates comfort in the anticipation of death. In contrast to Daphne's *contemptus mundi*, "Our daies are full of dolor and disease, / . . . why should he that loves me, sorie bee / For my deliverance" (274-7), Alcyon presents a distorted version, condemning earthly existence for its mutability, through which every "Faire thing on earth" will "in a moment loose their grace and glorie" (492-7). Instead of taking comfort in the promise of heaven, Alcyon sets up an alternative model of comfort:

And ye true Lovers, whom desastrous chauce  
 Hath farre exiled from your Ladies grace,  
 To mourne in sorrow and sad sufferance,  
 When ye doo heare me in that desert place  
 Lamenting lowde my Daphnes Elegie,  
 Helpe me to wayle my miserable case,  
 And when life parts, vouchsafe to close mine eye.       (505-11)

Alcyon's identification of his lament as elegy comes at a moment in which he rebuilds a sense of community around his death, his art, and its posthumous reception. His comfort will come from others who "Helpe [him] to wayle [his] miserable case" after his death. He thereby replaces the pastoral community he had earlier abandoned with a new community of lovers who have, for reasons unknown, been "exiled from [their] Ladies grace" (506). Alcyon creates a community of Petrarchan mourners, bereft of their beloved, and in his request that they "wayle [his] miserable case," asks them to both mourn alongside him and transmit his lament after his death. This posthumous transmission relies on the poet's death (rather than his poetic achievement) for its staying power. In a convoluted, macabre version of fame, Alcyon's mourners relay his poetic composition for the sake of remembering his emotional and physical *decomposition*; his poetry lives on precisely because he does not. In projecting this future, Alcyon builds a non-transcendent continuity into his own death, supported by the ongoing life of his elegy and the community of grieving lovers who close the eyes of his corpse.

But Alcyon's death never comes. Unlike Daphne, Alcyon does not take comfort in the promise of heaven. Rather, he derives a kind of comfort from engineering an earthly continuity. He distorts *contemptus mundi* by hating the world but refusing not to live in it, and he revises elegiac comfort by anticipating a space between life and death carved out by poetic fame. Though Alcyon repeatedly expresses a desire for death, he constantly puts it off. He claims that he must remain on earth because "My Daphne hence departing bad me so, / She bad me stay, till she for me did send" (454-5), but the very next stanza opens with a pun on Alcyon's poetic continuity: "My wearie feete shall ever wandring be" (457). He ties his earthly wandering to his poetic composition, and his dedication is such that three lines down he goes on to assert, "Ne will I rest my feete for feeblenesse, / Ne will I rest my limmes for frailtie, / Ne will I rest mine eyes for heavinesse" (460-2). This

description of Alcyon's tenacity in mourning calls to mind an image of a poet scribing away at his desk, exhausted, perhaps trying to limn an elaborate manuscript.

Alcyon further suggests a continuity that lingers between life and death when he compares himself with Ceres, "the mother of the Gods, that sought / For faire Eurydice her daughter deere / Throughout the world" (463-5). Though McCabe glosses "Eurydice" as "an error for Proserpina," this conflation seems unlikely to be erroneous, as it allows Spenser to neatly embed the story of Orpheus' poetic failure and the permanence of Eurydice's death into that of Proserpina's seasonal renewal.<sup>76</sup> Though DeNeef names Alcyon "a type of failed Orpheus," he forgets that Orpheus himself failed to resurrect Eurydice.<sup>77</sup> Spenser's insertion of Eurydice into the role of Proserpina aligns precisely with Alcyon's attempts earlier in the poem to interfere with pastoral renewal. Whereas Proserpina returns annually, Eurydice remains in the underworld, and the conflation of the two allows Alcyon to both undermine pastoral continuity and to occupy a space between life and death. Such a space also suits Alcyon's comparison of himself to Philomela, "the partner of my plight" (476). As told by Ovid, Philomela was raped by her brother-in-law, silenced by having her tongue cut out, and transformed into a nightingale after she and her sister had taken revenge upon her assailant. After her transformation, Philomela's song comes to emblemize masculine poetry, even as her avian transformation represents the death of her human aspect.<sup>78</sup> Both Philomela and Orpheus therefore function for Alcyon as symbols of poetry, but whereas his reference to Orpheus suggests him as an author figure who fails to bring back the dead, his comparison to Philomela points to himself as a victim, subject to erotic violence (all too appropriate for a Petrarchan griever);

---

<sup>76</sup> McCabe, 648n463.

<sup>77</sup> DeNeef, *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor*, 42.

<sup>78</sup> P. Cheney observes that Ovid's "Philomela receives the only consolation available after suffering the brutality of rape and silencing: as the nightingale, the sweetest singer of an elegiac complaint against the prick of masculine violence, she becomes a figure for poetic immortality or fame," "Career Rivalry and the Writing of Counter-Nationhood: Ovid, Spenser, and Philomela in Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,'" *ELH* 65 (1998): 523-55, 532. On Philomela as a symbol of poetry, see P. Cheney's *Spenser's Famous Flight*, 81-6, and Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body*, 68-79.

it suggests that Alcyon's poetic voice arises from the trauma he has undergone, and it locates his earthly existence somewhere between death and human life.<sup>79</sup> The twin vocal failures in these allusions capture yet again Alcyon's Petrarchan dilemma: he is the poet who will never regain his beloved just as much as he is the wounded victim of his own desire.

In forecasting his authorial continuity, Alcyon constructs for himself a version of poetic fame in his anticipation of future audiences for his lament. He forecasts a community of "Lovers" who will hear "Daphnes Elegie" and "wayle my miserable case" (505-10), but he also asks his "fellow Shepherds" to "Remember yet my undeserved paines" and to "Lament my lot, and tell your fellow swaines, / That sad Alcyon dyde in lifes disdaine" (519-25). He rebuilds and repurposes his shepherd community, asking them to memorialize the "paines" he recounts in his lament and his eventual death. He thus makes the shepherds responsible for the transmission of his verse as well as the enlargement of his reputation. He goes on to ask the "faire Damsels Shepherds dere delights" to strew "Cypresse" upon his "hearse," and "ever sprinkle brackish teares among, / In pitie of my undeserv'd distresse, / The which I wretch, endured have thus long" (526-32).<sup>80</sup> Again, Alcyon cultivates a posthumous reputation for himself based on his extremity of mourning. And he ties that reputation to the lament he sings once more in the culminating stanza of his song, asking that "ye poore Pilgrimes" "When passing by ye read these wofull layes / On my grave written, rue my Daphnes wrong, / And mourne for me that languish out my days" (533-8). In his final lines in the poem, Alcyon ties the injustice and inconsolability of complaint to elegiac mourning and a kind of comfort. He envisions his forty-nine-stanza lament as an epitaph, albeit an unwieldy one, engraved

---

<sup>79</sup> In *Rime* 310, Petrarch's narrator associates Philomela with springtime and bemoans that he cannot enjoy the season for his grief.

<sup>80</sup> The story of Cyparissus is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* X, in between Orpheus's loss of Eurydice and his lament. Cyparissus incurs a deadly wound when his lover, the god Apollo, accidentally "pierced [him] with a sharp javelin" (X.130-31). To prevent Cyparissus from dying, Apollo transforms the boy into a tree. Alcyon's request for "Cypresse" suggests once more the penetrative nature of the Petrarchan wound that fuels his desire for death. *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised by G. P. Goold, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984). All quotations from *Metamorphoses* are taken from this edition.

on his own headstone, and in this moment he asks more directly than anywhere else in the poem to be remembered for his poetic work. He thus derives comfort from the prospect of posthumous fame. Such fame is not only earthbound, but it takes death as its central principle, making it doubly opposed to Daphne's more conventional comfort of the Christian afterlife. But significantly, Alcyon *does not die*.

Despite his forecast of and oft-stated desire for death, Alcyon does not pursue this end. And though Daphne "bad me stay, till she for me did send" (455), his stubborn inattention to everything else she has said casts more than a little doubt on the sincerity of this sentiment. For Alcyon, at least, death is no consummation devoutly to be wished, despite his protestations to the contrary. Rather, his despair prevents him from the comfort of faith in the afterlife. Instead of death, he pursues a kind of earthly immortality, forever wandering in his "pilgrimage," spreading "Daphnes Elegie," and thereby cultivating his fame as a grieving Petrarchan poet. Like Hercules, who the Nemean lion "slew, and fixt in firmament" (166) among the stars, Alcyon immortalizes his beloved lioness, expecting to gain Herculean fame for the celestial depiction of his own lion. But the reference to Hercules also carries with it the less remembered episode of the hero's death. Poisoned by a shirt his wife had given him, Hercules throws himself on a pyre, burns away his "mortal part," and ascends to the godhead.<sup>81</sup> His way to immortality lies through embracing the pain of mortality, and Alcyon's determination to persist in his grieving suggests his own embracing of mortality's pain. Indeed, it is primarily for his own suffering that Alcyon hopes to be remembered. When he addresses "Shepherds," "Damsels," and "poore Pilgrimes" in the final stanzas of his lament, Alcyon ends each with a plea for remembrance, but those pleas steadily work their way backward from death. He asks the shepherds to "Lament my lot, and tell your fellow swains, / That sad Alcyon dyde in lifes disdain" (524-5), the "Damsels" to "pitie . . . my undeserv'd distresse, / The which I wretch,

---

<sup>81</sup> The story of Hercules's death is told at length by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* IX.211-72.

endured have thus long” (532-3), and the “poore Pilgrimes” to “mourne for me that languish out my dayes” (538). Though he explicitly anticipates his death several times over, complete with a lengthy, autobiographical epitaph, Alcyon’s pursuit of fame keeps him alive, “languish[ing] out [his] dayes” in order to sustain the condition of grief that, in the form of poetry, fuels his public reputation among the shepherd community that he has newly re-formed around that grief. Alcyon’s poetic immortality is thus tied to his constant expectation and delay of death. Further, it remains tied to his Petrarchism.

Alcyon’s version of poetic immortality, based on grief for the Petrarchan beloved, also carries within it what Giuseppe Mazzotta calls “the living death which is love.”<sup>82</sup> Though Alcyon does little with the Petrarchan device of paradox, his approach to mortality marks an important exception, and he simultaneously pushes both toward and away from death. He treats death as the daily pain of living without his beloved, and life as the pain that makes him desire death. He transforms pastoral renewal of “all the world . . . / That dying lives, and living still does dye” (428-34) into an immortalizing pain of suspension between life and death: “So doo I live, so doo I daylie die” (435). When the narrator rouses Alcyon from his faint at the end of his lament, Alcyon glares at him with “sdeinfull eie . . . / As one disposed wilfullie to die” (549-52). Yet this moment also captures Alcyon’s return to the “wandring pilgrimage” through which he seeks fame and immortality by spreading his lament of Daphne. In his endless pilgrimage, seeking the woman he knows he will never find, Alcyon embodies an immortality based not only on his poetic reputation, but also on the Petrarchan lover’s experience of love as death, translated from the *in vita* context of desire to the *in morte* context of grief.<sup>83</sup>

Because Alcyon’s wandering poetic repetition forever approaches but never reaches death, it allows him to pursue fame without the risk of misrepresentation usually attendant upon public

---

<sup>82</sup> *The Worlds of Petrarch*, 35.

<sup>83</sup> See Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

transmission of verse. His lament is rendered fixed and indelible, resistant to the errors of transmission. By the perpetual recital of the lament and by the very material of the tombstone, with its heavy-handed suggestion of permanence, on which he imagines it carved, Alcyon provides an extreme stability to his verse that would seem to lend itself to the pursuit of fame. But as he tries to author and authorize his solipsistic version of fame, stability collapses into stagnation, preventing the poet from moving into other genres.<sup>84</sup>

Alcyon's version of a poetic career, if we may call it that, can never live up to that which Spenser sets for himself. Spenser constructs his idea of a poetic career from the models of Virgil and Ovid, establishing a laureate program for himself based on a sequential progression of genres beginning with pastoral and moving to epic, love lyric, and finally hymn.<sup>85</sup> Through this model, Spenser seeks for himself both earthly fame for his poetry and Christian glory for his poetry's capacity to cultivate virtue and salvation.<sup>86</sup> Alcyon's poetry, with its attachment to despair, can offer no such comforts; it will never help its author or reader toward salvation or a godly life. The immortality Alcyon aspires to is only half of the Spenserian program; it is crippled, "stagging" (564), and earthbound; it is a distorted version of Spenser's virtue-based project of transcendence through authorship.

This distorted notion of poetic continuity also carries implications for *Daphnaïda's* structure. Though Alcyon walks away at the end of the poem, leading to the narrator's concluding statement of confusion, "But what of him became I cannot weene" (567), Alcyon has already established his

---

<sup>84</sup> As a kind of wandering ghost, Alcyon may here perform a version of *eidolopoeia*, a rhetorical device that gives voice to the dead. In her book on *eidolopoeia* in Renaissance Italy, Sherry Roush detects Petrarch using a version of this technique to safeguard against the misrepresentation of his work after his death. See *Speaking Spirits: Ventriloquizing the Dead in Renaissance Italy* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2015), 155-61.

<sup>85</sup> See P. Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight*, 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> P. Cheney establishes this paradigm for Spenser's career in *Spenser's Famous Flight*, in which he explains, "Rather than the narrowly circumscribed Virgilian idea of pastoral and epic, the New Poet works from the Orphic idea of pastoral, epic, love lyric, and hymn. This progression is typological in its structure, and it represents the poet engaged in a complex providential process fundamental to the salvation, not merely of himself, but also of his readers," 7.

pilgrimage as endless. His wandering therefore is cyclical. Like Colin Clout, he ends with the same Petrarchan despondence with which he began, but whereas Colin's bitterness at his unrequital in *December* is rectified by the structure of the *Calender*, Alcyon's mournful wandering reworks the structural perfection of the poem.

As both Dennis Kay and Maren-Sofie Røstvig demonstrate, *Daphnaïda* boasts a numerologically auspicious structure. In particular, Kay argues that Alcyon's lament, with its seven stanzas of seven lines each, suggests mutability (among other things), and that the mutable stanzas of seven are embedded within the poem's larger, square structure based on the divine immutability of the "immortal" number nine (with eighty-one total stanzas).<sup>87</sup> Despite this apparent formal aspiration to divine transcendence, however, both Kay and Røstvig neglect the troubling rhyme scheme of each stanza. Two major editors of *Daphnaïda* note how the poem's "variant of rhyme royal [is] subtly altered to avoid the resolution of the concluding couplet."<sup>88</sup> If the patterning of sevens and nines does suggest the preeminence of the divine over the mortal, as Kay argues it does, *Daphnaïda* offers no content to confirm this reading. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that the narrator's final state of confusion offers any sort of virtuous reassurance to the reader. Rather, I contend that Alcyon's cycle of repetition disrupts any formal perfection that may appear in the poem's structure. Alcyon tells the tale of Daphne's death twice over the course of the poem, once in his fable of the lioness and once in his lament, and he announces it three distinct times (158, 184, 293). And though his wandering may seem geographically linear, it represents a cycle of endless retellings of his tale of woe. The cyclical nature of his wandering echoes the narrative repetition of the story of Daphne's death (yet another inversion of pastoral cyclicity). If *Daphnaïda* attempts a

---

<sup>87</sup> Kay, *Melodious Tears*, 48-52, 50. In her essay "The Hidden Sense," Røstvig contends that the numerology of *Daphnaïda* suggests Alcyon's "spiritual illumination which induces a desire for penance and remission of sins," in *The Hidden Sense and Other Essays* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963), 1-112, 85.

<sup>88</sup> McCabe, headnote to *Daphnaïda*, in *Shorter Poems*, 642-4, 642; and Oram, headnote to *Daphnaïda* in Oram et al., *Yale Edition*, 487-91, 491.



sense of structural closure, I suggest that Alcyon's wandering and repetition subvert and rework such closure. He embeds a repetition of Daphne's story within the cyclical structure of his wandering, forcing the poem's numerological perfection to revolve around the cycles of his grief. He thus replaces cyclical closure with a cyclical refusal of closure, re-presenting pastoral's cyclicity absent the principle of renewal. Instead, he restructures generic and formal cyclicity, basing his revised structure on a principle of repetition that takes as its focus the very moment of the beloved's death.

In both content and form, Alcyon's lament keeps him trapped in the pastoral landscape. He will never progress to epic. Neither, it seems, does he aspire to. He does expect, however, to see his pastoral "Elegie" transformed to epitaph. Though his endless wandering will forever delay the opportunity for epitaph—the living dead have no need of graves or headstones—Alcyon's anticipation of this genre indicates a lower aim in generic progression than that which Spenser subscribes to. Pastoral occupies the lowest rung of the generic hierarchy, as Colin affirms in *June*, "my rymes bene rough, and rudely drest" (77), whereas epic stands apart as "the best and most accomplished kinde of Poetry."<sup>89</sup> Epitaph, by its brevity and occasional nature, falls short of epic's heights. Joshua Scodel observes that "the epitaph was often considered minor or 'low,' so that most epitaphic poets felt compelled to stake out a position . . . concerning the status of the genre . . . to support or to challenge traditional hierarchical notions of literary kinds."<sup>90</sup> The description of epitaph reveals Alcyon's aspiration to the genre to be doubly appropriate: he aims lower than epic, but he also aims at a genre with a history of disrupting other literary kinds. In forecasting his elegy as an epitaph, Alcyon continues his habit of disrupting, distorting, and reworking genre and form. But again, because Alcyon refuses to die, his aspiration to epitaph can never be realized. If anything, his

---

<sup>89</sup> Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904), vol. 1, 148-207, 179.

<sup>90</sup> *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 5.

constant wandering and intemperate grief together may suggest his entry into romance, one of the two major modes of *The Faerie Queene* and one which, in its episodic structure, exposes the wanderer's moral failings through a process of error and correction.<sup>91</sup> If this is the case, *Daphnaïda* may represent just one episode in a larger landscape of error that is never revealed to the reader. But the poem offers no clear corrective to Alcyon's excessive mourning. If *Daphnaïda* does signal Alcyon's error, Spenser may not have published the corresponding corrective until 1596, when the second edition was printed in the same volume as *Fowre Hymnes*, in which Spenser presents "a program of idealization that labors to relinquish all earthly objects in favor of their divine counterparts"—a fitting response to Alcyon's preoccupation with his earthly existence.<sup>92</sup>

Though Alcyon's lament invokes a variety of forms, only one offers the possibility of upward movement along the generic hierarchy: tragedy. In his tale of the lioness, Alcyon remarks that hope "daylie doth her changefull counsels bend / To make new matter fit for Tragedies" (153-4). Though tragedy was typically held equal in generic ranking to epic (Sidney refers to it as "high and excellent Tragedy"), Jeff Dolven speculates that Spenser distrusted the popular enterprise of dramatic tragedy, arguing that he depicts it as a "crisis of faith" in the Amavia episode of *Faerie Queene* II and suggesting that Spenser prefers the more didactic dramatic form of the pageant.<sup>93</sup> Though Dolven does not address *Daphnaïda*, the poem may confirm his notion of Spenser's unease with the genre of tragedy. Alcyon perceives his loss of Daphne as "matter fit for Tragedies," but he does not situate the term within the purview of his authorial aspirations. He sees himself, rather, as the victim of tragic happenings. The word does suggest, however, his awareness of his own role as a performer of grief and creator of artifice in delivering his tale of the lioness. If Alcyon does consider

---

<sup>91</sup> On *The Faerie Queene* as a generic hybrid of epic and romance, see Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), 54-113 and Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993).

<sup>92</sup> Miller, "Laughing at Spenser's *Daphnaïda*," 248-9.

<sup>93</sup> Jeff Dolven, "Spenser and the Troubled Theaters," *ELR* 29 (1999): 179-200, 183.

himself a writer of tragedy early in the poem, the narrator quickly disabuses him of the notion when his “dull wit” cannot “well understand” the allegory “of the loved Lionesse” (176-7). Elsewhere in his canon, Spenser “reformulat[es] . . . Aristotle’s phrase of ‘pity and fear’ for the emotions aroused by the genre [of tragedy],” and we may witness in the narrator’s confusion Alcyon’s inability to do the same with his art.<sup>94</sup> If the tale of the lioness focuses too much on poetic craft and too little on emotion (a common complaint about pastoral elegy), Alcyon’s lament errs in the opposite direction. If Alcyon has any aspirations to tragedy, they remain indirect, and his poetic efforts reveal the genre to be out of his reach.

Instead of viewing Alcyon as a failed author figure, in this chapter I have tried to suggest that he is rather a *stunted* one, impeded by the Petrarchan grief that inscribes and directs his generic limitations and truncates his poetic career. Given Spenser’s ongoing representations and critiques of Petrarchism, *Daphnaïda* may be Spenser’s 1591 estimation of what a literary career founded in the Petrarchan mode might look like in the circumstance of the beloved’s death, a circumstance which he had only partially addressed in *November*. But Colin, successful elegist though he may be, remains unrequited at the end of the *Calender*, and he therefore resolves to give up poetry. Alcyon, on the other hand, keeps wandering, presumably repeating his lament for anyone who will listen. Grief informs poetic creation, but, as *Daphnaïda* seems to warn, it also informs repetition and stagnation. Spenser’s translation of *Rime 323 (Visions of Petrarch)* in the 1591 *Complaints* continues the repetition of the beloved’s death that Alcyon performs in *Daphnaïda*. These poems confront the reader with a repetition of Laura’s death both through a series of dream metaphors and through their nature as translations. They also repeat themselves within Spenser’s corpus, first appearing in publication (in slightly different form) in the 1569 *Theatre for Voluptuous Worldlings*, long before their inclusion in *Complaints*. The recurrence of *Rime 323* indicates that Spenser had over two full decades in which to

---

<sup>94</sup> Donald V. Stump, “tragedy,” in *Spenser Encyclopedia*, 697.

contemplate and resurrect in print Petrarch's visions of Laura's death. Indeed, the problem these poems present seems to have occupied him a great deal. As a backdrop for *Daphnaïda*, *Visions of Petrarch* reinforces the inescapability of Petrarchan desire, particularly when confronted with the dead or dying beloved. In composing his 1591 Petrarchan elegy for the death of Douglas Howard, Spenser seems to be interrogating the limits of the Petrarchan mode for poetic creativity. The ongoing mourning and the repetition of the moment of the beloved's death arise from and stand in uneasy tension with the love the poet figure bore his beloved while she yet lived. Requitall cannot serve as a solution to Petrarchism, as *Daphnaïda* reveals, but it can augment the poet-lover's unhealthy attachment to the earthly over the spiritual. When requital returns to impediment by way of the beloved's death, the poet-lover finds himself trapped within his grief and within a poetic capacity of limited range and form. In *Daphnaïda*, then, the dead beloved unmoors the Petrarchan poet from the potential for a more expansive literary career.

If Colin's abandonment of pastoral in *December* signals Spenser's maturation into an epic poet, perhaps Alcyon, with his repeated and repetitive song and his attachment to an immortalizing mortality, may indicate Spenser's struggle to leave behind Petrarch and pastoral.<sup>95</sup> Both modes routinely resurface throughout his career, and while he attempts to resolve the *in vita* problems of Petrarchism in various places in his works, *Daphnaïda* perhaps provides insight into how troubled Spenser may have been by Petrarchism *in morte*. The struggles that Petrarch undergoes in the *in morte* section of the *Rime* remain undeniably unresolved in *Daphnaïda*. If the death of the beloved presents Petrarch with a spiritual solution to his earthly desires, he never fully embraces it, and perhaps *Daphnaïda* offers an explanation of this failure even as it expresses the dangers Petrarchan poetry may represent to an author's career. The poem's curious formal irresolution may suggest an anxiety

---

<sup>95</sup> P. Cheney writes that pastoral "is the form from which [Spenser] longs to escape," arguing that the division of his career into distinct phases represents a "disciplined struggle to move beyond pastoral, to assume fully the Virgilian mantle." "Spenser's Pastorals," 83.

that publishing Petrarchan poetry could somehow prevent the author from moving upward through the generic hierarchy. (Petrarch, after all, was best known not for his epic *Africa* but for his love poetry.) And if “Few Elizabethan sonnet cycles elaborate the spiritual aspect of the lady,” perhaps *Daphnaïda* warns against such neglect by portraying Alcyon turning away from the spiritual realm.<sup>96</sup> An emblem of the tensions between poetic creativity and grief, death and immortality, and earthly fame and divine transcendence, *Daphnaïda*, in so many ways an outlier in Spenser’s poetry, bears witness to the way Petrarchism *in morte* troubles spiritual enlightenment, literary form, and the laureate career.

---

<sup>96</sup> Montrose, “Poetics of Courtship,” 54.

## Chapter Two

## Petrarchan Poetics, Epic Conquest, and the

Death of Zenocrate in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great 1 & 2*

Whereas Spenser engages and reworks Petrarchism throughout his career, including in *Daphnaïda*, Marlowe deploys the mode only sporadically. Few critics would classify him as a Petrarchan writer. Despite a brief rumor to the contrary, Marlowe never authored a sonnet sequence, and critics often point out that the beloveds of his poetry and drama tend to be more Ovidian than Petrarchan—earthly, desirous, and attainable. But if “Marlowe’s poetry tends to reject the dominant Petrarchan mode,” it cannot be said that he abjures it entirely, “as his experiments with the form of the blazon and the received vocabulary of the Petrarchan tradition suggest.”<sup>97</sup> The eponymous protagonist of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, for example, woos Aeneas in Petrarchan terms. Similarly Petrarchan is Ithamore’s appeal to the courtesan Bellamira in *The Jew of Malta*.<sup>98</sup> *Tamburlaine*, however, stands out in Marlowe’s tendency to incorporate Petrarchan desire into a program of epic conquest. Both lover and warrior, *Tamburlaine* might seem to be the center of both amorous and epic discourse. He deploys Petrarchan language and amorous poetics as a means of conquest, and he even occupies the position of beloved without becoming subject to the disempowerment usually attendant upon that role. But if *Tamburlaine* is able to tame threatening aspects of Petrarchan language and desire and harness them for the purpose of conquest, both amorous and imperial, he derives this remarkable ability from his relationship with Zenocrate.

In both *1* and *2 Tamburlaine*, Zenocrate introduces an interaction between amorous and epic poetics that bolsters *Tamburlaine*’s imperial project in *Part 1* and that undermines that project in *Part*

---

<sup>97</sup> Danielle Clarke, “Marlowe’s Poetic Form” in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 57-67, 57, 65.

<sup>98</sup> Alan Shepard points out the Petrarchan aspects in *Dido* and *Jew of Malta* and uses them to inform his reading of masculinity and intimacy among soldiers. See *Marlowe’s Soldiers: Rhetorics of Masculinity in the Age of the Armada* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 65-75, 131-5.

2. As a beautiful woman and a foreign princess, Zenocrate suggests a combination of love and empire in her very identity. Tamburlaine perceives her as an object of desire and a means of empire building, two actions that are generically opposed but aligned in that they both feature versions of conquest. In capturing Zenocrate's person and her heart, Tamburlaine absorbs her as a desiring symbol of his empire. This conquest also attests to a poetic overcoming of the dangers of desire. Not only does Tamburlaine confront and overcome such desire, particularly the effeminizing Petrarchan obsession with the beloved's beauty, but he effectively retools Petrarchism into a device that props up epic conquest and heroic masculinity. He appropriates the mode to persuade Theridamas to join his army, and he is the subject of masculine blazons of epic praise, yet is not subject to the typically subjugating power of this device. Indeed, he appropriates the mode so fully that his heroic deeds inspire Zenocrate, the initially resistant beloved, to take up the position of suffering Petrarchan lover. Through Zenocrate, Tamburlaine adds a Petrarchan cast to his Ovidian and Virgilian poetics of war, building the mode into the very foundations of his empire and creating her as its symbol. Her death, therefore, deals a debilitating blow to Tamburlaine's capacity to reconcile love and war. The death of Zenocrate causes Tamburlaine to sink into a Petrarchan madness, and though he co-opts her corpse and her image as symbols of empire, they can only serve to inscribe the bounds of empire with mortality.

In Tamburlaine's relationship with Zenocrate, Marlowe colors Virgilian and Ovidian poetics with a Petrarchan language of love, crafting a hybrid poetics that unites, counters, and overgoes the relationship between love poetry and epic modeled in the works of his predecessors.<sup>99</sup> In *1 Tamburlaine*, Marlowe shows his skill in reconciling these classically opposed genres, but in *2 Tamburlaine* he reminds his audience of his authorial power to unravel that reconciliation. The death

---

<sup>99</sup> On Marlowe's counter-Virgilian and counter-Ovidian career, see Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997), 31-68.

of Zenocrate marks the start of this unravelling, and, as Tamburlaine absorbs her body and image into his epic program, he unwittingly circumscribes his expanding empire with death itself. In the *Tamburlaine* plays, then, Marlowe uses the figure of Zenocrate in two important ways: 1) to showcase his hero's (and, by extension, his own) capacity to reconcile epic and amatory poetics, and 2) to rupture this same generic unity by way of Zenocrate's death, effectively shifting the play from epic into tragedy.

With the notable exception of Roy Eriksen's work on Marlowe and Petrarch, *Tamburlaine* criticism offers no focused studies of the play's Petrarchan aspects. Eriksen's exceptionally thorough investigation locates "Petrarch's possible influence" in "Marlowe's adaptations of striking Petrarchan conceits to suit new contexts," in his "literary allusion[s]," and in his "praising [of] a patron or . . . self-advertisement."<sup>100</sup> A significant portion of Eriksen's argument relies on Tamburlaine's famous inset "What is beauty" sonnet (*1 Tamb.* 5.1.160-73), which "repeats the argument [of Petrarch's *Rime* 309] down to the *non . . . ancora*."<sup>101</sup> Other critics only gesture toward Petrarchan dynamics in *Tamburlaine*. Alexander Leggatt, for instance, argues that Tamburlaine "suffers" for his inability to express the beauty he sees in Zenocrate, though he does not connect this suffering with the poetic suffering and inexpressibility *topos* typically associated with the Petrarchan mode.<sup>102</sup> C. L. Barber observes Tamburlaine "drawing on traditions of courtly love poetry," while Clarke remarks that

---

<sup>100</sup> Eriksen, "Marlowe's Petrarch: *In morte di madonna Laura*," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 29 (1986): 13-25, 22. Eriksen also claims that an as yet undiscovered sonnet sequence, which, at the time of his essay's publication, was thought to be Marlowe's, offers further proof of Petrarch's influence, but the sonnet sequence in question was subsequently discovered in manuscript and Marlowe's authorship disproved. See Sukanta Chaudhuri, "Marlowe, Madrigals, and a New Elizabethan Poet," *Review of English Studies* 39 (1988): 199-216; and Paul H. Kocher, "A Marlowe Sonnet," *Philological Quarterly* 24 (1945): 39-45. See also Eriksen's other essay on the topic, which covers much of the same ground, "The Epilogue in *Doctor Faustus*: The Petrarchan Context," *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9 (2010): 1-16.

<sup>101</sup> Eriksen, "Marlowe's Petrarch," 20.

<sup>102</sup> Leggatt, "Tamburlaine's Sufferings," *Yearbook of English Studies* 3 (1973): 28-38. Benjamin Miele identifies the inexpressibility *topos* in Tamburlaine's "What is beauty" speech as a principle of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, suggesting that "Tamburlaine encounters a similar feeling of inadequacy because of Zenocrate's powerful hold over him." See "Zenocrate's Power, the 'Remorse of Conscience,' and Tamburlaine's Ovidian Impotence in *1* and *2 Tamburlaine*," *Marlowe Studies* 5 (2015): 131-50, 142.



Marlowe “experiments with the form of the blazon and the received vocabulary of the Petrarchan tradition.”<sup>103</sup> Lisa S. Starks explicitly compares Tamburlaine to a “Petrarchan sonneteer” for his use of “oxymorons” in praising Zenocrate.<sup>104</sup> Benjamin C. Miele reads Tamburlaine’s “What is beauty” speech as an ironizing “adaptation of Petrarch” that undercuts his heroic ethos, and Matthew R. Martin points out that Tamburlaine describes Zenocrate’s eyes “in a Petrarchan key.”<sup>105</sup> Such broad acknowledgment of the Petrarchan elements present in *Tamburlaine* strongly recommends the topic for a more extended inquiry, which this chapter attempts to provide.

If critical attention to the Petrarchan moments in *Tamburlaine* lacks a sustained focus, a markedly richer vein of investigation centers on the play’s genre. The respective title pages of both parts identify *Tamburlaine* as a tragedy, yet the Stationer’s Register logs it as a comedy.<sup>106</sup> Critics variously categorize the plays as *de casibus* tragedy, “heroic tragedy,” “heroic romance,” romance, a “Triumph of Death,” and “a romantic drama” that “is neither tragic nor comic, being primarily spectacular.”<sup>107</sup> The play itself invokes or performs the genres of funeral elegy, epitaph, epigram, and

---

<sup>103</sup> Barber, *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd*, ed. Richard P. Wheeler (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), 66; Clarke, “Marlowe’s Poetic Form,” 65. Critics often analyze the blazons in 1 and 2 *Tamburlaine* to support larger arguments. On the blazon and gender, see Tina Takapoui, “Kristevan Femininity and Negative Theology in Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine, I and II*,” *Early Modern Culture Online* 3 (2012): 69-87, 75; Timothy Francisco, “Marlowe’s War Horses: Cyborgs, Soldiers, and Queer Companions” in *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, ed. Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 47-65, 51-7; Timothy A. Turner, “Executing Calyphas: Gender, Discipline, and Sovereignty in 2 *Tamburlaine*,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 44 (2018): 141-56, 143. On the blazon and representation, see Sarah Emsley, “‘I Cannot Love, to Be an Emperess’: Women and Honour in *Tamburlaine*,” *Dalhousie Review* 80 (2000): 169-86, 182n23; Meg. F. Pearson, “‘Raving, Impatient, Desperate, and Mad’: *Tamburlaine*’s Spectacular Collapse,” *Marlowe Studies* 2 (2012): 87-102, 96.

<sup>104</sup> “‘Won with thy words and conquered with thy looks’: Sadism, Masochism, and the Masochistic Gaze in 1 *Tamburlaine*,” in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998), 179-93, 183.

<sup>105</sup> Miele, “Zenocrate’s Power,” 142; Matthew R. Martin, “Inferior Readings: The Transmigration of ‘Material’ in *Tamburlaine the Great*,” *Early Theatre* 17 (2014): 57-75, 69-70 and *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One and Two* (Tonawanda, NY: Broadview, 2014), 78n4.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Jones, printer of the 1590 edition of *Tamburlaine*, implies in “To the Gentleman Reader” that the play was staged more comedically than the printed text suggests, declaring that “I have purposely omitted and left out some fond and frivolous jestures.”

<sup>107</sup> Northrop Frye reads the play as “primarily spectacular” in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 283. Roy W. Battenhouse argues for *Tamburlaine* as a *de casibus* tragedy that should lead readers to condemn the play’s tyrannical protagonist in his foundation study *Marlowe’s Tamburlaine: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1941). Eugene M. Waith, on the other hand, calls the play a “Herculean tragedy”—a version of “heroic tragedy” that bases its hero’s story on that of Hercules and his “legendary feats,” *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 60-87, 13. J. S. Cunningham and Eithne Henson see

love elegy. To make matters more complicated, Marlowe's writings have routinely provoked polarized critical responses: does he "satirize" and "ironize" his hero, as Miele and others suggest, or does he expect his audience to take Tamburlaine's titanic self-importance seriously?<sup>108</sup> Is the audience meant to sympathize with Tamburlaine as a self-made man, or are we meant to condemn him as a power-hungry tyrant?<sup>109</sup> Marlowe, of course, gives his reader no clear answers, yet within the critical muddle about *Tamburlaine's* genre, the declaration of "epic features" remains a reliable fixture.<sup>110</sup>

Tamburlaine's "epic grandeur of style, with its resounding catalogue of exotic names, its hyperboles, and its heroic boasts and tirades," contributes to Marlowe's depiction of an epic hero, and the imperial project on which the play's action centers carries out the epic register of Tamburlaine's speeches.<sup>111</sup> If, as Clayton G. Mackenzie suggests, Tamburlaine "opens up the seemingly unthinkable possibility that Death itself is conquerable," he may be pushing against the very boundaries of the epic genre, pursuing an earthly immortality by reducing death to just another foe whose defeat is inevitable when faced with his irresistible might.<sup>112</sup> But if this is so, the death of Zenocrate in *2 Tamburlaine* reasserts the inescapability of mortality, and critics widely acknowledge her death as the first indicator that even Tamburlaine the Great may be susceptible to common

---

*Tamburlaine* as having characteristics of both heroic tragedy and heroic romance, Introduction to *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. J. S. Cunningham and Eithne Henson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998), 1-32, while Troni Y. Grande calls the play a "new strain of heroic tragedy," *Marlovian Tragedy: The Play of Dilation* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999), 46. Michael Neill sees *Tamburlaine* as performing a "Triumph of Death" as part of the English dramatic tradition that takes its cue from Petrarch's *Trionfi*, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997), 92-101. Richard A. Martin (1978) understands the play's tragedy as arising from the "subordination of the romantic imagination" to unavoidable reality of death, "Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and the Language of Romance," *PMLA* 93 (1978): 248-64, 263.  
<sup>108</sup> Miele, "Zenocrate's Power," 142.

<sup>109</sup> For the sympathetic perspective, see Waith, *The Herculean Hero*. For the perspective of Tamburlaine as tyrant who deserves the death that he finally receives, see Battenhouse, *Marlowe's Tamburlaine*.

<sup>110</sup> Grande, *Marlovian Tragedy*, 46

<sup>111</sup> Waith, *The Herculean Hero*, 87.

<sup>112</sup> "Marlowe's Grisly Monster: Death in *Tamburlaine, Parts One & Two*," *The Dalhousie Review* 87 (2007): 9-24, 28. On Tamburlaine as a figure of death itself, see David Hard Zucker, *Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Salzburg: U of Salzburg P, 1972), 48. On *Tamburlaine*, tragedy, epic, and immortality, see Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession*, 115-35.

mortality. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the death of the hero's beloved wife in *2 Tamburlaine* subverts the conventional epic *teloi* of immortality and empire by introducing death itself as the ultimate—and perhaps the only—impediment to Tamburlaine's otherwise irresistible powers of conquest.<sup>113</sup>

Critics broadly agree that Tamburlaine, in his adoption of Zenocrate as a symbol of his empire and martial might, subsumes his beloved wife into the spectacle of his imperial project. His poetic persuasion overcomes the initially resistant Egyptian princess as handily as his military might does cities and nations.<sup>114</sup> And despite widespread critical assessments of Zenocrate as passive, she does, as Miele contends, represent a force of resistance for Tamburlaine to conquer.<sup>115</sup> Miele's essay demonstrates Zenocrate's surprising hold over Tamburlaine that most critics leave unacknowledged; not only does the legitimation and continuation of his empire rely on her in her roles as empress and mother, but she is also the only character able to pass moral judgment on Tamburlaine or to dissuade him from killing.<sup>116</sup> In crowning Zenocrate empress in *Part 1* and memorializing her in terms of his own conquests in *Part 2*, Tamburlaine subsumes his beloved into his highly contrived epic spectacle, producing and re-producing her image as a symbol of his martial success.<sup>117</sup> As Alan

---

<sup>113</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett assesses Tamburlaine's susceptibility to death through the lens of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in "Tamburlaine and the Body," *Criticism* 33 (1991): 31-47.

<sup>114</sup> R. Martin argues that in conquering Zenocrate, Tamburlaine is later able to conquer beauty itself, "Language of Romance," 252-7. On Zenocrate as colonized, see Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997), 142; and Catherine Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2014), 150. On theatrical colonization in *Tamburlaine*, see Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., "Space, Measurement, and Stalking Tamburlaine," *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997): 3-27.

<sup>115</sup> On Zenocrate's passivity, see Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire*, 149; Joanna Gibbs, "Marlowe's Politic Women," in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, ed. J. A. Downie and J. T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 164-76, 173; Shepard, *Marlowe's Soldiers*, 38. On Zenocrate's resistance to Tamburlaine, see Miele, "Zenocrate's Power."

<sup>116</sup> Miele makes precisely these points in "Zenocrate's Power," 133-6. Because of Zenocrate's unique ability to pass moral judgments on Tamburlaine's actions, many critics read her as a figure by which we may judge the morality of her husband's actions. See, for instance, Joel B. Altman, *Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978), 330; Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 194-221, 212; Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues*, 151;

<sup>117</sup> On Tamburlaine's creation of and reliance on spectacle, see David H. Thurn, "Sights of Power in *Tamburlaine*," *English Literary Renaissance* 19 (1989): 3-21; and Pearson, "Tamburlaine's Spectacular Collapse."

Shepard notes, “Dead, . . . [Zenocrate] serves his cause with silent devotion.”<sup>118</sup> Tamburlaine’s appropriation of Zenocrate’s image and body reduces her to a symbol of his imperial project and martial prowess, a demonstration of her husband’s “absolute sovereignty.”<sup>119</sup> But if critics widely agree that Tamburlaine recuperates his dead wife as an image of his own might, they neglect the implications of this maneuver for the play’s representation of epic.

In this chapter, I argue that Marlowe establishes Zenocrate as the primary figure through which Tamburlaine acquires and plays out the conjunction of poetic modes, and that Zenocrate, as body and symbol, serves as a crucial pillar of support for Tamburlaine’s construction of empire. In *1 Tamburlaine*, Marlowe’s hero embeds amorous desire for Zenocrate within a discourse of epic achievement, thereby demonstrating a capacity to conquer and unite not just nations but literary modes. And in *2 Tamburlaine*, Zenocrate represents a renewed division between love and arms in her wish that Tamburlaine would retire from the battlefield as well as in her death. Through her death and funeral, Tamburlaine subsumes her as an image of his martial enterprise, keeping her corpse with him from battlefield to battlefield. But by adopting a corpse as an emblem of his epic accomplishments, Tamburlaine builds mortality into epic, thereby subverting both the continuity of his empire as well as the immortality associated with the epic hero.

The first section below establishes the relationship between the *Tamburlaine* plays, Virgilian epic, and Ovidian love poetry, and it suggests the ways in which Marlowe deployed Petrarchan aspects and language to modify both. In responding to these authors’ models of epic and amatory

---

<sup>118</sup> “Endless Sacks: Soldiers’ Desire in *Tamburlaine*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 46 (1993): 734-53, 740. See also Shepard’s parallel point in *Marlowe’s Soldiers*, 64. On Zenocrate as subsumed, see Thurn, “Sights of Power,” 19; Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 220; Gibbs, “Marlowe’s Politic Women,” 173; Emsley, “Women and Honour,” 182; Carolyn Scott, “Consuming Sorrow: Conversion and Consumption in *Tamburlaine: Part One*” in *Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman: Lives, Stage, and Page*, ed. Sarah K. Scott and M. L. Stapleton (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 199-213, 208; Meg F. Pearson, “*Tamburlaine*’s Spectacular Collapse,” 90; Alison Findlay, “Marlowe and Women” in Bartels and Smith, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 242-51, 249.

<sup>119</sup> Thurn, “Sights of Power,” 17-18. In contrast, Judith Weil sees Tamburlaine’s attempt to reduce Zenocrate to a “symbol of ideal beauty” as the height of his “difficulty in mastering life through art,” *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin’s Prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977), 135.

poetry, Marlowe conjures each model in order to counter it. The second section therefore demonstrates how Tamburlaine invokes Ovidian and Petrarchan discourses of love, overcomes the threats (to both poet-lover and beloved) associated with them, and embeds these discourses within his rhetoric of epic. Zenocrate, both beautiful and politically valuable, allows Tamburlaine to establish this integration of poetic modes as a precedent of seduction, through which he woos Theridamas into joining his forces, and of epic strength, demonstrated by his resistance to amorous suffering and to the dismembering effects of the blazon. Through Zenocrate, Marlowe creates Tamburlaine as a hero who can overcome the enervating dangers of love and repurpose them in support of epic ambitions.

In the fourth and final section, I argue that in *2 Tamburlaine* Zenocrate sparks the renewed separation of amorous and epic poetics that her husband had reconciled in the first play. She reestablishes the opposition between love and war by asking her husband to refrain from further battle, but more importantly, her death confronts Tamburlaine with an insurmountable impediment to loving union with his wife. Such an impediment disrupts Tamburlaine's ability to overcome the Petrarchan pains of love, and he starts to resemble the suffering poet-lover. Further, his love and inconsolable grief for his wife leads him to take up her image and her corpse as symbols of his empire, and, though he thinks to represent himself as threatening, these symbols instead emphasize his own inability to control death. As he carries Zenocrate's hearse with him to every battle, its presence asserts mortality as a force that limits the scope of empire and thwarts the epic *telos* of immortality. Through the corpse of Zenocrate in *2 Tamburlaine*, Marlowe finally transforms his staged epic into the "tragic glass" promised in the Prologue of *1 Tamburlaine*.<sup>120</sup>

*Elevating Virgil and Ovid through Petrarch*

---

<sup>120</sup> All references to *1* and *2 Tamburlaine* taken from *Tamburlaine, Parts I and II, Doctor Faustus, A- and B-Texts, The Jew of Malta, Edward II*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, reissued 2008).

Marlowe's works frequently exhibit a tension between love and war, a convention rooted in the classical division between epic and amorous poetry and prominently featured in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Amores*. Marlowe reproduces this tension in staging the Dido episode from Book IV of the *Aeneid* in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, and in translating Ovid's *Amores*, which opens with Cupid compelling the narrator to write love elegy rather than epic. Indeed, Marlowe maintains an ongoing fascination with this polarity, as works like *Hero and Leander*, which has been called both a "minor epic" and an "erotic complaint," attest.<sup>121</sup> These themes also surface in *Tamburlaine*, and, as M. L. Stapleton observes, "Tamburlaine's frequent pairing of romantic and martial language appears to have had its genesis in the Ovidian *bellum Amoris*, its *locus classicus* *Amores* 1.9."<sup>122</sup> Indeed, as Stapleton goes on to argue, Marlowe's encounter with Ovid in translating his elegies seems to have followed him into many of his other works, including the *Tamburlaine* plays.<sup>123</sup>

Tamburlaine has much in common with the narrating persona of Ovid's *Amores*. In addition to the Scythian shepherd's combining the languages of love and of war, Stapleton detects the following similarities: Tamburlaine's constant self-interestedness, his "destabiliz[ing of] himself by his rhetorical excess," his "insensitivity, hollowness, and self-delusion" regarding Zenocrate's feelings, his "spectacular callousness amidst the horrors he perpetrates," and his desire of "objects" that "correspond to the feminine bodily analogue" (in Tamburlaine's case, a crown that corresponds to the body of Zenocrate).<sup>124</sup> He attempts to woo his beloved by offering her material goods (*I*

---

<sup>121</sup> Clarke, "Marlowe's Poetic Form," 58.

<sup>122</sup> *Marlowe's Ovid*, 79. Stapleton argues for the ongoing influence of Ovid's *Amores* throughout Marlowe's body of work. He tracks this influence in *Tamburlaine* primarily through the vectors of "the Ovidian metaphor of love's war, first identified by Warren D. Smith (1970), and Michael Goldman's concept of the 'histrionics of ravishment' (1977)," 78. See Smith, "The Substance of Meaning in *Tamburlaine, Part 1*," *Studies in Philology* 67 (1970): 156-66; and Goldman, "Marlowe and the Histrionics of Ravishment" in *Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), 22-40.

<sup>123</sup> *Marlowe's Ovid*, 57-80.

<sup>124</sup> *Marlowe's Ovid: The Elegies in the Marlowe Canon* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 57-80, 67, 68, 69, 70, 79.

*Tamb.* 1.2.87-105).<sup>125</sup> He also desires an eternizing fame (“Even as thou hop’st to be eternized,” *1 Tamb.* 1.2.72), and he grounds that fame in his earthly accomplishments and in his creation of an eternal image of his beloved (“Calling the provinces, cities, and towns / After my name and thine, Zenocrate,” *1 Tamb.* 4.4.82-3) just as the persona of the *Amores* promises in Elegy 1.3, “So likewise we will through the world be rung, / And with my name shall thine be always sung” (25-6).<sup>126</sup>

Tamburlaine’s search for fame resonates also with Virgilian epic insofar as his idea of fame relies upon success in conquest and imperial expansion. In the figure of Tamburlaine, Marlowe stages an “imitat[ion of] Spenser’s . . . Virgilian turn from pastoral to epic” in order to rewrite Spenser’s Virgilian program.<sup>127</sup> Marlowe crafts his hero’s aspiration to earthly fame as a counter to the dedication to duty, destiny, and the gods embodied in Virgil’s Aeneas. Further, Marlowe extends this counter-Virgilian fame to a counter-Spenserian one, glorifying fame as “the perfect bliss and sole felicity of an earthly crown,” ultimately making “[e]arthly fame . . . irreconcilable with Christian glory.”<sup>128</sup> Tamburlaine’s model of earthly fame recalls the similarly earthbound terms of *Amores* 1.3, “we will through the world be rung,” aligning Ovid’s counter-Virgilian approach with his own. Marlowe thus imitates Ovid in order to counter the laureate poet Virgil and his English, self-proclaimed successor, Spenser.<sup>129</sup> But if Tamburlaine is not entirely Virgilian in war, neither is he entirely Ovidian in love.

---

<sup>125</sup> All *Tamburlaine* quotes taken from *Tamburlaine, Parts I and II*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), reissued 2008.

<sup>126</sup> All translations of the *Amores* used in this chapter are Marlowe’s. All quotations from Marlowe’s poetry are from *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Brian J. Striar (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

<sup>127</sup> Cheney, *Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession*, 119.

<sup>128</sup> Cheney, *Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession*, 131. See 115-35 for a fuller account of Marlowe’s counter-Spenserian project in *Tamburlaine*. Cheney elsewhere argues for Tamburlaine as a figure of both imperialism and republican liberty in *Marlowe’s Republican Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 96-120.

<sup>129</sup> Cheney reads key amorous moments in *Tamburlaine* as emblematic of Marlowe’s Ovidian career progression, triangulating “[love] elegy, tragedy, and epic,” and thereby reworking and countering the Virgilian career model with its prioritization of epic poetry and nationalistic sentiment. *Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession*, 117, 116-20.

Tamburlaine is a far cry from the lascivious, ironic, and occasionally detumescent poet figure of the *Amores*. If Marlowe counters the transcendence of Spenserian-Virgilian epic with an Ovidian focus on earthly desires, he elevates those desires through aspects of Petrarchan love. Whereas “Ovid’s *Elegies* refuses to *idealize* desire,” *Tamburlaine* offers a new, earthly ideal in the protagonist’s love for the “divine Zenocrate.”<sup>130</sup> Just as Petrarch’s poet figure does for Laura, Tamburlaine elevates Zenocrate to divine status and even apotheosizes her after her death.<sup>131</sup> And though he does not share in the pain of non-requital that the narrator of the *Rime* suffers, he does encounter impediments to his union with Zenocrate, specifically her initial resistance in *Part 1* and her death in *Part 2*. Further, Tamburlaine uses Petrarchan tactics in his wooing of both Zenocrate and Theridamas, but unlike Petrarch, Marlowe writes a persuasive character whose magnetism is so great that he never experiences rejection. Tamburlaine’s Virgilian aspects allow him to succeed in war; his Ovidian aspects allow him to succeed in love; and his Petrarchan aspects elevate the conditions of that love. Tamburlaine’s success represents Marlowe’s capacity as an author to overcome the obstacles of all three of these major poets. He even subjects his hero to various blazons, a device that rhetorically dismembers its subject but that, when applied to the mighty Tamburlaine, becomes an epic catalogue of his powerful features.

Zenocrate is even less Ovidian than Tamburlaine. She is no Corinna, though she is attainable. She is loyal, harboring desire only for her lover and eventual husband. Neither Tamburlaine nor the play overtly sexualizes Zenocrate, and she and Tamburlaine remain steadfastly dedicated to one another. She presents no obvious threat to Tamburlaine’s masculinity or virility,

---

<sup>130</sup> Cheney, “Introduction: Authorship in Marlowe’s Poems,” in *Collected Poems* 8, 1-25.

<sup>131</sup> Charles G. Masinton argues that Tamburlaine expects his speech to effect Zenocrate’s apotheosis in *Christopher Marlowe’s Tragic Vision* (Athens, GA: Ohio UP, 1972), 50. Though he does not mention Petrarch, Masinton effectively reverses Petrarch’s expectation that the deceased Laura, whom Petrarch canonizes as a saint, will apotheosize her poet-lover upon his death. Alternatively, Cartwright locates her apotheosis in the scene of Arabia’s death in Part 1. See *Theatre and Humanism*, 219.



though her image does function as a crucial vehicle of his intended fame. And rather than preventing her lover from epic conquest, Zenocrate acts as a foundational component of such conquest.

Zenocrate, does, however, share some qualities with her corresponding figure in Petrarch's *Rime*: Laura. Though Zenocrate requites Tamburlaine's love, she nevertheless presents a force of resistance in both plays. In *1 Tamburlaine*, she initially cannot requite her captor's love and, later in the play, she persuades Tamburlaine to spare the life of her father. Less successfully, in *2 Tamburlaine* Zenocrate urges her husband to leave the "dangerous chances of the wrathful war" (1.3.11). Like Laura, she inspires her lover to describe his amorous feelings in martial terms, but unlike Laura, Zenocrate combines beauty and political advantage (via her royal status), allowing her poet-lover to reconcile the discourses of love and war through marriage to her.<sup>132</sup> Her function as a Petrarchan beloved emerges through Tamburlaine's use of Petrarchan tropes (e.g., calling her his sun or describing her icy beauty), and like Laura, Zenocrate represents the divine for her poet-lover.<sup>133</sup> After her death, Tamburlaine imagines her outshining all the other stars in heaven.<sup>134</sup> He sees her beauty as omnipresent, as a light to the world, and when confronted with the reality of her death, he, like the narrator of the *Rime*, cannot relinquish his beloved. Instead, he aestheticizes her in a series of items at her funeral, literally creating her as an image, and he carries her corpse around with him until his death. Though Marlowe does not exactly reproduce Petrarch's poet-lover and his beloved Laura on stage, he nevertheless invests his pair of lovers with a good deal of their features. Given Eriksen's correlation between Tamburlaine's "What is beauty" sonnet and *Rime* 309, along with

---

<sup>132</sup> Petrarch often describes love as war. In *Rime* 107, for example, he writes that Laura's "lovely eyes make such long war on me that I fear, alas, the excessive torment will destroy my heart, which never knows a truce." Robert M. Durling (trans.), *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976).

<sup>133</sup> According to Miele, "Tamburlaine refers to her as 'divine Zenocrate' at least nine times in both plays. See *1Tam*, 4.4.28, 5.1.135, 5.1.506; and *2Tam*, 2.4.21, 2.4.25, 2.4.29, 2.4.33, 2.4.111, and 3.2.27." See "Zenocrate's Power," 131n2. By my count, however, Tamburlaine uses the phrase ten times, though the first occurrence in *2 Tamburlaine* is spelled "devine" (2.4.17) in early print editions of the text, which may explain Miele's miscount.

<sup>134</sup> "Zenocrate's Power," 131n2.

others' persistent acknowledgment of Petrarchan aspects in the play, the similarities between Marlowe's couple and Petrarch's cannot be dismissed as coincident.

Marlowe thus presents a complicated overlay of intertextual influences, drawing as he does upon Virgil for Tamburlaine's heroic aspects, on Ovid for his focus on material gains (both imperial and romantic), and on Petrarch for his hyperbolic language of beauty and love. And each influencing author counters the last. Tamburlaine's Ovidian tendency to pursue empire and love for the sake of satisfying his own desires, and his unrelenting success in both, refutes the Virgilian notions of duty, destiny, and self-sacrifice; were Tamburlaine in Aeneas's position, he would ignore the command of the gods, marry Dido, and found his empire anywhere he liked. And *Tamburlaine's* Petrarchan aspects elevate the terms of love from the non-idealized forms of sexual desire showcased in the *Amores* to an aestheticizing, almost hyperbolic language of divine beauty. And when the Petrarchan blazon is applied to male warriors like Tamburlaine and Theridamas, it strangely counters the *Amores's* emasculating experience of love. Applying Petrarchan language to Ovidian desire elevates that desire toward love and allows Marlowe to demonstrate that his warrior figures need not be enervated by such love. Nor must they suffer as the Petrarchan poet-lover suffers. Requitil is achievable, and it strengthens *Tamburlaine's* warriors, proving that, in the hands of the right poet-playwright, the epic hero can win the day *and* get the girl.

#### *Conquering Amatory Poetics with Epic*

Through the love Zenocrate inspires and the Petrarchan suffering that she herself briefly experiences, Marlowe injects *1 Tamburlaine* with Petrarchan language and devices in order to display his hero's capacity to conquer the dangers of amatory poetics, particularly as conceived through Petrarch, Virgil, and Ovid, and then to put that poetics to use in constructing an empire. Unlike Virgil's Aeneas, Tamburlaine seeks to build an empire for his own glory, and he remains undeterred by love. Nor does love diminish his masculine virility, as Ovid's love for Corinna sometimes does.

Nor does it inflict the pleasurable pain of lifelong pining after a woman who rejects him, as does Petrarch's love for Laura. Rather, Marlowe presents his hero encountering and overcoming all of these threats. Tamburlaine's appeal to Zenocrate appears in Ovidian and Petrarchan terms in order to showcase his ability to confront and overcome the threats these discourses present. He generates a version of love that supports the masculine enterprise of empire-building, absorbing the amorous into the epic. And Zenocrate, too, undergoes the experience of Petrarchan love—an event that has yet to receive critical attention—taking Tamburlaine as her object of desire and amorous suffering. But Marlowe recontextualizes desire around his hero, reformulating it in terms of masculine virtue and martial strength. Thus, when male characters blazon Tamburlaine, they enhance his reputation as a warrior.

But if Tamburlaine serves as the primary performer of Marlowe's revised discourse of desire, Zenocrate acts as the vehicle through which Tamburlaine establishes generic precedent. The figure of the beautiful Egyptian princess lies at the intersection of love and empire, thereby allowing Tamburlaine to successfully fuse the rhetoric of both. She inspires him to produce amorous poetry and to vanquish his enemies, and her royal status allows him a measure of legitimacy in claiming the title of emperor.<sup>135</sup> Marlowe implies Zenocrate's generic significance structurally in *1 Tamburlaine* by embedding Tamburlaine's change of costume from pastoral shepherd to warrior within his first overture to her (1.2.34-51), and by closing the play with Tamburlaine's crowning of her to celebrate his empire (5.1.505-33). These two key moments bookend Tamburlaine's appearances on stage, suggesting the centrality of Zenocrate to Tamburlaine's epic agenda, and his incorporation of amorous language throughout the play reinforces this centrality.

---

<sup>135</sup> On the importance of Zenocrate's royal status, see Miele, "Zenocrate's Power," 136.

Tamburlaine's first appearance on stage in *Part 1* builds the language of seduction into an epic context. He opens trying to woo Zenocrate with her own riches, which he, having accosted her train, has just seized from her:

Come, lady, let not this appal your thoughts.  
 The jewels and the treasure we have ta'en  
 Shall be reserved, and you in better state  
 Than if you were arrived in Syria,  
 Even in the circle of your father's arms,  
 The mighty Sultan of Egyptia.                   (1 *Tamb.* 1.2.1-6)

Marlowe here borrows from his own love lyric, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," to develop Tamburlaine's amorous appeal to Zenocrate, inserting that appeal into an epic context.<sup>136</sup>

Tamburlaine's opening line above—his very first line in the play—echoes the first line of "The Passionate Shepherd": "Come live with me, and be my love" (1). In fact, much of Tamburlaine's wooing recalls the language and tone of this poem, particularly the inventory of gifts that the speaker promises his beloved, though in *Tamburlaine* Marlowe shifts the pastoral context of his poem to a martial one. Whereas the passionate shepherd would woo his mistress with country pleasures, such as a "gown made of the finest wool" (13) and "fair lined slippers for the cold" (15), Tamburlaine shifts the nature of the promised material gain from pastoral goods of love to epic spoils of war, at least two of which he bases on that which Zenocrate already possesses.

In seeking to win her with promises of "treasure" and the improved status of "better state," Tamburlaine appropriates what already belongs to Zenocrate—wealth and royal status—and offers it again to her on the condition that she "live with me" (1.2.82). In fact, though he offers these

---

<sup>136</sup> On amorous appeal in Marlowe's "Passionate Shepherd," see R. S. Forsythe, "The Passionate Shepherd; And English Poetry," *PMLA* 40 (1925): 692-742.

rewards to Zenocrate, had he not abducted her train, he would not have them in the first place. Even in Tamburlaine's first words to her, he appropriates parts of her and repurposes them as seductive tools within a discourse of epic ambition. And buried within the offer of "better state / Than if you were . . . / Even in the circle of your father's arms" lies the implicit threat of Tamburlaine's martial violence. Much as "The Passionate Shepherd" implies the "threat of force" in its aggressive invitation to the lady, Tamburlaine's offer anticipates a martial victory over the Sultan's army.<sup>137</sup> Thus, were Zenocrate to remain in her "father's arms" and, by extension, the military safety he can provide, Tamburlaine's forces would conquer both such "arms." The "better state" he offers Zenocrate is precisely her own life. Thus, in his wooing of her Tamburlaine weaves into amorous discourse a principle of epic conquest that promises great wealth and power even as it tacitly threatens the object of his affection.

Tamburlaine continues to echo "The Passionate Shepherd" in his attempts to persuade Zenocrate with a longer list of promised goods. The technique of providing an inventory of gifts as a means seduction has its roots primarily in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, particularly in the story of Polyphemus and Galatea.<sup>138</sup> Tamburlaine's extensive use of this method reveals an Ovidian dynamic in his approach to love, yet the inventory itself anticipates Tamburlaine's martial victories:

Disdains Zenocrate to live with me?  
 . . . . .  
 Zenocrate, lovelier than the love of Jove,  
 Brighter than is the silver Rhodope,  
 Fairer than whitest snow on Scythian hills,  
 Thy person is more worth to Tamburlaine

---

<sup>137</sup> Douglas Bruster, "Come to the Tent Again': 'The Passionate Shepherd,' Dramatic Rape, and Lyric Time," *Criticism* 33 (1991): 49-72, 61.

<sup>138</sup> On the influence of this tale on "The Passionate Shepherd," see Bruster, "Come to the Tent Again,'" 50-1.

Than the possession of the Persian crown,  
 Which gracious stars have promised at my birth.  
 A hundred Tartars shall attend on thee,  
 Mounted on steeds swifter than Pegasus;  
 Thy garments shall be made of Median silk,  
 Enchased with precious jewels of mine own,  
 More rich and valorous than Zenocrate's;  
 With milk-white harts upon an ivory sled  
 Thou shalt be drawn amidst the frozen pools  
 And scale the icy mountains' lofty tops,  
 Which with thy beauty will be soon resolved;  
 My martial prizes with five hundred men,  
 Won on the fifty-headed Volga's waves,  
 Shall all we offer to Zenocrate,  
 And then myself to fair Zenocrate.      (*1 Tamb.*, 1.2.82-105)

Tamburlaine phrases his overture in terms of epic conquest that elevate and constrain Zenocrate. He first portrays her as his equal by comparing her to Juno, Queen of the gods and wife of Jove, whose power Tamburlaine alternately invokes and threatens to surpass throughout both plays. He also inserts Zenocrate into his self-fashioned narrative progression from pastoral to epic. Mirroring his own shedding of his shepherd's "weeds" for "This complete armour and this curtle axe" (41-2), Tamburlaine compares Zenocrate to the "whitest snow on the Scythian hills" in order to imagine her surpassing that pastoral setting with a "worth" that exceeds "the possession of the Persian crown." He promises her the people and the goods of conquered lands as well as his very own "jewels" (which he doubtless derives from pillaging those same lands). And he forecasts her ascent,

should she accept his love, to the earthly heights of “mountains’ lofty tops.” Tamburlaine invests the Ovidian seduction technique of “The Passionate Shepherd” with an epic poetics that promises to raise Zenocrate to a status equal with that of her lover, even as it seeks to appropriate and contain the Egyptian princess in a role that supports Tamburlaine’s epic ambitions.

While Tamburlaine’s inventory of promised gifts allows him to overgo the poet of the *Amores* by overcoming the division between epic and amorous poetics, his famously frigid description of Zenocrate allows him to overgo Petrarch’s narrator in the description of and response to his beloved. The iciness that Tamburlaine associates with Zenocrate in “frozen pools” and “icy mountains” recalls that which is conventionally attributed to the coldly chaste and unreciprocating Petrarchan mistress. Petrarch routinely depicts Laura’s resistance in such terms and pairs them with descriptions that characterize his own frustrated desire as a kind of burning. In Tamburlaine’s speech, however, Marlowe makes two significant changes to this equation. First, he omits the conventional burning of the poet-lover. Unlike Petrarch’s narrator, Tamburlaine expresses his desire and affection from a position of power rather than powerlessness, much like the speaker of “The Passionate Shepherd.” Second, he locates coldness in Zenocrate’s environment, not in Zenocrate herself. He situates her *above* the “icy mountains’ lofty tops,” elevating her beyond the physicality of Ovidian desire that usually attends a seductive inventory of gifts, and marking her as separate from and superior to the conditions of frigidity. In soaring above the icy mountains, Zenocrate exists at a remove from the liberal sexuality of a Corinna and the cold inaccessibility of a Laura. Instead, her presence will “soon resolve” the ice of non-requital. Through this description, Tamburlaine transforms Zenocrate into a beloved that surpasses those of Ovid and Petrarch. Chaste but not cold, sexually accessible but only by way of marriage and “martial prizes,” Zenocrate is the canvas on which Tamburlaine paints the image of his ideal beloved.

But if Tamburlaine's aestheticization of Zenocrate places her above the Petrarchan mistress, the very act of that aestheticization aligns him with the poet-lover of Petrarch's *Rime*. In Petrarchan poetry, such idealizing erases the voice and agency of the mistress in favor of her masculine image, and Zenocrate reflects this loss in her initial encounter with Tamburlaine. She speaks, but she knows her agency has been compromised. When Tamburlaine asks her if she is "betrothed," she responds, "I am, my lord—for so you do import" (1.2.32-3), clearly indicating that her voice and her decisions are not her own. Marlowe showcases Zenocrate's silencing—and her resistance—by ending the scene with her repetition of the same sentiment: "I must be pleased perforce. Wretched Zenocrate!" (1.2.259). Though Tamburlaine offers her position and the worldly goods of empire, he also silences her opposition; for all his promises, she remains his captive. In order to legitimately claim the title of emperor, Tamburlaine's martial rhetoric must incorporate an amatory dynamic in order to win the love of Zenocrate. The weaving together of the amatory and the epic modes in Tamburlaine's seduction speech thus makes Zenocrate the subjugated object of love and empire.

Tamburlaine's persuasion of Theridamas also relies on the rhetorical techniques of love poetry to support his martial enterprise.<sup>139</sup> He again echoes the opening of "The Passionate Shepherd," addressing Theridamas, "If thou wilt stay with me" (1.2.188), and again he offers "martial spoil / Of conquered kingdoms and of cities sacked" (1.2.191-2). He promises Theridamas an elevated status to equal his own, such that both will "reign as consuls of the earth" (1.2.197). Yet Tamburlaine's rhetoric here not only mirrors that he uses upon Zenocrate, it also relies on Zenocrate as a signifier of his inevitable success in conquest. Vaunting divine assurance of his success, he claims Zenocrate as evidence of Jove's favor: "He sends this Sultan's daughter, rich and brave, / To be my queen and portly emperess" (1.2.180-7).

---

<sup>139</sup> Ian McAdam observes the homosocial dynamic between Tamburlaine and Theridamas and connects it to what he sees as Marlowe's nascent homosexuality. *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999), 86-9.



In his appeal to Theridamas, Tamburlaine further echoes his overture to Zenocrate by including another classical allusion of female subjugation: “See how he [Jove] rains down heaps of gold in showers / As if he meant to give my soldiers pay!” (1.2.182-3). In his appeal to Zenocrate, he tells her she will be “Mounted on steeds swifter than Pegasus,” the winged horse born at the moment of Medusa’s death at the hand of Perseus. In his appeal to Theridamas, Tamburlaine metaphorizes his accumulating wealth as the golden rain of Jove himself, recalling the rape of Danaë, in which the god impregnates the unsuspecting woman by taking on exactly this form of precipitation.<sup>140</sup> Importantly, Perseus is the product of this union. This heroic figure arises from the irresistible, violent force of a god’s desire; not only is his mother the victim of rape, but so is Medusa, whom he later kills in a moment of heroic action.<sup>141</sup> Tamburlaine’s appeals to Zenocrate and Theridamas therefore seem to suggest that sexual violence goes hand in hand with heroic accomplishment—yet Marlowe again evokes a tradition only to contradict it by his hero’s superhuman superiority. Despite Tamburlaine’s abduction of Zenocrate, he offers her no ill treatment, sexually or otherwise. In Zenocrate’s own words, “The entertainment we have had of him / Is far from villainy or servitude, / And might in noble minds be counted princely” (3.2.37-9). Though Tamburlaine effectively dictates the terms of amorous persuasion, embedding seduction in a context of conquest, he never uses force against Zenocrate or any of his allies. By invoking Jove’s rape of Danaë and then *not* performing the same upon Zenocrate, Tamburlaine puts on display his

---

<sup>140</sup> In an expression of his own powerlessness to win Laura, Petrarch writes of Jove’s rape of Danaë. Near the end of *Rime* 23, he complains that he “was never the cloud of gold that once descended in a precious rain so that it partly quenched the fire of Jove,” (161-3). Marlowe’s reference to this myth in a scene of double-wooing (i.e., Zenocrate and Theridamas) may be an early indicator of Tamburlaine’s capacity to succeed where Petrarch had failed.

<sup>141</sup> At the end of the *Rime sparse*, Petrarch refers to Laura as “Medusa” (366.111), and Nancy J. Vickers suggests that for Petrarch (and Shakespeare, in *The Rape of Lucrece*), the Medusa figure embodies a feminine force that endangers the male poet and therefore must be conquered, whether through Perseus’s beheading or through the linguistic containment of the blazon. “‘The blazon of sweet beauty’s best’: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 95-115, 112.

godlike power to “force” his prisoners “with slavery” and his more-than-godlike habit of rewarding his “friends” with “honours as your merits be” (1.2.241, 255-6).

While Tamburlaine’s amorous appeal to Zenocrate—and his martial appeal to Theridamas that echoes it—aligns him with the Petrarchan poet-lover, wielding his persuasive and poetic powers to win the love (whether heterosexual or homosocial) of his desired object, Marlowe also casts Tamburlaine himself as an object of desire. In Virgil, Ovid, and Petrarch, the desired beloved has, at best, a little influence over the amorous relationship, and at worst none at all: Dido, queen in her own right, has no power over Aeneas’s departure; Ovid’s Corinna strives with her lover for control of their sexual dynamic; and Petrarch’s narrator fetishizes the silent, idealized image of Laura, overshadowing the real woman. Marlowe makes Tamburlaine the object of desire, again in both heterosexual and homosocial contexts, but allows his hero to overcome the potential powerlessness that typically accompanies this role. He casts Tamburlaine as the object of Zenocrate’s love in Act 3 and of several blazons delivered by various men throughout the play. Both the device of the blazon and the idiom of Zenocrate’s love are Petrarchan, and while both position Tamburlaine as desired, neither imposes the silencing or powerlessness that Petrarchan poets typically inflict on the beloved. Rather, in casting Tamburlaine as desired, Marlowe again inserts the amorous into a martial context, thereby presenting his hero’s capacity to overcome a position of disempowerment from the other side of a Petrarchan relationship.

Soldiers throughout *1 Tamburlaine* blazon the protagonist’s heroic attributes in epic terms. Ubiquitous in English Petrarchism, the blazon rhetorically anatomizes and dismembers its object, but when applied to Tamburlaine, it serves only to enhance his larger-than-life reputation.<sup>142</sup> Menaphon describes Tamburlaine’s “stature tall,” “his joints so strongly knit,” his “breadth of

---

<sup>142</sup> On the blazon as a device of dismemberment and fragmentation, see Vickers, “Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme,” *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 265-79.

shoulders,” the “fiery circles of his eyes,” his “arms and fingers long and snowy,” and his “amber hair / Wrapped in curls, as fierce Achilles’ was.”<sup>143</sup> He is “In every part proportioned like the man / Should make the world subdued to Tamburlaine” (2.1.7-30). Menaphon’s blazon concludes with Tamburlaine’s association with the epic hero, and the blazons that Techelles, Theridamas, and Agydas perform formalize this association. They fuse their anatomizing praise with epic similes, with the result that Tamburlaine, unlike the typical Petrarchan beloved, is not dissected, but rather uplifted in the devices of *both* poetic modes. Techelles compares Tamburlaine to “princely lions when they rouse themselves, / Stretching their paws and threatening herds of beasts” as he notes his “feet,” “frowning brows” and “fiery looks” (1.2.52-7). Tamburlaine’s “looks” and “eyes” feature centrally in these blazons. Theridamas similarly declares that

His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods;  
 His fiery eyes are fixed upon the earth,  
 As if he now devised some stratagem,  
 Or meant to pierce Avernus’ darksome vaults  
 And pull the triple-headed dog from hell.       (1.2.157-61)

Significantly, these blazons occur in the same scene in which Tamburlaine first attempts to woo Zenocrate. Here, as well as in Tamburlaine’s appeal to his beloved, the language and forms of amatory poetry subtend the heroic rhetoric of his driving epic agenda. These blazons, however, do more than support Tamburlaine’s reputation as warrior. By weaving into epic simile a Petrarchan device that conventionally dismembers and disempowers its object, these blazons reverse the Petrarchan power dynamic, fortifying the object of praise with the strength of the epic warrior and the irresistible magnetism of the Petrarchan beloved. Amatory poetics lends its force to epic, and

---

<sup>143</sup> M. Martin notes that editors change “snowy” to “sinewy,” and argues that the original text of “snowy” “amplif[ies] the Petrarchan resonances” in this blazon. “Inferior Readings,” 70.

Tamburlaine channels the violent energy of Petrarchan desire into the power of transcendent conquest: “His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods.”

Agydas’s blazon of Tamburlaine in Act 3 makes this Petrarchan power reversal into a deadly reality. Unlike those of Techelles and Theridamas, Agydas’s blazon of Tamburlaine culminates in a physical manifestation of the deadly power that the blazon describes:

Upon his brows was portrayed ugly death,  
 And in his eyes the fury of his heart,  
 That shine as comets, menacing revenge,  
 And casts a pale complexion on his cheeks.  
 As when the seaman sees the Hyades  
 Gather an army of Cimmerian clouds  
 (Auster and Aquilon, with winged steeds  
 All sweating, tilt about the watery heavens  
 With shivering spears, enforcing thunderclaps,  
 And from their shields strike flames of lightning),  
 All fearful folds his sails, and sounds the main,  
 Lifting his prayers to the heavens for aid  
 Against the terror of the winds and waves,  
 So fares Agydas for the late-felt frowns  
 That sent a tempest to my daunted thoughts  
 And makes my soul divine her overthrow. (3.2.72-87)

Tamburlaine’s brows and eyes again feature here, but rather than Cupid, who often takes up residence in the Petrarchan’s mistress’s eyes or forehead, Tamburlaine’s brows are occupied by

Death.<sup>144</sup> The lengthy epic simile here also embeds Virgilian and Ovidian components. J. S. Cunningham notes that “‘ugly’ associates insistently with Marlowe’s Virgilian imagery of Hell,” and on the references to Auster and Aquilon, the south wind and north wind, respectively, Cunningham directs readers to *Metamorphoses* V.285.<sup>145</sup> He does not mention, however, that this conflict of the winds sets in motion events that lead the King of Thrace, who captured and threatened violence to the Muses, to throw himself off of the highest tower.

We might see Tamburlaine’s aspirations in this tale. He can “play the orator” (1.2.129), “His talk [is] much sweeter than the Muses’ song” (3.2.50), and he desires to “spread . . . [his] fame through hell and up to heaven” (5.1.466). But Tamburlaine, of course, will not suffer the same fate as the King of Thrace. He can master the poetic and rhetorical arts *and* ascend to the heights. In Agydas’s blazon, then, we find Marlowe again weaving Petrarch into Ovid and Virgil in order to present his own protagonist as surpassing those of his literary predecessors. To emphasize Tamburlaine’s superiority in this vein, Marlowe weaponizes the Petrarchan blazon, and Agydas, who already spies death in his visage, carries out the fatal message of Tamburlaine’s silent promise: “thou shalt surely die” (3.2.95).

As the blazons of Tamburlaine reverse the Petrarchan power dynamic, so does Zenocrate’s emergent love for her captor. But whereas the blazons emphasize Tamburlaine’s heroic aspects, Zenocrate’s love takes on many of the debilitating symptoms suffered by the typical Petrarchan lover. Upon Agydas’s inquiry into her “unquiet fits” and the “heart’s sorrow” that causes her to “wax so wan and pale” (3.2.2-5), Zenocrate confesses that

. . . a farther passion feeds my thoughts

With ceaseless and disconsolate conceits,

---

<sup>144</sup> Other characters refer to Tamburlaine’s “brows” six times and his “eyes” four times in *1 Tamburlaine*, but in *2 Tamburlaine* not at all.

<sup>145</sup> See Cunningham’s annotation at 3.2.72 and 3.2.78.

Which dyes my looks so lifeless as they are  
 And might, if my extremes had full events,  
 Make me the ghastly counterfeit of death.

.....

Ah, life and soul still hover in his breast  
 And leave my body senseless as the earth,  
 Or else unite you to his life and soul,

That I may live and die with Tamburlaine! (3.2.13-17, 21-4)

When Tamburlaine earlier plays the role of poet-lover with Zenocrate, attempting to convince her “to be my queen and portly emperess” (1.2.187), he remains unaffected by the typical dangers of love and desire. Zenocrate’s love, by contrast, takes on many of the most common Petrarchan expressions of the poet-lover’s sufferings. Despite his initial overture to her, Tamburlaine has left behind “those looks, / Those words of favor, and those comfortings” (3.2.61-2), placing Zenocrate in the surprising (if temporary) position of unrequited lover. She conceives of her “passion” as a food that “feeds my thoughts” yet leaves her unsatisfied. Her face takes on a “lifeless” pallor, “wan and pale.” “Disconsolate conceits” wrack her thoughts. In typical Petrarchan hyperbole, unfulfilled desire leaves her looking like “the ghastly counterfeit of death,” and she wishes only to “live and die” with her beloved.

In her pining, Zenocrate offers only a brief description of Tamburlaine as beloved, yet that description exposes the extent to which she has adopted and internalized the terms of Tamburlaine’s original appeal to her:

As looks the sun through Nilus’ flowing stream,  
 Or when the morning holds him in her arms,  
 So looks my lordly love, fair Tamburlaine;

His talk much sweeter than the Muses' song  
 They sung for honour 'gainst Pierides,  
 Or when Minerva did with Neptune strive;  
 And higher would I rear my estimate  
 Than Juno, sister to the highest god,  
 If I were matched with mighty Tamburlaine.                   (3.2.47-55)

Unlike Theridamas and others, Zenocrate does not blazon Tamburlaine, though she does describe him as the “sun,” a metaphor that Petrarch often uses to characterize Laura. But this brief epic simile situates Tamburlaine simultaneously in contexts of amatory embrace, as “when the morning holds him in her arms,” and of poetic competition and triumph. His “talk” surpasses that of the Muses when the Pierides challenged them in song, thereby exceeding the Muses at the acme of their skill. And his right to rule the earth surpasses that of Minerva, who wins the right to the land of Athens in a competition with Neptune. Zenocrate also imagines herself elevated above Juno in a turn that reflects Tamburlaine’s original promise to elevate her status and parallels his frequent vaunts that he exceeds the power of Jove. Zenocrate’s Petrarchan love thus aggrandizes Tamburlaine in much the same way as blazons of him do, and places her in a position of contingent power that only Tamburlaine, with his imperial success, can realize.

Having overheard Zenocrate’s pronouncement of love, Tamburlaine silently leads his beloved offstage, and this moment signals the consummation of his powers in love and war. Zenocrate has passed from her initial resistance to the “shepherd, [who] . . . seemed to love [her] much” (3.2.60) to a Petrarchan affection for the conquering “king of Persia” “in his majesty” (3.2.59, 61). Tamburlaine has won her heart not through the promise of riches or status, but through his own elevated status, won by success on the battlefield and performed in his poetic speech “sweeter than [that of] the Muses.” And while much of his power in the play derives from his ability to turn

words into action, here he surpasses his own verbal power by enacting both love and death with nothing more than a glance.<sup>146</sup>

Zenocrate's union with Tamburlaine is surrounded by indicators of his martial power. At the exact center of the play, just prior to his vanquishing of the Turkish army and the capture of Bajazeth and Zabina, Tamburlaine enters the stage to hear Zenocrate describing her despair for the love she believes to be unrequited. Upon hearing this, he "*goes to her, and takes her away lovingly by the hand . . . and says nothing*" (3.2.65, stage direction). In this moment, Tamburlaine performs the silence of a Petrarchan beloved even as he takes up the dominant position of that power dynamic. In gaining Zenocrate's love, he establishes his success in amatory ventures at the same time as he secures the future of his empire. As Tamburlaine walks away with Zenocrate in hand, he also directs Agydas to take his own life merely by "*looking wrathfully*" at him (3.2.65, stage direction). In this strange moment of silence from the play's central character and speaker of "high astounding terms," Tamburlaine steps fully into his control over amorous and martial realms. Further, in its presentation of romantic affection, this moment serves to reinforce the importance of a loving union within the context of epic achievement, as in the very next scene, Tamburlaine and Zenocrate must present a united front to Bajazeth and Zabina, the imperial couple whom they conquer both on and off the battlefield.

Marlowe thus allows his hero to be both desirous and desired without any of the usual attendant sufferings, either Ovidian or Petrarchan, that these roles entail. But only in his soliloquy on Zenocrate's beauty, however, does Tamburlaine directly confront the danger of love to the Petrarchan lover and to the Virgilian epic hero. After Zenocrate pleads with him to spare the lives of her father and her former betrothed, Tamburlaine, now alone on stage, contemplates the nature of a

---

<sup>146</sup> On Tamburlaine's verbal power and violence, see Burnett, "*Tamburlaine the Great, Parts One and Two*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 127-43, 128-30.



force so powerful that it can make even him, the “scourge of God,” consider the possibility of mercy. He opens his soliloquy extemporizing on Zenocrate, formally fusing Petrarchan and epic devices much as his blazoners had done for him:

Ah, fair Zenocrate, divine Zenocrate!  
 Fair is too foul an epithet for thee  
 That, in thy passion for thy country's love  
 And fear to see thy kingly father's harm,  
 With hair disshvelled wip'st thy watery cheeks,  
 And like to Flora in her morning's pride,  
 Shaking her silver tresses in the air,  
 Rain'st on the earth resolvèd pearl in showers  
 And sprinklest sapphires on thy shining face  
 Where Beauty, mother to the Muses, sits  
 And comments volumes with her ivory pen,  
 Taking instructions from thy flowing eyes. (5.1.135-46)

Tamburlaine names his beloved “divine Zenocrate” ten times over the course of both plays. Arabia, her former betrothed, also refers to her in this way as he lies dying in her arms (*1 Tamb.* 5.1.417). Between her former fiancé and her current husband, then, Marlowe establishes an epic epithet for Zenocrate within an amorous context. In her single paragraph on Tamburlaine's Petrarchism, Starks notes that he speaks like a “Petrarchan sonneteer” in using oxymoron to describe Zenocrate (“Fair is too foul an epithet,” 5.1.136) and in focusing on her eyes, concluding that she is “immortalized by the poet's pen, like Petrarch's Laura.”<sup>147</sup> These observations usefully point to Tamburlaine's employment of Petrarchan language here. In addition, as the speech progresses, Tamburlaine

---

<sup>147</sup> Starks, “Sadism, Masochism, and the Masochistic Gaze,” 183-4.

confronts the “sufferings” (5.1.160) of beauty’s inexpressibility, “Which into words no virtue can digest” (5.1.173) and its potential threat to heroic masculinity in making him “harbour thoughts effeminate and faint” (5.1.177).<sup>148</sup>

In addition to this speech’s Petrarchan characteristics, it also exhibits formal aspects that associate it with epic and link it to the earlier blazons of Tamburlaine. He praises Zenocrate in epic forms and ideals, including the recurrent epithet of “divine”; he extols her loyalty to her father and her country; and in an epic simile he compares her to the pastoral goddess Flora. But as Tamburlaine tries to locate and contain Zenocrate’s beauty within heroic values and forms, he must first confront the ways in which his love of her threatens those values and forms. Her “hair dishevelled” and “watery cheeks,” her “shining face” and “flowing eyes” together suggest this as a blazon of Zenocrate—Tamburlaine’s first—and they momentarily shift the former shepherd back into a pastoral context where Flora resides, as Zenocrate’s “sorrows lay . . . siege unto my soul,” and in her “eyes,” “angels . . . fight / A doubtful battle” “For Egypt’s freedom and the Sultan’s life” (151-5).

In Tamburlaine’s contemplation of beauty, Marlowe extends epic combat from the field of battle to the field of genre, and just as he uses form to evoke this struggle, he uses form to resolve it. Tamburlaine eventually concludes that “every warrior that is rapt with love / Of fame, of valour, and of victory, / Must needs have beauty beat on his conceits” (5.1.180-2). The break in the first of these lines is crucial, as it allows Marlowe’s hero to have it both ways: “every warrior” may be “rapt with love” at the same time as he is “rapt” with “fame,” “valour,” and “victory.” The elegant

---

<sup>148</sup> Noting the Petrarchan inexpressibility topos, Miele argues that Tamburlaine “encounters a . . . feeling of inadequacy because of Zenocrate’s powerful hold on him.” Miele detects in this a threat of impotence that he traces to Petrarch’s “metaphorical impotence [which] recalls the Ovidian persona’s detumescence,” “Zenocrate’s Power,” 142. Leggatt also considers Tamburlaine’s “sufferings” a problem of inexpressibility, but situates it rather in Tamburlaine’s broader problem of “striving for the unattainable that unites the poet, the lover, and the warrior.” “Tamburlaine’s Sufferings,” 29.

enjambment at work here deftly asserts the compatibility of love and heroic conquest. And Tamburlaine—warrior, lover, and poet—in his conclusion suggests that the real challenge confronting him is the reconciliation of generic opposition. There need be no conflict between his epic aspect, “That which hath stopped the tempest of the gods,/ Even from the fiery spangled veil of heaven” (184-5), his pastoral aspect, that “feel[s] the lovely warmth of shepherd’s flames” (186), and his amatory aspect, that manifests in “beauty’s just applause” (178). Rather, he reconciles these aspects by reframing them as support for heroic values, concluding that “virtue solely is the sum of glory / And fashions men with true nobility” (189-90).

In the ways that I have outlined here, Zenocrate becomes the mechanism by which Tamburlaine manages to adapt and incorporate amatory poetics within an epic framework. Critics routinely note the way that Zenocrate’s crowning at the end of *1 Tamburlaine* subsumes her into her husband’s imperial pageantry, and I would add that that subsumption, which will be carried to an extreme in *2 Tamburlaine*, signifies Tamburlaine’s successful reconciliation of love and war. The majority of Zenocrate’s lines in the final scene are spent on lamenting the fate of her people in Damascus and the grotesque deaths of Bajazeth and Zabina, yet when Tamburlaine arrives on stage victorious, Zenocrate expresses little besides relief at her father’s survival (5.1.439-41). Despite the horrors she has seen and decried, her only words to her husband after his return from battle meekly reiterate her consent to marry him: “Else should I much forget myself, my lord” (5.1.499). Sara Munson Deats suggests that “although Zenocrate’s silence may betoken consent or merely acceptance of the patriarchal feminine ideal of passivity and compliance, it may instead suggest grief not joy, perhaps even a mute protest against her lover’s belligerence, thereby shadowing the triumph of the final festivities.”<sup>149</sup> The bombast of Tamburlaine’s crowning speech, however, allows only

---

<sup>149</sup> *Sex, Gender, and Desire*, 147. In contrast to Deats, Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. reads Zenocrate as cementing her shift in “status” from “Egyptian” to “Tamburlaine’s lover” as she “reconstitut[es] herself entirely in terms of her new husband,” *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 19.

speculation, as it firmly situates Zenocrate as a pillar of support for his martial accomplishments and imperial status:

And here we crown thee queen of Persia  
 And all the kingdoms and dominions  
 That late the power of Tamburlaine subdued.  
 As Juno, when the giants were suppressed  
 That darted mountains at her brother Jove,  
 So looks my love, shadowing in her brows  
 Triumphs and trophies for my victories;  
 Or. As Latona's daughter, bent to arms,  
 Adding more courage to my conquering mind. (5.1.505-14)

In these lines, Zenocrate becomes a rhetorical device by which Tamburlaine may list his own achievements. In her “brows” he sees only his own “victories.” Like Juno or Diana (“Latona’s daughter”), she functions as an image of almost mythic support for Tamburlaine’s conquests.

Throughout *1 Tamburlaine*, Marlowe uses Zenocrate as a figure through which he introduces conflicting generic discourses into the play. Through Zenocrate, he provides his hero with something besides nations to conquer. But the Marlovian response to these conflicting discourses is not to banish one or the other of them, as Virgil and Ovid would have it. Rather, Marlowe makes the discourse of heroic achievement dependent on, yet still superior to, love and desire. Tamburlaine may make his empire on the battlefield, but only through union with his beloved wife can he ensure that empire’s continuation.

*The Death of Zenocrate and the Divorce of Amatory and Epic Poetics*

In *Part 1*, Tamburlaine establishes a generic precedent of incorporating and subduing amatory within epic, reconciling the two by rhetorically transforming the threats that love traditionally poses to epic

endeavors into a force of support instead. In *Part 2*, however, Marlowe unravels this union, beginning with Zenocrate's first appearance on stage. Her opening lines imply a renewed division between poetic modes, and Tamburlaine unwittingly carries out this division over the remainder of the play, mirroring and reversing moments of generic unity from the first play. And because amatory and epic poetics fall out of alignment, the former resumes its threatening status with respect to the latter. Marlowe roots much of this re-division of generic modes in Tamburlaine's Petrarchan outbursts of love and grief for the death of his beloved Zenocrate. Her death sends him into his most extreme moment of Petrarchism, apotheosizing his dying beloved, feeling "pierce[d]" (2.4.84) or penetrated, and even wishing to join her in death. Once she has died, however, Tamburlaine transforms Zenocrate's body, as well as her funeral monuments, into a symbol of his empire. Yet unlike her crowning at the end of *1 Tamburlaine*, a moment that also subsumes Zenocrate into an image of empire, Zenocrate's death subverts the epic enterprise that Tamburlaine intends it to support. Driven by a Petrarchan attachment to her corpse, he orders Zenocrate's hearse brought along to every battle he fights, effectively circumscribing his still-growing empire with death itself. Thus, in subsuming the dead beloved into his imperial project Tamburlaine carries out the separation between amatory and epic poetics introduced by Zenocrate earlier in the play. After the death of the beloved, love again becomes a threat to the epic hero. Even if Tamburlaine can dispel love's "thoughts effeminate and faint" in *Part 1*, in *Part 2* he cannot dispel death, "Whose darts do piece the centre of my soul" (2.4.84).

Zenocrate's opening lines in *2 Tamburlaine* immediately indicate the oncoming dis-integration of the harmony that Tamburlaine had established between love and war at the close of *Part 1*. While her silence at the scene of her crowning remains ambiguous, her first words in *Part 2* invoke a clear resistance to Tamburlaine's ongoing martial endeavors:

Sweet Tamburlaine, when wilt thou leave these arms

And save thy sacred person free from scathe

And dangerous chances of the wrathful war? (2 *Tamb.* 1.3.9-11)

In concern for her husband's safety, Zenocrate wishes he would leave the path of war and establish himself as Emperor and father at a safe distance from danger. Her request asserts a fresh divide between Tamburlaine's martial and amorous aspects. Couched within this outright plea to cease fighting lies a pun on "arms" that further establishes the division between love and war, between the "arms" of the loving Zenocrate and the "arms" of the battlefield.<sup>150</sup> But perhaps most obvious and most remarkable, Zenocrate's request requires Tamburlaine to differentiate between the two. In deploying this dichotomy, Zenocrate asks Tamburlaine to reverse the complementary relationship between amatory and epic values that he had established at their first meeting in *1 Tamburlaine* and that had culminated in his crowning her empress. Her appeal to her husband in *2 Tamburlaine* thus sets a contrasting precedent to that which Tamburlaine establishes in the first play. Whereas in *Part 1* Zenocrate facilitates Tamburlaine's incorporation of love into his martial values, in *Part 2* she introduces a contrary force that divorces these terms.

Shortly following Zenocrate's request, Tamburlaine's assessment of his sons bears out this revised generic precedent. He accuses them of being effeminate and unmanly, repeating the generic division implied in Zenocrate's request just prior:

But methinks their looks are amorous,

Not martial as the sons of Tamburlaine;

Water and air, being symbolized in one,

Argue their want of courage and of wit;

---

<sup>150</sup> Marlowe seems to have had a fondness for this particular pun, as he also deploys it in his translation of *Amores* 2.18 and several times in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. See Fred B. Tromly, *Playing with Desire: Christopher Marlowe and the Art of Tantalization* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998), 52-3, 188n15.

Their hair as white as milk and soft as down,  
 Which should be like the quills of porcupines,  
 As black as jet, and hard as iron or steel,  
 Bewrays they are too dainty for the wars.  
 Their fingers made to quaver on a lute,  
 Their arms to hang about a lady's neck,  
 Their legs to dance and caper in the air,  
 Would make me think them bastards, not my sons,  
 But that I know they issued from thy womb [Zenocrate],  
 That never looked on man but Tamburlaine. (1.3.21-34)

In seeing his sons as too “amorous” “for the wars,” Tamburlaine blatantly asserts the disconnection between these endeavors implied earlier by Zenocrate. He employs a blazon to inventory the particulars of their failings. In contrast to the blazons in *Part 1* of Tamburlaine himself, which establish him as a powerful, heroic figure, this blazon serves as a poetic vehicle to critique its subjects’ heroic shortcomings. The “fingers,” “arms,” and “legs” of Tamburlaine’s sons are better suited to courtly love and merrymaking than the rigors of battle. By using the blazon to critique his sons’ masculinity, Tamburlaine returns the device’s power to threaten its object—a power which *Part 1* had overcome by situating blazons in heroic context. Here, however, Tamburlaine reworks the heroic context of the blazon in such a way that its content depicts the typical effeminacy of an “amorous” lover at court and uses the component parts of its subjects specifically to depict heroic failure. This blazon variation differs from those in the first play, as well as from the typical Petrarchan blazon that rhetorically dissects its subject. In the *Tamburlaine* plays, the blazon is routinely appropriated as a heroic device: it provides a measurement of heroic masculinity. Tamburlaine’s use of it here reconfirms the threat of love to a warrior ethos, the same threat that he

had conquered in *Part 1*. And lest his sons' failings reflect poorly on his own epic masculinity, Tamburlaine is quick to announce his sexual control over Zenocrate, whom he knows "never looked on man but Tamburlaine."

As two of his sons, Amyntas and Celebinus, assure their father of their suitability for war, the remaining son, Calyphas, goads Tamburlaine into performing another blazon that condemns those unwilling to go to war as effeminate. Calyphas wishes to remain with his mother rather than take up his father's martial ways, but Tamburlaine threatens to disinherit him if he cannot muster the threatening power of a warrior's attributes:

Of all the provinces I have subdued,  
 Thou shalt not have a foot, unless thou bear  
 A mind courageous and invincible.  
 For he shall wear the crown of Persia  
 Whose head hath deepest scars, whose breast most wounds,  
 Which, being wroth, sends lightning from his eyes,  
 And in the furrows of his frowning brows  
 Harbours revenge, war, death, and cruelty.      (1.3.71-9)

This blazon, like the previous one, stands in contrast to those of *Part 1*. Though Tamburlaine here catalogues the attributes his son must have to become a king of Persia, what "mind," "head," "breast," "eyes," and "brows" a warrior should have, he generates the list based on the absence of such characteristics. Like the earlier blazon of his sons' "amorous" inclinations, this one serves as a critique of what Tamburlaine sees as Calyphas's unmanliness. Though in content this blazon resembles those of Tamburlaine in *Part 1* in its listing of aspects of heroic strength, here heroic content serves only to declare its absence. Through these two blazons, as well as Zenocrate's opening lines, *2 Tamburlaine* quickly establishes a renewed divide between the forces of love and war.



Zenocrate's death in Act 2 and her funeral in Act 3 more forcefully assert this divide through the Petrarchan register of Tamburlaine's grief. As Zenocrate lies dying, he declares his grief in a speech that echoes and reverses much of his soliloquy from *Part 1* on Zenocrate's beauty. Marlowe signals this mirrored reversal in Tamburlaine's first grief-stricken line, "Black is the beauty of the brightest day!" (2.4.1). Rather than the interrogative "What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?" (*1 Tamb.* 5.1.160), this line offers a declamatory statement on the nature of beauty. It is not, as Tamburlaine concludes in the earlier soliloquy, a challenge to and proof of heroic masculinity, through which "every warrior" "Must needs have beauty beat on his conceits" so that he may "conceiv[e] and subdu[e] both" (*1 Tamb.* 5.1.180-3). Instead, beauty in the context of death offers deprivation, darkness, absence, and a sense of desperation. It blots out the sun, that "golden ball of heaven's eternal fire" (*2 Tamb.* 2.4.2) that also serves as a conventional descriptor for the Petrarchan beloved. Zenocrate's eyes, formerly "flowing" (*1 Tamb.* (5.1.146) with beautiful tears, are now "eyes [that once] shot fire from their ivory bowers" that are, like her "latest breath," "All dazzled with the hellish mists of death" (*2 Tamb.* 2.4.9-14). The angels, which once did battle in her eyes for Tamburlaine's mercy (*1 Tamb.* (5.1.151-5), now patrol the "walls of heaven / As sentinels to warn th'immortal souls / To entertain divine Zenocrate" (*2 Tamb.* 2.4.15-17). And in order to "entertain the divine Zenocrate," Tamburlaine calls on the stars to turn their light away from earth and toward her, on "cherubims and holy seraphims" to make music, and on "The god that tunes this music to our souls" to "Hold out his hand in highest majesty" (*2 Tamb.* 19-33). Such an inventory of requests effectively reorients the entire cosmos "[t]o entertain divine Zenocrate"—a phrase which Tamburlaine repeats five times over the course of his lengthy request. In contrast to his invocation of "fair Zenocrate, divine Zenocrate!" (*1 Tamb.* 5.1.135) in the soliloquy from *Part 1*, Tamburlaine's insistent repetition of "divine Zenocrate" as she lies dying frantically seeks to apotheosize and immortalize her in the event that "all the pens that ever poets held" (*1 Tamb.* 5.1.161) are not up to

the task. Whereas beauty first confronts Tamburlaine as a threat to his heroic ethos that can and should be conquered, here it confronts him in the shape of death—an unavoidable event that even the mighty Tamburlaine cannot conquer. Thus, rather than insisting on his own prowess in “conceiving and subduing” beauty, here Tamburlaine asks for his own death, “That this my life may be as short to me / As are the days of sweet Zenocrate” (2 *Tamb.* 2.4.36-7). In a stunning reversal of his soliloquy on beauty, Tamburlaine’s outburst at Zenocrate’s impending death suggests that beauty, in fact, will be the cause of his own death.

Zenocrate’s sudden and inexplicable death confronts Tamburlaine with his own mortality, causing him to experience Petrarchan suffering for the first time and thereby threatening his heroic masculinity. Tamburlaine the epic hero finally encounters an insurmountable impediment to his love—and therefore to his empire. In addition to wishing for his own death and projecting a stellified Zenocrate among the “ceaseless lamps” of the stars, Tamburlaine slips into a register of Petrarchan hyperbole. Zenocrate’s eyes, “where Cupid used to sit,” are now “Sadly supplied with pale and ghastly death / Whose darts do pierce the center of my soul” (2.4.82-4). Not only has Cupid been replaced with death, but Tamburlaine casts himself as penetrated, a common metaphor for Petrarchan poet-lovers and one that emphasizes the “thoughts effeminate and faint” that Tamburlaine harbors and that conflict with his heroic masculinity.<sup>151</sup> Confirmation of her death “pierce[s his] soul” as his “mind dies for want of her” (2.4.125-8).

After Zenocrate dies, although Tamburlaine threatens to conquer hell itself “For taking hence my fair Zenocrate” (2.4.101), he cannot quite escape the feeling of amorous and heroic defeat. He casts himself as having lost a competition with Jove, who “hath snatched my love from hence” (2.4.107), and calls out

---

<sup>151</sup> Petrarch “habitually portrays the action of love as invasion, intrusion, influence, or inspiration—as a penetrative, overwhelming force acting from without upon a passive subject.” Ross Knecht, “Invaded by the World’: Passion, Passivity, and the Object of Desire in Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*,” *Comparative Literature* 63 (2011): 235-52, 238.

Behold me here, divine Zenocrate,  
 Raving, impatient, desperate, and mad,  
 Breaking my steeled lance with which I burst  
 The rusty beams of Janus' temple doors,  
 Letting out death and tyrannizing war  
 To march with me under this bloody flag;  
 And if thou pitiest Tamburlaine the Great,  
 Come down from heaven and live with me again!       (2.4.111.115)

Of this passage, Cunningham writes that “Marlowe is skillfully balancing what is true and what is indulgent and impotent in the hyperboles of theatrical grief,” yet neither Cunningham nor any other editor acknowledges that the hyperbole here is Petrarchan. It is precisely this Petrarchan grief that poses a threat to Tamburlaine’s heroic status.<sup>152</sup> His reaction to death, the one impediment to love he has ever encountered, takes the erotic frustration typical of a poet-lover figure to its extreme when Tamburlaine describes himself as “Raving, impatient, desperate, and mad.” Further, the “breaking” of his “steel lance” recalls the detumescence of the Ovidian lover of the *Amores* as well as the metaphorical impotence of Petrarch’s poet-lover.<sup>153</sup> Tamburlaine even ends the scene with his plan to march his army in mourning around a statue of his dead beloved, “Drooping and pining for Zenocrate” (2.4.142). But perhaps most tellingly, Tamburlaine invokes pity, a ubiquitous term in Petrarchan appeals to an unrequiting beloved. This request for pity shifts into desperation in the final line of his eloquent outburst, “Come down from heaven and live with me again!” Unlike his

---

<sup>152</sup> See Cunningham’s note at ll. 114-18.

<sup>153</sup> Miele reads Tamburlaine’s susceptibility to Zenocrate’s persuasions in Part 1, specifically his “What is beauty” soliloquy, as an “echo [of] the effeminate Ovidian and Petrarchan poet-lovers” through which “Marlowe joins Tamburlaine to the feeble poets,” “Zenocrate’s Power,” 143. “Impotence,” suggests Jenny Mann, “may be the point of the entire sequence” of the *Amores* as translated by Marlowe,” but in *Tamburlaine*, I contend, the protagonist’s resistance to the enfeebling effects of love serves as a measure of his heroic masculinity. Mann, “Marlowe’s Translations” in Bartels and Smith, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 110-21, 113.

appropriation of the same line in *Part 1*, however, this one cannot have the same imperative force.<sup>154</sup> After Tamburlaine's forty-one lines of helpless railing against death itself, "Come down from heaven and live with me again!" is transformed from the forceful demand of *Part 1* (and of its original context in "The Passionate Shepherd") to a desperate plea from a desperate man who can only understand love and loss through conquest.

In response to Zenocrate's death, Tamburlaine appropriates her corpse as a symbol of epic conquest. Turning away from his grief, Tamburlaine turns toward Zenocrate's body, declaring, "thou shalt stay with me, / . . . / And till I die thou shalt not be interred" (2.4.129). Yet this line works paradoxically, as Tamburlaine implies his own mortality in order to resist his beloved's. Further, that resistance comes in the form of subsuming the mortal remains of his wife. Whereas the newly crowned Zenocrate in *Part 1* serves as a symbolic support of Tamburlaine's imperial power, the dead Zenocrate in *Part 2* foreshadows Tamburlaine's own mortality, try as he might to (re)appropriate her body for the ends of empire and epic immortality:

And till I die, thou shalt not be interred.  
 Then in as rich a tomb as Mausolus'  
 We both will rest and have one epitaph  
 Writ in as many several languages  
 As I have conquered kingdoms with my sword.  
 This cursèd town will I consume with fire  
 Because this place bereft me of my love.  
 The houses, burnt, will look as if they mourned,  
 And here will I set up her stature

---

<sup>154</sup> In Bruster's estimation, "The Passionate Shepherd," like other *carpe diem* invitational poetry, "verges on the imperative mood, as a form of obligation." "Come to the Tent Again," 51.

And march about it with my mourning camp,  
 Drooping and pining for Zenocrate. (2.4.133-42)<sup>155</sup>

Instead of a shared empery, Tamburlaine and Zenocrate will, in death, have a shared epitaph. Through this epitaphic union, Tamburlaine attempts to contain death in the terms of epic, much as he had done with amatory poetics, but death resists containment. Instead, death takes on the eternizing effects of epic. Their joint epitaph will incorporate the hero's epic victories by incorporating the languages of the people Tamburlaine has conquered, but it also unites the fate of the conquered with that of their conqueror. Larissa, the "cursèd town" where Zenocrate died, will be razed in a gesture that imposes Tamburlaine's personal grief upon the latest addition to his empire, and the "march" of his "mourning camp" will perform those griefs in military fashion. But though these gestures of grief seem to reinforce Tamburlaine's role as conqueror, they also belie his apparent invincibility: he "droop[s] and pin[es]" along with the rest of his army, and he explicitly predicts his own death—a notion that would have been impossible in *Part 1*. By incorporating Zenocrate's corpse into his rhetoric of epic, Tamburlaine cannot avoid incorporating his own mortality, as well.

His subsumption of Zenocrate in *Part 2* reaches its peak in the scene of her funeral. Like his frantic repetition of "divine Zenocrate" as she lay dying, the repetition of funeral monuments in this scene desperately resists mortality even as it attempts to elevate their dedicatee. Together with Tamburlaine's decision to carry her hearse around the battlefield with him, these monuments represent his final attempt to preserve his love for Zenocrate by incorporating it into his martial agenda. But such incorporation, when it is built on a premise of mortality, is doomed to fail.

---

<sup>155</sup> On the relationship between epic, immortality, and history, see David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 29-30.

To reinforce his dominance as conqueror, Tamburlaine frames Zenocrate's funeral as a display of his ability to control death. He orders Larissa, the site of Zenocrate's death, burned, and "Over my zenith hang a blazing star / That may endure till heaven be dissolved, / . . . / Threat'ning a death and famine to this land!" (3.2.7-10). His destruction of Larissa will be so great that it will be reflected in the stars, whose influence over earthly events will continually ensure that only "death and famine" (3.2.9) take root there. Because Tamburlaine could not prevent Zenocrate's death, he exerts the only kind of control over death that he can, constructing an environment that eternizes death. In doing so, he shifts the terms that undergird empire from an amatory register into one of grief. The "pillar" that Calyphas carries ensures Tamburlaine's continued sovereignty with an inscription "in Arabian, Hebrew, and Greek" that reads "This town, being burnt by Tamburlaine the Great, / Forbids the world to build it up again" (3.2.16-18). The "mournful streamer" that Amyntas carries declares Zenocrate's Egyptian and Persian heritage "To signify she was a princess born / And wife unto the monarch of the East" (3.2.19-22). In the funeral pennon, Tamburlaine cleverly retains his claim to legitimacy as emperor gained in marriage to Zenocrate. And the "table" that Celebinus carries acts as a Petrarchan "register / Of all her virtues and perfections" (3.2.23-5). These memorial items culminate in the portrait of "divine Zenocrate" that Tamburlaine himself carries "To show her beauty which the world admired" and to "draw the gods from heaven / And cause the stars fixed in the southern arc . . . / Only to gaze upon Zenocrate" (3.2.28-33). Tamburlaine again apotheosizes his "divine Zenocrate" to grant her influence over the gods and even the cosmos itself. If he could not prevent the death of his beloved, he puts her image and memory to work in supporting his claim to power as lasting and divine.

In addition to Zenocrate's memorials and monuments, Tamburlaine tries to assert his epic agenda by transforming her corpse into a symbol of his power that he can carry with him to every field of victory. Harkening back to his first encounter with Zenocrate, in which he declares that she

will be better off with Tamburlaine than “in the circle of your father’s arms” (*1 Tamb.* 1.2.5), Tamburlaine tells Zenocrate’s corpse that he will “keep [it] within the circle of mine arms” (*2 Tamb.* 3.2.35). Much as the first pun on “arms” signals Tamburlaine’s incorporation of amatory poetics into epic, this second pun on the same reveals his attempt to *reintegrate* these genres. But, as elsewhere in this scene, Tamburlaine tries too hard. The pun, when applied to a corpse, suggests in its amorous sense an alarming element of necrophilia, and in its martial sense a feeling of futility and defeat, for even the most fearful “arms” can neither conquer nor protect someone who is already dead.

Yet Tamburlaine insists that Zenocrate’s corpse can be used as a symbol of his own threatening ferocity on the battlefield. He goes on addressing the body:

At every town and castle I besiege  
 Thou shalt be set upon my royal tent,  
 And when I meet an army in the field  
 Those looks will shed such influence in my camp  
 As if Bellona, goddess of the war,  
 Threw naked swords and sulfur balls of fire  
 Upon the heads of all our enemies.                   (3.2.36-42)

In contrast to his habit of incorporating amorous elements into epic, here Tamburlaine takes what was once amorous—Zenocrate’s body—and transform it into an image of conquest. He reassigns Zenocrate’s divinity from a context of love (“O, fair Zenocrate, divine Zenocrate!” *1 Tamb.* 5.1.135) to one of war, comparing her to “Bellona, goddess of the war.” This goddess, unlike Zenocrate, whose beauty and mortality both threaten Tamburlaine’s epic endeavors, serves as an uncompromised symbol of martial support. Alive, Zenocrate’s “eyes shot fire from their ivory bowers” (*2 Tamb.* 2.4.9), at once combative and chaste, but the “looks” of her corpse seem to

“Thr[o]w naked swords and sulfur balls of fire.” Tamburlaine effectively purges the Petrarchan danger of Zenocrate’s eyes and channels that power instead into a feminine image of martial dominance appropriated to threaten his enemies, but not Tamburlaine himself. But though he tries to fashion her body into a symbol of his military power and prowess, the corpse brings its own meaning to the stage, acting as an insistent reminder of Tamburlaine’s powerlessness to prevent death.

Tamburlaine effectively subverts the martial power he seeks to uphold by trying to use a corpse, the material embodiment of mortality itself, as proof of his invincibility. Though Tamburlaine only intends for Zenocrate’s body to represent the danger he poses to his enemies, it also represents the threat of death to Tamburlaine himself. The most immediate indication of this new vulnerability occurs in a moment of self-penetration in which Tamburlaine cuts into his own body to demonstrate to his sons how to “look . . . like a soldier” (2 *Tamb.* 3.2.117). At the close of Zenocrate’s funeral, Tamburlaine “*cuts his arm*” (3.2.114, SD), though “by the wars [he] lost not a dram of blood” (3.2.113). He thinks to teach his sons the value in receiving wounds in war by inflicting a wound on himself and labeling it as a “great grace and majesty to me” (3.2.118), but instead he exposes the material reality of the threat of mortality, a threat that comes in the form of self-penetration.<sup>156</sup> Whereas Zenocrate’s death has “pierce[d]” his “soul” (2.4.84), Tamburlaine literalizes this penetration on his own body. And whereas the penetrative force of love could not harm him in *Part 1*, in *Part 2* Tamburlaine creates a self-energating, self-penetrating force in his adoption of his dead wife as a symbol of his empire. His subsumption of the dead Zenocrate into his martial agenda results in Tamburlaine delivering to himself a version of the penetrative wound that undoes the epic poet and transforms him into a suffering poet-lover.

---

<sup>156</sup> Burnett argues that, in wounding himself, “Tamburlaine endeavors to reconstruct his former invulnerable influence,” “*Tamburlaine and the Body*,” 39.



In addition to his presentation of Zenocrate's corpse and funeral monuments, as well as his act of self-penetration, Tamburlaine presents the loss of his beloved in literary terms, suggesting that love has, in *2 Tamburlaine*, finally become a threat to the martial hero. As Zenocrate lies dying, her flailing husband pronounces that, had she lived in an earlier time, "Her name had been in every line he [Homer] wrote," and that those "wanton poets" Ovid and Catullus would have written about her rather than Lesbia or Corinna (2.4.90-3). Though Cheney sees this moment as "a conjunction of elegy, tragedy, and epic" in its invocation of epic and elegiac poets in a tragic moment, I would suggest that this conjunction is not a harmonious one.<sup>157</sup> Until Zenocrate's death, Tamburlaine successfully manages to incorporate love into his epic agenda, but in this moment love becomes a threat to Tamburlaine, making him "Raving, impatient, desperate, and mad" (2.4.12). Epic can no longer sustain the amatory mode, and tragedy is the mechanism that catalyzes this generic disjunction through the event of the beloved's death.

Tamburlaine himself carries this amorous-tragic threat to epic to its extreme when he orders Zenocrate's corpse brought along to every battlefield. From the moment that he declares that her corpse will "keep within the circle of mine arms" (3.2.35) until he demands in his dying moments, "Now fetch the hearse of fair Zenocrate" (5.3.210), the body of his beloved wife goes unmentioned in the text. Yet, if we assume that Tamburlaine's command is carried out, Zenocrate's body is present when Tamburlaine conquers the Turks at Natolia 4.1 and the Governor of Babylon's forces in 5.1, and when he scares off Callapine's army in 5.3. Yet each of these scenes contains indications of the fallibility of the hero and his empire. In 4.1, Calyphas pretends not to be afraid of battle but abstains from it anyway, resulting in his father labeling him a "traitor to my name and majesty" (4.1.89) and stabbing his own son to death (4.1.110), eliminating one third of his progeny in whom he later locates his "immortality" (5.3.172-4). In 5.1, Tamburlaine orders the Governor of Babylon

---

<sup>157</sup> Marlowe's *Counterfeit Profession*, 117.

hung from the city wall in chains and shot, an execution that, like the corpse of Zenocrate in the background of every battle scene, marks out the literal boundary of Tamburlaine's empire in death. And in 5.3, the scene of the hero's death, Tamburlaine does not even fight Callapine, who, like the rest of his army, has "fled for fear" (5.3.115) even as Tamburlaine acknowledges, "my martial strength is spent" (5.3.119). Thus, when he reads from his map the places he has conquered and asks of the rest, "And shall I die, and this unconquerèd," Marlowe ironizes his hero whom, we know, has himself been conquered by the mysterious illness that plagues him. Throughout these scenes, Zenocrate's corpse silently subverts depictions of epic immortality and informs the earthly limits of empire and martial success.

Just lines prior to his death, Tamburlaine performs his love for Zenocrate one last time, but this time he embeds his address to her not just within the context of empire but also within death. At his father's instruction, Amyras has taken up Tamburlaine's crown and chariot, and at the completion of this action Tamburlaine calls for Zenocrate to be brought before him: "Now fetch the hearse of fair Zenocrate" (5.3.210). Looking into the hearse, he directs:

Now, eyes, enjoy your latest benefit,  
 And when my soul hath virtue of your sight,  
 Pierce through the coffin and the sheet of gold  
 And glut your longings with a heaven of joy.  
 So reign, my son! Scourge and control those slaves,  
 Guiding thy chariot with thy father's hand. (2 *Tamb.* 5.3.224-9)

In the same breath that Tamburlaine channels the power of his amorous gaze from life into the afterlife, he leaves instructions for his son in continuing his legacy by maintaining control over the empire he has built. And though he compares the importance of Amyras's responsibility to that of

Phaeton (5.3.231), he notably does not direct his son to continue expanding his empire. Tamburlaine thus implies the end of his empire even as he seeks to preserve it.<sup>158</sup>

Yet Tamburlaine's notion of preservation has long been problematic. In carrying Zenocrate's body around to every battlefield, he attaches to his epic endeavors the inevitability of death. Though he knows not where her soul has gone ("Where'er her soul be," 2.4.129), he thinks to preserve her by absorbing her completely into his epic project, a symbol of their unity in "one epitaph" (2.4.134) under the umbrella of conquest. That fraught symbol of conquest seems mysteriously to infect the rest of the play much as an inexplicable illness infects Tamburlaine. Not only does the presence of Zenocrate's body refract an air of doom upon the scenes of conquest in which it appears, it effectively circumscribes Tamburlaine's ever-expanding empire with death itself. Through Zenocrate's mobile corpse, death marks the boundary of what is conquerable for the epic hero. Both amatory and epic modes must end in death.

In *2 Tamburlaine*, Marlowe thus presents his audience with the death of the beloved as a catalyst for a renewed disunity between amatory and epic poetics and as the site at which both love and conquest fail simultaneously. Tamburlaine is left to gaze lovingly upon a corpse as he builds his empire on a powerful symbol that proves that even the mighty Tamburlaine cannot truly control death. Cheney suggests that Marlowe presents a genre-based authorial project through Tamburlaine's actions, and I would add that in *2 Tamburlaine* Marlowe presents a notion of tragedy through his hero's failure to perform and reconcile amatory and epic modes.<sup>159</sup> In *Part 1*, Marlowe showcases his own virtuosity in writing an epic hero who is also a successful lover, but in *Part 2* he plunges his audience into tragedy by confronting it with the hero's deterioration in both roles. In the

---

<sup>158</sup> Kenneth Friedenreich argues that the entirety of *2 Tamburlaine* foreshadows the end of Tamburlaine's empire, writing of the play's final scene, "The scourge of God is dead. There is little need to inform us that the empire soon collapsed." "Huge Greatnesse' Overthrown: The Fall of the Empire in Marlowe's Tamburlaine Plays," *Clio* 1 (1972): 37-48, 47.

<sup>159</sup> *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession*, 115-35.

*Tamburlaine* plays, tragedy emerges when the immortality that should be generated by the Petrarchan poetics of epic conquest is thwarted by the inexorable force of death itself.

## Chapter Three

Ophelia and Orphic Failure in *Hamlet*

Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes

.....

Till that her garments heavy with their drink,

Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay

To muddy death. (*Hamlet*, 4.3.149-55)

In *Hamlet*, the description of Ophelia's musical, watery death calls up the image of another doomed poet who floats downriver singing: Ovid's Orpheus. Like Orpheus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Ophelia is the victim of unfulfilled love and desire; and like Orpheus, she reacts to death and lost love by performing lyric songs. Orpheus's music causes trees to gather round him to listen and brings order to human society, but his lyric power is overcome by the unruly noise of the salacious Maenads. Ophelia's verses also gather listeners, though they are people rather than trees, but the grief-fueled madness of lost love that drives those verses obscures their meaning even as it positions them as a threat to the order of Denmark's social and political realms. Through such similarities as these, Shakespeare presents Ophelia as a parallel of Ovid's Orpheus. Shakespeare injects her speech with key characteristics of lyric and, as Ovid does with Orpheus (and others), he makes Ophelia's body a key site of poetic impact.

Despite her multifaceted alignment with Orpheus, however, few critics have examined Ophelia's connection with the ill-fated bard, preferring instead to focus on Hamlet, the play's more obvious author figure. Yet Shakespeare clearly draws on the circumstances of Orpheus's death in writing Ophelia's, and he undoubtedly presents her as a performer of lyric, Orpheus's preferred

genre. By attending to Ophelia's dynamic and multi-faceted Orphic resonance, this chapter demonstrates Shakespeare's deep and generically inflected engagement with the myth of Orpheus in *Hamlet* and argues that the tragedy of the play turns upon the Orphic poetic failure represented, at the last, in the body of Ophelia.

Criticism on *Hamlet* has largely overlooked Ophelia's Orphic aspects and their generic implications; yet over the course of the play she variously figures Eurydice, Orpheus, and the lyric genre itself. In particular, Shakespeare situates her in dramatic moments that evoke Orpheus's two major poetic failures: his failure to rescue Eurydice from the underworld, and his failure to save himself from the lust-fueled fury of the Maenads. Just as Eurydice is separated from Orpheus at his backward glance, so Ophelia is abandoned by her lover Hamlet, who casts his eyes back upon her as he backs away (2.1.95-8). And like Orpheus, whose head floats down the River Hebrus singing after he has rejected the amorous advances of the Maenads, so Ophelia, having rejected Hamlet's love letters, floats to her own death singing "snatches of old tunes" (4.3.149).<sup>160</sup> Yet Ophelia is more than a character stand-in. She performs lyric, the genre of Orpheus, in her mad songs and elsewhere, and her performance is always entangled with her "superfluity of bodily presence."<sup>161</sup> Ophelia constitutes a site of allusive lyric discourse in the play, and even Gertrude's description of her death takes on a lyric register. Figuring Eurydice, Orpheus, and lyric itself, Ophelia triangulates an Orphic dimension to *Hamlet* that shapes Shakespeare's great tragedy according to Orpheus's failures. As an Orphic figure and as the embodiment of lyric, Ophelia suggests a crucial relationship in *Hamlet* between Orphic failure and tragedy.

---

<sup>160</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are taken from the 1623 Folio text of *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006).

<sup>161</sup> Scott Trudell, "The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia's Orphic Song," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012): 46-76, 49.

If Ophelia critics tend to overlook Ophelia's Orphic associations, they pay close attention to her feminine madness.<sup>162</sup> Typically, critics read Ophelia's "gender-specific" madness as a result of "sexual frustration, social helplessness, and [the] enforced control over women's bodies," and it leads her to produce music that Leslie C. Dunn describes as "radically 'other.'"<sup>163</sup> Through the lens of gender, Ophelia critics tie her mad music-making to the socially disruptive quality of her songs. Her music thus constitutes a specifically feminine form of social transgression: "the *fact* that Ophelia sings is just as indecorous as *what* she sings."<sup>164</sup> But Ophelia's madness has implications beyond the context of her songs.

In addition to its gendered social disruption, Ophelia's madness marks her body a site of political and poetic import. Margreta de Grazia argues that Ophelia's madness and resultant suicide cut off patrilineal futurity; she will never marry, and she will never produce an heir. The pastoral imagery of her death scene serves as "an emblem of spoiled genealogy, an image of blasted dynastic promise."<sup>165</sup> Whereas de Grazia attends to Ophelia's unfulfilled reproductive potential, Scott Trudell

---

<sup>162</sup> On the relationship between Ophelia's madness and gender, see Caroll Camden, "On Ophelia's Madness," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964): 247-55; Mildred E. Hartsock, "Major Scenes in Minor Key," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21 (1970): 55-62; Gabrielle Dane, "Reading Ophelia's Madness," *Exemplaria* 10 (1998): 405-23; and Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004). On the relationship between Ophelia's songs and her madness, see Lucy Bate, "Which Did or Did Not Go to the Grave," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17 (1966): 163-5; Leslie C. Dunn, "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*: Music, Madness, and the Feminine" in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 50-64; Jacquelyn A. Fox-Good, "Ophelia's Mad Songs: Music, Gender, Power" in *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1995), 217-38; David Lindley, *Shakespeare and Music* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 154-61; Katherine Bootle Attie, "Passion Turned to Prettiness: Rhyme or Reason in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012): 393-423; Deanne Williams, "Enter Ofelia Playing on a Lute" in *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, ed. Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 119-36; and Caralyn Bialo, "Popular Performance, the Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia's Madness," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 53 (2013): 293-309.

<sup>163</sup> Neely 52; Dunn 58. On the related issue of Ophelia's agency, see Nona Fienberg, "Jephthah's Daughter: The Parts Ophelia Plays" in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik (Conway, AR: UCA P, 1991) 128-43; Sandra K. Fischer, "Hearing Ophelia; Gender and Tragic Discourse in *Hamlet*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 14 (1990): 1-10; and Coppelia Kahn, "Afterword: Ophelia Then, Now, Hereafter" in Peterson and Williams, *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, 231-43.

<sup>164</sup> Dunn, "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*," 59, emphasis original. On Ophelia's socially disruptive lyrics, and on the disruptive nature of lyric more broadly, see Heather Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 215-27.

<sup>165</sup> Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 119.

examines her a figure of poetic re-production, an emblem of textual transmission and mediation.<sup>166</sup> For Trudell, Ophelia represents poetry's capacity to make meaning beyond the material realm of "scriptive matter."<sup>167</sup> Through Ophelia, we may witness "early modern anxieties about how bodies and other types of 'matter' come to signify," an issue largely ignored in criticism.<sup>168</sup>

Trudell's work, along with that of Martha C. Ronk and Bridget Gellert Lyons, contributes to a narrow body of criticism that examines Ophelia as a figure for poetic signification. More than a "document in madness" (4.1.174), she operates as a cipher for the mechanism by which representation itself functions. For Trudell, Ophelia reveals how poetry makes meaning specifically through a mix of media. For Lyons, Ophelia constitutes a shifting iconography at once legible to audience members but impossible to pin down, just as her distribution of flowers in Act 4 resists any "stable connection between object and meaning."<sup>169</sup> And for Ronk, who approaches Ophelia through the lens of *ekphrasis*, she represents an "eternal icon," constantly shaped by the men in her life and their often conflicting desires.<sup>170</sup> Even Elaine Showalter's foundational feminist essay relies on Ophelia's figural status, tracing as it does critical and cultural "representations [of Ophelia] that have overflowed the text."<sup>171</sup> If "the play allows Ophelia no mind of her own," perhaps it is because, in Ronk's words, she is reduced to "pure figuration."<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Moreover, in connection with Ophelia's body as a vessel for potential heirs, Sarah Gates argues for Ophelia as a revenger of "love-tragedy," depriving the culture and the men who have wronged her the use of her body, "the one thing that has value because men must stake their patrimony upon it." See "Assembling the Ophelia Fragments: Gender, Genre, and Revenge in *Hamlet*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 34 (2008): 229-47, 231. Also see Trudell, "The Mediation of Poesie."

<sup>167</sup> Trudell, "The Mediation of Poesie," 68. Trudell recognizes many of Ophelia's parallels with Orpheus, and I discuss these connections in detail in the following paragraph.

<sup>168</sup> Trudell, "The Mediation of Poesie," 49.

<sup>169</sup> Bridget Gellert Lyons, "The Iconography of Ophelia," *ELH* 44 (1977): 60-74, 62.

<sup>170</sup> Martha C. Ronk, "Representations of 'Ophelia,'" *Criticism* 36 (1994): 21-43, 33.

<sup>171</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia" in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia Parker (New York: Methuen, 1985), 77-92, 91.

<sup>172</sup> de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* 112; Ronk, "Representations of 'Ophelia,'" 33.



Yet only Trudell has offered some insight into Ophelia as “pure figuration” in light of Ovid’s myth of Orpheus.<sup>173</sup> Trudell locates Ophelia in a variety of roles across the tale of Orpheus:

In mythological terms, poesie was linked to Orpheus, the foundational figure for lyric poetry, whose name resonates phonetically with Ophelia’s, and whose captivating voice and lyre resemble the first quarto’s description of Ophelia “*playing on a lute, and her hair down, singing.*”

The attending gentleman draws out the association when he suggests that listeners eagerly ‘yawn’ and gape at Ophelia’s ‘winks and nods and gestures,’ implying a connection to Orphic *furor* and its power to compel and allure (4.5.9-11). Indeed, Ophelia has much in common with the long-haired maenads who destroy Orpheus, overtaking him and drowning out his song.

Ophelia’s erotomania and drowning evoke the most troubling aspects of the legend, including the sexual frenzy that culminates in Orpheus’s severed head floating down the Hebrus.<sup>174</sup>

Trudell draws on such Orphic associations in claiming Ophelia as a kind of “versifier” who, though she does not operate within the conventional medium of writing, nevertheless “exerts a cogent force over” her “song-speech.”<sup>175</sup> She shares Orpheus’s mode of vocal performance even as her Orphic resonance ranges across Ovid’s tale, aligning her with multiple characters, frustrating any one-to-one correlation with Ovid’s figures, and decentering interpretation.<sup>176</sup> Ophelia is a moving target of representation. In Trudell’s estimation, Ophelia’s Orphic resonances tell us something about how poetry comes to signify, but he does not engage with “the most troubling aspects of the legend” that he claims Ophelia embodies: he does not interrogate the ominous threat of poetic failure, loss, and

---

<sup>173</sup> Harold Jenkins notes that the language characterizing Hamlet’s backward glance at Ophelia recalls that which Ovid’s narrator uses to describe Orpheus’s damning glance backward at Eurydice, *flexit amans oculos*. See *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (New York: Methuen, 1982), II.i.100n. This parallel implicitly aligns Ophelia with the figure of Eurydice, though Jenkins does not identify her as such.

<sup>174</sup> Trudell, “The Mediation of Poesie,” 62.

<sup>175</sup> Trudell, “The Mediation of Poesie,” 63.

<sup>176</sup> The few critics who mention Ophelia’s parallels with the tale of Orpheus do so only in passing and usually in relation to Hamlet as the Orpheus figure. In addition to Jenkins, see L. M. Findlay, “Enriching Echoes: Hamlet and Orpheus,” *MLN* 93 (1978): 982-89 and Patrick Cheney, who calls Hamlet an “Ovidian Orphic Poet” in *Shakespeare’s Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 218n41.

death that accompanies those “troubling aspects.” Trudell’s *Ophelia* tells us something about how poetic language works. In this chapter, I will suggest that she is trying to tell us something about how it fails.

In particular, the chapter examines Ophelia’s relationship to the Orpheus myth as inherited in the Renaissance from the works of Ovid and Virgil and as portrayed in classical and Renaissance texts of literary criticism and theory. The former provides the foundation for Ophelia’s narrative parallels with Orpheus, Eurydice, and even the Maenads, while the latter establishes the rhetorical and literary frameworks of eloquence and genre that, as I will show, emerge in Ophelia’s relationship to poetic language. In the first section below, I provide classical and early modern context for the Orpheus myth and the rhetorical principles of Orphic eloquence, establishing the key elements that Shakespeare refracts and re-presents in Ophelia. In the succeeding sections, I identify and interrogate Ophelia’s Orphic moments and qualities and suggest their implications for the play. By dynamically enfolding many elements of the Orpheus myth into Ophelia, Shakespeare offers a commentary on the power and limitations of poetic language in terms of genre, mortality, and its capacity to impact the surrounding world. In particular, the third section establishes Ophelia’s affinity with Orpheus and Eurydice and identifies her as an embodied representation of the lyric genre—the primary genre of Orpheus for Renaissance writers. The fourth section addresses Ophelia’s performance of lyric in her mad songs, their focus on the permeable, mortal body, and their social disruption and generic resistance. The fifth section addresses Ophelia’s corpse in Gertrude’s highly aestheticized tale of Ophelia’s death and in the staging of her corpse in her funeral scene in Act 5. Her corpse, I suggest, functions as a lyric disruption to the epic genre and as a powerful symbol of Orphic poetic failure. This section concludes that the poetic failure represented in Ophelia’s corpse suggests the failure of lyric and epic (another Orphic genre) to restore order to the realm of Denmark and to immortalize either poet-lover or beloved. As the next section

demonstrates, in body, voice, and genre, Ophelia evokes many of the (sometimes paradoxical) qualities of the Orpheus myth handed down to the Renaissance.

*Orpheus in the Renaissance*

Critical accounts of Orphic song focus on its powerful persuasive capacity, yet the myth itself highlights Orphic song's failure in moments of dire need. Orpheus's music wins him entrance to the underworld and convinces Pluto and Proserpina to allow Eurydice to leave with him. It causes trees and stones to move. With the power of his song, Orpheus tames wild animals and brings civil order to barbarous human societies. Yet this same power fails Orpheus when he loses Eurydice to death a second time. It fails him again when he is attacked by the Maenads, the lustful and vengeful acolytes of Bacchus whose noise (*ululatus*) drowns out the Orphic music that causes the stones and spears being thrown at him to drop in mid-air. The Maenads dismember Orpheus and scatter the pieces of his body. His head, cast into the River Hebrus, continues to sing as it floats away in a macabre mockery of the poet's former power. Despite Orpheus's gruesome end, the Renaissance held him up as the ideal practitioner of poetic and rhetorical skill. Shakespeare interrogates the limits of that power in *Hamlet* by weaving the Orphic myth and a sense of a frustrated poetic impact into the figure of Ophelia, drawing on a rich tradition of classical and contemporary depictions of Orpheus.

The Orpheus myth comes down to the Renaissance primarily through Virgil and Ovid. These Roman writers both recount the same major events—Orpheus's loss of Eurydice, his consequent rejection of all women, and his death and dismemberment at the hands of the Maenads—but they depict Orpheus's response to loss and its impact on his music differently. In *Georgics* IV, Virgil presents an Orpheus in continual mourning for his wife. This Orpheus holds the entire underworld "spellbound" (*stupuere*, 481) with his song as he breaches the divide between life

and death in search of his wife.<sup>177</sup> His music compels the gods of hell to surrender Eurydice on Prosperpina's condition that Orpheus not look at her until they have regained the upper world. As he approaches the surface, however, he finds himself overcome with a sudden madness (*dementia*, 488; *furor*, 495) and casts his gaze backward upon Eurydice, who then fades "like smoke mingling with thin air" (*ceu fumus in auras / commixtus tenuis*, 499-501). Grieving the second death of his wife, Virgil's Orpheus sings the story of his loss. His lament creates a sympathetic ordering of the world around him, "charming tigers and drawing oaks" (510) through the music of his grief, even as it represents a rejection of romantic love in favor of "plaintive lamentation" (*miserabile carmen*, 514): "No thought of love or wedding song could bend his soul" (516).<sup>178</sup> The rejection of love thereby operates on a principle of excess grief and generic disorder. Orpheus's mourning is out of measure, and his grief-filled devotion to his dead wife inspires the similarly excessive lust and violence of the Maenads, who dismember the poet. Their excess overcomes his excess, and the head of Virgil's Orpheus, "now cold forever," floats down the Hebrus, "call[ing] with departing breath on Eurydice—ah, poor Eurydice!" (525-6).

In Book VI of the *Aeneid*, Virgil corrects Orpheus's excess grief and generic disorder by placing him in the "Blissful Groves" (*Fortunatorum Nemorum*, 639) of the afterlife.<sup>179</sup> There, Orpheus plays his lyre in an epic landscape populated by the forefathers of Troy with their "phantom arms and chariots," and by "good bards, whose songs were meet for Phoebus" (651-62).<sup>180</sup> By locating Orpheus in this epic Trojan afterlife, Virgil sets up the mythic bard as his own imperial poetic

---

<sup>177</sup> *Georgics* 4.453-527, trans. H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999)

<sup>178</sup> Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. and Mary Floyd-Wilson discuss the relationship between environment and affective experience in "Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World" in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007), 1-13.

<sup>179</sup> *Aeneid* 1-6, trans. H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999).

<sup>180</sup> In his fourth eclogue, Virgil also connects Orpheus with epic by alluding to the bard's mother Calliope, the Muse of epic (53-9).

predecessor.<sup>181</sup> Here Virgil turns Orpheus from a poet of excess and disorderly grief from the *Georgics* to one of orderly epic heritage; further, he makes “good bards” a defining feature of the epic landscape. In epicizing Orpheus, Virgil effectively contains the lyric threat of excess grief and unnatural love generically and chronologically, circumscribing the poet in the epic setting of Rome’s mythic history. The cost of the order established by Virgilian epic is, as Aeneas well knows, a surrender of the beloved: a sacrifice of personal feeling for imperial duty. But whereas Aeneas must leave Dido, Orpheus sits alone in the Elysian Fields, and Virgil’s narrator makes no mention of Eurydice.

In contrast to Virgil, Ovid writes an Orpheus whose bitter grief leads to repetitions of disorderly desire. Whereas Virgil’s Orpheus looks back at Eurydice in a moment of madness or *dementia*, Ovid’s Orpheus gives in to temptation and desire: “eager for sight of her, [he] turned back his longing eyes” (*metuens avidusque videndi / flexit amans oculos*, X.56-7). Ovid’s Orpheus not only upsets the order of life and death but also breaks Proserpina’s condition that allows him to do so. Though Ovid’s Orpheus mourns for his wife, he is much more a creature of desire than in Virgil. As Ovid tells it, after the death of his wife “Orpheus had shunned all love of womankind, whether because of his ill success in love, of whether he had given his troth once for all” (X.79-81). This ambiguity of motivations suggests a bitter Orpheus, scorned by his “ill success.” Heartbroken and resentful, Orpheus turns his thwarted desire toward young boys for fulfillment. Though Virgil omits Orpheus’s homosexual turn, Ovid makes it explicit: “He set the example for the people of Thrace of giving his love to tender boys” (X.84). While Ovid casts no aspersions on these sexual acts, he does mention that Orpheus was the first lover of young boys, suggesting the potentially disruptive quality

---

<sup>181</sup> For more on the use of Orpheus in the Virgilian model of laureate poetry, see *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie, vol. 2, 1558-1660 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015); *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception*, ed. Philip Hardie and Helen Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010); and Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993).

of desire construed outside the bounds of heterosexual relationships. Orpheus's songs, which Ovid allows his reader to witness, center on such disruptive desire. Unlike Virgil's figure, this Orpheus does not sing of his own grief, but rather of "boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty of their lust" (X.153-4). Where the grief of Virgil's Orpheus restores order through his song, the thwarted desire of Ovid's Orpheus perpetuates erotic disorder that inhibits or corrupts generative heterosexual pairing. Homosexual desire was, in Ovid's time, a matter of course and an accepted practice, but the Renaissance would have read such desire as illicit and transgressive.<sup>182</sup>

The transgressive desire and disorder contained in the songs of Ovid's Orpheus are, as in Virgil, also generically inflected. But in contrast to Virgil, Ovid's Orpheus rejects rather than sustains epic: "I have sung the giants in a heavier strain, and the victorious bolts hurled on the Phlegraean plains. But now I need the gentler touch (*leviore lyra*, or more literally, "lighter lyre"), for I would sing of boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty of their lust" (X.149-54).<sup>183</sup> Ovid counters the epic agenda that Virgil imposes onto Orpheus by rewriting the mythic bard as one who relinquishes the "heavier strain" of epic in favor of the "gentler touch" of lyric. Ovid grounds the Orphic turn from epic to lyric in the content of "unnatural love," establishing an Orphic paradigm of lyric that implicitly connects song with desire and the erotic (or eroticized) body. The songs of Ovid's Orpheus clearly reflect this connection in their focus on other

---

<sup>182</sup> Though pederasty is here attended by connotations of disruption, the passage in *Metamorphoses* X also suggests its later evolution into a regular practice. On the treatment of homoeroticism and homosexuality in Renaissance texts, see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993), 52-3 and Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016), 150-76.

<sup>183</sup> Elizabeth Marie Young identifies this as the moment that Orpheus moves from lyric to elegy. See "Inscribing Orpheus: Ovid and the Invention of a Greco-Roman Corpus," *Representations* 101 (2008): 1-31. In Greek tradition, Orpheus is associated with a variety of genres, including hymn, epic, and tragedy. Virgil presents him as a predominantly tragic figure that serves as foil to epic. Responding to Virgilian epic, Ovid writes a "humbler, less heroic" Orpheus. See Charles Segal, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), 36-72, 56. For more on Ovid's Orpheus as a response to Virgil's, see W. S. Anderson, "The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid: *fleBILE nescio quid*," in *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. John Warden (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982), 25-50.

such lovers as Phoebus and Ganymede, Phoebus and Hyacinthus, and Myrrha and Cinyras. Ovid thus turns the Virgilian epic agenda on its head in writing an Orpheus who abandons epic and sings of bodies and desires. Ovid also inverts the reflection in the natural world of the mourning of Virgil's Orpheus's. Instead, Orpheus's song of "unnatural love" is perversely reflected in the lust and mad revenge of the Maenads. The head of this Orpheus does not float down the Hebrus calling out the name of Eurydice. Rather, the Orphic head floats away with his lyre, and both "gave forth . . . mournful notes" (*Met.* XI.51). Ovid's tale highlights the lethal failure of the song "to which rocks listened, and to which the hearts of savage beasts responded" (XI.41-2).

Despite Orpheus's gruesome end, traditional accounts of Orphic song unwaveringly emphasized its potency. Classical as well as Renaissance texts consistently portray the bard as a founder of lyric poetry (that *leviore lyre* to which Ovid's phrase alludes) who uses the persuasive power of his song to tame beasts, move stones and trees, and civilize human society.<sup>184</sup> Horace refers to Orpheus as one who, "While men still roamed the woods . . . made them shrink from bloodshed and brutal living" (391-407)<sup>185</sup> Taking a cue from Horace and others, the Renaissance maintains the image of a civilizing Orpheus, representing him as the epitome of poetic excellence and a primary founder of poetry itself. Identifying him as one of "two poets of the first ages," George Puttenham praises Orpheus as one who tamed wild beasts and "with melodious instruments . . . brought the rude and sauage people to a more ciuill and orderly life" (6).<sup>186</sup> Philip Sidney, too, describes Orpheus as one who was "listened to by beastes, indeed stony and beastly people" (151).<sup>187</sup> The Renaissance Orpheus even becomes a mythic counterpart to English poetic greatness, with

---

<sup>184</sup> All of these capacities arise from poetry's ability to move (*movere*) the surrounding world. Based on the persuasive, *moving* capacity of Orphic song, Joseph Ortiz attributes Orpheus's death to a failure of *movere*. See *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), 39-40.

<sup>185</sup> *Ars Poetica*, trans. H. R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929).

<sup>186</sup> *The Arte of English Poesie in Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904) vol. 2, 1-193, 6.

<sup>187</sup> *An Apology for Poetry in Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904), vol. 1, 148-207.

Sidney, Francis Meres, and others drawing parallels between the legendary poet and Chaucer, Gower, and, in Thomas Nashe's preface to *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney himself. Renaissance literary critics thereby fabricate a national poetic lineage by appropriating the civilizing capacity and aesthetic achievement represented by Orphic song, extending its traditional social and material impact to encompass the national.<sup>188</sup>

These ordering impacts of Orphic song occur within specific generic frameworks. In Greek texts, Orpheus was originally associated with epic. He accompanied Jason on his epic quest for the golden fleece and fought alongside the Argonauts.<sup>189</sup> And while Virgil re-inserts Orpheus into an epic context in the *Aeneid*, Ovid explicitly presents Orpheus's shift from singing of "giants in a heavier strain" to the "gentler touch" of lyric.<sup>190</sup> The Renaissance bears out this shift, routinely casting Orpheus as the founder of lyric and depicting him with his lyre. Indeed, matters of love are more suited to lyric than epic, as the narrator of Ovid's *Amores* affirms (I.i.17-20).<sup>191</sup> And as Orpheus comes to represent lyric, Renaissance lyric comes to resemble Orpheus, evoking the myth in a variety of ways, including a focus on the topic of love, a formal performance of motion (from Orphic *movere*) and scatteredness (mirroring Orphic *sparagmos*), a negotiation of distance and proximity (recalling Orpheus's nearness to and later distance from Eurydice), and a presentation of the interior self often mediated through the reporting of personal experience (recalling Orpheus's dejected music making).<sup>192</sup> As I shall show in the following section, Shakespeare weaves these

---

<sup>188</sup> Though she does not address *Hamlet*, Heather James charts Shakespeare's uses of Virgil, Ovid, and other classical sources to develop an English national myth. See *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997).

<sup>189</sup> On Orpheus's time as an Argonaut, see Segal, *The Myth of the Poet*, 13-14, 103-9; and Emmet Robbins, "Famous Orpheus," in Warden, *The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, 3-24, 5-8.

<sup>190</sup> Young contends that the death of Eurydice in the *Metamorphoses* marks Orpheus's shift from epic to love elegy, which would have fallen under the rubric of lyric in Renaissance paradigms of genre.

<sup>191</sup> "My new page of song rose well with first verse in lofty strain, when that next one—of thy [Cupid's] making—changes to slightness the vigour of my work; and yet I have no matter suited to lighter numbers—neither a boy, nor a maiden with long and well-kept locks." *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1977).

<sup>192</sup> See Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus*, for a more in-depth examination of these characteristics and their relationship to Orpheus, esp. 18-26.



characteristics of lyric verse into the figure of Ophelia even as he narratively and allusively aligns her with the central characters of the Orpheus myth.

*Figuring Orphic, Embodying Lyric*

Ophelia's lyric and Orphic aspects first emerge in 2.1, the scene in which she reports to her father on the private interaction she has just had off stage with Hamlet. Her lyric and Orphic resonances occur through her figuration as beloved and poet-lover, through her narrative and linguistic allusions to Ovid's myth of Orpheus, and through her performance of what Heather Dubrow has termed the "rhetoric of lyric."<sup>193</sup> It is through these generically laden mechanisms that Ophelia narrates Hamlet's lyric behavior and weirdly silent Petrarchism (itself a lyric mode deeply indebted to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*).<sup>194</sup> Though Ophelia delivers her report in blank verse, we may regard it under the rubric of lyric by virtue of her ongoing role as a speaker and subject of lyric verse throughout the play. The report takes Ophelia herself as the passive aesthetic object and Petrarchan beloved. Shakespeare thereby mediates Hamlet's silent and unstaged performance of lyric through the voice and body of Ophelia, endowing her with a significance beyond that of the two-dimensional image typical of a Petrarchan beloved. But if Hamlet, within the frame of Ophelia's narrative, anchors the principles of Petrarchan lyric in the body of Ophelia, it is *her* voice that conjures up the correlative image of the Petrarchan action that has occurred off stage. If Hamlet performs lyric upon Ophelia, it is still Ophelia—her body, her voice—who injects lyric into the dramatic medium.

---

<sup>193</sup> See Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 15-53.

<sup>194</sup> Petrarch incorporates Ovidian notions of body, voice, and image in his creation of and fixation on Laura, the beloved of *Rime sparse*, generating a "rhetoric of the body" that subtends the *Rime's* presentation of the relationship between poet and beloved, artist and art work. See Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body*,

In her figural, linguistic, and rhetorical aspects enacted in her report to Polonius, Ophelia represents a complex and expansive relationship to lyric, the primary genre that the Renaissance attached to Orphic song:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.  
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm  
 And with his other hand thus o'er his brow  
 He falls to such perusal of my face  
 As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.  
 At last, a little shaking of mine arm,  
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound  
 That it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
 And end his being. That done, he lets me go,  
 And with his head over his shoulders turned  
 He seemed to find his way without his eyes  
 (For out o'doors he went without their help)  
 And to the last bended their light on me. (2.1.85-98)

Though Ophelia does not recite lyric in this scene, her report nevertheless exhibits many of the principles and characteristics that Dubrow identifies as belonging to lyric, most prominently the tension between distance and immediacy, but also that between authorial power and impotence, and between permanence and impermanence. In its negotiation of lyric distancing, the speech also generates a complex relationship between speaker, performer, poet, and audience that is

characteristic of both lyric and Petrarchan traditions.<sup>195</sup> The speech constructs two blazons and weaves in such traits of English Petrarchism as ambivalent depictions of female silence, an implicit struggle with the concept of representation, and blurred distinctions between poet and mistress. This blurring also manifests allusively in Ophelia's dual figuration of Eurydice *and* Orpheus. Through the enactment of these characteristics, Ophelia mediates bodily, and rhetorically, the drama of her unstaged (but not unspoken) lyric and Orphic interaction with the Prince.<sup>196</sup>

Hamlet's restraint of Ophelia locks the couple in a paradoxical state of distance and immediacy. Dubrow contends that "[w]hat is most characteristic of lyric in the early modern period . . . is . . . the coexistence of those techniques suggesting immediacy and those creating forms of distance."<sup>197</sup> Hamlet plays out this lyric tension on Ophelia's body, literalizing this powerful poetic principle. He locks on to her wrist, pulls her close, and shakes her, all while keeping her at "the length of all his arm," performing (insofar as the term can apply to offstage action) physical closeness and distance simultaneously. When he releases her arm, the intensity of his stare maintains the immediacy of his presence even as he moves away from her. This intimate moment enacts both seduction and rejection, desire and restraint, physical touch and physical absence, evoking dichotomies characteristic of both lyric and Petrarchan dilemmas.

The physical tension of lyric distance and immediacy in Ophelia's report also registers rhetorically. Because her report communicates dramatic action through an embedded narrative, it effectively distances Polonius as well as the audience from the action of the event. Yet this distancing also creates immediacy as Ophelia's vivid description of Hamlet draws the audience into

---

<sup>195</sup> On complexity and multiplicity of lyric audiences, see Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus*, 54-105. On the complexities of audience that arise from the blazon's use in early modern theater, see Deborah Uman and Sara Morrison, ed. *Staging the Blazon in Early Modern English Theater* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>196</sup> On lyric tensions, see Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus*, 54-105. On characteristics of English Petrarchism, see Dubrow's earlier work, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995).

<sup>197</sup> Dubrow, *Challenges of Orpheus*, 108.

*his* experience through *her* narration. The “long” “perusal of [Ophelia’s] face,” the “sigh so piteous and profound / That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,” and the intense stare of his departure all suggest Hamlet’s interior condition. Ophelia’s report generates the immediacy of Hamlet’s presence by bringing his interiority to the stage in a disclosure to her father that specifically depends on Hamlet’s absence. Her narration thus mediates both dramatic action and her poet-lover’s subjectivity through a lyric register.<sup>198</sup>

Ophelia further dramatizes aspects of lyric in serving as the first “audience” for Hamlet’s performance of madness and thereby creating Polonius, and the playgoers at The Globe, as the second and third audiences. Her description of Hamlet echoes his decision in the preceding scene “To put an antic disposition on / . . . / With arms encumbered thus, or thus, head shake” (1.5.171-3), and these lines reverberate throughout the play’s performances of madness, anticipating Ophelia’s later “winks and nods” (4.1.11) as well as Hamlet’s silent, offstage performance. His “encumbered” arms and the shaking of his head predict his grasp on her wrist and the “waving up and down” (2.1.91) of his head, respectively. Ophelia’s verbal echo of Hamlet’s intended performance manifests bodily within the story that she tells. This echo from text to body extends to include a gestural echo centered on a word that implicitly ties text to action: “thus.” In performance, Hamlet’s rehearsal of his pretended madness “with arms encumbered *thus*, or *thus*, head shake” often includes gestures that portray the actions he describes. Ophelia’s use of “thus” in her description of Hamlet with “his head *thus* waving up and down” likewise signals bodily movement that manifests the text. Her “thus,” however, effectively resituates Hamlet’s dramatic gesture within a narrative that is never staged, only *represented* on the stage. Both the poet-lover Hamlet and his beloved Ophelia thereby code dramatic performance as well as lyric principle

---

<sup>198</sup> This distancing at work here is also reminiscent of the “Ovidian distance” that Enterline detects in Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*: a “narrative disjunction between the look and the voice,” *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 114.

through bodily performance. Through the lyric distancing at work here, Ophelia figures the embodied process that brings dramatic and lyric texts to life. She emblemizes and enacts the bodily representation of the text, folding the representational nature of drama into the complexities of lyric.

Her representational navigation between drama and lyric also evokes and blurs the roles of poet figure and beloved. Her description of Hamlet's attentions clearly suggests him as a type of the Petrarchan poet-lover: he writes to her in verse making "many tenders / Of his affection" (1.3.99-100), he stares at her as at an art work, and perhaps he even performs a silent blazon of her.<sup>199</sup> Her descriptions of Hamlet thus cast him as a Petrarchan author figure. Yet Ophelia matches Hamlet's silent blazon with a vocalized blazon of her own. In voicing this blazon, along with its undertones of desire, Ophelia bridges the roles of beloved and poet-lover.<sup>200</sup>

Ophelia's report shows Hamlet in the attitude of a stereotypical Petrarchan lover, "Mad for [her] love" (2.1.83). He appears to her "with doublet all unbraced / No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, / . . . / Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking together" (2.1.76-9), all signs of a Petrarchan affliction. He stares at her face "As he would draw it," suggesting her status as an image or art object to which the typical Petrarchan beloved is often reduced. And he locks his gaze on her as he backs away with a "sigh so piteous and profound."<sup>201</sup>

Yet this description also serves as a blazon of the disheveled prince, one that is bookended by statements of the speaker's emotional response to Hamlet's physical condition. As with the conventional blazon, Ophelia's is couched in erotically evocative imagery. Like her poetic mediation,

---

<sup>199</sup> Cheney notes that "Ophelia's description of Hamlet's subsequent behavior literalizes the 'hallmark' of Petrarchan lyric poetry, the blazon." *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, 218.

<sup>200</sup> Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*, 12. Dubrow notes that "Petrarchan poets emphasize the divide between the poet and the mistress—even as they erase it," an observation that holds true in Ophelia's lyric discourse.

<sup>201</sup> Cheney argues that through Hamlet's Petrarchan behavior, "Shakespeare voices the idiom of Petrarchan poetry to represent an aesthetic process . . . fus[ing] the discourse of theatre and the discourse of the book to present the authorial figure as a theatrical Petrarchist." *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, 218.

her blazon also elides the boundary between poet and art object while continuing to import other genres into her lyric mode of discourse:

*Ophelia:* Alas, my lord, I have been so affrighted.

*Polonius:* With what, in the name of heaven?

*Ophelia:* My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,

No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,

Ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle,

Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,

And with a look so piteous in purport

As if he had been loosed out of hell

To speak of horrors, he comes before me.

*Polonius:* Mad for thy love?

*Ophelia:* My lord, I do not know,

But truly I do fear it. (2.1.73-84)

Ophelia's description of Hamlet suggests a state of desire that Petrarchan poets sometimes crafted for the beloved, portraying their mistress as desirous but unwilling to yield their chastity, yet desire also aligns her with the role of Petrarchan poet. With such a lurid description of Hamlet, Ophelia effectively gives him the once over, shifting her gaze from chest to head to legs and ankles. He may indeed be "ungartered" by Ophelia's gaze, his "doublet all unbraced," yet any desire that these lines suggest is tempered by fear. She is "affrighted" by Hamlet, who appears both "Mad for [her] love" and "[a]s if he had been loosed out of hell." The potential desire implicit in Ophelia's blazon is eclipsed by the threat of hell, a threat that also appears in the Ghost's use of an "eternal blazon" (1.5.21) to describe the hypothetical bodily impact on the Prince were he to reveal the details of his

hellish “prison-house” (1.5.14). In the mouths of Ophelia and the Ghost, the blazon captures an infernal eternity that subsumes the supposed immortality of earthly fame associated with epic. Through this device, Shakespeare endows Ophelia with a Petrarchan poetic capacity even as her body acts as the space of lyric and the physical representation of the Petrarchan beloved. While Hamlet is silent, Ophelia speaks *about* him and *for* him, much as a Petrarchan poet would do for his beloved. In so doing she brings to the stage Hamlet’s interiority as well as her own capacity as a potential author figure.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to the elision of poet and beloved, Ophelia’s speech evokes the Petrarchan trajectory that moves from physical desire toward spiritual matters. Responding to her statement of alarm, Polonius exclaims, “With what, in the name of heaven?” (2.1.74). Ophelia’s reply, however, redirects her father’s offhandedly invoked teleology. As she shifts from describing Hamlet’s body and outfit to his facial expression, Ophelia declares that he looks “As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors” (81-2). Whereas the narrator of Petrarch’s *Rime sparse* turns his attention (or tries to) from Laura toward heavenly matters, Ophelia’s blazon shifts away from the body of her poet-lover—and away from “heaven”—toward “hell.” This movement redirects the spiritual trajectory of Petrarchism. In contrast to Hamlet’s distinctly Petrarchan idolization of Ophelia as “celestial” and “my soul’s idol” (2.2.108), Ophelia’s Petrarchan blazon of the Prince shifts the traditional trajectory from the divine toward the infernal.

Such a shift also upends the telos of epic, the genre to which the Ghost belongs and to which Hamlet aspires.<sup>203</sup> Shakespeare is known to have drawn on classical epic in the construction of

---

<sup>202</sup> Though critics like Cheney and Garber maintain that Ophelia merely reflects aspects of masculine authorship or of the male author figure, I qualify that perspective by illuminating the way that Ophelia, as the embodiment of lyric, enfolds the figural roles of poet-lover and beloved, of author and poetic object, into a lyric modality that is at odds with the epic tendencies that Cheney and Garber ascribe to Hamlet.

<sup>203</sup> In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare critiques epic and Petrarchan poetry by literalizing the device of blazon in Lavinia’s violently mutilated body. See James, *Shakespeare’s Troy*, 65-9.

such works as *Titus Andronicus*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and while *Hamlet* incorporates epic less overtly, various critics argue for the influence of Homeric and Virgilian epics as “conceptual models” for the play.<sup>204</sup> Common to most analyses are the father-son relationship between Hamlet and the Ghost, the filial and dynastic imperative to correct a wrong, and the conflict between romantic love and duty. In addition to such thematic parallels, the play also offers a multitude of allusive phrases and names, including most obviously the First Player’s Hecuba speech, the majority of which is spoken by Hamlet himself.<sup>205</sup> Cheney and Marjorie Garber both argue that the play establishes a generic context of fallen epic in the figure of the Ghost, and that Hamlet’s inability to live up to the values of that genre constitutes a uniquely Shakespearean reworking of early modern tragedy.<sup>206</sup> Their arguments rely on the Ghost as an indicator of what Cheney calls “the death of epic as a Western literary form” (emphasis removed), and Hamlet’s attention to the material mortality of such figures as Caesar and Alexander, whose “noble dust” “might stop a hole” (5.1.201, 211), supports Cheney’s and Garber’s notion of the prince who falls short of epic values.<sup>207</sup> “Hamlet stands,” as Charles Whitney notes, “between [the] spiteful, if heroic, injunction [of the Ghost] and Aeneas’s impossible heroic ideal.”<sup>208</sup>

What these critics do not acknowledge, however, is how Hamlet’s fascination with physical deterioration and mortality inverts the epic telos of earthly fame and a paradisaical afterlife. The

---

<sup>204</sup> Bruce Loudon, “Telemachos, the *Odyssey*, and *Hamlet*” in *Text and Presentation 2014*, ed. Graley Herren (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co., 2014): 33-50, 34. Loudon provides a helpful catalogue of classical allusions in *Hamlet*. See also H. Gaston Hall, “Epic Antecedents of the Ghost of Hamlet’s Father: Reminiscence and Allusion?” *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 82 (2012): 33-8. In contrast to these, which detect in *Hamlet*’s classical references and parallels the echoes of epic, Tanya Pollard argues that the First Player’s Hecuba speech indicates Shakespeare’s engagement with a female-centered tradition of Greek tragedy. See “What’s Hecuba to Shakespeare?,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 1060-93.

<sup>205</sup> See Robert Miola, “Aeneas and Hamlet,” *Classical and Modern Literature* 8 (1988): 275-90.

<sup>206</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 485-90; Cheney, *Shakespeare’s Literary Authorship*, 59-60.

<sup>207</sup> Cheney, *Shakespeare’s Literary Authorship*, 60. Garber identifies the Ghost of King Hamlet as “the embodiment of lost epic and heroic values, the tutelary spirit of a heroic past” that Hamlet cannot resurrect in “the new Denmark.” *Shakespeare After All*, 486-7.

<sup>208</sup> “The Fall of Troy and the Rise of Elizabethan Drama: Empowering the Audience,” *Quidditas* 23 (2002): 69-81, 81.



Ghost presents revenge, rather than prayer, as the vehicle that ought to free him from Purgatory, yet the play refuses to resolve this.<sup>209</sup> And Hamlet's confrontation with death in the graveyard scene in Act 5 suggests anything but the comfort of a heavenly afterlife for the epic figures upon whose corporeal fate he expounds. Hamlet's mortal rhetoric, along with the Ghost's purgatorial poetics and geography, redirects epic toward an infernal telos. Whereas Virgil resituates Orpheus, and by extension lyric, in a heroic afterlife in the Elysian fields, Shakespeare uses the lyric blazon to upend epic teleology. The "hell" that Ophelia describes in Hamlet's face repeats and makes manifest the Ghost's apophatic description of hell and its affective blazon of the prince. Within the play's presentation of epic, as characterized in the Ghost's corrupt version and Hamlet's ideal, unachievable Virgilian version, lyric acts as the vehicle of epic destabilization. As in the story of Orpheus, after his own failed katabatic journey and turning away from epic, lyric emerges as powerfully affective, persuasive, and generically subversive. It plays out in and on bodies, it seduces, and it signals the disruption of epic.

#### *Ophelia's Mad Lyrics*

In her mad songs in Act 4, Ophelia moves from physically, emblematically, and rhetorically embodying lyric in 2.1 to performing it. Much like Orpheus, she responds to death and lost love with songs that reflect her own grief and frustrated desire. They transform and divide Orpheus's lachrymose longing for his twice-dead wife (from which his *leviore lyra* emerges) into the thwarted desire of the abandoned beloved and the mourning for a dead father. The respective bodies of these figures suffuse Ophelia's songs, emphasizing the centrality of the body in an Orphic lyric context. They also invert the relationship between lyric and the body. Whereas in 2.1 Ophelia's body operates as the site about, upon, and through which lyric commences, in Act 4 her lyric verses become the

---

<sup>209</sup> Eleanor Prosser sees in the Ghost's demand for revenge instead of prayers to release him from purgatory as an indication of its demonic nature. *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967), 97-142.

vehicle of her body, incorporating Ophelia once again into the realm of representation. As represented in her verses, the bodiliness of death and desire constitute social and generic disruptions that, in their bawdy, suggestive content and low form, threaten courtly decorum and political stability. Further, in pointing to the loss of her royal paramour as well as her father, Ophelia's songs shut down dynastic history and futurity, two major components of classical epic. Her emphasis on bodily death and the impossibility of resurrection recalls Orpheus's failed resurrection of Eurydice and, as her earlier blazon of Hamlet suggests, refutes the possibility of a heavenly immortality. Thus, as Ophelia's verses resolve her body into a potent symbol of Orphic poetic failure, their focus on a tragic finitude—one that foreshadows her own death—continues to upset epic sensibilities and values.

Before Ophelia appears onstage in 4.1 to sing her mad songs, Horatio describes her insane speech to Gertrude (and, by extension, to the theater audience) by way of its thematic content and indecipherability. The bitterness and grief with which he describes her ravings, as well as their capacity to attract an audience, recalls similar aspects of Orpheus's song:

She speaks much of her father, says she hears  
 There's tricks i'th'world, and hems and beats her heart,  
 Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt  
 That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,  
 Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
 The hearers to collection. They aim at it,  
 And botch the words up to fit their own thoughts,  
 Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.      (4.1.4-13)

Like Orpheus's song after losing Eurydice, Ophelia's half-intelligible words and gestures perform a grief tinged with resentment. While her railing at the "tricks i'th'world" may make little sense to Horatio, Gertrude at least knows of Hamlet's lyric promise, "never doubt I love" (2.2.117), and his subsequent madness and banishment; even if she never learns of Hamlet's vitriolic reversal of affection, "I loved you not" (3.1.119), she knows Ophelia has lost the Prince's heart. If Ophelia complains of the "tricks i'th'world, and hems, and beats her heart," we may hear in this unintelligible vocalization of grief a more emphatic, if less articulate, version of her reply to Hamlet, "I was the more deceived" (3.1.119). And because "trick" may mean both "an artifice to deceive or cheat" and "a thing done without full thought or consideration," Horatio suggests Ophelia as both accusatory and self-deprecating.<sup>210</sup> Further, this bitter descriptor immediately follows that of "She speaks much of her father," precariously juxtaposing filial love with frustrated erotic desire in a way that perhaps calls to mind the story of Myrrha's incestuous seduction of her father Cinyras, one of the various tales of "unnatural love" of which Orpheus sings. This is not to suggest that Ophelia feels any such desire for her father, but rather to demonstrate the Orphic notes that subtend Ophelia's mad speech even before she begins to perform it.

Ophelia's capacity to "draw the hearers to collection" with her "unshaped speech" continues her alignment with Orpheus. As Orpheus's song gathers trees as listeners, Ophelia's crazed singing gathers an audience. And where Orpheus sings of tragically ill-fated love that ends in the re-shaping of the beloved's body, Ophelia sings of lost love in speech that attests to the dangerous transformative power of language in relation to the body. Horatio's declaration that "Her speech is nothing" exemplifies this relationship between body and language with a triple pun on "nothing."

---

<sup>210</sup> "trick, n." OED Online. December 2018. Oxford UP.  
<http://www.oed.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/view/Entry/205842?rskey=Rb4Bl3&result=1&isAdvanced=false>  
 (accessed December 17, 2018).

First, “nothing” suggests an absence of meaning or importance. Horatio means to suggest that Ophelia’s mad words are unimportant or without meaning, and because he delivers this description in her absence, this sense of “nothing” also points to Ophelia’s absence from the stage. This second absence quickly turns to presence, as “nothing” may also indicate a third sense of the word, *noting*, suggesting both observation and written record. This sense endows Ophelia with an authorial capacity to record the world around her and perhaps gestures to the printed play as a written record of events. This sense of *noting* may also direct listeners and audiences to pay attention to Ophelia’s words, much as her later directive to Gertrude “Pray you mark” (4.1.34) does. And in its use as a slang term for a woman’s genitals (“That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs,” 3.2.115), “nothing” also emphasizes and eroticizes Ophelia’s body. Thus, “nothing” paradoxically ties substance to absence and language to body.

Horatio’s declaration that “Her speech is nothing” generates a nexus of meaning around Ophelia’s roles as madwoman, poet figure, and eroticized beloved. It anticipates the centrality (and helplessness) of the erotic female body in Ophelia’s songs about jilted women. It also points to language that is at odds with itself, at once full of meaning in its denotative capacity and (to borrow from Macbeth) signifying nothing. “This nothing’s more than matter,” says Laertes of his sister’s ramblings, and indeed, Ophelia’s “nothing” exceeds the corporeal limitations of matter. It is, Horatio tells the Queen, “unshaped.” The term suggests both a precursor to “shape” and an unraveling of that shape. This single word captures the Ovidian sense of metamorphosis in its anticipation of a changing shape or condition and in its alternate meaning of physical disintegration: to *un*-shape. The *re*-shaping of metamorphosis in Ovid may be understood as being preceded by the violence of *un*-shaping, the surrender of the original physical form, usually in circumstances of desire and/or violation. Philomela, herself a type of Orpheus in the *Metamorphoses*, offers a primary example

of the “unshaping” of form in speech and body.<sup>211</sup> Having been raped and had her tongue cut out by her sister’s husband, Philomela is transformed into a nightingale and comes to symbolize poetry itself. Yet, as Enterline points out, poetry’s origins in Ovid are routinely entangled with women’s silence and violation. With the stage direction “*Enter Ophelia playing on a lute, and her hair down, singing*” that is unique to Q1 (13.14), the text clearly associates Ophelia with lyric song and with the sexual violence typically indicated by a woman’s disheveled hair on stage.<sup>212</sup> Horatio’s pun on “nothing” thus suggests a disintegrative version of the Ovidian transformative power of poetic language.

As Ophelia comes into focus as a grieving and potentially violated Ovidian figure of poetry, her speech, “unshaped” as it is, wields an Orphic power over her audience. Specifically, “it doth move / The hearers to collection,” even though comprehension escapes them. The primary power of Orphic song is its capacity to persuade or move (*movere*) its listeners, human or otherwise. Orpheus wields this power when, after his second loss of Eurydice, he sits down on a hilltop to sing. In his grief-inspired song, trees gather on the hillside, surrounding the bard. In Ophelia’s grief, her songs similarly move those around her to gather nearer to listen. Yet her audience cannot correctly interpret her words. In fact, the problem of interpreting Ophelia’s words, as described by Horatio, mirrors Renaissance pedagogy with regard to the texts of Ovid. With his racy content and scenes of strange or illicit desire, Ovid was considered suitable only for those readers who could learn from his poetic art while understanding its contents as a negative moral exemplar.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, the kinds of rhetorical imitation that were practiced in Renaissance schools involved not just recitation but also facial and gestural expression.<sup>214</sup> Thus, though Ophelia gathers listeners the way that Orpheus

---

<sup>211</sup> Philomela, notes Lynn Enterline, “‘will move even rocks to share knowledge’ of an act that is, literally, *ne-fas*, or ‘unspeakable,’” *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 3. On Philomela and the Ovidian rhetoric of rape and unspeakability as a paradoxical means of representation, see Enterline, *Rhetoric of the Body* 3-5.

<sup>212</sup> Thompson and Taylor, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*.

<sup>213</sup> For more on Renaissance resistance to Ovid’s illicit content, see Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 52-3, and Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012), 76.

<sup>214</sup> See Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, 38-48.

gathers trees, and though she provides gestural assistance for interpretation much as Renaissance schoolchildren may have done when reciting from Ovid, her listeners still “botch up the words to fit their own thoughts.” We may read this as a Shakespearean jibe at his age’s moralizing misinterpretation of Ovid, yet we might also read it in context of an Orphic resonance. As Orpheus’s songs reflect his own bitterness, so Ophelia’s ravings at the “tricks i’t’h world” reflect a personal resentment that, when refracted through her lyric performance, unseemly in content and form, imposes a socially disruptive poetic force on the royal court of Denmark.

Ophelia’s songs perform two primary positions of loss: that of the abandoned beloved and that of the grieving child. Their ballad form and bawdy content make her performance before the King and Queen particularly scandalous, showcasing and juxtaposing the shamefully deflowered virgin with that of the patriarchal corpse. Her first song, “How should I your true love know,” introduces the body of the lover and of the corpse united in the same metrical form:

How should I your true love know

From another one?

By his cockle hat and staff

And his sandal shoon.

. . . . .

He is dead and gone, lady,

He is dead and gone.

At his head a grass-green turf,

At his heels a stone. (4.1.23-32)

Into this ballad Ophelia enfolds her grief for her lost lover and her late father, as well as a quiet accusation aimed at Gertrude. The Queen, Ophelia insinuates, determines her “true love” based on “his cockle hat and staff,” or his crown and scepter. Shakespeare borrows these stanzas from a

popular ballad, and while they do not appear side by side in early modern copies of this song, their proximity here functions as a kind of memento mori, pointing to the mortality of all, regardless of whether they bear a staff or a royal scepter.<sup>215</sup> In “Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s Day,” Ophelia invokes the stereotypically deceived and deflowered virgin and inserts this figure into her growing string of stanzas on erotic and dead bodies:

Quoth she, “Before you tumbled me  
 You promised me to wed.”  
 “So would I ha’done by yonder sun  
 And thou hadst not come to my bed.” (4.1.62-5)

Suggesting a parallel between the fictional maiden and Ophelia, this song brings the erotic body of the betrayed female front and center in Denmark’s court. The lesson here, in de Grazia’s words, is “beware male treachery,” but with their ubiquity of the implicitly naked, eroticized female body, these verses also offer a specifically lyric mode of social disruption through their capacity to scandalize.<sup>216</sup>

Ophelia’s songs titrate bodily desire through a lyric genre, creating a potentially volatile force of social disruption. As Dunn notes, their ballad form is at odds with the setting of Denmark’s royal court—a place in which Ophelia should not be singing at all, let alone singing such low brow material. Dubrow also notes the socially disruptive capacity of Ophelia’s lyrics, pointing out that “song allows Ophelia two interrelated opportunities: she can introduce ideas that might not otherwise be voiced or voiceable, and she can express those ideas in a social situation. . . . One could

---

<sup>215</sup> For a thorough overview of the significance of Ophelia’s songs in editorial traditions and their borrowings from contemporary ballads, see Jenkins, 529nIV.v.23. For in depth studies of songs in Shakespeare, see Peter J. Seng, *The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1967); and Lindley, *Shakespeare and Music*.

<sup>216</sup> de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, 117. On the disruptive qualities of Ophelia’s lyrics, see Dubrow, *Challenges of Orpheus*, 218-19 and 58-60.

readily envision a play in which madness is figured by the solitary singing of these words, but that is precisely the opposite of what Ophelia does.”<sup>217</sup> Gertrude, too, acknowledges the danger of Ophelia’s mad songs in her only lines in 4.1: “’Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds” (14-15). Indeed, her songs avoid specificity in their expression of grief and romantic betrayal. When expressed to Gertrude, already “full of artless jealousy” and “guilt” (19), Ophelia’s opening line of “How should I your true love know / From another one?” (23-4) becomes barbed and potentially accusatory.

In addition to their rhetorically persuasive and politically threatening expression of grief, Ophelia’s songs also elegize an unspecified dead man. Whereas Orpheus sings of beloveds who die tragically and are transformed (Phoebus and Hyacinthus, Venus and Adonis), the corpse of which Ophelia sings will not be preserved or transformed. If the subject of the first and second stanzas of “How should I your true love know” is the same, the corpse of the second stanza may refer to a dead lover. As this song is addressed to Gertrude, the dead lover in question may be King Hamlet himself. Alternatively, each stanza may refer to distinct losses for Ophelia: that of her lover and her father, respectively. In either case, the verses move from accusatory to mournful in tone. The mournful tone continues in “They bore him bare-faced on the bier “ (4.1.162-4), moving the image of the corpse in reverse from the “grass-green turf” of the grave to the open funeral bier, bringing the listening audiences closer to the image of the dead man without actually describing him.

Ophelia leaves her listeners with thoughts of the permanence of death in her final song. Having delivered various flowers to her listeners on stage, she sings:

And will a not come again?

And will a not come again?

No, no, he is dead,

---

<sup>217</sup> Dubrow, *Challenges of Orpheus*, 219.



Go to thy death-bed.

He never will come again. (4.1.185-9)

This ominous ending withholds the Christian comfort of resurrection. Though Hamlet's father has returned to the play twice in the form of the Ghost, Polonius "never will come again." The Ghost of Hamlet's father would seem to offer proof that a return to the realm of the living is possible, his returns are short-lived and, in their emphasis on purgatorial punishment, offer only a mockery of Christian resurrection. This denial of a return from death calls up Orpheus's failure to resurrect Eurydice from the underworld. Like Orpheus, Ophelia expresses her thwarted desire in the wake of death through song. And, for all of the disruptive potential of her songs, they cannot make a difference in either of the tragic dilemmas they describe. She cannot force the return of her absent lover, nor can she return her father to life. The stone that lies at her father's heels not even Orpheus could move.

Finally, Ophelia's songs entangle desire and mortality with notions of duty to one's father and one's state, resulting in a counter-epic tone. Earlier in the play, Ophelia, ever the obedient daughter, begins to reject Hamlet's advances at the behest of her father and brother.<sup>218</sup> Laertes informs her that Hamlet "may not, as unvalued persons do, / Carve for himself; for on his choice depends / The sanctity and health of the whole state" (1.3.19-21), and Polonius warns her, "Do not believe his vows" (1.3.127). She thus rejects her paramour for the sake of filial and national duty, an obedience that calls to mind a similar decision made by Virgil's Aeneas with respect to Dido. Yet Hamlet's strange retreat from her in 2.1 and his later declaration of "I loved you not" (3.1.119) reverse Ophelia's role in the equation, paralleling her with the abandoned beloveds of Ovidian Orphic failure and Virgilian epic. Hamlet's double dismissal of Ophelia in Act 2 and Act 3 does stem

---

<sup>218</sup> On Ophelia's obedience as generically exceptional on the early modern stage, see James J. Marino, "Ophelia's Desire," *ELH* 84 (2017): 817-39.

from a sense of duty, but not one of epic nation building. Rather, he means to pursue his newly assigned duty of vengeance.<sup>219</sup> As Hamlet's revenge imperative warps the typical trajectory of epic *pietas*, his murder of Polonius and Claudius, as well as his own death, covers Denmark's history in bloodstains and prohibits its dynastic continuity.<sup>220</sup> And as Polonius's death contributes to Ophelia's madness, it, too, signifies a break with patrilineal history. Further, madness and presumed suicide prohibit Ophelia's participation in royal reproduction, defying Gertrude's hope, spoken only over her grave, that she "shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife" (5.1.241). Not only do Ophelia's mad verses forbid the possibility of resurrection and immortality, they also make her "an image of blasted dynastic promise," doubly derailing the possibility of epic continuity.<sup>221</sup> Even as her verses mark the peak of her vocal agency, their indecipherability to those around her and their reliance on her body as symbol cast her as figure of representation itself.<sup>222</sup>

#### *Ophelia's Orphic Corpse*

Ophelia's death reduces her entirely to image, but Shakespeare presents that image in two contrasting but complementary ways. First, in Gertrude's lyric tale of Ophelia's death, Shakespeare presents a highly aestheticized Ophelia: she is an innocent, pastoral maiden driven to madness and death by the world's abuses. In Gertrude's report, Ophelia is everything suggested in John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia*: beautiful, sad, innocent, vacant, and subsumed by the world around her. She is, as Cheney contends, "a tragic book of lyric performance."<sup>223</sup> Second, her staged corpse in Act

---

<sup>219</sup> Walter N. King sees Hamlet's behavior in 2.1 as his means of testing Ophelia to determine whether he can trust her. Hamlet, of course, discovers that she has been sent by her father to spy on him and therefore finds her wanting. See *Hamlet's Search for Meaning* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1982).

<sup>220</sup> Miola argues that "Hamlet's *pietas*, the loving reverence toward family, state, and gods, demands *furor*, the impious rage that kills without ruth or mercy." "Aeneas and Hamlet," 285.

<sup>221</sup> de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, 119.

<sup>222</sup> Feinberg sees the potency of Ophelia's songs as arising from "woman's culture," arguing that Ophelia's songs indicate a burgeoning self-awareness that develops only too late. My argument does not preclude the possibility of Ophelia's agency, but it does focus on Ophelia and her songs as symbolic elements in the play's presentation of a metapoetic discourse. See "Jephthah's Daughter," 136.

<sup>223</sup> Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, 224.

5 presents the grim, corporeal reality of death that stands in stark contrast to the epic poetics of Hamlet's elegy. While the former scene presents only an aestheticized idea of the doomed Ophelia, the latter critiques this lyric embellishment, insisting instead on the fleshly reality of death. As the embodiment of lyric, Ophelia is resolved first into a lyric picture of her death, and second into a real corpse that refutes lyric's elaborate ostentation as well as epic's grandiosity and ambition. By allowing Ophelia to function as a symbol of the two major poetic genres of Western literature, Shakespeare subverts the primacy of these genres and makes their failure part of tragedy's foundation.

Having embodied, emblemized, and performed the lyric genre and Orphic poetics, Ophelia shifts into the space of two-dimensional representation in Gertrude's tale of her death. Whereas Hamlet makes her into an art object through his physical enactment of poetic sight and touch in 2.1, Gertrude creates Ophelia as an image through the more traditional poetic medium of language. She delivers news of Ophelia's death in a lyric register, crafting an elaborate pastoral image of rich greenery and endowed with an artful sense of pity for the fate of "poor Ophelia" (4.3.157).

Critics have noted the highly aestheticized lyric style of Gertrude's delivery, identifying it as an implicit, corrective response to Ophelia's unseemly lyrics. Gertrude's report is "coded...artificial" and calls attention to its own artifice, aestheticizing Ophelia's body while burying her voice beneath the referential obscurity of "snatches of old tunes" (4.3.149).<sup>224</sup> As Ovid's narrator does to Orpheus, Gertrude obscures Ophelia's voice with a broad descriptor. She does not float down the river calling out the name of Hamlet any more than Ovid's Orpheus calls for Eurydice, which is to say that the

---

<sup>224</sup> Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), 190n59. Kaara Peterson argues that Gertrude's "narrative describing the progressive loss of Ophelia's body also enacts that loss in the process of its telling, for the 'unauthorized,' finely-wrought tale that she tells always stands in for the missing original narrative, which is always a lost 'body of work.' Thus, Ophelia's body is lost once to death and once more to the very narrative about her death." "Framing Ophelia: Representation and the Pictorial Tradition," *Mosaic* 31 (1998): 1-24, 7.

narrator in both cases obscures the content of the respective poet's final utterance, keeping readers/listeners in the proverbial dark. In obscuring Ophelia's voice with her highly wrought, lyric narrative, Gertrude "re-appropriates Ophelia's music by inscribing it in the... blank verse of high court culture."<sup>225</sup> Gertrude's aestheticized version of events also returns Ophelia to the ekphrastic realm of "speaking pictures."<sup>226</sup> In doing so, it acts as a response to Ophelia's lyric report in 2.1; where Ophelia describes Hamlet's visual and tactile transformation of her into a poetic object, Gertrude performs this objectification through lyric imagery and style. And where Ophelia's lyric report presents her aestheticization in a Petrarchan mode, Gertrude's performs this process through pastoral elegy.<sup>227</sup> As Gertrude's tale performs anew Ophelia's transformation into a lyric object, it also confirms and continues her affinity with Ovid's Orpheus.

Gertrude's narrative of Ophelia's death evokes Ovid's Orpheus not just in the specifics of her musical drowning, but also in the eroticized pastoral imagery:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook  
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.  
 There with fantastic garlands did she come  
 Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies and long purples  
 That liberal shepherds give a grosser name  
 But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.  
 There on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds  
 Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,  
 When down the weedy trophies and herself

---

<sup>225</sup> Dunn, "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*," 63.

<sup>226</sup> Dunn, "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*," 63.

<sup>227</sup> On the pastoral and elegiac qualities of Gertrude's lyric narrative, see Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, 224-5; Ronk, "Representations of 'Ophelia,'" 34.

Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
 And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,  
 Which time she chanted snatched of old tunes  
 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 Or like a creature native and endued  
 Unto that element. But long it could not be  
 Till that her garments heavy with their drink  
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 To muddy death. (4.3.138-55)

This narrative retains and elevates the tragic eroticism of Ophelia's mad songs, capturing and reworking Ophelia's unfulfilled and indecorous desire in a form more appropriate to the context of the royal court of Denmark. What psychoanalytical criticism sometimes identifies as Freudian erotomania in Ophelia's verses becomes in Gertrude's telling a desire that is poignant, tragic, and most importantly *contained*.<sup>228</sup> The socially disruptive and generically inappropriate force of Ophelia's mad lyrics is transformed into the tragic beauty of pastoral elegy. Despite this elegant transformation, however, an Orphic eroticism creeps in.

The flower imagery of Gertrude's speech elevates and reinforces the lewdness of desire that infuses Ophelia's mad songs, subtly resonating with the transgressive desire of Ovid's Orpheus. The "long purples" with their "grosser name" that Gertrude declines to mention are associated with male genitalia.<sup>229</sup> Yet Ophelia weaves these flowers into the "coronet weeds" that lead to her death as she attempts to hang them on the willow's branches. Such a juxtaposition recalls Ophelia's earlier conflation of death and desire in her mad songs. The presence of a purple flower that represents

---

<sup>228</sup> On Ophelia's erotomania, see Camden, "On Ophelia's Madness."

<sup>229</sup> Scholars disagree on the specific part of male anatomy to which the "long purples" refer. See Jenkins 544nIV.vii.165-82.

male genitalia, however, may also allude to Orpheus's inclusion of the stories of Hyacinthus and Adonis in his songs. Both of these male beloveds are subject to the gods' desire for young boys and are turned into blood-colored flowers when their divine lovers cannot save them from death. The status of these young men, pursued—but not won—by gods, constitutes one version of the “unnatural love” of which Orpheus sings. Phoebus's desire for Hyacinthus mirrors Orpheus's own homosexual turn, and Venus's aggressive wooing of Adonis transgressively reverses the traditional gender roles of lover and beloved. Ophelia's “long purples,” therefore, may suggest a version of Orphic transgressive desire, especially one that, in the rage of the Maenads, comes to exemplify the violent consequences of such desire.

The willow tree from which Ophelia falls may also bear Orphic resonance. The willow is a popular image of lost love in Renaissance England, and Shakespeare uses it as such throughout his canon (perhaps most prominently in Desdemona's willow song in *Othello*). But the willow tree is also among those that gather to hear Orpheus's song in *Metamorphoses* (X.86-105). Whereas Ovid's willow moves in response to Orpheus's music, Shakespeare's breaks beneath Ophelia. The broken willow branch may thereby allude to Orpheus's poetic potency, while its breaking may foreshadow the end of that power. The willow imagery thus serves the double function of predicting tragedy in an amorous and a poetic context.<sup>230</sup>

If the willow tree predicts an Orphic failure in the scene of Ophelia's death, her “coronet weeds” also suggest a foreclosed future. As madness precludes her dynastic generative capacity, the crown-like arrangement of flowers poignantly symbolizes the royalty that she once might have gained by marriage, were it not for her (and Hamlet's) madness. Further, given her alignment with the Orpheus myth, the “weedy trophies” that she weaves may also identify her as a failed author

---

<sup>230</sup> Orpheus is also attended by, among many others, the Cypress tree, a symbol of the death of Cyparissus, loved by Phoebus, and a homoerotic precursor to the stories Orpheus sings.

figure, one whose laurel crown (derived from the laurel tree, an Ovidian symbol of female silence inflicted by male desire and turned to masculine poetry) drags her into death and silence. Such a crown would support Cheney's vision of Ophelia in this moment as an image of the "tragically doomed, self-crowning laureate."<sup>231</sup>

By appropriating, aestheticizing, and changing the generic register of Ophelia's bawdy songs, Gertrude's lyric description of her death highlights the disruptive qualities that it seeks to contain and correct. And the potent, disruptive force of Ophelia's poetic voice is most apparent in Gertrude's chosen descriptor, "mermaid-like." Though Gertrude's narrative glosses over the words of Ophelia's songs, it does not deny their power. If the broken willow branch and the tragic and erotically charged garlands of flowers allude to her Orphic failures in poetry and in love, the descriptor of "mermaid-like" continues to position her as erotically charged and generically disruptive. Mermaid or siren song traditionally lured sailors off course with irresistible melodies and promises of sexual satisfaction, resulting in shipwreck and death. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus ties himself to the mast of his ship in order to successfully resist their song. "[S]irens," writes Dubrow, "tempt their listeners ... [to] abandon their roles as warriors for a passive self-indulgence ... [and] the linearity of the epic journey is blocked."<sup>232</sup> In its antagonism of the epic genre, "mermaid-like" also resonates with Orpheus's turn from epic to lyric, and with the lustful Maenads destructive noise at being denied their sexual satisfaction. By invoking the mythical mermaid, Gertrude's narrative emphasizes Ophelia's sexual and vocal capacity to trouble the epic genre. If Ophelia's disruptive capacity is sanitized, but not contained, by Gertrude's narrative, the Orphic circumstances of her death symbolize not just the failure of epic, but of all poetic utterance.

---

<sup>231</sup> Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, 225. Cheney understands the myth of Orpheus as crucial to the construction of a laureate career in Spenser. See *Spenser's Famous Flight*, 25-7.

<sup>232</sup> Dubrow, *Challenges of Orpheus*, 26.

Of the Orphic allusions present in Gertrude's narrative, Ophelia's musical drowning is by far the clearest. Both poet figures have suffered from unfulfilled desire, their own and others, and both divert epic into lyric. Both drift downstream singing, one physically dismembered and the other psychically fragmented.<sup>233</sup> Ophelia's death captures Orpheus's second major poetic failure: the failure to save his own life. Gertrude's narrative works to contain the dangerous erotic-poetic power of Ophelia's voice, and crafting a scene of Orphic death would seem to perform the final stroke of poetic disempowerment. One might say that her death puts the final nail in the coffin of her poetically disruptive potency, except that Ophelia's coffin in 5.1 is quite open.

The staging of Ophelia's corpse during her funeral in Act 5 brings the issue of Orphic poetics and failure into direct contrast with Hamlet's epic ambitions. Through her corpse, Shakespeare stages the threat of poetic failure at the same moment in which Hamlet forecasts his political and spiritual ascension through the sheer force of his poetic skill. Having just come from pondering his own mortality in terms of such titanic conquerors as Caesar and Alexander, Hamlet responds to Laertes's poetic mourning with a poetic challenge:

What is he whose griefs  
 Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow  
 Conjures the wandering stars and makes them stand  
 Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,  
 Hamlet the Dane. (5.1.251-5)

Hamlet takes Laertes's "phrase of sorrow" as a poetic and political threat, and he responds by declaring his place as king for the first time in the play. His interruption of Laertes's elegiac grief pits

---

<sup>233</sup> On Ophelia's fragmentation, see Gates, "Assembling the Ophelia Fragments" and Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, 223. On Ovid's use of fragmentation, Enterline writes that "Fantasies of fragmentation permeate Ovidian narrative, and they do more than convey a message about the body's vulnerability. . . . But as Philomela's tongue suggests, violated bodies also provide Ovid with the occasion to reflect on the power and limitations of language as such." *Rhetoric of the Body*, 3.



his royal right as heir against the would-be usurper's poetic capacity. Having just spent the majority of 5.1's first two hundred lines speculating on corporeal mortality, and having concluded that "Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away" (210-11), Hamlet turns to defiant poetic ambition in a rhetorical move that seems sudden and inconsistent with his recent and markedly bleaker postulations on death. Yet he rushes onward to assert his superior poetic and rhetorical skill:

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers  
 Could not with all their quantity of love  
 Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?  
 . . . . .  
 Come, show me what thou'lt do.  
 Woul't weep? Woul't fight? Woul't tear thyself?  
 Woul't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?  
 I'll do't! Dost thou come here to whine,  
 To outface me with leaping in her grave?  
 Be buried quick with her, and so will I.  
 And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw  
 Millions of acres on us till our ground,  
 Singeing his pate against the burning zone,  
 Make Ossa like a wart. Nay, an thou'lt mouth,  
 I'll rant as well as thou. (5.1.265-7, 270-80)

Having been bested by the slippery "equivocation" of the Gravedigger's wordplay just prior, Hamlet here pins down language with sheer force. He conveys his love for Ophelia in epic scope and in the epic devices of catalogue, simile, and hyperbole. He loved Ophelia better than "forty thousand

brothers,” and the mountain of his hypothetical burial mound with her would surpass Ossa and reach unto Olympus itself. In referencing Ossa, Hamlet invokes the story of the giants’ rebellion, of which Orpheus sang prior to his turn toward lyric (*Met.* X.149-54). Hamlet thus reverses Orpheus’s poetic trajectory and asserts the superiority of epic over the mourning tones of Laertes’s lyric elegy. This assertion, however, takes place in conspicuously close proximity to Ophelia’s visible corpse.

Though dead, Ophelia’s body continues to exert a poetic force in the play. As Hamlet enumerates his self-aggrandizing poetic skills in direct proximity to his beloved’s corpse, he ignores its implications of mortality. While F and Q2 are unclear on Hamlet’s placement either within or next to the grave, the stage directions of Q1 indicate that “*Hamlet leaps in after Laertes*” (16.146).<sup>234</sup> Though he is undeniably in close proximity to Ophelia’s body in F and Q2, Q1 insists on the irony of an epic claim to ascend unto the heights of Olympus spoken from within the grave, next to the cold, unmoving corpse of the dead beloved. Ophelia’s body finally presents an immovable resistance to Hamlet’s epic agenda in its ironic presentation of the harsh reality of death.

In addition to embodying the inevitability of death, Ophelia’s corpse also imposes the Orphic failure of her death on Hamlet’s epic rhetoric. If Laertes “Conjures the wandering stars,” Hamlet insists on the power of his poetry to build mountains and “Make Ossa like a wart.” If Orpheus can move stones, Hamlet can move mountains. Yet the presence of Ophelia’s corpse insists not only on mortality, but on the specifically Orphic failure of poetry to prevent death. Hamlet’s epic agenda is overshadowed by Orpheus’s legendary failure of poetic power, and though he denies the reality of death when confronted with it, the specter of Orphic failure follows him, foreshadowing his own death in the following scene.

---

<sup>234</sup> Q2 and F are less clear on this direction. Q2 offers no stage directions for this moment, while F indicates that Laertes “Leaps into the grave” (5.1.247) but does not indicate whether he leaps back out again or Hamlet leaps in.

Hamlet's reaching for the poetic heights in this scene ignores or resists the truth of death he has just confronted in his interaction with the Gravedigger. He relies on an epic poetics to surpass Laertes rhetorically and politically, but the corpse of Ophelia silently interrupts this trajectory of ambition and ascent. In the staging of her corpse, the play has finally reduced Ophelia to pure, embodied symbol.<sup>235</sup> Death has silenced her lyric voice and any resistance to aesthetic objectification it might once have offered. But instead of presenting the immortalizing effects of art so touted by Renaissance poets and literary theorists, Ophelia's reduction to embodied symbol highlights exactly the opposite. The funeral scene for Ophelia confronts Hamlet, in many ways her poet-figure double, with the cold reality of a cold corpse. Her body, which Hamlet works so diligently to ignore, signifies the inevitability of death irrespective of poetic skill or epic achievement. Thus, when Hamlet makes his shocking turn from calculating machinations to a reliance on providence (5.2.233-8), he does so having finally registered the gulf between poetic art and the inevitability of death. Ophelia's corpse is evidence that neither lyric nor epic can overcome the terrifyingly annihilative fate of the body. When, at the end, Fortinbras orders Hamlet's body displayed with the due pomp and circumstance of a prince and "soldier" (5.2.241), the presentation of his corpse is haunted by that of Ophelia's, reminding the audience that no matter who tells our story, death comes for all.

While Cheney and Garber assert that *Hamlet* presents the tragic loss of heroic values, the argument of this chapter attempts to extend and qualify that assertion. The construction of Shakespearean tragedy, as presented in *Hamlet*, involves the failure of two primary genres of the Western literary tradition: lyric and epic. In providing two central characters that in many ways mirror each other's authorial aspects but differ in their primary genres of operation, Shakespeare sets

---

<sup>235</sup> Ophelia's transition into symbol echoes what Harry Berger, Jr. tracks in Marvell's *The Garden* and what Cheney spots in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*: "a crossover" from "the real into the ideal, the person back into her literary image." *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime: Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), 131. Also see Berger, *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 281.

up twin possibilities of poetic efficacy only to knock them down with the force of tragedy. In closing, I would suggest that Shakespearean tragedy acts as a generically purgative force; it derives its tragic component from cutting off the teleology of other major genres. In the cases of lyric and epic, this manifests as a corporeal acknowledgement that neither the aesthetic object nor the writer of epic can gain poetic immortality. Neither genre can defeat the bodily truth of death, and the Orphic failure upon which this truth turns for *Hamlet* thereby serves as a key mechanism of Shakespearean tragedy.

## Chapter Four

## Revening the Beloved: Repurposing Petrarchism in

Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

In the reign of Elizabeth, Petrarchism was one of the most prevalent idioms for expressing political ambition, requesting patronage, and depicting the queen.<sup>236</sup> Beginning with Edward Dyer's 1575 Petrarchan lyric "The man whose thoughts against him doe conspire," courtier poets cast Elizabeth as a Petrarchan beloved—beautiful, chaste, and distant.<sup>237</sup> This trend soon made its way beyond the court and into other literary environments, including the theater. Petrarchan lovers were commonplace on the Elizabethan stage, and the histrionic suffering of the typical poet-lover lent itself well to parody, as can be seen in the comically amorous fervor of Shakespeare's Romeo, whom Mercutio teasingly describes as a poet "for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in" (2.3.45-6).<sup>238</sup> Popular theater, of course, was an unlikely place to seek patronage, though Elizabeth did from time to time request private performances at court. As a result, the theater presented an ideal space for playwrights to more critically explore the dynamics of the Petrarchan mode. At the same time, the close association of Elizabeth with the Petrarchan beloved (which the Queen herself helped to foster) allowed Petrarchism on stage to serve as a register of political discontent in a way that courtier poetry, with its imperative of flattery, never could. Critics have long detected coded criticisms of Elizabeth on stage, and Elizabeth herself is reputed to have remarked upon Shakespeare's *Richard II*, "I am Richard II, know you not that?"<sup>239</sup> But while critics have drawn connections between Elizabethan and Jacobean plays and a cultural commentary on the queen and

---

<sup>236</sup> See Arthur Marotti's seminal essay, "'Love is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH* 49 (1982): 396-428.

<sup>237</sup> Steven W. May suggests that the Earl of Oxford may have preceded Dyer in composing Petrarchan lyrics, but adds that Dyer's poem is the first for which we have evidence of having been "directed to the queen." *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets: The Poems and Their Contexts* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1991), 52-8, 57.

<sup>238</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Gordon McMullan (London: W. W. Norton, 2017).

<sup>239</sup> Jason Scott-Warren attempts to verify the historical accuracy of this statement through archival investigation. See "Was Elizabeth I Richard II?: The Authenticity of Lambarde's 'Conversation,'" *Review of English Studies* 64 (2013): 208-30.

her politics, they have not yet accounted for the way that these dramas engage with the Petrarchan dynamics that constituted such a significant part of her political strategy.

In this chapter, I examine the echoes of Petrarchism in relation to two prominent dead beloveds of revenge tragedy, Gloriana of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Annabella of Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. In both works, the dead beloved serves as the cause for and implement of revenge. The plays thereby register a misogynistic mourning for the dead Queen, as Steven Mullaney has demonstrated. Further, because the beloveds of both dramas die as a result of the sexual desire of powerful men that, when denied, turns to murder, the plays also register a failure of the moral integrity of the ruling class in relation to the worship of a perfect, chaste beloved.<sup>240</sup> In making this distinction, these plays divide what Elizabeth had united in the cultivation of her public image: her fitness to rule and her perfection as a chaste beloved.<sup>241</sup> In making the dead beloved the instrument of revenge, the revengers in Middleton's and Ford's tragedies literalize and weaponize Petrarchan conceits, using the corpse of the dead woman (or parts of it) to punish the manipulative deployment of amorous appeals for personal pleasure and social advancement. Vindice in *Revenger* laces the dead lips of Gloriana with poison to kill the Duke who had murdered her for rejecting him, and Giovanni in *'Tis Pity* brandishes Annabella's heart on his dagger to emblemize his victory over her heart that her husband, the Petrarchan seducer who had planned to murder them both, would never have. Written and performed after the death of Elizabeth, these revenge tragedies purge the now-exhausted image of the Petrarchan beloved, with which the Queen had tried to restore confidence in her youth, beauty, and power as a ruler. At the same time, the plays also punish the corruption for

---

<sup>240</sup> On misogynistic mourning for Elizabeth on the stage, see Steven Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994): 139-62.

<sup>241</sup> On Elizabeth's incorporation of Petrarchan aspects into her image as a ruler, see Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of Shepherdes,' and the Pastoral of Power," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 153-82.

sexual and political gain of the erotic-political dynamic that often subtended courtly Petrarchan discourse.

Whereas the texts addressed in earlier chapters of this dissertation understand the dead beloved as a generically disruptive figure, these revenge tragedies carry out their defining generic feature through the body of the dead beloved. This chapter therefore differs from those previous in that it demonstrates early modern playwrights using the dead beloved to construct rather than disrupt genre. This change, I suggest, emerges in response to the obviation of the encoding of ambition within a Petrarchan discourse after the death of Elizabeth in 1603. First performed in 1606, *The Revenger's Tragedy* captures a sense of mourning for Elizabeth in the dead Gloriana (as Mullaney demonstrates), but in Vindice's weaponization of Petrarchism through the medium of Gloriana's skull, the play also revels in the power that can be co-opted from a symbol of the dead queen and wielded as an instrument of revenge against those who would appropriate the Petrarchan discourse of Elizabeth and her courtiers for the purpose of seduction and injustice. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, in some ways an Elizabethan relic staged during the Caroline period, also portrays the use of Petrarchan language for seduction, and like *Revenger*, it turns that language toward revenge. Thus, in its presentation of the dead beloved in relation Elizabethan Petrarchism, this chapter attempts to capture an aspect of staged cultural responses to Elizabeth's rule that historicist scholars tend to overlook. Elizabeth's death after so many years of politicized amorous praise gave playwrights an opportunity to mourn their queen by repurposing the Petrarchan mode that she had favored toward vengeance and the reestablishment of order and justice in her absence. They pay homage to the poetic mode so favored by the late queen by transforming the dead beloved into an image and a weapon of revenge. Once revenge has been accomplished, the dead beloved fades from the play; once love and revenge have reached their endpoints, Petrarchan discourse evaporates.

Although they arrived on the stage long after Elizabeth's passing, both Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* and Ford's *'Tis Pity* process a lingering dissonance between admiration and frustration after forty-five years under a female monarch by making the figure of the Petrarchan beloved a victim in life and a weapon in death. Though these plays may echo the events and attitudes at the end of Elizabeth's reign, I do not claim that they contain direct allusions to or commentaries on this era. I do, however, suggest that the echoes continue beyond the years immediately following Elizabeth's death, even into the early Caroline period—later than scholars have heretofore traced dramatic reactions to Elizabethan politics. As Rowland Wymer rightly notes, "Once certain attitudes have been imaginatively and powerfully related in art, they continue to be reproduced, whether or not they remain an appropriate response to new social and political circumstances."<sup>242</sup> The "attitudes" of Petrarchism had been "imaginatively and powerfully related" in English literary culture for four decades under Elizabeth. In their tendency to invest the beloved with power only in death, these plays, I suggest, stage an ongoing process in which the literary imagination struggles to relinquish the compelling discourse of Petrarchan love that had become so deeply ingrained.

The following section examines the Petrarchan language and tropes that Vindice attributes to the skull of Gloriana in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and by which he revenges her death. The very name of Gloriana, which Spenser had bestowed upon his figure of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*, connects the skull to England's dead monarch, and while critics have explored this connection in terms of politics and gender relations, they have not yet attended to the Petrarchan aspects of Middleton's Gloriana, nor have they understood these aspects as a connective tissue between contemporary representations of literary modes and the politicized Petrarchism of Elizabethan courtly discourse. If, as critics suggest, the play stages a sense of nostalgic admiration for the dead Elizabeth in the

---

<sup>242</sup> "Jacobean Tragedy" in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 544-55, 546.



figure of Gloriana, even as it eliminates her from the play, I suggest a similar process occurring with the Petrarchan beloved. The dead Gloriana is praised in a blazon, transformed into a weapon of revenge, and eliminated from the play after Act 3. Once vengeance has been achieved, the entire Petrarchan dynamic fades from the play.

The second section below turns to Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* to locate another Petrarchan beloved whose dead body becomes a means of inflicting revenge. Unlike *Revenger*, this play has no Elizabeth figure, but it does feature a Petrarchan beloved whose dead body serves as a weapon of revenge. Though critics frequently point out Annabella's heart upon Giovanni's dagger as a literalized Petrarchan conceit, they tend to overlook the way that the play presents this as a culminating moment of Petrarchan excess. Yet Petrarchan excess, I suggest, is a key concept in *'Tis Pity*. It intensifies desire to the point of incest, violence, and revenge, transforming the body of the incestuous beloved into that of a partially dismembered corpse as an act of vengeance. This section therefore argues that *'Tis Pity* serves a critique of Petrarchism (which was quite a stale mode by the play's first performance around 1630) that lets excess play out to its inevitable conclusion of death. Like *Revenger*, *'Tis Pity* weaponizes the corpse of a beautiful, virtuous beloved in the service of revenge, and ends without any lovers left alive.

Both plays thus enact a Petrarchan revenge that relies on the body of the dead beloved even as the lovers that survive her lament the loss of her beauty and perfection. By allowing the dead beloved an antemortem history in which she embodies Petrarchan beauty and virtue, and by then placing her in a dramatic context in which Petrarchism has been misappropriated, misused, and exaggerated, these plays express a nostalgic admiration for the Petrarchan idiom even as they banish it from the stage.

*Petrarchan Revenge in The Revenger's Tragedy*

The name Gloriana, as one of the many idealizing pseudonyms assigned to the late queen, could not have been far removed from the minds of Elizabeth's former subjects when *The Revenger's Tragedy* was first performed in 1606. As such, opening the play with the skull of a dead beloved that shared this name with the late Queen was certainly a bold move. This decision, however, allowed Middleton to stage a response not just to the loss of Elizabeth and the particular virtues she had cultivated in her courtiers, as critics have established, but also to the Petrarchan discourse through which Elizabeth had styled herself as the chaste beloved of the English nation. *Revenger* invokes Petrarchan dynamics especially in relation to Gloriana, who takes her name from Spenser's Elizabeth figure in *The Faerie Queene*, but England's Gloriana was dead by the time the play was performed, and so was her court's discourse of Petrarchan idolization. The Duke's court in *The Revenger's Tragedy* operates on a principle of hedonistic gratification in which powerful men use their rank and influence to coerce young women into sexual relations, and denial of male desire is met with the vengeance of rape and murder. In this environment, the dead beloved functions as the vehicle through which Middleton imports Petrarchan dynamics into the play, and by which the murder of the beloved may be avenged. The Duke's position of power enables his adulterous and abusive habits, as well as his ability to murder with impunity when his lust goes unsatisfied. The male desire embodied in the Duke thereby can be read as a response to the Petrarchan dynamic of desire in which the beloved is chaste, unrequiting, or otherwise unattainable; male desire as presented in *Revenger* demands the sexual attainability of the desired woman. But the play itself does not endorse this demand. Rather, it wields the skull of the dead beloved as a corrective weapon, punishing the sexual mistreatment of women with a symbol of Elizabethan chastity and sovereignty. By employing the dead Gloriana as the instrument of revenge, *The Revenger's Tragedy* presents a retrospective homage to Elizabethan Petrarchism even as it obviates the role of the beloved in the restoration of order and justice at the end of the play.

Criticism on *The Revenger's Tragedy* reveals a complex interplay of gender, justice, history, and death. The play has been characterized as both misogynistic and feminist, and, especially as a commentary on the recently dead Elizabeth, its attitudes toward women cannot be separated from issues of politics and death. Both Mullaney and Peter Hyland argue that the skull of Gloriana constitutes a symbolic engagement with the reign of Elizabeth, an engagement that, in Mullaney's estimation, looks back on contemporary representations of the Queen's body in important ways (which I will discuss in more detail presently).<sup>243</sup> In *Revenger*, the female body presents a threat to male control of sexual, social, and political power, and even meaning itself.<sup>244</sup> The bodies of Gloriana and of Antonio's wife, who commits suicide as a result of her rape by the Duke's bastard, become sites where meaning is generated, made legible by death, or refused entirely.<sup>245</sup> And by its violation, the female body becomes the driving force and implement of revenge.<sup>246</sup>

Despite this breadth of analysis, however, Petrarchism has not been a topic of discussion in criticism on *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and I shall show, however, that the play contains remnants and transformations of the mode that deserve critical attention. It uses those remnants to murderous ends, building them into the fabric of revenge itself. Vindice, the lover-turned-revenger, introduces Petrarchan elements to the play through Gloriana's skull. Not only does he fixate on her skull as a ghastly mockery of his late beloved's heavenly beauty, but he also wields the skull as a blazonic

---

<sup>243</sup> Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny"; Peter Hyland, "Re-Membering Gloriana: *The Revenger's Tragedy*" in *Resurrecting Elizabeth I in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Elizabeth H. Hageman and Katherine Conway (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2007), 82-94.

<sup>244</sup> See Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny"; Kathryn R. Finin, "Trying Rape in *The Revenger's Tragedy*: 'A Slack Performance,'" *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 74 (2008): 17-22; Gregory A. Wilson, "The Tragedy of Revenge: Sexual, Moral, and Political Power in *The Revenger's Tragedy*" in *Authority of Expression in Early Modern England*, ed. Nely Keinänen and Maria Salenius (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 63-76. In contrast to Mullaney and Finin, Celia R. Daileader offers a persuasive argument for the play's feminism in contrast with *Hamlet*, in "Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, and the Masculine Grotesque" in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, ed. Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 452-68.

<sup>245</sup> Peter Stallybrass argues that death makes the female body legible to the men of the play. "Reading the Body: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption," *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 121-48. Susan Zimmerman expands Stallybrass's point in her claim that the female corpse serves as a site where men can create meaning. *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005), 128-42.

<sup>246</sup> See Hyland, "Re-Membering Gloriana," 83-4; and Daileader, "Masculine Grotesque," 458.

weapon in poisoning its lips to murder the Duke. The skull of Gloriana thus acts as a symbol in which the death of the beloved converges with revenge, a union that in turn suggests the importance of the Petrarchan idiom to the play. Through Gloriana's bony remains, Vindice adapts that idiom to formulate revenge in a Petrarchan register.

In identifying the echoes of Petrarchism attached to the dead beloved in *Revenger* and demonstrating their role in and as revenge, this chapter complements critical assessments of the play that identify the female as sexually controlled and aesthetically created by men.<sup>247</sup> Only Celia R. Daileader argues for the play as feminist, pointing out that all of the women in *Revenger* are virtuous, while the men are steeped in vice.<sup>248</sup> Though Daileader's claim seems at odds with those who rightfully point to misogyny, Petrarchism can accommodate both perspectives. The typical Petrarchan beloved is perfectly virtuous *and* a product of the male imagination *and* subject to male attempts to control her body. We might, then, bridge various feminist interpretations of the play.

With a name like Gloriana, the skull of Vindice's late betrothed must invoke the dead Elizabeth, the self-styled Petrarchan queen. Hyland and Mullaney offer compelling new historicist analyses of *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a cultural response to the transition from Elizabeth to James, yet their assessments differ in significant ways. They agree that the skull called Gloriana evokes the dead queen and the social and political culture of her reign. They differ, however, in their interpretation of the play's attitude toward Elizabeth and her court. In the male characters' attitudes toward Gloriana, Mullaney sees the play registering a mourning for the queen that is itself undergirded by the misogynistic attitudes that characterized the last days of Elizabeth's reign. The people of England in 1603 mourned a queen, but they were also, Mullaney contends, relieved to again have a male

---

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, Kathryn R. Finin, "Re-Membering Gloriana: 'Wild Justice' and the Female Body in *The Revenger's Tragedy*," *Renaissance Forum* 6 (2003): 1-19 and "Trying Rape"; Carol Thomas Neely, "New Directions: Revengers Tragedy: Affairs Between Men" in *The Revenger's Tragedy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Brian Walsh (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 143-65.

<sup>248</sup> See "Masculine Grotesque."

monarch who could provide heirs and who did not construct a political idiom “with the erotic dynamics of courtship and desire” (143). For Mullaney, Gloriana’s skull represents a cultural process of mourning that cannot be separated from misogynistic attitudes. Hyland, however, argues that the dead Gloriana functions as an emblem of the Elizabethan past that Jacobean England idealized in retrospect, and that *Revenge* uses this nostalgia as a comparison to critique the excesses and political favoritism of James’s court.

In the process of his argument regarding perceptions of the queen’s body, Mullaney notes that the “dynamics of Petrarchan romance that had so fully informed her [Elizabeth’s] earlier reign” later informed a public perception of a “fissure . . . between the queen’s two bodies.”<sup>249</sup> Though Mullaney does not return to the topic of Petrarchism, his assessment nevertheless highlights the importance—and unsustainability—of idealizing Petrarchan representations of Elizabeth at the end of her reign. The youthful paintings that Elizabeth had commissioned in the 1590s, for instance, exemplified her motto, *semper eadem*, “which suggested that she fused the moral virtue of constancy with a personal exemption from time’s depredations.”<sup>250</sup> Such depictions of the Queen, however, stood in stark contrast to the aging face and barren body of a woman in her sixties, and the skull called Gloriana evokes a similar tension between an abstract ideal and the reality of decay to which all bodies are subject.<sup>251</sup> While Mullaney presents this tension as something that Elizabeth sought to overcome and that *Revenge* reflects, I would add that the play makes this tension unexpectedly productive in the performance of revenge. It makes no attempt to depict Gloriana with an enduring perfect beauty (Vindice’s disguising of the skull to make it resemble a living woman only parodies the imitation of youth). Rather, the play takes advantage of the divide between the beauty of the

---

<sup>249</sup> “Mourning and Misogyny,” 147.

<sup>250</sup> Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006), 222.

<sup>251</sup> Mullaney presents as evidence the reflections of the French ambassador in 1597, which explicitly records Elizabeth’s efforts to look like a young maid, painting her face and wearing low-cut dresses to display her bosom, as well as the wrinkles that belied her age. See “Mourning and Misogyny,” 145-6.

living beloved and the horror of her remains to impose a particularly gruesome Petrarchan revenge on the Duke.

The Duke's abuse of his power transforms the Petrarchan discourse of Elizabeth's court, repositioning the desiring male as a ruling figure who violates rather than reveres the idealized beloved. Though Vindice remembers his betrothed in Petrarchan terms, the age of corruption in which he lives cannot sustain such high-minded idealism about love. Gone are the days of a sovereign Gloriana who styled herself as a symbol of transcendent chastity and virtue. The political power of the ruling family lends a threatening force to male desire, and the chaste woman is raped or killed if she will not submit. With its presentation of a lecherous male ruler in the shadow of the Virgin Queen, the play registers the passing of both Elizabeth and the Petrarchan idealism of her court. Moreover, in the corrupt sexual economy of the Duke's court, the play imagines the corrosion of the Elizabethan erotic poetics of ambition. *Revenger* thus deploys Petrarchan devices, particularly the blazon, to correct the imagined abuses of Petrarchan discourse, repurposing the body of the beloved as a Petrarchan weapon of revenge.

At the very outset of the play, Vindice's attitude toward Gloriana's skull introduces the Petrarchan ideal as a dead one, the passing of which has cost him and his family the possibility of advancement at court. He addresses the skull,

Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,  
 My study's ornament, thou shell of death,  
 Once the bright face of my betrothèd lady  
 When life and beauty naturally filled out  
 These ragged imperfections,  
 When two heaven-appointed diamonds were set  
 In those unsightly rings—then 'twas a face

So far beyond the artificial shine

Of any woman's bought complexion. (1.1.14-22)<sup>252</sup>

Gloriana's skull, the partial remains of a beautiful woman that echo the rhetorical dismemberment of a conventional Petrarchan blazon, is the only part of the dead beloved that Middleton permits us to see.<sup>253</sup> But as the decayed relic of Gloriana's face, the skull provides a sufficient material reminder of the traits she possessed in life and of their changed state in death. Vindice accordingly fixates on the skull, its deathly features and the beauty they have replaced. It becomes the "ornament" of his "study," transformed from the "bright face" of a living woman to the "sallow picture" of death itself. His aestheticization of the skull throughout his speech (and again in 3.5) highlights its role as art object and suggests it as a dead Petrarchan mistress. In life, Gloriana's eyes were like "heaven-appointed diamonds," and her face shone brighter than any beauty made of the "bought complexion" of cosmetics.<sup>254</sup> In death, her diamond-like eyes have turned to "unsightly rings" in a macabre re-presentation of Petrarchan beauty. And later in the play, Vindice delivers a blazon of the skull itself, cataloguing its "eye," "lip," "mouth," and "cheek" (3.5.54-60). As he contemplates the loss of his beloved's "heaven-appointed" beauty, he also invests the "sallow picture" of her earthly remains with the "ragged imperfections" of a dead and decayed Petrarchan ideal.

As Vindice establishes Gloriana's Petrarchan qualities, he also begins to list the temptations that such beauty might incite, setting up a contrast between the virtue represented in Gloriana and the evils of the Duke's court:

---

<sup>252</sup> All quotations from *The Revenger's Tragedy* are taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (London: W. W. Norton, 2002).

<sup>253</sup> On the blazon and dismemberment, see Nancy J. Vickers's seminal essay, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 265-79.

<sup>254</sup> Tanya Pollard contends that the poisoned cosmetics that Vindice applies to the skull represent the moral dangers of the theater itself. *Drugs and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 101-22.

. . . the uprightest man (if such there be,  
 That sin but seven times a day) broke custom  
 And made up eight with looking after her.  
 Oh, she was able to ha' made a usurer's son  
 Melt all his patrimony in a kiss.  
 And what his father fifty years told  
 To have consumed, and yet his suit been cold.  
 But oh, accursèd palace!  
 Thee when thou wert appareled in thy flesh  
 The old Duke poisoned,  
 Because thy purer part would not consent  
 Unto his palsy lust. (1.1.23-34)

Gloriana's chaste beauty has the power to inspire lust, prodigality, and even murder. Even "the uprightest man" may fall to sin simply by watching her walk away. A "usurer's son" might "Melt" the entirety of his inheritance in pursuit of her. But these hypotheticals pale in comparison to the actions of the Duke, who poisoned Gloriana because she refused to yield her chastity to his lust. Vindice's list of temptations that the beloved could incite sets a precedent for sinful responses to beauty, exposes the truth of that precedent, and in his synecdochic outburst, "But oh, accursèd palace!" he extends the moral failings of the Duke to the entire ruling class. In the world of the play, powerful men indulge their prurience to the point of rape and murder, and the perfection of a Gloriana—both her person and the virtuous ruler to whom she alludes—cannot survive. In the corrupt world of the Duke's court, the idealized Petrarchan beloved becomes a "shell of death" (1.1.15), an object for consumption and disposal. And when the remainder of her beauty has rotted away, Vindice mourns its loss in a Petrarchan key, "Still sighing o'er death's vizard" (1.1.50).



Thus, in the skull of Gloriana, Middleton embeds an idealizing nostalgia not only for the rule of Elizabeth, as Hyland argues, but also for the literary idiom that idealized her and through which the business of Elizabethan politics was conducted. And like Gloriana, that idiom has no place in a world run by lecherous men. With James on the throne, Middleton was free to shed the female-centric power dynamic of the queen's Petrarchism and to speculate on what might become of this defunct paradigm in the court of a male ruler who has the power to indulge his desires at will. I am not suggesting that *Revenger* offers a commentary on the sexual behavior of James and his court, and history does not paint him as a man especially prone to casual, extramarital affairs. Rather, I suggest that *Revenger* explores what Elizabeth's Petrarchism might mean in light of James's reputation for political favoritism and lavish spending. In committing rape and murder, the powerful, aristocratic men in *Revenger* present an attitude antithetical to the idolization of an unrequiting beloved. I therefore attribute the misogyny that Mullaney detects in the play to a staged reaction against Petrarchan political discourse.

In the male-led world of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, political maneuvering still takes place in terms of erotic desire, but whereas Elizabethan courtly discourse employed such desire as a metaphor for ambition, the Duke makes the fulfillment of his desire the primary condition by which others may advance themselves. He rewards Vindice (disguised as Piato) for setting up what he believes to be a secret tryst, but he has also prevented Vindice's family, too full of chaste women, from political advancement and financial gain. The Duke "Hires" Vindice / Piato "by price" to find him "a lady" and a location "veiled from the eyes of the court" (3.5.12-13), but earlier, he had denied Vindice's father advancement, possibly as a result of the stubborn chastity of his future daughter-in-law. As a result, Vindice's father died of "discontent" and "disgrace" when "The Duke did much deject him" (1.1.124-7). Further, Vindice's father left his family relatively poor, and Gratiana recalls that her late husband "was a worthy gentleman, / Had his estate been fellow to his mind" (1.1.122-3).

The audience learns of the father's death in Act 1, immediately following the news that not one but two women, Gloriana and Antonio's wife, have been violently punished for holding to their chastity in spite of the demands of the Duke and his stepson. The order in which this information is presented—Gloriana's murder, Antonio's wife's rape, and the father's death—suggests a series of reactions against those who would deny the desires of the Duke and his family. Gloriana's rejection of the Duke may therefore have had consequences that extended as far as her intended in-laws. Following the revelation of the father's "dejection" and death, Hippolito comments on his tenuous position in "the Duke's chamber." Vindice exclaims that "'Tis a marvel thou'rt not turned out yet," and Hippolito replies, "Faith, I have been shoved at" (1.1.61-2). Vindice has no position at all, and his mother is deeply troubled over her own "poor estate" (2.1.111). Though the play never directly addresses a connection between Gloriana's rejection of the Duke and the low state of Vindice's family, the Duke's vengeful tendencies and unexplained treatment of Vindice's father together suggest that his spite played an active role in bringing about the hardships of this family.<sup>255</sup>

The monetary reward that the Duke offers to Piato, therefore, represents one part of a politics that upends the relationship between erotic desire and ambition established in the Petrarchan discourse of Elizabeth's court. In that model, erotic desire must always be expressed but never achieved in order to gain patronage or favor from the beloved sovereign. In the Duke's model, the desires of those in power *must be* appeased in order to avoid political or monetary punishment and physical harm. Where Elizabeth's model was one of praise and reward, the Duke's is one of extortion and revenge.

The lust of Lussurioso and Junior Brother similarly corrupts and distorts Elizabethan Petrarchism. While the first scene of the play portrays the experience of those who have been

---

<sup>255</sup> Garret A. Sullivan, Jr. contends that "Middleton sees the connection between the deaths of Gloriana and Vindice's father as generative of Vindice's subjectivity." See "Tragic Subjectivities" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 73-85, 80.

victims of the Duke's desires and unjust punishments, the second scene stages the perspective of those who commit such crimes, as well as the poor excuse for justice by which they are held to account. Junior Brother, the Duchess's youngest son, stands trial for the crime of raping the wife of Antonio, whose status as a nobleman means that Junior Brother's offense has "drawn blood of honor" (1.2.2). To preserve his own reputation, the Duke intends to support the judges in their sentence of death upon Junior Brother, but the Duchess intercedes to preserve the life of her son. Before she manages to convince the Duke to relent, however, Junior Brother proudly declares his utter lack of regret:

Well, then, 'Tis done, and it would please me well  
 Were it to do again. Sure she's a goddess,  
 For I'd no power to see her and live;  
 It falls out true in this, for I must die.  
 Her beauty was ordained to be my scaffold,  
 And yet methinks I might be easier 'sessed;  
 My fault being sport, let me but die in jest.      (1.2.60-6)

The description of the woman's power over Junior Brother's desire fits neatly into a Petrarchan paradigm. She is a divine "goddess" whose beauty overpowers and refuses the desiring male. Without requital, the unfulfilled passion he possesses will surely kill him. And the threat of death by desire comes complete with the standard pun on "die": in the final line, Junior Brother asks that the death of orgasm achieved in the "jest" of his rape be separated from the literal death of his sentence. He thus invokes and corrupts a Petrarchan dynamic as an excuse for his rape, locating an irresistible power of divine beauty in Antonio's wife in order to excuse his crime. While the Duke expresses great concern for a crime committed against a high-ranking nobleman, he nevertheless spares Junior Brother from punishment, implicitly privileging the rank of his own family above that of lesser

nobility. In the Duke's court, the beloved has power only to inspire her own violation, and the primary consideration in the execution of "justice" is how the crime and its punishment will impact the Duke's reputation.

Lussurioso, too, appropriates and warps Petrarchan principles in his pursuit of pleasure. When asking Piato to assist him in seducing Castiza, he explicitly identifies his intentions for the young woman as he describes his lust in terms that echo Petrarchan dynamics of overwhelming desire for a chaste beloved and pursuit of her via poetry:

I am past my depth in lust,  
 And I must swim or drown. All my desires  
 Are leveled at a virgin not far from court,  
 To whom I have conveyed by messenger  
 Many waxed lines, full of my neatest spirit,  
 And jewels that were able to ravish her  
 Without the help of man; all which and more  
 She, foolish-chaste, sent back, the messengers  
 Receiving frowns for answers. (1.3.88-96)

Like any suffering poet-lover, Lussurioso expresses his desire to his beloved in the "waxed lines" of poetry. Such desire overwhelms him so that he fears he may "drown" unless it is satisfied. And of course, the chaste beloved rejects him, responding to his poetic missives with only "frowns." But the familiar Petrarchan elements here have been repurposed toward the fulfillment of lust, particularly that of a social superior for a woman beneath him in rank. Lussurioso tries to tempt her with "jewels," but Castiza, "foolish-chaste," clings to her virtue, adhering to ethical principles that baffle her unrelenting pursuer. Indeed, Vindice earlier insists that Lussurioso's lust could not be put off by any woman except one as "ill featured, vile proportioned" as "a skull" (1.1.85-9). While the

womanizer conveys his desire in Petrarchan tones, it needs no particular object; rather, it may be satisfied by any living woman. Only “a skull” can restrain Lussurioso’s lust. Whereas the conventional Petrarchan lover holds up his beloved as a paragon among women, Lussurioso’s lust inverts this ratio: only a dead woman can restrain his appetite. Only Gloriana, that “shell of death” (1.1.15), can transform the exceptionally desirable into desire’s only exception.

Gloriana’s skull contains both poles of this exceptionality: in life her beauty made her irresistible to the Duke, and in death she represents the only woman repulsive enough to put off Lussurioso. In this reversal, Gloriana’s death and subsequent decay allows her corpse a measure of control over the kind of unchecked male desire that took her life.<sup>256</sup> Only the dead beloved, already killed by male desire, has the capacity to shut down that desire. But in Vindice’s hands, the dead beloved becomes even more powerful. She becomes the weapon of revenge itself.

Vindice performs his revenge against the Duke in terms explicitly sexual and lethally Petrarchan. He has arranged what the Duke believes to be a secret assignation between himself and “a country lady” (3.5.132), but Vindice will instead present him with the disguised skull of Gloriana in veils and makeup. Arriving first on the scene, Vindice sets a striking tone for his imminent revenge: “Oh, sweet, delectable, rare, happy, ravishing!” (3.5.1). Were it not for the context of intended murder, Vindice’s elation in vengeance might easily be mistaken for an outburst of love. In the “violence of my joy” (3.5.27), he has even forgotten to tell his brother Hippolito of his plans to torture and kill the Duke in a dark parody of Petrarchan tropes.

While waiting for the Duke’s arrival, Vindice anticipates the Petrarchan terms of his intended murder in an admiring yet morbid blazon of Gloriana’s skull:

---

<sup>256</sup> Emma Rees argues that the dead Gloriana exercises an agency denied to the living women of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*. See “Gloriana’s Queer Skull: The Matter of Life and Death in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*,” *Anglistik* 28 (2017): 77-85.

Here's an eye

Able to tempt a great man—to serve God;

A pretty hanging lip, that has forgot now to dissemble.

Methinks this mouth should make a swearer tremble,

A drunkard clasp his teeth and not undo 'em

To suffer wet damnation to run through 'em.

Here's a cheek keeps her color, let the wind go whistle.

Spout, rain! We fear thee not; be hot or cold,

All's one with us. (3.5.54-61)

What might otherwise appear to describe a woman whose beauty needs no cosmetics instead describes a state of complete decomposition. Death is just as honest as a woman who wears no makeup, because no amount of “wind” or “rain” can wash away the hue of the naturally beautiful cheek or its bone.

Consequently, Vindice's blazon of the skull performs a dark parody of Petrarchan convention. The head of Gloriana, already removed from the rest of her body, bears out the dismemberment usually enacted in a blazon. And in Vindice's depiction of her death-like visage, the “eye” and “lip” and “mouth” and “cheek” of Gloriana might tempt a man to repent rather than to sin. In this blazon, Vindice thus presents the dead beloved as a corrective to the sexual temptation incited by the living woman. She is a *memento mori*, a reminder of universal morality and subsequently an incentive to repentance. And as a reminder of death and the implement of vengeance, she serves as a potential corrective to unruly male desire. Only when such desire has been punished or prevented by the dead beloved may a woman finally “lie chaste” (3.5.89), and only death can ensure such chastity.

But if Vindice uses the blazon to contemplate the abstract notions of mortality and temptation, in murdering the Duke he makes this blazon of death literal in order to carry out his revenge. He poisons the lips of the skull to ensure that an oft-praised aspect of women's faces delivers the punishment of death to the man who could not control his desires. In disguising the dead Gloriana as "a country lady," Vindice poisons the Duke in a macabre bed trick: rather than a "Lady, sweetly encountered" (3.5.142), the Duke finds himself kissing a skull and looking into the "dreadful vizard" of the "hollows" (3.5.147-8) where its eyes should be. From this point forward, the Duke's disintegrating features become the subject of another blazon of death. "My teeth," he cries, "are eaten out!" and when he complains "Oh, my tongue!" (3.5.160, 164), Vindice reminds him that he "[has] eyes still" (3.5.166) with which to look upon the dead Gloriana. As part of his revenge, Vindice will make sure "Those eyes shall see the incest" (3.5.186) of the Duchess's union with her stepson Spurio. The Duke expects the very sight of this act to "kill" (3.5.192) him, and to ensure that he does not look away, Vindice instructs Hippolito,

Now with thy dagger

Nail down his tongue, and mine shall keep possession

About his heart. If he but gasp, he dies.

We dread not death to quittance injuries.

Brother,

If he but wink, not brooking the foul object,

Let our two other hands tear up his lids

And make his eyes, like comets, shine through blood.

When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good. (3.5.198-206)

With his tongue nailed down and his heart in the "possession" of another, the Duke finds himself the subject of and subject to a violently literalized blazon. And while the Duke's powerlessness

against the violence of the blazon echoes the violence to which the typical beloved is subject, Vindice, in a move of cruel irony, also positions him as a desirous lover whose life is literally endangered by looking upon a scene of love. Under the revenger's knife, the Duke's gaze is involuntarily directed toward the "foul object" of Spurio's incestuous copulation with the Duchess. Should he look away, Vindice and Hippolito will ensure that he is quite literally blind to all other sights. And, in a violent adaptation of the convention in love poetry that encodes orgasm in the language of death, Vindice declares that should the Duke so much as "gasp, he dies." Rather than the gasping release of *la petit mort* that he so often sought in his extramarital affairs, and which he was denied by Gloriana, the Duke's "gasp" will precede his release from life itself. Possibly echoing Petrarchism's inexpressibility topos, the Duke dies of shock mid-sentence, unable to articulate the intensity of his experience: "I cannot brook—" (3.5.223).

Vindice thus takes his revenge by literalizing the blazon in Gloriana's skull and inflicting a version of blazonic dismemberment upon the Duke. Through the Petrarchan idiom and the corpse of his beloved Gloriana, he seeks to correct the injustice of a world in which the likes of Spurio and Lussurioso and the Duke have corrupted an idealizing discourse of love. If the debauchery of the Duke and his family suggests a reactionary response to Elizabethan Petrarchism, we may read this as Middleton's response to the loss of that discourse. With the skull of Gloriana, Middleton punctuates this loss with a reminder of how dangerously powerful the symbol of a dead, sovereign beloved can be in the hands of the right revenger. Yet the skull disappears from the play after Vindice kills the Duke in Act 3, and, after a murderous masque and the arrest of Vindice and his brother, male rule is restored without the unrestrained lechery of the Duke and his family. In using Gloriana's skull as the cause for and means of revenge, *The Revenger's Tragedy* manages to celebrate the reign of Elizabeth, process the obviation of Petrarchan courtly discourse, and usher in a new era in which men may rule without being ruled by love, desire, or revenge.



*“Love’s Measure is Extreme”: Petrarchan Excess and Revenge in ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*

As in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, in Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* the dead beloved functions as both the cause and instrument of revenge. And like *Revenger*, *’Tis Pity* contrasts a Petrarchan discourse of love with its corrupt appropriation in a discourse of seduction, staging a response to the violent imposition of male desire upon the beloved by literalizing a Petrarchan trope as a weapon of revenge. But whereas *Revenger* presents a corrective to the abuses of the discourse of love, ultimately purging that discourse from the court, *’Tis Pity* suggests Petrarchism itself as problematic. Specifically, the play intensifies conventional Petrarchan tropes in the language and actions of Giovanni, Annabella, and Soranzo. This intensification occurs as a type of excess that transforms desire into incest, violence, and revenge. Giovanni and Annabella articulate their desire for each other as doubling and sameness, and their incest thus arises from an excess of Petrarchan desire in the form of a narcissistic longing for their own reflection in each other. Giovanni’s desire, of course, culminates in his murder of Annabella, and while the would-be Petrarchan poet Soranzo woos her (and seduces Hippolita) in conventional terms, he also harbors a murderous violence toward these women who exhibit excess desire in their own right. Soranzo and Giovanni thus parallel each other in their violence toward a beloved who disappoints them, and Annabella, herself a mirror of Petrarchan excess, becomes the ultimate victim of love and revenge. Her skewered heart is the proof of the violent excess that links desire and revenge. *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* thus presents Petrarchism as a form of excess that shapes desire into incest and revenge. This transformation of desire for the beloved culminates in her eroticized murder, and only the death of Annabella can satisfy and obviate the violence of excess.

The presence of Petrarchism in *'Tis Pity* is widely acknowledged by critics, though few offer analysis of its relationship to incest.<sup>257</sup> Sussanah B. Mintz exposes the gender dynamics of incestuous love, arguing that Giovanni's and Soranzo's "Petrarchan idealization" of Annabella acts as a controlling fiction that disguises the masculine domination of the female.<sup>258</sup> Susan B. Wiseman and Zenon Luís-Martínez make use of different methodologies to conclude that Petrarchism, or in Wiseman's terms "courtly love" (which captures many of the same characteristics), ultimately fails as a discourse by which incest might be understood; through Giovanni's incestuous Petrarchism, "the intelligibility of literary discourse dissolves."<sup>259</sup> Others identify the divine or Neoplatonic qualities that Giovanni assigns to Annabella—qualities that echo a primary feature of Petrarch's own *Rime sparse*—in service of arguments concerning the play's representation of iconography and religious ideas.<sup>260</sup> But, as Mintz implies, "courtly lyricism" and "Neoplatonism" both contribute to the "Petrarchan idealization" of Annabella.<sup>261</sup> And despite common acknowledgement of her heart on Giovanni's dagger as a literalization of a Petrarchan trope and a symbol of incestuous love and revenge, the way that Petrarchism informs the presentation of revenge, culminating in Annabella's impaled heart, remains largely unexplored.

---

<sup>257</sup> Critics tend to approach incest in *'Tis Pity* as a social, political, economic, and religious issue. See, for example, Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992), 121-7; Terri Clerico, "The Politics of Blood: John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*," *English Literary Renaissance* 22 (1992): 405-34; Richard McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 116-26; Lisa Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994), 123-61, and her essay "Incest and Class: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Borgias" in *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Elizabeth Barnes (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2002), 39-58; and Molly Smith, *Breaking Boundaries: Politics and Play in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 103-24.

<sup>258</sup> Mintz, "The Power of 'Parity' in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 102 (2003): 269-91.

<sup>259</sup> Wiseman, "*'Tis Pity She's a Whore*: Representing the Incestuous Body" in *Revenge Tragedy*, ed. Stevie Simkin (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 208-28; Luís-Martínez, *In Words and Deeds: The Spectacle of Incest in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2002), 194-211, 203.

<sup>260</sup> See Huston Diehl, "Bewhored Images and Imagined Whores: Iconophobia and Gynophobia in Stuart Love Tragedies," *English Literary Renaissance* 26 (1996): 111-37. Diehl also approaches iconography in *'Tis Pity* through its presentation in "conventional visual images" in "The Iconography of Violence in English Renaissance Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama* 11 (1980): 27-44, 44. On iconography in *'Tis Pity*, see also Laurel Amtower, "'This Idol Thou Ador'st': The Iconography of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 34 (1998): 179-206.

<sup>261</sup> Mintz, "The Power of 'Parity,'" 279

Annabella plays a key role in Ford's construction of revenge in *'Tis Pity*, due in no small part to his use of dramatic genres and conventions that might have seemed outdated in the late 1620s and early 1630s when the play was being staged. As a dramatist that followed Shakespeare, Middleton, Webster, and others, Ford enjoyed the "benefits of belatedness," as Richard S. Ide contends in his seminal essay, enabling him to draw from a wide assortment of conventions and genres, including (with regard to Annabella), "the physically abused wife of Jacobean tragedy" and "the beautiful (but ultimately destroyed) idol of Stuart love tragedy."<sup>262</sup> In Ford's manipulation of generic convention, characters like Giovanni become "trapped between dramatic traditions," between "love tragedy and revenge drama," and the image of Annabella's heart on Giovanni's dagger comes to emblemize "Cupid's arrow" and "Tragedy's dagger" united in revenge.<sup>263</sup> In Michael Neill's reading, Annabella's heart on a dagger takes on such an excess of meaning that it cannot sustain the weight and resolves into an empty image.<sup>264</sup> But this interpretation suggests that these meanings must exist in competition with each other. I contend, however, that the meanings attributed to or imposed on Annabella's heart, particularly Petrarchan love, incest, and revenge, must be read together, each building upon the others. "[I]ncest," writes Richard McCabe, is "a quintessentially tragic theme," and Ford constructs his tragedy from a layering of incest, revenge,

---

<sup>262</sup> Ide, "Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Benefits of Belatedness" in *"Concord and Discord": The Plays of John Ford, 1586-1986*, ed. Donald K. Anderson, Jr. (New York: AMS P, 1986), 61-86; Mario DiGangi, "John Ford" in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 567-83, 576. For more on the conventions from which Ford draws, also see Kathleen McLuskie, "'Language and Matter with a Fit of Mirth': Dramatic Construction in the Plays of John Ford" in *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 97-128.

<sup>263</sup> Marion Lomax, *Stage Images and Traditions: Shakespeare to Ford* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 174; Zenón Luis-Martínez, *In Words and Deeds: The Spectacle of Incest in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2002), 204. See also Ide, "Benefits of Belatedness," 82; Richard Madelaine, "'Sensationalism' and 'Melodrama' in Ford's Plays" in Neill, *Critical Re-visions*, 29-54. Madelaine focuses on the dagger as the emblem of revenge rather than Annabella's heart.

<sup>264</sup> Neill, "'What Strange Riddle's This?' Deciphering *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*" in Neill, *Critical Re-visions*, 153-80, 162-3.

and Petrarchan love that, embodied in the female heart, allows him to distill from these literary conventions a shared tendency toward excess that culminates in eroticized violence.<sup>265</sup>

Both Giovanni and Soranzo employ Petrarchan dynamics when they woo, as critics have long observed, and while they mirror each other in their performance of personal suffering and sexual desire, they manifest the excesses of desire in different ways. Giovanni, suffering from the “incurable and restless wounds” (1.2.148) of love, communicates that love to his sister in terms of sameness and their double nature as siblings.<sup>266</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus writes that Giovanni “is especially drawn to the Neoplatonic image of lovers as perfect likenesses, as mirrors of one another, as one soul mysteriously shared or divided between two bodies and eternally seeking union,” and this assessment accurately describes Giovanni’s *perception* of the love that he bears Annabella.<sup>267</sup> That love, however, exceeds the bounds of his idealizing discourse. At Annabella’s approach, he prays to the “heavenly powers” to “double” his “virtue” of “courage” (1.2.164), and then proceeds to double it himself in enumerating her virtues through Petrarchan praise of her “cheeks” and “lips” and “hands” (201-2). At her initial objection to incest, he replies,

My sister, Annabella, I know this,  
 And could afford you instance why to love  
 So much the more for this; to which intent  
 Wise Nature first in your creation meant  
 To make you mine; else’t had been sin and foul  
 To share one beauty to a double soul.                   (1.2.233-8)

---

<sup>265</sup> McCabe, “*Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and Incest” in *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 309-20, 309.

<sup>266</sup> McCabe remarks on the “childlike narcissism of which Giovanni’s incestuous love is merely one facet,” *Incest, Drama, and Nature’s Law*, 233. All quotations from *Tis Pity She’s a Whore* are taken from Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama*.

<sup>267</sup>Headnote to *Tis Pity She’s a Whore* in Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama*, 1906.

While this passage confirms Maus's statement, it also undermines the Neoplatonic unity that Giovanni seeks. By his logic, because they share a "double soul," their incest cannot be a "sin." Rather, it becomes a reason "to love / So much the *more*." Thus, the doubleness of Neoplatonic unity that Giovanni means to portray transforms into a principle of multiplication, doubling his sexual desire for Annabella, whose "hands . . . / Would make an anchorite lascivious" (202-3). Though physical desire and Christian virtue had been previously reconciled in Spenser's *Amoretti*, the introduction of incest to the equation forbids such a reconciliation. Giovanni's application of Petrarchan, Neoplatonic idealism as justification for incest corrupts the ideal it seeks to employ, and the doubleness of perfect union transforms into the excess of a desire that has overflowed its bounds.<sup>268</sup>

Annabella's requital reinforces and reflects Giovanni's excess in her Petrarchan requital. She responds to his confession of love by echoing and overgoing his sentiments of suffering:

Thou hast won  
 The field, and never fought. What thou hast urged,  
 My captive heart had long ago resolved.  
 I blush to tell thee (but I'll tell thee now):  
 For every sigh that thou hast spent for me,  
 I have sighed ten, for every tear, shed twenty;  
 And not so much for that I loved, as that  
 I durst not say I loved, nor scarcely think it.      (1.2.244-51)

With her "blush" and her "captive heart" and reference to love's war, Annabella echoes the stock terms of Giovanni's professed love. And knowing the sinful nature of her love, she, like Giovanni,

---

<sup>268</sup> McCabe also acknowledges the problematic nature of Giovanni's desire as it "undermines the high Platonic idealism in which the relationship is first couched," and goes on to suggest that Ford's portrayal of such desire "may also cast a cynical light on the fashionable Neoplatonism of the Caroline court." "*'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Incest*," 316-17.

has feared even to speak it. Yet her “tear[s]” and “sigh[s],” though they directly echo Giovanni’s, overgo his own by twenty fold. While Petrarchan suffering is conventionally hyperbolic, Annabella’s hyperbole is an exercise in excess: she doubles her brother’s suffering by repeating it, and then multiplies that double by factors of ten and twenty. She, like her brother, has experienced the pain of unrequitedness specific to the Petrarchan lover, allowing her to occupy the positions of both lover and beloved, thereby extending her excess even further. Annabella’s desire thus mirrors and intensifies that of Giovanni, urging them both toward the consummation of their incestuous love.

Soranzo, too, plays the suffering Petrarchan lover, but unlike Giovanni, he employs this rhetoric for purposes of seduction and personal gain rather than love. He redirects the extremity of Petrarchan suffering, with which he seduces Hippolita and tries to woo Annabella, toward pleasure rather than love, a process that he perceives as mitigating love’s extremity. Yet both of Soranzo’s romantic engagements lead to deadly violence, and excess reemerges in the context of betrayal and vengeance. Hippolita seeks to poison him (and ends up poisoned herself) for not fulfilling his promise to marry her after her husband’s death, and Soranzo violently abuses Annabella and plots to end her life after learning of her pregnancy and incest. Though he presents pleasure as a more moderate alternative to the extremity of love, amorous betrayal leads Soranzo to the excesses of violent revenge that, as I will later discuss, forecast the same reaction in Giovanni.

As his name suggests, Soranzo is an imitator of the Italian Petrarchan poet Sannazaro, and at the opening of Act 2, scene 2, he translates and plans to overgo Sannazaro’s depiction of love as excessive suffering:

“Love’s measure is extreme, the comfort, pain;

The life unrest, and the reward disdain.”

What’s here? Look o’er again: ’Tis so; so writes

This smooth, licentious poet in his rhymes.

But, Sannazar, thou liest, for, had thy bosom  
 Felt such oppression as is laid on mine,  
 Thou wouldst have kissed the rod that made thee smart.  
 To work, then, happy Muse, and contradict  
 What Sannazar hath in his envy writ. (2.2.1-9)

Sannazaro's lines exhibit the conventional trope of Petrarchan suffering and label it "extreme," but Soranzo cannot believe that the "licentious poet" should characterize love as "pain." He therefore sets out to correct Sannazaro's error by writing of the love he claims to feel for Annabella, which he experiences not as pain, but as pleasure:

"Love's measure is the mean, sweet his annoys;  
 His pleasures life, and his reward all joys."  
 Had Annabella lived when Sannazar  
 Did in his brief encomium celebrate  
 Venice, that queen of cities, he had left  
 That verse which gained him such a sum of gold,  
 And for one only look from Annabell  
 Had writ of her and her diviner cheeks. (2.2.10-18)

In his revision of Sannazaro, Soranzo formulates "pleasures" and "joys" as a more moderate version of desire, transforming love's "pain" into the pleasance of "sweet . . . annoys." He paradoxically seeks to exceed Sannazaro by writing poetry that emphasizes moderation rather than excess, and he presents the source of his inspiration as a paragon whose beauty surpasses that of Venice, "that queen of cities." Importantly, the excess that peeks through Soranzo's comparison is both poetic and monetary. Had Sannazaro ever seen Annabella, he would have foregone the "sum of gold" that he earned by his "brief encomium" to Venice to write instead of "her diviner cheeks." In taking

Annabella as his poetic subject and declaring her superiority, Soranzo paradoxically uses comparative excess to support his argument for moderation. Further, the product of this superiority is a poetry whose worth exceeds the “sum of gold” that Sannazaro earned with his encomium to Venice. Annabella’s beauty therefore registers as excess both poetically and economically, suggesting that Soranzo is enamored not only of her looks but of the money she will bring as the daughter of a wealthy merchant.

Hippolita’s entry immediately after Soranzo’s poetic revision of Petrarchan suffering reveals his use of the mode for deception and seduction, which in turn sets off a violent reaction in his jilted beloved. She calls Soranzo “perjured man” and accuses him of deceiving her for his own “sensual rage of blood” that nevertheless remains “unsated” (2.2.27-31). “Thine eyes,” she recalls, “did plead in tears, thy tongue in oaths” (36), and through these devices Soranzo achieved “the conquest of my lawful bed” (39). Though he had been penning Petrarchan verse when Hippolita arrived, Soranzo here denies his previous seduction in that mode, claiming, “The vows I made, if you remember well, / Were wicked and unlawful” (86-7). Choosing to engage or disengage from Petrarchan discourse as its best suits him, Soranzo “appropriates whichever code serves his purpose.”<sup>269</sup> He shifts from Petrarchan love to repentance, observing the excess of Hippolita’s reaction in labeling her “too violent” (52) for her heated accusation of him. His assessment, however, shares a line with Hippolita’s reply: “You are too double.”

In compressing the excesses of both characters, this line represents in form the excess it conveys in content. Hippolita is, indeed, “too violent,” and will become more so as she plots Soranzo’s murder to avenge the loss of her own “modest fame” (32). Yet Soranzo is himself “too double,” as evidenced by the pun—itsself a device that multiplies meaning—on his duplicity and his Petrarchan performance of desire. Their shared line contains the “too double” excesses of love from

---

<sup>269</sup> Wiseman, “Representing the Incestuous Body,” 218.



the perspective of the desiring lover as well as the jilted beloved, and in the case of the latter, it signals the potential of extreme desire to be repurposed as revenge. In her extremity, Hippolita performs just such a repurposing, declaring, “My vengeance shall give comfort to this woe” (104).

Soranzo’s interaction with Hippolita establishes a principle in which excess desire tends to overflow into revenge, and this principle plays out in the vengeful language and actions of *Tis Pity*’s competing Petrarchan lovers, Soranzo and Giovanni. For Soranzo, this shift from desire to vengeance is triggered when Annabella’s pregnancy exposes her deception and betrayal. As he had with Hippolita, Soranzo deploys the language of Petrarchan suffering in his attempt to woo Annabella in such clichéd phrases as “let me live” (3.2.27) and “I’m sick, and sick to th’heart” (3.2.35). Such language suits his purpose here—to persuade a wealthy merchant’s daughter to marriage—but it does not exhibit an extremity of desire. Only in Annabella’s rejection of him does Soranzo declare himself “doubly . . . undone, / Both in my present and my future hopes!” (3.2.74-5). Given his earlier comparison of Annabella to “a sum of gold” and his investment in love as “pleasure,” his reference to the double disappointment of his “present and future hopes” suggests that disappointment as both sexual and financial. If he exhibits none of the same fervor as Giovanni in performing his love for Annabella, the disappointment of his hopes for money and pleasure nevertheless takes the form of excess.

Learning of Annabella’s pregnancy intensifies Soranzo’s sense of disappointment. His famously violent abuse of Annabella on stage after learning of her pregnancy displays the deadly extremity of his anger in reaction to his new wife’s betrayal. He physically drags her into the scene, “pull[s]” her “hair,” and “drag[s]” her “lust-belepered body through the dust” (4.3.60-1). He shouts insults at her, calling her “strumpet, famous whore” (4.3.1), “Excellent quean” (25), and “Damnable monster” (33). He even threatens murder: “I’ll rip up thy heart / . . . with my teeth” (53-4) and “hew thy flesh to shreds” (58). Having lost control over his wife’s body, he attempts to reassert it in the

form of violent vengeance and physically abuse.<sup>270</sup> In doing so, he asserts sexual control over his object of desire, and eroticizes the violence he inflicts upon her to the point of implied arousal, declaring, “I will not slack my vengeance” (4.3.76). In this punning refusal of detumescence, Soranzo integrates sexual pleasure into his performance of revenge. At Vasques’s prompting, he resumes a Petrarchan stance of love and apology, calling her “saint” (111) and expressing his love for her “heart” (127), but the vengeance he plans continues to resonate erotically. “I burn,” he declares to Vasques, and only “blood shall quench that flame” (5.4.26-7).

Soranzo’s desire-turned-revenge anticipates and parallels the revenge that Giovanni performs for his love of Annabella. Though Giovanni offers Annabella no violent words or abuses, and though his revenge is directed at Soranzo rather than at his beloved, he nevertheless enacts that revenge in the same way that Soranzo had intended to perform his own: by murdering Annabella. But whereas Soranzo seeks to avenge his betrayal in love, Giovanni kills Annabella to preempt her husband’s revenge and thereby preserve their love. Having learned that Soranzo’s “banquet is a harbinger of death” (5.5.27) for them both, Giovanni resolves to kill Annabella and himself (5.6.99-100). As he builds to this action, he employs Petrarchan language that evokes the mode’s conventional association with death. And whereas Petrarchan convention weaves the language of mortality into that of desire, Giovanni weaves his love for Annabella into her murder. He hopes they shall be reunited in the afterlife, to “kiss one another, prate, or laugh” and “do as we do here” (5.5.40-1). He cries “funeral tears” (49) for the impending loss of “Annabella’s sacred love” (57). He admires her “hand,” her “palms,” and “How sweetly life doth run” in her “well-colored veins” (74-6). And as he prepares to stab her, he bids her “Be dark, bright sun, / And make this midday night” (79-80). Finally, he confesses his intentions to Annabella, “To save thy fame, and kill thee in a kiss” (84) at the very moment he stabs her. Rather than the miniature death of orgasm, Giovanni’s

---

<sup>270</sup> See Mintz, “The Power of ‘Parity’” on male control of Annabella’s body.

Petrarchan progression culminates in literal death. Like Soranzo, Giovanni eroticizes his violence toward the beloved in an act of vengeance, declaring, “Thus die, and die by me, and by my hand. / Revenge is mine” (85-6). Petrarchan love thus shapes Giovanni’s revenge into an act of such excess that not only does he appropriate and abuse its convention of conflating love and death, but also does so to such exaggerated degree that he confronts his enemies with the heart of Annabella on his dagger in a final act of love, revenge, and excess.

While Soranzo and Giovanni both transform their Petrarchan excess into revenge, Annabella, prior to her death, presents an alternative conversion of excess. In her soliloquy of repentance, she acknowledges the “pleasures” and “joys” (5.1.1-2) of desire fulfilled but repurposes the language of such pleasure toward repentance. She laments that Giovanni “hast had the spoil / Of thine own virtues” (17-18), though she makes no mention of her own “virtue,” but rather wishes that

my black offense

Might pass from thee, that I alone might feel

The torment of an uncontrollèd flame! (5.1.21-3)

Having opened her soliloquy by saying “farewell” to “Pleasures,” “thrifless minutes,” and “false joys” (1-2), Annabella’s reference to her “uncontrollèd flame” of hell elicits a sense of excess sexual desire. This excess also appears in her nameless reference to her husband, the man to whom she has been “joined in ceremonial knot” (25). Beneath the obvious reference to Soranzo, her legal husband, this surprisingly vague descriptor also glances at Giovanni, with whom she had exchanged the grave vow of “love me or kill me” (1.2.256-9), and with whom the Friar had suggested marriage (2.5.40). The “ceremonial knot” thus implies a sense of doubleness that appears more explicitly in the material of Annabella’s letter to Giovanni, “double-lined with tears and blood” (5.1.34). In her letter, she writes a “woman’s tragedy” in which “my conscience now stands up against my lust / With

depositions characterized in guilt” (8-10). Whereas “blood” and “tears” might suggest lustful desire and Petrarchan suffering, respectively, Annabella’s idiom of repentance transforms them into the ink with which her letter is *gilt*. She thereby repurposes the leaky excesses of a body in love or lust toward contrition.<sup>271</sup> She translates the language of Petrarchism, excess, and erotic “death” into a confession of spiritual guilt, a “Repentance and a leaving of that life / I long have died in” (36-7).

Annabella’s repurposing of Petrarchan excess stands in stark contrast to that of Giovanni and Soranzo. When Soranzo beats her and threatens her life, she tells him she is not afraid to die, and that “I leave revenge behind, and thou shalt feel’t” (4.3.71). Unlike Hippolita, the other abused and betrayed beloved, Annabella expresses no interest in revenge. Instead, she funnels excess away from revenge and violence and toward contrition. The murder of Annabella, which Soranzo wishes for and Giovanni carries out in much the same terms, comes to represent not only Petrarchan excess and violent revenge, but also a refusal of the only possibility of redemption in Parma. In killing Annabella, Giovanni exacts a revenge that cannot lead to justice. The excesses of Petrarchan desire lead him to incest, and when the fulfillment of that desire is interrupted, Giovanni re-consummates his relationship with Annabella, penetrating her in an act of love and revenge. And Annabella, the dead beloved, is thus not only the instrument of revenge; she is the body by whose penetration Petrarchan desire *becomes* revenge.

\*

\*

\*

The revenges performed with or upon the dead beloved in both *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* reflect upon England’s ruler and court. *Revenger*, I have tried to show, stages a paradoxical need to maintain and dispense with the idealizing Petrarchan discourse of Elizabeth’s court. Of *'Tis Pity*, McCabe has suggested that the Neoplatonic transcendence of Giovanni’s love for

---

<sup>271</sup> On early modern understandings of women’s bodies as “leaky,” see Gail Kern Pastor, “Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy,” *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 43-65.

Annabella might “cast a cynical light on the fashionable Neoplatonism of the Caroline court,” and that the much-celebrated marriage of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, the first royal couple to be glorified *as* a couple, may lead to conceptions of “The state itself” as “unhealthily introverted, politically and spiritually endogamous, doomed to turn inwards upon itself.”<sup>272</sup> And the excesses of desire in *'Tis Pity* turn similarly inward toward incest, resulting in revenge, death, and a restoration of order that remains corrupt. Thus, the Cardinal concludes the play with its title, “’Tis pity she’s a whore” (5.6.161). The excess of desire, transformed into incest and revenge, ultimately implodes in the pointlessness of death without justice, and the corrupt order of Parma “turns inwards” toward self-destruction.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that Giovanni and Vindice share a self-destructive drive, evidenced in the former’s intended suicide and the latter’s strangely proud confession of his crimes, that derives from their authors’ struggle to purge the Petrarchan dynamics that had become so deeply ingrained in English literary culture during the reign of Elizabeth. Though the plays I have analyzed here may be read as critiques of Petrarchan love and its discourses, I suggest that their glorification and disposal of the beloved allows them to pay homage to this iconic figure while purging the paradigm to which she belongs through the mechanism of revenge. After forty-five years under Elizabethan Petrarchism, not to mention its initial emergence in the reign of her father, the figure of the beautiful, chaste, divine, and unattainable beloved must have been too deeply ingrained into the cultural consciousness for playwrights and poets simply to dispense with her. She had become an icon, and I suggest that plays like *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and *'Tis Pity She’s a Whore* exemplify an artistic struggle to extricate the literary imagination from this divinized figure. If *Revenger* presents an early effort at purging the beloved while paying tribute to her, *'Tis Pity*, in so many ways exceptional among Caroline plays, stages the final gasp of a dying Elizabethan icon.

---

<sup>272</sup> “’Tis Pity She’s a Whore and Incest,” 316-17; *Incest, Drama and Nature’s Law*, 236.

## Conclusion:

## Reimagining the Dead Beloved

Methought I saw my late espoused Saint  
     Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,  
     Whom Joves great Son to her glad Husband gave,  
     Rescu'd from death by force though pale and faint.  
 Mine as whome washt from spot of child-bed taint,  
     Purification in the old Law did save,  
     And such, as yet once more I trust to have  
     Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,  
 Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:  
     Her face was vail'd, yet to my fancied sight,  
     Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd  
 So clear, as in no face with more delight.  
     But O, as to embrace me she inclin'd  
     I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.

—John Milton, Sonnet 23

Milton's Sonnet 23 (1673) offers a reimagining of the dead beloved that not only reconceives her relationship to the poet lover, but of the poet to poetry itself. The sonnet calls attention to the problem of generating the beloved as an aestheticized image—in part because the truly divine beloved cannot be conceived in earthly terms, and in part because that image makes little room for true reciprocity in love. In the process, Milton presents a dead beloved who frustrates literary form

not because she is a symbol of mortality, but because her death is the beginning of divine existence. It is this new existence that the poet attempts to capture in Sonnet 23.

Published at least forty years after Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* was first staged and over eighty years after Raleigh's "A Vision" from which it takes its cue, Milton's Sonnet 23 returns the dead beloved to sonnet form in an elegiac key. It takes its opening phrase of "Methought I saw" from Raleigh's sonnet, and both poems use the figure of the dead beloved to suggest an intimate relationship between love and death. Her absence is the cause for the grief expressed in each poem, but whereas Raleigh's "A Vision" laments having lost the dead Laura as a literary symbol, Milton's sonnet grieves not just the absence of his wife, but also the incapacity of earthly love and its poetic expression to comprehend her posthumous, transcendent form. Death transforms the beloved into a Neoplatonic ideal that, rather than fading into "Oblivion" as Raleigh's Laura does, fades from the poet's gaze and craft. Sonnet 23 presents no declaration of poetic accomplishment and no replacement for the beloved as comfort for her loss, as Raleigh's poem does with the arrival of the "Faery Queene"; only the poet's image of her in his dream can offer any sense of comfort. Or rather, her image is all the comfort he can muster. Thus, in Sonnet 23 Milton performs for his reader a doomed process in which the poet attempts to see, remember, and describe in words the image of his beloved's heavenly form. But because the heavenly form can never be adequately expressed in earthly terms, the dead beloved in this poem frustrates the poet's ability to create the masculine image of her in his mind—a process on which almost all depictions of the beloved rely, and which Petrarch makes the center of his *Rime sparse*.

Over the course of this dissertation, I have tried to show how the Petrarchan dead beloved functions as a pivotal figure for generic changes, that, in turn, signals changes in models of English Renaissance authorship. Writers construct the dead beloved as an object of their art, even as their fictional author figures grapple with the Petrarchan challenges she presents. Sometimes this process

leads the poet-lover to refute his own literary mode, as Alcyon does in *Daphnaïda*, pursuing poetic immortality through grief rather than love. In *Tamburlaine*, Zenocrate's death predicts the unlikely vulnerability of Marlowe's otherwise unconquerable epic hero, and Tamburlaine's intense aestheticization of her image and corpse points to the eventual death of his empire. And *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *'Tis Pity* showcase the dead beloved as a literal weapon of revenge, gruesomely aestheticized in Petrarchan tropes. And in *Hamlet*, Gertrude's story of Ophelia's death reduces her to image and allusion, a process that makes her death legible to Gertrude's listeners. Ophelia's body, however, remains opaque, almost invisible, to Hamlet. He ignores her corpse on stage, and the body seems to resist his poetic comprehension. In all of these works, the *image* of the dead beloved makes her death legible, particularly as a literary force, but it also puts an attractive veneer on the face of mortality. In contrast to this trend, Milton's Sonnet 23 tries and fails to make the dead beloved legible through a process of aestheticization, but instead of pointing toward mortality, the indescribable dead beloved turns out to be evidence of a higher fate.

Sonnet 23 acknowledges the beloved as a conjuration of the masculine poet's imagination: she is an image drawn from the poet's memory of his wife, an object of his gaze ("Methought I *saw*," 1, emphasis added), and is composed of poetry itself. Yet try as he might to fix her in the poem, to bring her image into focus and keep it with him, she at last eludes his vision and poetic comprehension: "I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night" (14). This sonnet thus continues the tradition of the formally disruptive dead beloved. Yet Milton adds a twist: it is not his beloved's absence or death that disrupts his vision, nor is it her body; rather, it is the newly divine nature of his saint-like beloved. Though "Her face was vail'd," he imagines the "sight" of her as "Love, sweetness, goodness, [that] in her person shin'd" (10-11). As Patrick Cheney has shown, the beloved in Milton's sonnet is an emblem of Christian Neoplatonic transcendence, and it is precisely her newly transcendent nature that simultaneously refutes poetic comprehension and implies the



promise of spiritual comfort in the Christian afterlife—an afterlife in which the poet anticipates regaining his “sight” when he is finally able to fix his gaze on her heavenly form.<sup>273</sup> Thus, when he anticipates “Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint” (8), it is not the “restraint” of her “vail” that will have been removed, but the restraint of mortal form with its limited comprehension of the divine. Until he also takes on heavenly form, he can only experience the reaching “embrace” (13) of his beloved as empty.

That empty embrace carries with it a long literary history: Odysseus experiences an empty embrace with his mother’s shade; Aeneas fails to embrace his dead wife and father when he finds them in the underworld; and Orpheus grasps only air when he reaches out for Eurydice in Virgil’s *Georgics*.<sup>274</sup> The attempted embrace is thus laden with literary allusion and generic resonance of monumental scope, invoking both Homeric and Virgilian epic and Orphic lyric. Yet Milton buries the reference for the same reason that the embrace fails: the power of poetry, whether it be lyric or epic, and the power of earthly love as conveyed through a Petrarchan sonnet, can never fully comprehend the divine grace of his tragically transcendent “Saint” (1). The promise of spiritual elevation that ought to be a comfort instead causes him to grieve in an amorous form for the poetic failure that represents an existential pain. As Cheney puts it, “The appropriate subtitle for Milton’s sonnet is ‘the agony of the *extasie*.’”<sup>275</sup>

The dead beloved here takes on fresh nuance. She both frustrates and elevates poetic form. And if the sonnet acknowledges her as an image of the poet’s imagination, it is because her glory exceeds the bounds of comprehension. The poet therefore can only describe her by literary

---

<sup>273</sup> “Alcestis and the ‘Passion for Immortality’: Milton’s *Sonnet XXIII* and Plato’s *Symposium*,” *Milton Studies* 18 (1983): 63-76.

<sup>274</sup> See Stella P. Revard’s note on *Sonnet 23* in *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Stella P. Revard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and Targoff, *Posthumous Love: Eros and the Afterlife in Renaissance England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014), 206-9.

<sup>275</sup> “Alcestis and the ‘Passion for Immortality,’” 74.

comparison (“like Alcestis,” 2) and by abstract virtues. His attention to the Neoplatonic form of his dead beloved—“Love, sweetness, goodness”—predicts the eventual transformation of the poet himself and his heavenly reunion with her. If the beloved is disruptive in Milton’s sonnet, it is because she cannot be contained by earthly forms. Milton thus constructs an idea of a dead beloved that is not only beyond masculine poetry control, but beyond the scope of poetry entirely.

Yet there exists a corollary feature of the inexpressible perfection of Milton’s dead beloved: she still desires her husband. Though the vision of his “late espoused Saint” is one of the poet’s own making, the poet imagines his “Saint” reaching out to embrace *him* rather than the other way around. This reaching is remarkable both for the agency it bestows on the dead beloved and for its suggestion of a divine erotics. Ramie Targoff writes that “Milton builds . . . toward an erotic encounter that does not look to the heavens but remains firmly on the ground.”<sup>276</sup> I would suggest, however, that Milton seeks to have it both ways: the Miltonic poet-lover aspires to an erotic-transcendent relationship with the saint-like dead woman. Further, he wants that relationship to be “coequal.” Love’s divine “embrace” is the space in which the dead beloved asserts her own desire, and therefore the space in which mutuality may be achieved. And because the mutuality and divinity of this “embrace” arise from the beloved’s recent ascension to the heavenly plane, we might conclude that this radical representation of love is a consequence of death itself: the mortal lovers must die before their love can transcend earthly desire.

Milton’s notion of love captured in Sonnet 23 represents a recuperation of sexual love for divine ends that is enabled by the death of the beloved.<sup>277</sup> Sonnet 23 constitutes an important reimagining of the dead beloved. If she thwarts the poet’s efforts to describe her, it is because Milton is reworking the Petrarchan dynamic in which the beloved remains frustratingly inaccessible.

---

<sup>276</sup> *Posthumous Love*, 206.

<sup>277</sup> Milton depicts the prelapsarian sex of Adam and Eve as sacred in *Paradise Lost*. See Achsah Guibbory, “Donne, Milton, and Holy Sex,” *Milton Studies* 32 (1995): 3-21.

He is also reworking the way in which this figure transforms the genres and modes in which she appears. In this poem, Milton almost returns the dead beloved to the context of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* in that she comes to represent the hope of heaven for the mourning poet. But whereas the poet of Petrarch's *Rime* still perceives the dead Laura as a distraction from the proper worship of the divine, Milton's resolves this problem by suggesting the dead beloved as a means by which the poet might regain his spiritual "sight." The dead beloved is thus a gateway to Christian Neoplatonic transcendence and an ideal that defies poetic language. She is a figure of mutual love and agency. And she predicts an erotic and spiritual reunion with her partner in heaven. In Milton's reimagining, the dead beloved is a promise of paradise to come.

## Works Cited

- Altman, Joel B. *Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.
- Amtower, Laurel. "“This Idol Thou Ador’st’: The Iconography of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*.” *Papers on Language and Literature* 34 (1998): 179-206.
- Anderson, W. S. “The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid: *flebile nescio quid*.” In Warden, *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, 25-50.
- Attie, Katherine Bootle. “Passion Turned to Prettiness: Rhyme or Reason in *Hamlet*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012): 393-423.
- Barber, C. L. *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd*, edited by Richard P. Wheeler. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Bartels, Emily C., and Emma Smith, eds. *Christopher Marlowe in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Bate, Jonathan. *Shakespeare and Ovid*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993.
- Bates, Catherine. *Masculinity and the Hunt: Wyatt to Spenser*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Bate, Lucy. “Which Did or Did Not Go to the Grave.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17 (1966): 163-65.
- Battenhouse, Roy W. *Marlowe’s Tamburlaine: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1941.
- Berger, Harry, Jr. *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- Bevington, David, ed. *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*. London: W. W. Norton, 2002.
- Bialo, Caralyn. “Popular Performance, the Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia’s Madness.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 53 (2013): 293-309.

- Boehrer, Bruce Thomas. *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992.
- Braden, Gordon. *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.
- Bruster, Douglas. "‘Come to the Tent Again’: ‘The Passionate Shepherd,’ Dramatic Rape, and Lyric Time," *Criticism* 33 (1991): 49-72.
- Burnett, Mark Thornton. "Tamburlaine and the Body." *Criticism* 33 (1991): 31-47.
- . "Tamburlaine the Great, Parts One and Two." In *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Patrick Cheney, 127-43. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Burrow, Colin. *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993.
- . "Spenser's Genres." In McCabe, *Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, 403-19.
- Camden, Caroll. "On Ophelia's Madness." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964): 247-55.
- Cartwright, Kent. *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Chaudhuri, Sukanta. "Marlowe, Madrigals, and a New Elizabethan Poet." *Review of English Studies* 39 (1988): 199-216.
- Cheney, Donald. "Grief and Creativity." In *Grief and Gender: 700-1700*, edited by Jennifer C. Vaught, 123-32. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- . "Spenser's Fortieth Birthday and Related Fictions." *Spenser Studies* 4 (1983): 3-31.
- Cheney, Patrick. "Alcestis and the 'Passion for Immortality': Milton's *Sonnet XXIII* and Plato's *Symposium*." *Milton Studies* 18 (1983): 63-76.
- . "Career Rivalry and the Writing of Counter-Nationhood: Ovid, Spenser, and Philomela in Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love.'" *ELH* 65 (1998): 523-55.
- . "Dido to Daphne: Early Modern Death in Spenser's Shorter Poems." *Spenser Studies* 18 (2003): 143-63.

- . *English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime: Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018.
- . "Halting Sonnets: Poetry and Theater in *Much Ado About Nothing*." In *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited by Michael Schoenfeldt, 363-82. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- . "Introduction: Authorship in Marlowe's Poems." In *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Patrick Cheney and Brian J. Striar, 1-25. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.
- . *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood*. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1997.
- . *Marlowe's Republican Authorship: Lucan, Liberty, and the Sublime*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009.
- . "Petrarch." In *Edmund Spenser in Context*, edited by Andrew Escobedo, 235-45. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016.
- . *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.
- . *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career*. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1993.
- . "Spenser's Pastorals: *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*." In Hadfield, *Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, 79-105.
- Cheney, Patrick and Philip Hardie, eds. *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*. Vol. 2, 1558-1660. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015.
- Clarke, Danielle. "Marlowe's Poetic Form." In Bartels, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 57-67.
- Clerico, Terri. "The Politics of Blood: John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore.'" *English Literary Renaissance* 22 (1992): 405-34
- Colie, Rosalie L. *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, edited by Barbara K. Lewalski. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973.
- Cornish, Alison. "Embracing the Corpse: Necrophilic Tendencies in Petrarch." In *Dead Lovers: Erotic Bonds and the Study of Premodern Europe*, edited by Basil Duffalo and Peggy McCracken, 57-70. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006.

- Cunningham, J. S. and Eithne Henson. Introduction to *Tamburlaine the Great*, edited by J. S. Cunningham and Eithne Henson, 1-32. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.
- Daileader, Celia R. "Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, and the Masculine Grotesque." In *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, edited by Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley, 452-68. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
- Dane, Gabrielle. "Reading Ophelia's Madness." *Exemplaria* 10 (1998): 405-23.
- Deats, Sara Munson. *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997.
- de Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet without Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- DeNeef, A. Leigh. *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor*. Durham: Duke UP, 1982.
- Diehl, Huston. "Bewhored Images and Imagined Whores: Iconophobia and Gynophobia in Stuart Love Tragedies." *English Literary Renaissance* 26 (1996): 111-37.
- . "The Iconography of Violence in English Renaissance Tragedy." *Renaissance Drama* 11 (1980): 27-44.
- DiGangi, Mario. "John Ford." In *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, edited by Arthur F. Kinney, 567-83. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2004.
- Dollimore, Jonathan. *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Dolven, Jeff. "Spenser and the Troubled Theaters." *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999): 179-200.
- Donne, John. *The Poems of John Donne*. Edited by Robin Robbins. 2 Vols. Harlow: Pearson, 2008.
- Dubrow, Heather. *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008.
- . *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
- . *Genre*. London: Methuen, 1982.

- Dunn, Leslie C. "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*: Music, Madness, and the Feminine." In *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, edited by Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, 50-64. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Emsley, Sarah. "‘I Cannot Love, to Be an Emperess’: Women and Honour in *Tamburlaine*." *Dalhousie Review* 80 (2000): 169-86.
- Enterline Lynn. *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- . *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012.
- Eriksen, Roy. "The Epilogue in *Doctor Faustus*: The Petrarchan Context." *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9 (2010): 1-16.
- . "Marlowe's Petrarch: *In morte di madonna Laura*." *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 29 (1986): 13-25.
- Fienberg, Nona. "Jephthah's Daughter: The Parts Ophelia Plays." In *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, edited by Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik, 128-43. Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1991.
- Feng, Aileen A. *Writing Beloveds: Humanist Petrarchism and the Politics of Gender*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2017.
- Findlay, Alison. "Marlowe and Women." In Bartels, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 242-51.
- Findlay, L. M. "Enriching Echoes: Hamlet and Orpheus." *MLN* 93 (1978): 982-89
- Finin, Kathryn R. "Re-Membering Gloriana: 'Wild Justice' and the Female Body in *The Revenger's Tragedy*," *Renaissance Forum* 6 (2003): 1-19.
- . "Trying Rape in *The Revenger's Tragedy*: 'A Slack Performance.'" *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 74 (2008): 17-22.
- Fischer, Sandra K. "Hearing Ophelia; Gender and Tragic Discourse in *Hamlet*." *Renaissance and Reformation* 14 (1990): 1-10.
- Forsythe, R. S. "The Passionate Shepherd; And English Poetry." *PMLA* 40 (1925): 692-742.



- Fox-Good, Jacquelyn A. "Ophelia's Mad Songs: Music, Gender, Power." In *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, edited by David G. Allen and Robert A. White, 217-38. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1995.
- Francisco, Timothy. "Marlowe's War Horses: Cyborgs, Soldiers, and Queer Companions." In *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, edited by Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas, 47-65. New York: Palgrave, 2013.
- Freccero, John. "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics." *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 34-40.
- Friedenreich, Kenneth. "'Huge Greatnesse' Overthrown: The Fall of the Empire in Marlowe's Tamburlaine Plays." *Clio* 1 (1972): 37-48.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Pantheon, 2004.
- Gates, Sarah. "Assembling the Ophelia Fragments: Gender, Genre, and Revenge in *Hamlet*." *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 34 (2008): 229-47.
- Gibbs, Joanna. "Marlowe's Politic Women." In *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, edited by J. A. Downie and J. T. Parnell, 164-76. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Gibson Jonathan. "The Legal Context of Spenser's 'Daphnaïda.'" *Review of English Studies* 55 (2004): 24-44.
- Goldman Michael. "Marlowe and the Histrionics of Ravishment." In *Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson*, edited by Alvin B. Kernan, 22-40. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977.
- Grande, Troni Y. *Marlovian Tragedy: The Play of Dilatation*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999.
- Greene, Roland. *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.

- Greene, Thomas M. *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982.
- Gregerson, Linda. "Sexual Politics." In Hadfield, *Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, 180-99.
- Guibbory, Achsah. "Donne, Milton, and Holy Sex." *Milton Studies* 32 (1995): 3-21.
- Hadfield, Andrew, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Hadfield, Andrew. *Edmund Spenser: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
- Hainsworth, Peter. *Petrarch the Poet: An Introduction to the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Hall, H. Gaston. "Epic Antecedents of the Ghost of Hamlet's Father: Reminiscence and Allusion?" *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 82 (2012): 33-8.
- Hamilton, A. C., ed. *The Faerie Queene*. Harlow: Longman, 2001.
- Hardie, Philip. *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012.
- Hardie, Philip and Helen Moore, eds. *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- Harris, Duncan and Nancy L. Steffen. "The Other Side of the Garden: An Interpretive Comparison of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and Spenser's *Daphnaïda*." *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8 (1978): 17-36.
- Hartsock, Mildred E. "Major Scenes in Minor Key." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21 (1970): 55-62.
- Helgerson, Richard. "The New Poet Presents Himself: Spenser and the Idea of a Literary Career." *PMLA* 93 (1978): 893-911.
- . *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983.
- Hile, Rachel E. *Spenserian Satire: A Tradition of Indirection*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2017.

- Hopkins, Lisa. "Incest and Class: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Borgias." In *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, edited by Elizabeth Barnes, 39-58. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2002.
- . *John Ford's Political Theatre*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994.
- Horace. *Ars Poetica*. Translated by H. R. Fairclough. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929.
- Hutchins, Christine E. "English Anti-Petrarchism: Imbalance and Excess in 'the Englishe straine' of the Sonnet." *Studies in Philology* 109 (2012): 552-80.
- Hyland, Peter. "Re-Membering Gloriana: *The Revenger's Tragedy*." In *Resurrecting Elizabeth I in Seventeenth-Century England*, edited by Elizabeth H. Hageman and Katherine Conway, 82-94. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2007.
- Ide, Richard S. "Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Benefits of Belatedness." In "*Concord and Discord*": *The Plays of John Ford, 1586-1986*, edited by Donald K. Anderson, Jr., 61-86. New York: AMS P, 1986.
- James, Heather. *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Kahn, Coppelia. "Afterword: Ophelia Then, Now, Hereafter." In Peterson and Williams, *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, 231-43.
- Kay, Dennis. *Melodious Tears: The English Funerary Elegy from Spenser to Milton*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Kennedy, William J. *Authorizing Petrarch*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.
- . "Petrarch, Petrarchism." In *Spenser Encyclopedia*, 539-40.
- . "Petrarchism." In *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 1030-2.
- . *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England*. Ithaca: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003.
- King, Walter N. *Hamlet's Search for Meaning*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1982.

- Kirkpatrick, Robin. *English and Italian Literature from Dante to Shakespeare: A Study of Source, Analogue and Divergence*. London: Longman, 1995.
- Knecht, Ross. "‘Invaded by the World’: Passion, Passivity, and the Object of Desire in Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*." *Comparative Literature* 63 (2011): 235-52.
- Kocher, Paul H. "A Marlowe Sonnet." *Philological Quarterly* 24 (1945): 39-45.
- Laird, Andrew. "Re-inventing Virgil’s Wheel: The Poet and His Work from Dante to Petrarch." In *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception*, edited by Philip Hardie and Helen Moore, 138-59. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- Leggatt, Alexander. "Tamburlaine’s Sufferings." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 3 (1973): 28-38.
- Lewalski, Barbara K., ed. *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986.
- Lindley, David. *Shakespeare and Music*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006.
- Lipking, Lawrence. *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.
- Lomax, Marion. *Stage Images and Traditions: Shakespeare to Ford*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Louden, Bruce. "Telemachos, the *Odyssey*, and *Hamlet*." In *Text and Presentation 2014*, edited by Graley Herren, 33-50. Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co., 2014.
- Luis-Martínez, Zenón. *In Words and Deeds: The Spectacle of Incest in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2002.
- Lyons, Bridget Gellert. "The Iconography of Ophelia." *ELH* 44 (1977): 60-74.
- Mackenzie, Clayton G. "Marlowe’s Grisly Monster: Death in *Tamburlaine, Parts One & Two*." *The Dalhousie Review* 87 (2007): 9-24.
- Madelaine, Richard. "‘Sensationalism’ and ‘Melodrama’ in Ford’s Plays." In Neill, *John Ford: Critical Re-visions*, 29-54.

- Mann, Jenny. "Marlowe's Translations." In Bartels, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 110-21.
- Marino, James J. "Ophelia's Desire." *ELH* 84 (2017): 817-39.
- Marlowe, Christopher. *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Patrick Cheney and Brian J. Striar. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.
- . *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One and Two*, edited by Matthew R. Martin. Tonawanda, NY: Broadview, 2014.
- . *Tamburlaine, Parts I and II*, edited by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995, reissued 2008.
- Marotti, Arthur. "'Love is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order." *ELH* 49 (1982): 396-428.
- Martin, Ellen E. "Spenser, Chaucer, and the Rhetoric of Elegy." *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 17 (1987): 83-109.
- Martin, Matthew R. "Inferior Readings: The 'Transmigration of 'Material' in *Tamburlaine the Great*." *Early Theatre* 17 (2014): 57-75.
- Martin, Richard A. "Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and the Language of Romance." *PMLA* 93 (1978): 248-64.
- Masinton, Charles G. *Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision*. Athens, GA: Ohio UP, 1972.
- Masten, Jeffrey. *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016.
- May, Steven W. *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets: The Poems and Their Contexts*. Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1991.
- Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *The Worlds of Petrarch*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- McAdam, Ian. *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999.

- McCabe, Richard A. "Authorial Self-Presentation" in McCabe, *Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, 462-82.
- . *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law 1550-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- . "'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Incest." In *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, edited by Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield, 309-20. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.
- McCabe, Richard A., ed. *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.
- , ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- McLuskie, Kathleen. "'Language and Matter with a Fit of Mirth': Dramatic Construction in the Plays of John Ford." In Neill, *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*, 97-128.
- Miele, Benjamin. "Zenocrate's Power, the 'Remorse of Conscience,' and Tamburlaine's Ovidian Impotence in 1 and 2 Tamburlaine." *Marlowe Studies* 5 (2015): 131-50.
- Migraine-George, Thérèse. "Specular Desires: Orpheus and Pygmalion as Aesthetic Paradigms in Petrarch's Rime sparse." *Comparative Literature Studies* 36 (1999): 226-46
- Miller, David Lee. "Laughing at Spenser's *Daphnaïda*." *Spenser Studies* 26 (2011): 241-50.
- Milton, John. *Complete Shorter Poems*, edited by Stella P. Revard. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Mintz, Susannah B. "The Power of 'Parity' in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 102 (2003): 269-91.
- Miola, Robert. "Aeneas and Hamlet." *Classical and Modern Literature* 8 (1988): 275-90.
- Montrose, Louis Adrian. "'Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes,' and the Pastoral of Power." *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 153-82.
- . "'The perfecte paterne of a Poete': The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shepheardes Calender*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979): 34-67.
- . *The Subject of Elizabeth, Authority, Gender, and Representation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.

- Mullaney, Steven. "Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994): 139-62.
- Neely, Carol Thomas. *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.
- . "New Directions: Revengers Tragedy: Affairs Between Men." In *The Revenger's Tragedy: A Critical Reader*, edited by Brian Walsh, 143-65. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997.
- . "'What Strange Riddle's This?' Deciphering 'Tis Pity She's a Whore.'" In Neill, *John Ford: Critical Revisions*, 153-80.
- Neill, Michael, ed. *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- Nicholson, Catherine. *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2014.
- Oram, William A. "Daphnaïda." In *Spenser Encyclopedia*, 208-9.
- . "Daphnaïda and Spenser's Later Poetry." *Spenser Studies* 2 (1981): 141-58.
- . *Edmund Spenser*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997.
- . "Lyric Address and Spenser's Reinvention of the Proem." *Studies in Philology* 116 (2019): 253-79.
- . "A Mirror for Arthur Gorges: Spenser's *Daphnaïda*." In *Spenser at Kalamzoo*, edited by David A. Richardson, 238-53. Cleveland: Cleveland State U, 1978.
- Oram, William A., Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop, and Richard Schell, eds. *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.
- Ortiz, Joseph. *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011.
- Ovid. *Heroides and Amores*, translated by Grant Showerman, revised by G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1977.

- . *Metamorphoses*, translated by Frank Justus Miller, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised by G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984.
- Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oxford UP, 2017.
- Parker, Patricia A. *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979.
- . *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*. London: Methuen, 1987.
- Pastor, Gail Kern. "Leaky Vessels?: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy." *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 43-65.
- Pearson, Meg. F. "Raving, Impatient, Desperate, and Mad?: *Tamburlaine's* Spectacular Collapse." *Marlowe Studies* 2 (2012): 87-102.
- Peterson, Kaara L. "Framing Ophelia: Representation and the Pictorial Tradition." *Mosaic* 31 (1998): 1-24.
- Peterson, Kaara L. and Deanne Williams, eds. *The Afterlife of Ophelia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Petrarch, Frances. *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics*, translated by Robert M. Durling. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976.
- Pigman, G. W., III. *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.
- Pollard, Tanya. *Drugs and Theatre in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- . "What's Hecuba to Shakespeare?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 1060-93.
- The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by Roland Greene. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012.
- Prosser Eleanor. *Hamlet and Revenge*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967.
- Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie* in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. 2, edited by G. Gregory Smith, 1-193. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904.



- Quint, David. *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Race, W. H. and J. Diaz. "Complaint." In *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 287.
- Rasmussen, Mark David. "Complaints and *Daphnaïda* (1591)." In McCabe, *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, 218-36.
- Rees, Emma. "Gloriana's Queer Skull: The Matter of Life and Death in *The Revenger's Tragedy*." *Anglistik* 28 (2017): 77-85.
- Robbins, Emmet. "Famous Orpheus." In Warden, *The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, 3-24.
- Roche, Thomas P., Jr. *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences*. New York: AMS Press, 1989.
- Ronk, Martha C. "Representations of 'Ophelia.'" *Criticism* 36 (1994): 21-43.
- Røstvig, Maren-Sofie. *The Hidden Sense and Other Essays*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963.
- Roush, Sherry. *Speaking Spirits: Ventriloquizing the Dead in Renaissance Italy*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2015.
- Sacks, Peter M. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.
- Schenck, Celeste Marguerite. *Mourning and Panegyric: The Poetics of Pastoral Ceremony*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988.
- Scodel, Joshua. *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.
- Scott-Warren, Jason. "Was Elizabeth I Richard II?: The Authenticity of Lambarde's 'Conversation.'" *Review of English Studies* 64 (2013): 208-30.
- Scott, Carolyn. "Consuming Sorrow: Conversion and Consumption in *Tamburlaine: Part One*." In *Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman: Lives, Stage, and Page*, edited by Sarah K. Scott and M. L. Stapleton, 199-213. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010.

- Segal, Charles. *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.
- Seng, Peter J. *The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1967.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, edited by Harold Jenkins. New York: Methuen, 1982.
- . *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Bloomsbury, 2006.
- . *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Gordon McMullan. London: W. W. Norton, 2017.
- Shepard, Alan. "Endless Sacks: Soldiers' Desire in *Tamburlaine*." *Renaissance Quarterly* 46 (1993): 734-53.
- . *Marlowe's Soldiers: Rhetorics of Masculinity in the Age of the Armada*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2002.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia." In *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, edited by Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia Parker, 77-92. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Sidney, Sir Philip. *An Apology for Poetry*. In Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. 1, 148-207.
- Silver, I., T.V.F. Brogan, and C. Alduy. "Blason." In *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 150-1.
- Smith, G. Gregory, ed. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1904.
- Smith, Molly. *Breaking Boundaries: Politics and Play in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.
- Smith, Warren D. "The Substance of Meaning in *Tamburlaine, Part 1*." *Studies in Philology* 67 (1970): 156-66.
- The Spenser Encyclopedia*. Edited by A. C. Hamilton. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990.
- Stallybrass, Peter. "Reading the Body: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption." *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 121-48.
- Stapleton, M. L. *Marlowe's Ovid: The Elegies in the Marlowe Canon*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

- Starks, Lisa S. "‘Won with thy words and conquered with thy looks’: Sadism, Masochism, and the Masochistic Gaze in *1 Tamburlaine*." In *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Paul Whitfield White, 179-93. New York: AMS Press, 1998.
- Stephens, Dorothy. *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative: Conditional Pleasure from Spenser to Marvell*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Stump, Donald V. "Tragedy." In *Spenser Encyclopedia*, 697.
- Sturm-Maddox, Sara. *Petrarch's Laurels*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1992.
- Sullivan, Garrett A., Jr. *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- . "Space, Measurement, and Stalking *Tamburlaine*." *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1997): 3-27.
- . "Tragic Subjectivities." In *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, edited by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., 73-85. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- Sullivan, Garrett A., Jr., and Mary Floyd-Wilson. "Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World." In *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, edited by Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. and Mary Floyd-Wilson, 1-13. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007.
- Takapoui, Tina. "Kristevan Femininity and Negative Theology in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, I and II*." *Early Modern Culture Online* 3 (2012): 69-87.
- Targoff, Ramie. *Posthumous Love: Eros and the Afterlife in Renaissance England*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014.
- Thurn, David H. "Sights of Power in *Tamburlaine*." *English Literary Renaissance* 19 (1989): 3-21.
- Tromly, Fred B. *Playing with Desire: Christopher Marlowe and the Art of Tantalization*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998.
- Trudell, Scott A. "The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia's Orphic Song." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012): 46-76.

Turner, Timothy A. "Executing Calyphas: Gender, Discipline, and Sovereignty in *2 Tamburlaine*."

*Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 44 (2018): 141-56.

Uman, Deborah, and Sara Morrison, eds. *Staging the Blazon in Early Modern English Theater*. Burlington:

Ashgate, 2013.

Vickers, Nancy J. "'The blazon of sweet beauty's best': Shakespeare's *Lucrece*." In *Shakespeare and the*

*Question of Theory*, edited by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, 95-115. New York:

Methuen, 1985.

---. "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme." *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 265-79.

Virgil. *Aeneid*, translated by H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP,

1999.

---. *Georgics*, translated by H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP,

1999.

Waith, Eugene M. *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden*. London: Chatto &

Windus, 1962.

Waller, Marguerite R. *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980.

Warden, John, ed. *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982.

Weil, Judith. *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977.

Whitney, Charles. "The Fall of Troy and the Rise of Elizabethan Drama: Empowering the

Audience." *Quidditas* 23 (2002): 69-81.

Williams, Deanne. "Enter Ophelia Playing on a Lute." In Peterson and Williams, *The Afterlife of*

*Ophelia*, 119-36.

Wilson, Gregory A. "The Tragedy of Revenge: Sexual, Moral, and Political Power in *The Revenger's*

*Tragedy*." In *Authority of Expression in Early Modern England*, edited by Nely Keinänen and

Maria Salenius, 63-76. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009.

- Wiseman, Susan B. “’Tis Pity She’s a Whore: Representing the Incestuous Body.” In *Revenge Tragedy*, edited by Stevie Simkin, 208-28. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.
- Witmore, Michael. *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.
- Wofford, Susanne Lindgren. “Britomart’s Petrarchan Lament: Allegory and Narrative in the *Faerie Queene* III, iv.” *Comparative Literature* 39 (1987): 28-57.
- Wymer, Rowland. “Jacobean Tragedy.” In *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, edited by Michael Hattaway, 544-55. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Young, Elizabeth Marie. “Inscribing Orpheus: Ovid and the Invention of a Greco-Roman Corpus.” *Representations* 101 (2008): 1-31.
- Zajac, Paul Joseph. “Containing Petrarch with Pastoral: Spenser’s Allegory of Literary Modes in *Faerie Queene* VI.” *Philological Quarterly* 95 (2016): 201-26.
- Zimmerman, Susan. *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theatre*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005.
- Zucker, David Hard. *Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Salzburg: U of Salzburg P, 1972.

# Jayme Peacock

Department of English  
Penn State University  
430 Burrowes Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
[jpeacock@psu.edu](mailto:jpeacock@psu.edu)  
(219) 644-6964

---

## Education

**Ph.D. English**, The Pennsylvania State University, anticipated December 2019

*Dissertation*: “The Dead Beloved in English Petrarchism”

*Committee*: Patrick Cheney, Director, English and Comparative Literature  
Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., English  
David Loewenstein, English  
Marcy L. North, English  
Sherry Roush, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese

*Abstract*: This project interrogates the significance of the Petrarchan dead beloved as a central figure in Renaissance literary form and authorship. As a symbol of the laurel, that ancient sign of martial and poetic prowess, Petrarch’s Laura stands at the intersection of discourses on love, authorship, poetry, fame, and immortality, and Petrarch’s English inheritors import such literary concerns through the figure of the dead beloved. This dissertation argues that the beloved’s death—and often her corpse—precipitates reformulations of literary form and authorship. The project locates such reformulations in Spenser’s *Daphnaïda*, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*. As the death of the Petrarchan beloved reconfigures literary form, Petrarchism emerges as key to English Renaissance constructions of authorship. Writers use the figure of the dead beloved to expose the mode’s disruptive quality and to redirect its formal potency. In analyzing Petrarchism’s impact on constructions of form and authorship, this project contributes to critical models of Renaissance authorship by illuminating Petrarchism as a mode that the major writers of this period understood as both productive and threatening.

**M.A. English**, The Pennsylvania State University, 2014

**B. A. English**, Purdue University Northwest, 2010

**B. S. Mathematics**, Purdue University Northwest, 2010

## Publications

Book Review. *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* by Kirilka Stavreva. *Restoration* 42 (2018): 110-12.

“Keats’s Delight with Spenser (via Charles Cowden Clarke),” The Keats Letters Project, online, 2016. <https://keatslettersproject.com/correspondence/keatss-delight-with-spenser-via-charles-cowden-clarke/>.