

“O Carefull Verse”: Neoteric Poetics in the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser

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Melissa Joy Rack
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For Papa –

Carpent tua poma nepotes

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Abstract

This study aims to illuminate a new aesthetic in the shorter poems of Edmund Spenser. I introduce the concept of Elizabethan *neoteric* poetry as a method of describing the set of poetic values that inform these poems. Spenser's shorter poems are puzzling to critics because of their peculiar style, and because they deviate from the traditional *rota Virgilii*, or laureate career trajectory in which the poet progresses from pastoral eclogue, to didactic georgic, and finally to epic. This model is complicated considerably by the peculiar pastoral innovation of the *Shepheardes Calender* (1579), as well as Spenser's return, late in his career, to the composition of highly experimental shorter verse in the *Complaints* (1591), *The Daphnaida* (1591), and *The Mutabilitie Cantos* (1609). Although the influence of Virgil and Ovid has been previously established in these poems, this study claims it is a more useful exercise to read them alongside the work of the Latin poet Catullus. Catullus's literary circle looked to the work of the ancient Alexandrian scholar-poets for their literary models, particularly Callimachus, Theocritus, and Euphorion. As such, their "epyllia" or "minor epics" interpret shorter selections from Homeric epic with an eye to erudition, craftsmanship, elegance of phrase, brevity of form, and stylistic polish. These "neoterics" or "new poets" were the avant-garde literati of their age; thus, it is curious that Spenser announces himself as the "new Poete" at the outset of the *Shepheardes Calender*, and then proceeds to declare a generically experimental poetic programme that relies on radical opposition, difference, and fragmentation. Neoteric poetry takes the form of an epyllion and is written in a "plaintive" voice. Its subject is art and the artistic process, and it exhibits an ornate and ostentatious style that highlights the artificiality or "thingliness" of the materials of poetry. This calling attention to the dissonance in the space between sign and referent is at the heart of Spenser's defiant creation of an entirely new genre or literary "kind."

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The imposition of the Virgilian *rota* on the canon of Edmund Spenser has long been problematic. The assumption of this paradigm is that Spenser, as the new “English Virgil,” is an epic poet who must move through the composition of pastoral eclogue and didactic georgic, before finally achieving his magnum opus. D.M. Rosenberg usefully summarizes this point of view: “[The] Virgilian paradigm provided a generic scale for the poet to ascend, challenging him to imitate a literary kind at each step.”¹ Yet a number of problems arise in the application of this model to the Spenserian career trajectory; for Spenser deviates from it considerably. He begins, accordingly, with *The Shepheardes Calender*, a pastoral eclogue-georgic hybrid, fast-forwarding through the latter “transitional” literary kind. Subsequently, he composes a peculiar and highly experimental epic in *The Faerie Queene*, a poem that remains a “fragment” in its unfinished state. Then, apparently disillusioned with his epic project, he returns to the composition of what Paul Alpers has termed his “Late Pastorals.”² *The Complaints*, *The Daphnida*, and the mysterious *Mutabilitie Cantos*. A number of critics have acknowledged the questionable application of the Virgilian model. Richard Helgerson complicates it significantly, as he defines three distinct poetic career trajectories: the amateur, the professional, and the laureate. The “amateur” prefers the shorter genres of sonnet and pastoral, and looks upon poetic composition as play; conversely, the “laureate” poet views poetry as a vocation and an obligation to the state. In this formulation, Spenser, as a laureate poet, is concerned, particularly in the *Calender*, with the complexities of self-presentation. However, Helgerson asserts, by defining himself socially in opposition to the “amateur,” Spenser experiences a “sense of alienation” by the 1590’s, as he has lost his confidence as a

¹ D.M. Rosenberg, *Oaten Reeds and Trumpets: Pastoral and Epic in Virgil, Spenser, and Milton* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981), 17.

² See Paul Alpers, “Spenser’s Late Pastorals,” *ELH* 56.4 (Winter, 1989): 797-817.

laureate poet, not merely because of the apparently incomplete nature of *The Faerie Queene*, but also because his very self-definition relies on his laureate role.³ Patrick Cheney interestingly proposes that Spenser reinvents the Virgilian wheel via a synthesis of Virgilian, Ovidian and Augustinian career aspirations in order to embrace a Christianized Virgilian career trajectory. Cheney writes, “While the Virgilian, the Ovidian, and the Augustinian models constitute competing choices for the contour of the Renaissance poet’s career, they also ensure the valuation of four genres central to the Renaissance hierarchy of genres: pastoral, epic, love lyric, and divine poem or hymn.”⁴ My position as to the “puzzle” of why Spenser returned to the composition of shorter poems late in his career does not rely on the poet’s disillusionment with his initial generic aspirations. Rather, it is my assertion that Spenser begins his career with the intention of defying generic categories; thus, he not only breaks the Virgilian wheel, his aesthetic in the shorter poems relies on generic fragmentation. This study proposes that Spenser creates, in the *Faerie Queene*, a generic pastiche of sorts (allegorical epic-romance), and in his shorter poems he constructs an entirely new genre of poetry.

This study sets aside an explication of Spenser’s project in the *Faerie Queene*, and is instead concerned with what I insist on calling Elizabethan *neoteric* poetics in Spenser’s shorter poems. The word “neoteric” has been synonymous with “Catullan” in contemporary studies of Latin poetry for nearly four decades now, since Oliver Lyne stumbled across a reference to the *poetae novi*, or *neoteric poets* in one of Cicero’s letters to Atticus (*Att.* 7.2.1). Cicero’s line was “a humorously concocted example of affected and Grecizing narrative,”

³ Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983), 53.

⁴ Patrick Gerard Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 5-6.

and such an exact imitation of the poetic style of Catullus that Lyne concluded “Cicero must in fact be *parodying* what he regards as a *typical* ‘neoteric’ line.”⁵ In 45 B.C.E. Cicero refers to Catullus and his circle as ‘cantores Euphorionis’ [praise-singers of Euphorion, a contemporary of Callimachus] (Tusc. 3.45). In addition to Catullus, members of this group include Licinius Calvus (the author of *Io*), Helvius Cinna (the author of *Smyrna*), Cornificius (the probable poet of the epyllion *Glancus*), Caecilius (the author of an epyllion about Cybele) and Valerius Cato (the author of *Dictynna*).⁶ Apart from their scorn for contemporary poetic attempts to re-create the Homeric epic (they particularly maligned Volusius and his lengthy ‘*annales*’), they also shared a disdain for the grand style of Ennius, and an admiration for the selectivity and erudition of the Hellenistic poet-scholars of ancient Alexandria, namely Callimachus.

The poetic project of the Hellenistic writers that Catullus and his friends so admired involved the renovation of genre in order to create entirely new forms of verse. Carl Newell Jackson explains,

[The] Alexandrians were ever trying to create new poetic forms, and to bring the subjects of their poetry into close touch with the world in which they lived. The history of Greek and the Latin literatures is a record of the genesis and establishment of literary forms, and of the imitation and development of these forms by writers of succeeding ages.⁷

One of the primary innovations of the Alexandrians was the romantic epic, the first of which was created by Apollonius, but these poets can also be credited with exploring the

⁵ R.O.A.M Lyne, “The Neoteric Poets,” *The Classical Quarterly* 28.1 (1978): 167-187, 167. The emphasis here is Lyne’s.

⁶ Lyne, “The Neoteric Poets,” in *Collected Papers on Latin Poetry*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 60.

⁷ Carl Newell Jackson, “The Latin Epyllion,” in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 24 (1913): 37-50, 38.

possibilities of love as a literary topos, both in verse and prose. Furthermore, Jackson writes, “the Alexandrian age itself was fruitful in creating or developing various types, such as the pastoral, the didactic poem, the elegy, the romantic epic, and the epyllion, and of these types the most, in accord with the Alexandrian literary standards, were brief in form and romantic in content.”⁸ Alexandrianism in both Greece and Rome represented a challenge to the literary standards of the day, which Jackson identifies as two-fold: “the predominance of the short poem and the re-establishment and development of romance.”⁹ Perhaps the clearest window into the poetic stance of Catullus and his circle is *Carmen 95*, a poem that promotes Cinna’s epyllion *Zmyrna* and praises its brevity, as well as the great time and care invested in its craftsmanship. Because of Catullus’s emphatic focus on aesthetic value, as well as his juxtaposition of Cinna’s work with that of other “bad poets,” Oliver Lyne cites *Carmen 95* as a “polemic that suggests an identifiably Callimachean faction of Catullus, Cinna and . . . Calvus.”¹⁰ These poets belonged to a circle of Late Republican “avante-garde” literati; they were the formal revolutionaries of their age.

Similarly, the term “neoterick” in the sixteenth-century has a distinctly “Catullan” connotation, in that it refers to writers of neo-Latin poetry who often wrote imitations of Catullus’s shorter poems of praise, invective, and eroticism in idiosyncratically Catullan meter.¹¹ Julia Haig Gaisser writes, “the Catullan hendecasyllable provided the language for a certain type of Renaissance lyric . . . and the [neo-Latin] poets . . . saw themselves as devotees of Catullan poetry.”¹² Frances Meres refers to these “Neoterickes” in *Palladis Tamia*:

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jackson, “The Latin Epyllion,” 37.

¹⁰ Lyne, “The Neoteric Poets,” 65.

¹¹ Victoria Moul, “Lyric Poetry,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin*, eds. Sarah Knight and Stefan Tilg (New York: Oxford UP, 2015), 47.

¹² Julia Haig Gaisser, *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 197.

As these Neoterickes, Iouianus Pontanus, Politianus, Marullus Tarchaniota, the two Strozæ, the father and the son, Palingenius, Mantuanus, Philephus, Quintianus Stoa, and Germanus Brixius have obtained renown and good place among the ancient Latine poets: so also these Englishmen, being Latine poets, Gualter Haddon, Nicholas Car, Gabriel Haruey,¹³ Christopher Ocland, Thomas Newton with his Leyland, Thomas Watson, Thomas Campion, Brunswerd, and Willey haue attained good report and honourable aduancement in the Latin empyre.¹⁴

“Iouianus Pontanus” is Giovanni Pontano, who was known for his Catullan imitations, particularly his three collections: *Pruritus* ([Erotic] *Itch*, 1449); *Parthenopeus sive Amores* (*The Neopolitan, or Loves*, 1457); and *Hendecasyllabi sive Baiae* (*Hendecasyllables, or Baiae*, c.a. 1500). Meres also names Thomas Campion, whose fourth elegy¹⁵ incorporates the Catullan topoi of the sparrow and “many kisses.”¹⁶ In fact, according to Victoria Moul, “Both Catullus’s kisses and his dead sparrow won a long poetic life. The nineteen *Basia* (*Kisses*, 1541) of [the neo-Latinist] Johannes Secundus were enormously influential upon love poetry, both Latin and vernacular, across Europe.”¹⁷ However, Spenser’s neotericism is quite different from that of Meres’s “Neoterickes,” as he was of course writing in English (and he takes great care in the *Shepheardes Calender* to remind us of this fact). Additionally, Spenser’s understanding of a Catullan aesthetic was also unlike the neo-Latinists, as he embraces the more ambitious and sophisticated longer poems of Catullus as his aesthetic model.

¹³ The inclusion of Gabriel Harvey here is significant as he was Spenser’s confidante and teacher. Harvey is known for his intention to introduce classical hexameter into English poetry. This inclusion implies one can assume both Harvey and Spenser’s familiarity with a wide array of classical verse, including Catullus, Theocritus, and others (although this is speculative).

¹⁴ Frances Meres, “Palladis Tamia” (1598), in *Elizabethan Critical Essays, Volume 2*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904).

¹⁵ Thomas Campion, *Campion’s Works*, ed. Percival Vivian (Oxford: Clarendon 1909), 6.

¹⁶ Moul, “Lyric Poetry,” 48.

¹⁷ Ibid.

While this study will argue that Spenser's shorter poems are informed by a certain Catullan spirit, it is important to understand that to use the term "neoteric" to describe a distinct set of poetic values in Spenser's poetry is not merely to apply the programme of classical neotericism to Elizabethan verse, although the chapters that follow will draw comparative analogies between the two. Rather, this study employs this descriptive term to indicate how these values are informed by the literary influence of Catullus; thus, a comparative analysis of these two poets provides a richer understanding of Spenser's aesthetic in his shorter poems, and one that has not been previously recognized. Given the additional layer of classical literary influence provided by Catullus, this study will argue that the descriptive terms currently used to classify (and thus guide readings) of Spenser's shorter poems are insufficient. It is not enough to label the *Shepheardes Calender* "pastoral," "Virgilian," "Arcadian," or "Mantuan"; not enough to refer to *The Complaints* as Spenser's "Late Pastorals," not enough to describe *Muiopotmos* as "Ovidian," the curious originality of the *Daphnaida* an "embarrassing failure," and the *Mutabilitie Cantos* an "unfinished" seventh book or "coda" to the *Faerie Queene*. This study will insist that these poems are better understood when considered in the context of a specific "neoteric" genre, as they exhibit a common form, subject, and style.

Spenser's Elizabethan neoteric poetry employs Catullan neo-Alexandrian values as it places art and the artistic process at the forefront of the poem's subject; hence, these poetic art-objects serve to showcase the poet's skill. Neoteric style is conspicuously ostentatious and ornamental, pointing up a radical disjunction between sign and referent, between the "things" of poetry and the truth they represent. The weaving and painting metaphors, the references to art, vision, dressing, and adornment that dominate neoteric poetry continually

call attention to the thing-likeness or artificiality of poetic images. Such neoteric ornamental style threatens to overtake the primary narrative; thus, the poem itself serves as a defense of the intrinsic value of poetry. Nearly every component of neoteric poetry is highly stylized: metaphor, diction, poetic personae, imagined audience, poetic allusion, mythic narrative, metrical complexity, and elegiac voice. The neoteric artistic method relies on opposition, upheaval, and dissonance; thus “newness” is constructed via paradox. Spenser’s re-imaginings of eclogue and epic are recursive revisions that point up ruin and fragmentation. His stories of birth and creation are likewise stories of murder and destruction. The neoteric voice is defiant; it is an outcry against something, a representation of a wrong suffered, a grievance. Yet this “plaintive” voice is also an affective mechanism, for while the neoteric voice is at times aggressive, it is also self-conscious; as such, its complaints are evocative, laced with irony, and even, at times, with parody. Neoteric poetry, then, is perhaps best understood as poetry that reflects on poetry, its process, and its vocation.

Catullus in the Sixteenth Century

The influence of Catullus on Spenser’s work has been largely ignored, apart from a few studies of Catullan influence in the *Epithalamia*.¹⁸ This is perhaps because there is no distinct reference to Catullus in Spenser’s work; thus a clear connection between the two poets has not been established. Although we can speculate that perhaps Spenser’s religious or political affiliations led him to distance himself from a writer who was imitated in such a salacious manner by the neo-Latinists of his day, there is considerable evidence that Spenser’s contemporaries were actively engaged in reading Catullus, and that his work was

¹⁸ See Gordon Braden, “Catullus,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press; London Routledge, 1990), 137-138. Braden claims that Spenser’s “type” of epithalamium is modeled after *Carmen 61*; but “otherwise, Catullus seems a minor figure in Spenser’s background.”

widely influential and thus readily available to Spenser. As the first English copy of the *Carmina* did not appear until the 1684 edition of Isaac Vossius,¹⁹ exposure of Elizabethan writers to Catullan lyric would likely have occurred abroad, particularly in Italy and France, where Catullus's influence was profound. In Italy, over a hundred editions of his work were transcribed from the 14th century *Veronensis* manuscript even before the publication of the first Renaissance edition, which appeared in Venice in 1472 and was shortly followed by a 1475 version published in Rome. By 1530, at least five published editions of Catullus were in circulation in Venice, and Piero Valeriano gave regular lectures on Catullus at the University of Rome in the 1520's.²⁰

A preponderance of educated Englishmen were engaged in formal study at the *studium* at Padua, where they undoubtedly heard similar lectures. Jonathan Woolfson, in *Padua and the Tudors*, provides a register of over 300 Englishman who visited Padua between 1485 and 1603, including Henry Wotten, Reginald Pole, Richard Pace, Philip Sidney, and Thomas Starkey. Julia Gaisser recounts the popularity of Catullus in France and writes, "Italian Neo-Latin poets had imitated Catullus from the early days of the Renaissance, but from around 1530 on he also became a favourite model for French Neo-Latin poetry and in the early 1550's . . . the Catullan style was naturalized into French poetry."²¹ The French writer Clément Marot influenced Wyatt, and Ronsard and du Bellay influenced Sidney and Spenser. These latter two French writers "imitated Catullus directly in their epithalamia and

¹⁹ There appears to be some discrepancy as to the first edition of Catullus in England, but I believe the issue is language-specific rather than national. Vossius was a Dutch scholar writing in Latin, but I am inclined to agree with Blevins that his was the first "British" Catullus. *The Classical Tradition* focuses on the first version translated into the English language. The entry "Catullus" states, ". . . the first collection of translations appeared in *The Adventures of Catullus* (1707). This work, translated from the French *Les amours de Catulle* (1680) was a novel based on Catullus' poetry that includes translations by various authors" (182).

²⁰ Jacob Blevins, *Catullan Consciousness and the Early Modern Lyric in England: From Wyatt to Donne*, Ashgate: McNeese State University, 2004, 7.

²¹ Julia Gaisser, *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1993, pp.135-6.

their love sonnets, and the epithalamia of both Catullus and the French imitators are alluded to in Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and Spenser's *Epithalamion*.²² Spenser would have been quite familiar with Du Bellay, as the *Visions* in *A Theatre for Worldlings* are translations of Du Bellay's work.

Furthermore, there is abundant evidence that copies of Catullus acquired on the continent were in the hands of English scholars by the early 16th century. William Browne, a Fellow of Merton College and a contemporary of Wyatt, owned a copy and also left an extensive collection of classical texts upon his death in 1558. William Framyngham, another contemporary of Wyatt's, a close friend of the scholar John Caius, and a fellow of Queen's College, also owned a copy. John Bury, a student at Brasenose College in 1555, left a will containing an entry for *Propertius cum aliis*. As bound copies of Catullus were nearly always grouped with Propertius and Tibullus, we can speculate as to these "others." In addition, two copies of Catullus were found in the library of James Reynolds, who received his MA at Exeter in 1573 and became a Lecturer in the Humanities in 1577.²³ Ben Jonson was the owner of two collections of Catullus's poetry and "one of his copies was from Clare College in Cambridge, which means students and scholars at that college clearly had access to the work."²⁴ The British Library currently holds one of Jonson's copies of Catullus, and apparently a few poems were missing and have been added in Jonson's hand."²⁵

Familiarity with classical writers such as Horace, Ovid and Virgil would have exposed learned English readers to imitation of a neo-Alexandrian aesthetic in the work of Catullus, as he was greatly admired by a number of Augustan poets. Horace utilizes Catullan

²² Blevins, 8.

²³ *Books in Cambridge Inventories*, Vol. 1, ed. E.S. Leedham-Green (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), p.6).

²⁴ See David Macpherson's "Ben Jonson's Library and Marginalia: An Annotated Catalogue," *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 23-106.

²⁵ Blevins, 10.

motifs in the Sapphic strophe (11 and 51) of one of his most widely read odes (I.22, *Integer Vitae scelerisque purus*); Ovid, Propertius and Tibullus make liberal use of the topos of the stricken lover and his unfaithful mistress, in keeping with Catullus' Lesbia poems; and Book IV of Virgil's *Aeneid* features a lament that mimics that of Ariadne in *Carmen 64*. Francis Meres apparently was familiar enough with Catullus that he recognized Virgil's imitation. In *Palladis Tamia* (1598) he writes "As Virgil doth imitate Catullus in the like manner of *Ariadne* for his story of Queene *Dido*: so Michael Drayton doth imitate Ouid in his *England's Heroical Epistles*."²⁶ Robert Ascham references Catullus in his letters, notably in *The Scholemaster*, as one of the "most excellent poetes, deserving well of the Latin tonge."²⁷ William Webbe writes of "many rare and excellent Poets . . . among whom may be accounted Propertius, Tibullus, and Catullus."²⁸ George Puttenham mentions Catullus several times in *Of Poets and Poesy* (1589) and appears to have been familiar with *Carmina 61* and *62*, which he cites in his discussion of the epithalamia: "Catullus hath made of them one or two very artificiall and ciuil."²⁹ Sidney provides us with the first translation of a Catullus poem,³⁰ Samuel Daniel quotes *Carmen 22* directly in *A Defense of Ryme*, and the final lines of "A Pastoral" mimic "Vivamus, mea Lesbia."³¹

A great number of Renaissance texts make explicit comparisons between Catullus' *Carmina* and Elizabethan poets who wrote epyllia in the 1590's. Francis Meres writes: "As

²⁶ Frances Meres, *Palladis Tamian* (1598), in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), 316.

²⁷ Robert Ascham, in *The Whole Works of Robert Ascham*, ed. Rev. Dr. Giles, vol. 3, (London: J. H. Smith, 1864-5), 259.

²⁸ William Webbe, "A Discourse of English Poetrie," in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, Vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), 238.

²⁹ George Puttenham, "Of Poets and Poesy," in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), 55.

³⁰ See Sir Philip Sidney, Certain Sonnets 13, in *Sir Philip Sidney: A Critical Edition*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 22.

³¹ Samuel Daniel, *The Complete Works of Samuel Daniel*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Watson and Viney 1895-6), 260.

Pindarus, Anacreon, and Callimachus among the Greekes, and Horace and Catullus among the Latines are the best Lyrick poets: So in this faculty make the best among our poets are Spencer (who excelleth in all kinds), Daniel, Drayton, Shakespeare, Bretton.”³² Similarly, Richard Carew in “The Excellencie of the English Tongue” (1604-14) compares the grace of the English tongue to that of Latin: “Will yow reade Virgill? take the Earll of Surrey: Catullus? Shakespeare, and Marlowes fragment.”³³ Meres is particularly fond of Marston, and cites Satire as the most fitting genre for poetic debate or “the dissensions of Poets among themselves . . . and for this purpose our Satyrists Hall, the Author of *Pigmalion’s Image* and *Certain Satyres*.”³⁴

Although overt allusions to Catullus in Spenser’s work are conspicuously absent, the fact that Catullus was so widely read and studied, particularly by Sidney and by French writers whom Spenser admired and translated, indicates that the young poet would have been quite familiar with the *Carmina*. Spenser’s own familiarity with Virgil, Ovid, and other poets of the Augustan period also would have made the tremendous influence of Catullus on these later poets self-evident. Thus, I move beyond speculating as to whether or not Spenser read Catullus, to propose that not only did he read the work of this Latin poet, he recognized Catullus as a herald of lyric difference.

Neoteric Form

Neoteric poetry takes the form of the epyllion; yet defining the epyllion is a difficult task, in part because so few of the classical originals survive. Jackson explains this difficulty:

. . . we are hampered at the outset [in defining the genre] by the loss of almost all the

³² Meres, 319.

³³ Richard Carew, *The Excellency of the English Tongue*, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, Vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon, 1904, 293.

³⁴ Meres, 312.

many epyllia in which both Greek and Latin literature abounded. There remain today only two or three among the Idylls of Theocritus, two of the poems of Moschus, and in Latin the sixty-fourth poem of Catullus, the *Culex* and the *Ciris* in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, and the Aristaeus episode in the fourth book of the *Georgics*. Indeed so uncertain are the modern scholars about the real nature of this minor form of poetry that there is no unanimity . . . in classifying the poems of this [particular] sort in Theocritus.³⁵

Difficulty in classifying this form is additionally due to the fact that the term itself is a fairly modern invention. The word “epyllion,” is problematic because, as John F. Reilly explains, “The characteristics of the genre revealed in scholarly literature are very confused and highly subjective . . . the evidence . . . suggests that [the term] might have been in fairly frequent use, at least in Germany, before the middle of the nineteenth century,” and then primarily in reference to *Carmen* 64.³⁶ In classical antiquity, Reilly locates a mention of the term “epyllion” only seven times – five in Greek and two in Latin – and none of the references appear to directly correlate to the modern understanding of the word. Aristophanes, for example, uses it in reference to tragedy. There is another mention of the epyllion in the Greek lexicon of Hesychius (5th century A.D.) that refers to the form as a “versicle or scrap of poetry,”³⁷ an interesting definition in regards to Meres mention of Marlowe and Shakespeare’s epyllia as “fragments.” Oliver Lyne provides perhaps the most useful definition of the classical form of the epyllion in regards to the practice of Catullus and his circle. He describes it as follows:

[A] brief highly wrought *epos* which more or less ostentatiously dissociate[s] itself from traditional *epos*: concentrating on unheroic incidentals in the sagas of heroes, or

³⁵ Carl Newell Jackson, 39.

³⁶ John F. Reilly, “Origins of the Word ‘Epyllion’”, *The Classical Journal* 49.3 (Dec., 1953): 111-114, 114.

³⁷ Ibid.

on heroines as opposed to heroes, or on otherwise off-beat subject matter; employing a narrative technique that was often willfully individual and selective; and yet largely maintaining epic language, metre, and style.³⁸

Lyne's identification of the narrative of the epyllion as often focusing on the voice of heroines as opposed to heroes is in line with Jackson's inference that, judging from the titles of the extant and lost poems, "the epyllic poets chose for the most part a romantic theme, generally the unrequited love of a woman for a man."³⁹ Thus, if an oft-used narrative in the epyllion is the lover's "complaint," then the forms are quite similar, if not interchangeable.

An understanding of the interdependence of the epyllion and the mode of the complaint in neoteric poetry is essential for formal identification in the sense of sound. Spenser's poetry is quite "noisy," so to speak. In a mere ten lines of *Tears of the Muses*, for example (277-288), there are eight references to discordant sound: "Goblins and Shriekowles"; "Musick"; "Sing"; "Hard" (heard); "fearfull howling"; "laments and howles"; "dreadfull accents"; and "outcries shrill." This attention to sound is a key component of the oppositional nature of neoteric poetry. Louis Montrose explains, in part, the function of these sounds of lamentation in *The Shepheardes Calender*:

[It] is the poetry of frustrated desire, unfulfilled longing, alienation; it is a protest against an irremediable reality that obtrudes into a vision of happiness, harmony, perfection. Colin's complaints [in *The Shepheardes Calender*] bemoan the absence, loss, or irretrievability of the recreative state in its idealized personal form . . . The refinements of mood and expression in Colin's plaintive poetry transform its subject – the loss of recreative experience – into a new form of recreative experience;

³⁸ Lyne, "The Neoteric Poets," 67.

³⁹ Carl Newell Jackson, 40.

the frustration of erotic desire offers an occasion for the perfection of imaginative form.⁴⁰

Whereas the Greek neoterics created the romantic epic, and the Latin neoterics (particularly Catullus) revived the notion of love as a self-referential topos, then it is fitting that the Elizabethan neoterics follow their lead. Grief certainly creates a space for self-reflection from which some of the most affective art is created, but longing, absence, frustrated desire, and the media of complaint are also an expression of excess, an excess integral not only to the self-referential nature of neoteric poetry, but to its unique style.

The frame of the neoteric poem, as this study will show, is much more inclusive than has been previously recognized. Experimentation within this literary kind is particularly fitting for Spenser, who is traditionally recognized as an epic poet. As such, his aesthetic throughout his work, not merely in the *Faerie Queene*, manifests a preoccupation with epic innovation. Thus it is a useful exercise to imagine that Spenser's "minor poems" might be better understood as "minor epics." Indeed, the classical neoterics' preferred form was the epyllion or "minor epic"; yet the epyllion of the sixteenth century is not the epyllion of the late Republican or Augustan period. The form itself is remarkably malleable and inclusive, as it draws from an array of conventions that populate both pastoral and epic poetry. The epyllion is also particularly susceptible to idiosyncratic interpretation – to the expression of a poet's personal trademark, so to speak.

The epyllion is a proving ground for personal poetic style in part because its narrative subject is interpretive. Classical epyllia (both Augustine and Alexandrian) draw from a repertoire of traditional myths, and these are reiterated and uniquely transposed in

⁴⁰ Louis Adrian Montrose, "The perfecte paterne of a Poete": The Poetics of Courtship in The Shepheardes Calender," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21.1 (Spring 1979): 34-67, 34.

sixteenth century neoteric poetry. The epyllia of Callimachus, Theocritus, and Catullus were characterized by brevity, innovation, elegance of phrase and, as Peter Green explains “their re-examination of traditional myths for unusual (and often pathological or aberrant sexual) features hitherto ignored, in particular as these related to the origins or causes (*aitia*) of traditional customs and practices.”⁴¹ Catullus and his circle were highly learned and bilingual in Greek, and they modeled their epyllia after those of the Alexandrian scholar-poets of the mid-third century B.C.E., particularly Callimachus, Theocritus, and Euphorion. The Callimachean “style, diction, erudite allusiveness, and structure (e.g. sophisticated ring composition), is apparent throughout Catullus’s work, and clearly also permeated that of his friends, as even their few surviving fragments suggest.”⁴² The Alexandrians developed epyllia as a counter-epic genre, and Catullus and his circle reveled in its newness and difference, its avante-garde sophistication, and its revolutionary potential in a formal sense.

Studies of the epyllion in the sixteenth century often neglect Spenser’s contribution to the form, although scholarly monographs on the subject sometimes include *Muiopotmos*. This inattention is in part due to two interrelated factors. The first is the tendency of critics to deny that these poems belong to a fluid and inclusive genre; thus imposing a false distinction between “epyllion” and “complaint” (excluding not only the *Complaints* but the *Shepherd’s Calendar*). The second is the identification of both the narrative material and the overarching topos of the epyllion as exclusively “Ovidian” in nature. Clark Hulse, whose study of the early modern permutation of this form is perhaps the most influential,⁴³ agrees with the latter while acknowledging the former.

⁴¹ Peter Green, “Introduction,” in *The Poems of Catullus*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005), 10.

⁴² Green, “Introduction,” 11.

⁴³ See Clark Hulse, *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1981).

Epyllion, characteristically following Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as a model, relates a sexual consummation by young lovers in a witty narrative enforcing the lessons of *carpe diem*. The historical complaint, modeled on the *Mirror for Magistrates*, uses dramatic monologue to tell of a female protagonist who confronts seduction (or rape) and death, as a solemn and moral warning against lust.⁴⁴

Hulse's deconstruction of these categories is predicated on what he refers to as the "metamorphic nature" of the epyllion. Accordingly, he argues that the genre is better defined as "a literary system, dominated by the interplay of forms, changes of style, and the search for growth of the individual poet."⁴⁵ Hulse rightly identifies that the distinction between complaint and epyllion is easily deconstructed, as "the difference between 'history' and 'story' in poetry is just not crucial [and] the other criteria for differentiating epyllion from historical complaint are no more substantial under scrutiny."⁴⁶ Indeed, it is difficult to locate a sixteenth century complaint that might be described as "solemn," much less a "moral warning against lust." Rather, the genre, particularly in the 1590's, is characterized by its playful irony and eroticism.

However, in spite of Hulse's acknowledgment in 1981 of the tenuous distinction between epyllion and complaint, critics insist on tracing the origins of the epyllion back to Ovid and imposing a distinction between two "types of minor epic." In a recent book (2011), Patrick Cheney reiterates Hulse's categories without skepticism:

The *epyllion* typically re-embroiders a myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, featuring a story about lovers consummating the relationship, and aiming to teach readers to 'seize the day' (*carpe diem*). Second, the *historical complaint* follows the *Mirror*

⁴⁴ Hulse, 17.

⁴⁵ Hulse, 4.

⁴⁶ Hulse, 19.

for Magistrates (1559), modeled on Ovid's *Heroides* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, to present a female who tells her personal story about seduction, sometimes rape, and usually death, aiming to warn the reader about the dangers of erotic desire in the life of the nation."⁴⁷

The significant misreading here is the insistence on a distinction between the epyllion and the complaint. These two "kinds" are in fact interdependent, and this study will show how the complaint should rather be considered a mode contained within the epyllion, as the very voice of neoteric poetry is plaintive.

Georgia Brown affirms the interdependence between these two kinds, as well as their aesthetic significance overall. She writes, "marginal forms [like the epyllion] assume a particular importance in the literary culture of the 1590's" and the origin of the "craze" for epyllia in the 1590's can be located in Thomas Lodge's *Scillaes Metamorphosis*, a poem which "records the fictional origin of the epyllion in complaint."⁴⁸ In *Untutored Lines: The Making of the English Epyllion*, William P. Weaver writes of the centrality of the "tragic irony of the complaint" to Shakespeare's *Lucrece* and *A Lover's Complaint*,⁴⁹ Elizabeth Story Donno does not distinguish between the two forms at all:

[The] young poets . . . popularized the erotic epyllion. Utilizing some well-known myth for the core of their narrative, they stressed originality not of subject matter but of treatment [and] two elements became standard: the 'complaint' of the unhappy lover (whether male or female), including a catalogue of present charms or future delights. And as Ovid had done before them, they interpreted the past in terms of

⁴⁷ Patrick Cheney, *Reading Sixteenth Century Poetry* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 224.

⁴⁸ Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 120.

⁴⁹ William P. Weaver, *Untutored Lines: The Making of the English Epyllion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP Ltd., 2012), 136.

the present, bringing the pagan mythical world to England, mingling nymphs and dryads with elves and fairies.⁵⁰

My argument is that the oppositional nature of neoteric poetry *requires* a complaint; as it must defy and oppose tradition in order to carve a space for “newness.” The voice of neoteric poetry *is* the voice of the complaint, thus to impose a breach between the two is to limit our understanding of the revisionary project of this form.

Critics of 1590’s epyllia take for granted that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was the model for the Elizabethan epyllia; thus ignoring the rich complexities of the epyllion’s classical lineage. This assumption contains two general misreadings: 1) The word “Ovidian” is synonymous with “metamorphosis”; and 2) The mythic episodes interpreted in the epyllia are “Ovidian” in nature. Regarding “metamorphoses,” it must be noted that the influence of a classical literary author cannot be distilled into a single descriptive term if that description is inherently literal. Ovid was an elegiac poet as well as a mythic and epic poet. As Allan H. F. Griffin reminds us, “It is very important to grasp that the *Metamorphoses* is not about metamorphosis, but about love. Changes of shape occupy a comparatively small and trivial place in the 250 legends of the poem. Indeed one or two of the longest episodes have no transformation at all.”⁵¹ While I will admit that Ovid likely had a wider readership in the sixteenth century (particularly in the 1590’s) than Catullus, as the former was a large part of grammar school curriculum, it is imperative to recognize that both poets draw their material from the same Homeric and Alexandrian sources.

Furthermore, Ovid was undoubtedly familiar with Catullus, as he praises his work in

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Story Donno, “Introduction,” in *Elizabethan Minor Epics*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (New York: Columbia UP; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 18.

⁵¹ Alan H. F. Griffin, “Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses,’” *Greece & Rome* 24.1 (Apr., 1977): 57-70, 62-3.

the *Amores*: “Mantua Vergilio gaudet, Verona Catullo,” (*Amores* 3.15.7) and imitates it in the *Heroides* (the Ariadne episode of Book X). John Ferguson explains that Ovid was likely reading Catullus quite early in his career.

When Ovid was forming himself as a poet, Catullus attracted him for his love-themes, but not for his technique. In his younger days Ovid was not a learned poet. It was his studies for the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* which brought in myth as a significant element in his writing . . . this period of his life marks a change in his approach to poetry. He is now picking up the work of the *neoteri*, for in undertaking simultaneously the elegiacs of the *Fasti* and the epyllia which make up the *Memamorphoses* he was bringing to the Rome of his day the two principal *genres* of Alexandrianism.”⁵²

While this study does not claim that an Ovidian and a Catullan aesthetic are one and the same, and neither does it label Ovid “neo-Alexandrian,” the intersection between these two poets and their shared engagement with Theocritean, Callimachean, and Homeric myth must be acknowledged in order to fully appreciate this genre, for there is a tremendous critical lack of knowledge in regards to the origins of the epyllia and hence the nature of this literary kind. Jim Ellis, in his book on the 1590’s epyllia, for example, writes, “The epyllion is an odd genre. Its flourishing is linked to a single decade . . . not only did [it] not survive . . . it is not even clear that it existed as a genre in the first place . . . whether the Elizabethans viewed these poems as a group is unknown.”⁵³ The overall premise of Ellis’s book is stated as follows:

⁵² John Ferguson, “Catullus and Ovid,” *The American Journal of Philology* 81.4 (1 October, 1960): 337-357, 338.

⁵³ Jim Ellis, *Sexuality and Citizenship: Metamorphosis in Elizabethan Erotic Verse* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: Toronto UP, 2003), 4.

The [epyllia] produced at the Inns use Ovidian myth to produce a certain kind of subject, one suited to participating in newly emerging forms of economic and political relations; To be more precise, the epyllion invents, through its reinterpretation of Ovidian mythical narratives, a new version of heterosexuality.⁵⁴

While Ellis's thesis is fascinating, and relevant to the form in its nationalistic concerns and the cultural milieu in which these poems became fashionable, there is a scarcity of explication in his book concerning the classical lineage of this genre. This is made even more problematic when one considers the following statement: "From another perspective, the question of genre is immaterial," for these writers knew each other's work.⁵⁵ Neoteric poetry is a flexible genre that is uniquely susceptible (as I have stated earlier) to idiosyncratic interpretation. This is precisely because the poems are mythic *interpretations*. However, to examine Ovid's interpretation of Virgil, or Catullus's interpretation of Callimachus's interpretation of Homer's interpretation of pre-Homeric myth is to play a game of "telephone," so to speak. To call all Elizabethan epyllia "Ovidian" is to do the genre a tremendous disservice. Furthermore, if one wants to subjugate Ovid to the aesthetic of Catullus, it is certainly plausible to argue that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* can in many ways be considered a triumph of neoteric aesthetics, as Ovid chose to write his epic in a series of interlocking miniatures.

Neoteric Style

However I might disagree with Ellis's generic definitions, his description of the "style" of the epyllia he encounters is apt: "The poems share an interest in rhetorical display,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

lush erotic description, and self-conscious wit.”⁵⁶ The ostentatious nature of this literary kind cannot be denied. The word “style” is theoretically esoteric in a number of ways, but in practice it is distinctive. In the chapters that follow, I will sometimes refer to neoteric style as “ornamental.” By “ornamental,” I refer to the manner of dressing a poem. The language of neoteric style is allusive, metrically sophisticated, and elaborate in its description of beauty. It is characterized by frequent references to art, creation, weaving, dressing, and looking. The poem is adorned as an art object that stands as its own defense. As the flashy “style” of these poems has a tendency to subsume the primary narrative, neoteric style points up its true subject: poetry, the poetic process, and the social, moral, and personal function of art.

Furthermore, such dressing of a poem points up its “thing-iness” or status as an art object. This requires a radical disjunction between sign and referent, as the sign wholly belongs to the artist as it becomes an element of his repertoire; it is an artistic medium (such as paint or clay). Furthermore, “a style as prolix and technically elaborate as Spenser’s regards words and their intricacies as detached from things, and therefore [his style is] an overlay or embroidery, rather than a fully engaged dramatic representation of narrative realities.”⁵⁷ Thus neoteric style frames an idea as the principal subject of the poem rather than the mythic narrative. The ornate texture points up that idea, as the mythic narrative becomes subordinate to the idea. While such style might be called “allegorical,” it is not sufficient to view Spenser’s style as an instrument of allegory for, as Paul Alpers writes, “Spenser’s poems were written at a time of explosive development in English verse.” Thus,

⁵⁶ Ellis, “Sexuality and Citizenship,” 5.

⁵⁷ Paul Alpers, “Style,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, Ed. A.C. Hamilton, Toronto and Buffalo, Routledge, London: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 674.

the “verbal energy” of Spenser’s verse has to do with “a sense of abundance and possibility in the language itself.”⁵⁸

Other critics have proposed that Spenser’s neoteric or “ornamental” style serves a myriad of functions. David Wilson-Okamura suggests that ornamental style may be used as a kind of substitution for the complex dactylic hexameter of Latin poetry.⁵⁹ Gordon Teskey writes how the manner in which the ornamental use of images in poetry (in particular, the classical gods and goddesses) highlights the disjunction between image and idea in order to point up the fragility of the state and the ever-expanding fissure between myth and history. He writes,

The revival of classical gods in Renaissance allegory was a fairly direct consequence of the emergence of the idea of the sovereign state, centered in the body of the prince, as a cosmos unto itself. That such a system was sustained by the threat of violence was concealed behind the aesthetic beauty of the allegorized classical gods, who were thus made to appear to be elements of an impregnable structure.⁶⁰

The allegorical mode relies on a violent rift between image and metaphor, and neoteric style exploits this rift. Images become rhetorical figures subject to the whims of the artist. Gods and goddesses depicted in painting or sculpture are an excellent example. Neoteric style portrays a mythological image employed in an emblematic sense and distinctly identified as art. This schism between the real and the ideal at the heart of the emptying out of the mythological image, as Teskey explains, or this disjunction between image and metaphor (or image and idea) “can be extrapolated to refer to an existential schism between the world that is unknown . . . and the meaning we make of the world . . . that resides in the transcendental

⁵⁸Alpers, *Spenser Encyclopedia*, “Style,” 675.

⁵⁹ David Wilson-Okamura, *Spenser’s International Style*, New York: Cambridge UP, 2014, 141.

⁶⁰ Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996), 81.

space in which we situate ourselves in relation to the world.”⁶¹ Thus, stylistic methods that call attention to this schism re-affirm the power of poetry to create knowledge, just as they point up the “thingliness” or artificiality of the poem itself.

The space between the signifier and signified in neoteric verse allows the poet free reign to play with ideas, or to make his own nature, so to speak, as the picture or image can be understood only in a referential sense – it can refer to anything. These “encoded signs, apparently arbitrary and conventional are, through an ontological sanction, authorized to become, in effect *meta*-natural signs . . . full of the presence of the transcendental meaning they carry.”⁶² In clearer terms, “the picture relates to the sensible as the word relates to the intelligible. The illusion permitted by the words (the illusion of an image) liberates the mind and gives it access to the intelligible, while the illusion permitted by the natural-sign image (the illusion of an object) locks it within the sensible.”⁶³ Therefore, the ornate image is not a description of a work of art that *pretends* to be a visual image – rather, it speaks simultaneously to both sense and reason.

Patricia Fumerton offers a different understanding of “ornamental” and “fragmentary.” In her notion of what she terms “the fragmentary history of aristocratic subjectivity,” the subject is consumed by a drive to be part of a cultural whole. In this formulation, what often seems the most meaningless or peripheral actually shadows greater meaning within. “Decoration . . . allegorizes or alludes to a world of cultural value that could not otherwise be represented *except* by means of oblique, allusive adornment.” As history itself is broken or disjointed, “the ornamental urge, in sum, is one with the historical

⁶¹ Teskey, 7.

⁶² Krieger, 137.

⁶³ Krieger, 138.

urge: the drive to be part of the cultural whole.”⁶⁴ The neoteric poet builds a sense of order from the broken and disjointed (albeit an often dissonant sense of order that is affirmed as such), yet at the same time, he is driven by an impulse towards fragmentation. Thus, he enacts a recursive building, destruction, and rebuilding in different formulae – something that might be called “transformation” in a non-Ovidian sense. When I say that neotericism is built on the fragmentary; then, I mean that it is constructed from that which is always already fragmented, and inevitably must return to that state.

Neotericism in Theory and Practice

As this study seeks to refocus critical attention on Spenser’s shorter poems, and reclaim their aesthetic significance by placing them within a Catullan paradigm, the following chapters will comparatively examine several of Spenser’s shorter poems alongside the work of Catullus. My first chapter reads *The Shepheardes Calender* as a manifesto of Elizabethan neoteric aesthetics. Many of the chapters that follow will return to the ideas set forth in the *Calender*, as it is an aesthetic locus of sorts in which Spenser declares the intricacies of his poetic project, its generic resistance and oppositional nature (illustrated via the figure of Colin’s broken “pype”), and its reliance on a neo-Alexandrian programme. The *Calender*’s poet clearly states his intention to craft “short and intricate,” plaintive verse, that is highly stylized and framed in such a way that it appears different, strange, and entirely “new.” The trope of “secrecy” in the *Calender* functions to highlight the ornate complexity and craftedness of its design, as it incites in the reader a desire to “see” (to know or discover) what is hidden, and thus functions as a form of adornment. Furthermore, I will show how Catullus’s *Carmen* 95, in which Catullus praises his own work via his affiliation with a model for “right

⁶⁴ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 22.

poetry,” and *Carmen 49*, an occasional poem in which Catullus simultaneously praises and insults Cicero, sheds light on Spenser’s highly ironic stance of humility in both the *Calender’s* prefatory material and the “June” eclogue. In addition, I will expose how Attis’s lament for his lost youth in *Carmen 63* illuminates Spenser’s stylization of “young verse” in the fable of “Februarie.” I will also read “Aprill” as an allegory of poetic creation, and explain how the multi-layered narrative of *Carmen 64* is similarly focused on “making” in its portrayal of a sequence of visual art objects that are themselves in the process of creation. Finally, this chapter will argue that the poetic excellence of “November” may be held up as the epitome of neoteric design in its unusual treatment of an epic figure (the voiceless Dido) that is, at the same time, an intriguing link between Virgil, Ovid, and Catullus.

My next chapter illustrates how Catullus’s ironic elegiac voice in *Carmen 64* is mirrored and embellished in Spenser’s *Muiopotmos*. Spenser’s miniaturized retelling of Catullus’s story of Achilles shows how Elizabethan neoteric poetry exhibits a preoccupation with visual and formal artistry as it narrates a story of creation and destruction. The weaving and painting metaphors, and the continual references to art, dressing, and adornment, indicate that *Muiopotmos* is a poem about art and its process. Early narrative cues also reveal that the subject of the poem is an aesthetic one, and the miniaturized characters in turn provide a miniaturization of the epic form. I argue that *Muiopotmos* is a representation of a “pure” neoteric epyllion, in a formal sense; yet as Spenser weaves both form and sound in the poem, the boundaries of the genre of “epyllion” are revealed to be more fluid than have been previously recognized. Furthermore, *Muiopotmos* demonstrates how “ornamental” images in neoteric poetry insist on their status as art (thus urging the reader to “look”) yet at the same time convey the poet’s awareness of the precariousness of their ontological

presence. This chapter will also place *Muiopotmos* in the context of the *Complaints*, outline the Elizabethan understanding of the form of the “complaint,” and assert that *The Teares of the Muses*, *The Ruines of Time*, the Du Bellay translation *The Ruines of Rome*, the three sonnet sequences (also translations): *Visions of the Worlds Vanitie*, *Visions of Bellay*, *Visions of Petrarch*, and the two mock-heroic poems *Virgil’s Gnat* and *Muiopotmos. Mother Hubbard’s Tale* are neoteric permutations of different sorts, in part because of their “plaintive” nature. I will again return to *The Shepheardes Calender* to examine E.K.’s reference to “ornament,” and look to *A Theatre for Worldlings* as an illustration of Spenser’s seemingly ambiguous attitude towards visual images. Finally, this chapter will show how the spectacle of Clarion’s demise mirrors the abrupt ending of the *Aeneid*, which closes with an image of the defeated Turnus. As in Spenser’s poem, and as in Catullus’ epyllion, Virgil evokes the struggling craftsman. Spenser’s narrative is an example of the way neoteric poetry functions to engender an affect of fragmentation and detachment, thus highlighting the disjunction between image and idea.

The chapter that follows will offer a reconsideration of Spenser’s *Daphnaida*, a curious and highly experimental poem that dramatizes a very real loss, yet is often considered Spenser’s “worst” poem. Critics have called it “unrelievedly gloomy,” “heavy-handed and shrill,” a “grotesque authorial miscalculation,” and “an embarrassing failure.” I will assert that this misreading is because the excessive nature of neoteric style in the *Daphnaida* is not visual, but auditory; hence, the poem is lavishly rhetorical and appears to rely almost entirely on noise. Here, Spenser’s characteristically neoteric irony is highly inappropriate, considering the occasion – the death of Douglas Howard, the young wife of Spenser’s friend Arthur Gorges. The poem is often read historically as an allegorized “legal” complaint that demonstrates Gorges’ grief, for at the time of the poem’s composition, he

was engaged in a legal battle with Howard's father for her inheritance. I will instead argue that the *Daphnaïda's* is a "poetic" complaint, due to the problematic nature of the poem's voice and the way its form hovers in the space between complaint and elegy. Additionally, I will show how the *Daphnaïda's* "noise" is not indicative of its failure, but rather, its success. A reading of the *Daphnaïda* alongside the complaints of Attis and Ariadne in Catullus' *Carmen 63* and *64* reveals that Spenser's poem is an intentional experiment that represents grief in a manner that points up the ineffability of such representation. I will return again to the *Shepheardes Calender* to examine the way E.K., like Alcyon, speaks in an inappropriate manner and resists readerly expectations, and also to look at the way both the *Daphnaïda* and the "October" eclogue provide an interesting parody of the complaint mode.

My final chapter reads the *Mutabilitie Cantos* as a fragment that advertises its fragmentary nature; thus extending the argument of Humphrey Tonkin and Andrew Zurcher. My argument is that the subject of the poem is both metaphysical (a meditation on death) and aesthetic (a meditation on poetic process). This chapter will provide an explication of the "things" of mutability, and in comparison will show how Catullus exerts control over the "things" of the natural world via speaking objects that in turn speak of their status as art, specifically in *Carmen 4*, *Carmen 64*, *Carmen 67*, and *Carmen 68b*. Additionally, I will draw comparisons between Dame Mutabilitie and Catullus's rendering of the Earth-goddess Cybele in *Carmen 63*, alongside a contrast of Spenser's ungendered representation of Nature and the neutered acolyte Attis. Additionally, this chapter will posit that Virgil's *Georgics* are an interesting counterpart to Spenser's representation of change, in that they show how the things of the natural world can be brought into a state of submission by the poet's hand. Additionally, the "bull episode" in the fourth *Georgic* illustrates the notion that

poetic creation arises from fragmentation and decay. Furthermore, I will read the figure of Dame Mutabilitie as a neoteric poet who voices a complaint about her right to sovereignty; thus her association with decay and demise is a necessary, strategic move (as neotericism relies on fragmentation). Finally, as the comedic representations of the seasons curiously dominate the procession that Dame Mutabilitie presents as “evidence” of her supremacy, I will argue that this is Spenser’s satirical reprise of the *Shepheardes Calender*, as the poem overall is a reflection on the course of the poet’s life, his youth, and his art.

Chapter 2: A Neoteric Manifesto: *The Shepheardes Calender*

rura colit nemo, mollescunt coila iuuentis,
non humilis curuis purgatur uinea rastris . . .
ipsius et sedes, quacumque opulenta recessit
regia, fulgenti splendent auro atque argento.
candet ebur soliis collucent pocula mensae,
tota domus gaudet regali splendida gaza. ~Catullus, *Carmen* 64, (lines 38-39, 43-46)⁶⁵

In the above passage, Catullus's narrative shifts from the rural landscape, which now lies unkept, in ruin and overgrown with weeds, to the splendor and opulence of crafted "things," framed in an enclosed space. Similarly, at the opening of "January" in Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, Colin Clout enters the highly crafted world of the *Calender* during a lull in "Winters spight," looking on the "barrein ground, whome winters wrath hath wasted" (line 19). As he emerges, he emphasizes the artificiality of the pastoral space, for it serves a narrative purpose, in that its ruin is meant as a reflection of his psychological state: "Art made a myrrhour, to behold my plight" (20). Colin's complaint is staged in true neoteric style, among the naked trees and "feeble flocke" that wail and weep, yet are distinctly identified as "Art." Thus, in their artificiality, these thing-like objects both populate the crafted pastoral space (disguised as nature) and dramatize the narrative. Even Colin's despair appears crafted, as his sincerity does not hold up in the face of scrutiny; he appears to mourn for more than just Rosalind, who is an absent and peripheral figure. In an aesthetic sense, she is entirely outside the frame, and when invoked, an impediment to composition rather than a poetic device. She rejects Colin's love, but even more vehemently "hateth as the snake" his "rural musick" and rustic style, his "Shepheardes deuise" and his "songes."

⁶⁵ Fieldwork's abandoned, draught oxen's necks get flabby / no curved rake clears the weeds from the low-set ground vines, / But Peleus' seat, for the whole of its opulent rearward / length is a shining delight of gold and silver, gleaming ivory thrones, cups glinting on their tables, / the entire house glittering proudly with royal treasure.

The *Calender* thus immediately launches a preemptive defense against its poetic detractors (the scornful “Rosalinds” among Spenser’s audience) and announces the intention of generic dissonance via a destructive metaphor in which the shepherd’s primary tool of artistry – the “oaten pype” – is silenced. Indeed, obstinate “pype-breaking” is a motif in the *Calender*, and Colin is never fully reconciled with the notion of traditional shepherd’s piping. Although in “Aprill” there is a sense that the glory of Elisa may result in the formation of a new epic instrument; conversely, in “November” Colin urges other shepherdes to break their “pypes” as well: “Breake we our pypes, that shrild as lowde as Larke” (71). In “December,” Colin hangs his pype on a nearby tree, as an ominous force approaches:

My Muse is hoarse and weary of thys stounde:

Here will I hang my pype upon this tree,

Was never pype of reede did better sounde.

Winter is come, that blowes the bitter blaste,

And after Winter dreerie death does hast. (140-144)

Colin’s suggestion that his Muse is “weary of thys stounde” implies he will move to a new genre, at the same time that the woodcut reinforces what Rebecca Helfer has termed, the way the *Calender* “reimagines the architecture of immortality in ruin itself.”⁶⁶ In the woodcut, Colin leans wearily on his staff and the pipe lies in pieces at his feet. Piping, or creating poetry within a traditional pastoral frame, is thus discarded at both the outset and the close of the *Calender*.

The poem’s generic resistance is further manifest in the “Epistle,” addressed to Spenser’s confidante Gabriel Harvey. This introduction of the “new Poete” points up the

⁶⁶ Rebecca Helfer, “‘The Death of the ‘New Poete’: Virgilian Ruin and Ciceronian Recollection in Spenser’s ‘The Shepherdes Calender,’” *Renaissance Quarterly* 56.3 (Autumn, 2003): 723-756, 724.

oppositional nature of the *Calender's* poetic project, as E.K. utterly rejects the “piping” of unlearned “ragged rymers”:

I scorne and spue out the rakehellye route of our ragged rymers (for so themselves use to hunt the letter) which without learning boste, without judgement jangle, without reason rage and fome, as if some instinct of Poeticall spirite had newly ravished them above the meanenesse of common capacitie . . . Nethellesse let them a Gods name feede on theyr owne folly, so they seeke not to darken the beames of others glory.⁶⁷

This passage sets up a polarity between what is “without learning,” “judgment,” or “reason” and the *Calender's* verse, which is, in defiance, “finely framed,” and formed with great erudition and care, the latter of which echoes in the elegiac refrain of “November” – “O carefull verse” (72).⁶⁸ The great scholarship evident within the eclogues is advertised by E.K., who presumes a learned audience for Spenser’s work: his “knitting of sentences” are “round without roughnesse, and learned without hardnes, such indeede as may be perceived of the leaste, understood of the moste, but judged onely of the learned.”⁶⁹ E.K.’s own affected lack of dexterity in composition, evident in his description of the poem’s verse as “strongly trussed up together,” further highlights Spenser’s talent. The poetic project in the *Calender*, then, is quite specific and intends to promote both the fine craftsmanship of the poem itself and the literary potential of its author; yet in its revisionary assertion of “newness,” this venture echoes an aesthetic established centuries before the unveiling of this initial labor of the “new Poete.”

⁶⁷ Edmund Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram, et al, (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1989), 19. All subsequent quotations from the *Calender* are excerpted from this edition.

⁶⁸ Spenser, “November,” 190.

⁶⁹ Spenser, “Epistle,” 17.

The Greek term *οἱ νεωτερικοί* or the Latin *poetae noui* means the “innovators” as much as the “younger ones,” or more literally, the “new poets.” Cicero’s description of Catullus and his circle as such focuses on the freshness of their poetic experiments, although his parody of Catullan verse indicates he certainly does not approve.⁷⁰ The classical neoteric poets furthered an Alexandrian aesthetic in order to address the lengthy and badly written epics of their contemporaries – a project not unlike Spenser’s rejection of “ungyrt . . . ragged rymers,” and certainly in keeping with the erudition of Spenser’s aesthetic in the *Calender*. E.K.’s focus on the Spenser-poet’s “newness” is explained via a description of the poem’s style and its brevity of form:

his complaints of love so lovely, his discourses of pleasure so pleasantly, his pastorall rudenesse, his morall wisenesse, his due observing of Decorum everye where . . . in matter, in speech, and generally in all seemely simplicities of handling his matter, and framing his words: the which of many things which in him be straunge . . . the words them selves being so auncient, the knitting of them so short and intricate.⁷¹

If we consider the manner in which this passage points up the aesthetic attributes of the new Poete, then E.K. is quite usefully providing us a sketch of Spenser’s practice – his intention to craft “short and intricate,” plaintive verse, highly stylized with “auncient” words, characterized by affected “pastorall rudenesse” and “seemely simplicities,” and framed in such a way that they appear “straunge” to the reader, thus offering up, in their strangeness, something entirely new.

The newness of Catullus and the classical neoterics was due to their engagement with the Alexandrian verse of Callimachus and Theocritus, and their emphatic implementation of

⁷⁰ For the full excerpt from Cicero’s letter to Atticus alongside an explication of its significance, see R.O.A.M. Lyne, “The Neoteric Poets” *The Classical Quarterly* 28.1 (1978), 167-187.

⁷¹ Spenser, “Letter to Harvey,” 13-14.

the “big book, big evil” sentiment expressed by Callimachus in the *Aetia*.⁷² Indeed, the poetic programme set forth by Callimachus is recapitulated in the poetic procedure of Catullus and his circle, and also bears a striking resemblance to the aesthetic referenced in E.K.’s preface. Callimachus writes,

For, when I first placed a tablet on my knees, Lycian Apollo said to me:

“. . . poet, feed the victim to be as fat as possible but, my friend, keep the Muse slender. This too I bid you; tread a path which carriages do not trample; do not drive your chariot upon the common tracks of others, nor along a wide road, but on unworn paths, though your course be more narrow. For we sing among those who love the shrill voice of the cicada and not the noise of the . . . asses." Let others bray just like the long-eared brute, but let me be the dainty, the winged one. (21-32)⁷³

Virgil as well was highly influenced by the Alexandrian poets, and it is both Virgil and Theocritus (although primarily Virgil) to which critics traditionally turn to provide a lens through which to read the *Calendar*, as these poets are referred to specifically by E.K., and interestingly in language similar to Callimachus’s description of the “dainty, winged one”: “So flew Theocritus, as you may perceive he was all full fledged. So flew Virgile, as not yet feeling his wings.”⁷⁴

E.K.’s frequent references to Theocritus are noteworthy in regards to the neoteric paradigm, as they establish more of a Catullan than a Virgilian “spirit” in Spenser’s verse. They also provide a more precise understanding of Spenser’s particular experiments. In his rambling “generall argument,” E.K. traces the origins of the eclogue back to the Greeks:

⁷² See also the Introduction to this dissertation.

⁷³ Callimachus, *Aetia, Aetia, Iambi, Lyric poems, Hecale, minor epic and elegiac poems, fragments of epigrams, fragments of uncertain location*, trans. Contantine Athanasius Trypanis (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1958).

⁷⁴ Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” 18.

“They were first of the Greekes the inventours of them . . . Theocritus in whom is more ground of authoritie, then in Virgile.”⁷⁵ E.K.’s attribution of “authoritie” to Theocritus, whom he describes as “all full fledged,” in contrast to Virgil, who is “not yet feeling his winges,” is a salient point that begs a shift in critical focus from the literary influence of Virgil and Ovid on Spenser’s aesthetic in the *Calender*, to the literary influence of Theocritus⁷⁶ and later Catullus. Theocritean influence is evident in Virgil’s *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, as well as the epyllia contained within the epics of Virgil and Ovid; thus the aesthetic of these later poets can be subjugated to their Alexandrian predecessor and hence Catullus, whom they follow chronologically, and who is an Alexandrian “purist,” so to speak. In looking to Spenser’s Classical sources, all roads lead back to Catullus. Thus, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Spenser’s aesthetic intentions in the *Calender*, one must understand the manner in which his poetic project interacts with that of all of these ancient poets, but particularly Catullus.

Indeed, Virgil as well as Ovid were themselves neo-Alexandrians who were, at the same time, reading the poetry of Catullus. M. Owen Lee writes, “At the beginning of his career, Virgil was likely thought of as a Roman Alexandrian and specifically as a disciple of Callimachus (ca. 300-240 BC) . . . and his influence on the *Georgics* has been the subject of much critical writing.” Lee also reiterates that Callimachus “imposed an aesthetic on his fellow poets that called for the crafting of small, elegant, and above all erudite works.”⁷⁷ In regards to Ovid, Peter Toohey writes, “If we do not quite have a miniature epic in Ovid’s

⁷⁵ Spenser (E.K.), “The generall argument of the whole booke,” 22.

⁷⁶ Steven F. Walker asserts that “the case for any direct influence [between Theocritus and Spenser] is weak,” and it is unlikely Spenser was directly familiar with the *Idylls*. He was, however, likely familiar with the French Pléiades imitations, such as Ronsard’s “Le Cyclope amoureux,” which imitates *Idyll* 2. See “Theocritus” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al., Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

⁷⁷ M. Owen Lee, *Virgil as Orpheus: A Study of the Georgics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 33-34.

Metamorphoses, then there are, at least, many of the lineaments of Callimachean genre: generic and tonal variety, digressions within digressions, obsession with the erotic and with female emotions, psychological realism and sentimentality.”⁷⁸ In turn, the evidence of Virgil and Ovid’s engagement with Catullus abounds. A rather obvious allusion to Catullus appears in Book IV of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, as Ariadne’s lament in Catullus’s *Carmen 64* provides the backdrop for Virgil’s rendering of Dido’s lament. Judith P. Hallett, in a recent article, provides a fine analysis of Catullan influence in Ovid’s *Heroides 15*,⁷⁹ a poem that also contains a portrait of Ariadne, and Ioannis Ziogas writes that the *Metamorphoses* is framed in language quite similar to Catullus’s “nouum libellum” in *Carmen 1*. “Catullus’s preface [to the *Carmina*] begins and ends in terms similar to the beginning and the end of Ovid’s epic [;thus it appears] the whole program of the *Metamorphoses* is encapsulated in the frame of Catullus I.”⁸⁰

As Catullan poetry preceded that of Virgil and Ovid, reading Spenser’s poetry through a Catullan lens provides an additional layer of interpretation that helps us more fully understand Spenser’s neoteric project in his shorter poems, and particularly in the *Calender*, which this chapter will argue can be read as a manifesto of Elizabethan neotericism. My reading will show how Spenser declares and then illustrates neoteric values in *The Calender*, and will also explore the specific Catullan contribution to those values. In order to move past mere adjectives to a more demonstrative model, I will focus on a set of questions: If Spenser deliberately chose to present himself as the “new Poete,” then how does *The Calender*

⁷⁸ Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), 160-161. For a fine analysis of a Callimachean aesthetic in the *Amores*, see Donald Lateiner, “Ovid’s Homage to Callimachus and Alexandrian Poetic Theory,” *Hermes* 106.1 (1978): 188-196.

⁷⁹ See Judith P. Hallett, “Catullan Voices in *Heroides 15*: How Sappho became a Man,” *Dictynna [revue de poésie latine]* 2 (2005), <http://dictynna.revues.org/129>.

⁸⁰ Ioannis Ziogas, “The Poet as Prince: Author and Authority Under Augustus,” in *The Art of Veiled Speech: Self-Censorship from Aristophanes to Hobbes*, eds. Han Baltussen and Peter J. Davis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 126.

exhibit the “newness” of the poetic project which he purports to herald? In other words, what does Spenser specifically mean by new and how is that newness manifest? Furthermore, how do neoteric poetics in *The Calender* intersect with the stylistic concerns of Catullus and his contemporaries, in such a way that Spenser’s poem exhibits a Catullan spirit? How does Catullan influence serve to make the *Calendar* richer, more successful, more *new*?

Peculiar Pastoral

Critics remain puzzled by Spenser’s highly unusual innovation of the pastoral mode in the *Shepheardes Calender*, although they acknowledge his choice of pastoral provides a free space for the exploration of controversial subjects in religion and politics. George Puttenham writes of pastoral as a “safe” vehicle for the discussion of political⁸¹ life at court:

[The pastoral is used] not of purpose to counterfeit or represent the rustical manner of loues and communication: but vnder the vaile of homely persons, and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters, and such as perchance had not bene safe to haue bene disclosed in any other sort, which may be perceived by the Eclogus of Virgill, in which are treated by figure matters of greater importance than the loues of Titirus and Corydon.⁸²

The most influential theories of pastoral⁸³ recognize that the pastoral mode is concerned with the expression of resistance and subversion in a social and political sense, yet they are

⁸¹ For more on political and religious issues in the *Calender*, see Edwin A. Greenlaw, “The Influence of Machiavelli on Spenser,” *MP* 7 (1910): 187-202; and Paul E. McLane, *Spenser’s ‘Shepheardes Calender’: A Study in Elizabethan Allegory*. Notre Dame, Indiana, 1961.

⁸² George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge, 1936): book 1, chap. 18, 38.

⁸³ See William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1936; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1968), 23; Louis Adrian Montrose, “Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form,” *ELH* 15.3 (October, 1983): 415-459; and Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975).

slower to acknowledge the aesthetic resistance and subversion inherent in Spenser's unique revision of the genre. In Renaissance pastoral there is usually an ambivalence and tension between oppositional values. Patrick Cullen, whose work highlights the distinction between "Arcadian" and "Mantuanesque"⁸⁴ pastoral, affirms that "all pastoral . . . is constantly implying, introducing, juxtaposing disparate values, values other than pastoral – the heroic, the urban, the courtly."⁸⁵ Issues involved in Renaissance pastoral, according to Cullen, were often paradoxical and expressed cultural tension via aesthetic mode. These issues include "art and nature, the active life and the contemplative life, complexity and simplicity, [and these] were possibly even more acute [in the Elizabethan period] than in classical times."⁸⁶

Yet in spite of an avowed understanding of the oppositional and paradoxical nature of Spenser's pastoral, the complex formal design of the *Calender* has continually led critics astray from the notion that Spenser's point in the eclogues is upheaval and disjunction. On the whole, they seek to address the *Calender's* strangeness via a "right reading" in terms of a single, unifying topos or overarching idea to explain the eclogues' variance in design and subject. A.C. Hamilton writes of Spenser's efforts to "find himself" in the poem, and although Spenser may indeed undertake this task in an aesthetic sense, such a reading is speculative, at best.⁸⁷ R.A. Durr argues that the poem exhibits a significant polarity between "the flesh and the spirit," or "*amor carnis* and *amor spiritus*," in keeping with traditional interpretations that glorify Spenser as a champion of English Protestantism, a precarious historical reading that delves into the unknown, for it is quite a challenge to tease out

⁸⁴ Arcadian pastoral is modeled after Theocritus and exhibits a Utopian desire for the lost Golden World, whereas the Mantuanesque pastoral, indebted to the ten eclogues of Battista Spagnuoli, idealizes the Judeo-Christian *pastor bonus*. Patrick Cullen explains that the latter's "function . . . became one of enlightening man on the virtues of the *pastor bonus* and the vices of the *pastor malus*," 3.

⁸⁵ Patrick Cullen, *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard UP, 1970, 3.

⁸⁶ Cullen, 12.

⁸⁷ A.C. Hamilton, "The Argument of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*," *ELH* 23 (1956): 171-82.

Spenser's specific theological beliefs in the eclogues.⁸⁸ Muriel Bradbrook claims the theme of the *Calender* is "the pursuit of honour, surveyed from what was traditionally the lowest of human occupations," a rather literal analysis of Spenser's feigned humility in the *Calender*.⁸⁹ Isabel MacCaffrey, in her acknowledgment that reading the *Calender* according to the presumption of a unifying theme "underestimate[s] the power of the poet's imagination, its world-making energy, its drive toward comprehensiveness, its urge to include rather than exclude meanings,"⁹⁰ is in part a reiteration of the critical desire to provide the reader with an overarching *topos* (albeit an inclusive one); yet it opens a window to the notion that an attempt to unify a poem which courts fragmentation is a fruitless enterprise.

These readings of the pastoral in Spenser's *Calender* are problematic because we can neither reduce Spenserian pastoral to an exploration of man's relation to nature in a Raymond Williams-esque country vs. city formulation, nor summarize his experiments within the mode as concerned with a Utopian drive or yearning for a lost "Golden World." Critics concerned with the pastoral mode in the *Calender* fail to identify the tremendous aesthetic significance of the Theocritean contribution to the *Calender's* eclogues, although Cullen attempts such an endeavor in his alignment of "Arcadian" pastoral with the *Idylls*. If we are to consider Spenser a neoteric poet whose aesthetic is modeled after the work of Catullus; then the *Calender's* eclogues might be considered more neo-Alexandrian than Virgilian. In our modern understanding of pastoral, "the irony with which [Theocritus'] *Idylls* 7, 10, and 11, at least, self-consciously exploit their scripted rusticity [has slowly given way]

⁸⁸ R.A. Durr, "Spenser's Calendar of Christian Time," *ELH* 24 (1957): 269-295.

⁸⁹ M.C. Bradbrook, "No Room at the Top: Spenser's Pursuit of Fame," in *Elizabethan Poetry*, ed. J.R. Brown and Bernard Harris, (London, 1960): 91-109.

⁹⁰ Isabel G. MacCaffrey, "Allegory and Pastoral in The Shepherdes Calender," *ELH* 36.1 (Mar., 1969): 88-109, 89.

to a ‘pastoral’ code shared by poet, characters, and audience.”⁹¹ Indeed, Spenser revives this “scripted rusticity” in his archaic language and the humble posturing of the poet-shepherd and that of the characters within the eclogues. Yet critics persist in their dismissal of E.K.’s references to Theocritus, insisting it is unlikely Spenser had access to the works of Theocritus. Instead, they attribute E.K.’s allusions to his “desire to bring the prestige of the name of Theocritus . . . to Spenser’s eclogues, for Theocritus was synonymous with pastoral for the humanists.” However, Spenser would have been familiar with the French Pléiades imitations of Theocritus, specifically Ronsard’s 1560 ‘Le Cyclope amoureux,’ an imitation of *Idyll* 2. Steven F. Walker writes,

A whole set of pastoral topics and procedures of Theocritean origin were . . . available to Spenser, of which the most important was the figure of the herdsman as lover and poet . . . [;thus] Colin Clout owes much to Theocritus’s mythical herdsmen and archpoets Dahphnis and Polyphemus, to their ‘plaintive’ and ‘recreative’ moods.⁹²

A few critical readings of Spenser’s pastoral have indeed noted the Theocritean elements of the *Calender*, yet fail to define them as such. Helen Cooper notes that the conventions of pastoral in the *Calender*, “the amorous complaint, the débat, the panegyric, the singing match, the dirge, the hymn to Pan – all duly appear, each in an appropriate month,” yet Spenser innovates the eclogue series via the *Calender*’s metrical and formal complexity, as the stanza form varies from eclogue to eclogue, as does the mode or voice, as well as the subject.⁹³ Interestingly, Cooper’s passage could just as well be a description of Theocritus’s *Idylls*.

⁹¹ Richard Hunter, “Introduction to Theocritus’s *Idylls*,” (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2002), xvii.

⁹² Steven F. Walker, “Theocritus,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 686.

⁹³ Helen Cooper, 645.

Richard Hunter, in his introduction to the *Idylls*, writes, “None of the bucolic poems is quite like any other, the . . . constant rearrangement and fresh patterning of elements drawn from a repertoire which seems familiar, but is in fact being newly created before our eyes. Most remarkably, perhaps, no single structural pattern is repeated in [the *Idylls*].”⁹⁴

Spenser’s engagement with Theocritus in the *Calender* is crucial to an understanding of the neoteric project, not merely because of its wide variety of structural patterns, but because what Spenser borrows from Theocritus is the highly ironic mode of the complaint that figures so prominently in the *Idylls* and in the work of Catullus. Paul Alpers acknowledges how the pastoral space provides Spenser with an extension of lyric possibilities and the opportunity to examine a variety of unusual subjects within the frame of the pastoral complaint. In other words, the “plaintive” mode allows the pastoral speaker to “complain” about political and aesthetic circumstance beneath the veil of the scorned lover: “The modes and conventions of the pastoral [in the complaint or love lament] free the woeful lover from the assumptions of courtly lyric, of situation and witty coherence.”⁹⁵ The frame of the complaint within the pastoral means that the pastoral “lover” is freer to discuss a wide variety of topics than the courtly lover, as “[the former’s] versifying experiments reveal different lyrical motives and interests.”⁹⁶ For Spenser, the pastoral complaint and the pastoral space itself provide a platform for the expression of ideas about poetry via ambiguity and paradox; thus the complaint is not merely about desire, but about the poetic challenges of artistry in the context of the artistic process. Theocritus contributes a biting irony to this formulation, in addition to a focus on complexity and artistry. Furthermore, it is probable that the complaints in Theocritus’s *Idylls* had a tremendous influence on the young

⁹⁴ Hunter, “Introduction,” xvii.

⁹⁵ Alpers, 90.

⁹⁶ Alpers, 91.

Spenser, even if filtered through Ronsard's 1560 'Le Cyclope amoureux,' rather than *Idyll* II itself, although we certainly cannot rule out the possibility that Spenser had access to the latter (for Ronsard certainly knew it well). It is crucial to acknowledge such neo-Alexandrian borrowings in the *Calender*, for neoteric poems are primarily aesthetic "complaints;" hence the complaint mode is a prominent neoteric feature.

It is similarly important to note, as the preferred form of neoteric poets is the epyllion, the world of epic is never far from the world of Spenser's *Calender*. This is especially true in Theocritus's *Idylls*. Hunter writes, "The world of the bucolic poems is, from one perspective, the world which epic forgot. The description of the marvelous cup in *Idyll* I depicting different types and stages of life asserts a parallelism and opposition to the scenes on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18."⁹⁷ In the *Calender*, Spenser's foregrounding of aesthetic experimentation is not necessarily concerned solely with pastoral revision, but with generic revision overall for, as I will show, the *Calender* functions more like Virgil's *Georgics* rather than his *Eclogues*, as the point is not only experimentation within the pastoral mode, but the explosion of the pastoral mode, so to speak. The *Calender* is Spenser's transition to epic experimentation (a fast-forward of the Virgilian career model), in that it showcases his potential for such a project. Likewise in the *Idylls*, Hunter writes,

The literary and intellectual pretension of the hexameters, the metre of Homer, in which these characters express themselves, [both gestures to epic and is] naturally productive of various ironic effects. [Yet] Theocritus certainly does not sneer at his rustics [;conversely] the poem dramatizes the ironic truth.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Hunter, "Introduction," xviii.

⁹⁸ Hunter, "Introduction," xvii.

The “self-conscious humbleness of the [*Idylls*] characters and their world,” as I will show, echoes in Spenser’s neoteric verse, as does the ironic complaint and concern with epic “newness.”

Spenser uses a number of aesthetic techniques, borrowed from Theocritus, Virgil, and especially Catullus, to frame his neoteric poetics in the *Calender*. These techniques appear designed to highlight the revisionary project of the neoteric imagination. Always self-conscious in that they point up art and the artistic project, neoteric mechanisms are designed to call attention to their dual status as the poet’s “little machines” that both participate in and write the narrative. This chapter will delve into the “secrets” surrounding the multiplicity of mysterious personae in the poem as well as the unknown qualities of its author (himself a persona); illuminate the ironic guise of humility adopted by both the Spenser-poet and the poet-characters within the poem; clarify Spenser’s insistence that youth is an essential aspect of newness; explicate how Spenser’s juxtaposition of the “old” and the “new” points up the revisionary nature of the neoteric project; and explain how the perpetual attention to poetic artistry throughout the entire poem, provides an implicit defense of neoteric design and strategy, just as they echo a neo-Alexandrian aesthetic.

Aesthetic Secrecy

The notion of secrecy in the *Calender* allows Spenser to craft complex layers of personae, both within the text, among its learned readers, and in the margins that mediate between the two. This technique functions to highlight the ornate complexity of the *Calender’s* design. Secrecy is a technique that shadows what is hidden and creates a desire to “see” that which is hidden; however, this “seeing” is a metaphor for knowing or discovering the mysteries of the *Calender*. Theresa M. Krier, whose study of the trope of “prying into

mysteries” is limited to “secreted” female forms, writes that “[secreted] vision, for the ancients, is physiologically both a cause of desire and an expression of it;”⁹⁹ hence, we can consider secrecy in the *Calender* as a device that points up the crafted nature of Spenser’s eclogues and incites the reader’s desire to uncover what is within.

Many enigmas are secreted in Spenser’s eclogues. The author, for example, is never clearly stated, apart from naming himself an unworthy “shepheards swaine” or Immeritô in the initial “To His Booke.” Throughout the *Calender*, Spenser appears in various guises, as Edmund Spenser the poet, Colin Clout, Immeritô, Cuddie, or even E.K. Over the years, critics have proposed a plethora of “real” identities for the elusive E.K., in spite of tremendous evidence within the poem that Spenser and E.K. have similar agendas – in this case, secrecy. E.K. as an unreliable glossarist contributes significantly to the gamesmanship among the competing voices within the *Calender*.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the *Calender*’s focus on the what is unknown and “secret” underscores Spenser’s awareness of presentation in the ever-shifting voices of created personae and the sense of mystery surrounding the narrative’s characters, often amplified by their absence, as in the case of Colin Clout. In the prefatory verse “To His Booke,” Immeritô claims the book’s unknown parentage is a key characteristic and he abandons responsibility for its reception (unless it be well-received). Thus he bids his little orphan, “Goe little booke: thy selfe present, / As a child whose parent

⁹⁹ Theresa M. Krieg, *Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorums of Vision* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1990), 18.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Kirke, Edward Knight, Fulke Greville, Gabriel Harvey, and Spenser himself have all been presented as candidates for the person of “E.K.” I am of the belief that if E.K. and Spenser are not one and the same, E.K.’s glosses are certainly the product of a collaborative effort that included Spenser. Thus I’m in agreement with Louise Schleiner, whose work provides copious evidence that E.K. stands for “Edmund of Kent” and thus Spenser himself, who resided at Kent for a time. See Schleiner’s article “Spenser’s ‘E. K.’ as Edmund Kent (Kenned / of Kent): Kyth (Couth), Kissed, and Kunning-Conning,” *English Literary Renaissance* 20.3 (Sept. 1990): 374-407. I’m also indebted to Ted Steinberg, who first called my attention to this salient point. Steinberg argues that “[E.K.’s] role is to present positions which oppose, and thereby highlight, the positions which Spenser supports in the *Calender*.” For an excellent discussion of E.K.’s glosses, see Ted Steinberg, “E.K.’s ‘Shepheardes Calender’ and Spenser’s,” *Modern Language Studies* 3.2 (Autumn, 1973): 46-58, 54.

is unkente” (1-2). An alliterative play on “unkente” (unknown) continues in E.K.’s letter to Harvey, who writes “our new Poete, who for that he is uncouth (as said Chaucer) is unkist, and unknown to most men . . . regarded but of few” (11-13). The poem’s preoccupation with the unknown and with secrecy, however, does perhaps provide us with at least one certainty – that the eclogues’ author is a talented wordsmith who seeks to “ornifie” his writings by pointing up the secrets therein.¹⁰¹ Richard Rambuss argues, “what is secreted is less significant to the designs of the *Calender* than the fact of and insistence upon secrecy, than secrecy as a trope.”¹⁰² Secrecy, then, is an effective rhetorical strategy within the eclogues, for although readers undoubtedly seek to unpack Spenser’s epistemological schema of secrecy, “much of what is on display in the *Calender* is an empty secret.”¹⁰³ As George Simmel notes in his study of secret societies, “What originally was manifest becomes secret . . . and what once was hidden later sheds its concealment,” thus secrecy is rather a form of adornment and its objective is “to lead the eyes of others upon the adorned.”¹⁰⁴ Hence, secrecy as a trope is a device that emphasizes the *Calender’s* artistic complexity via its mysteriousness; thus increasing narrative desire.¹⁰⁵

The *Calender’s* focus on secrecy and the unknown is also a distinct function of a Spenserian hermeneutic, in that the mystery of what is unknown draws the reader into a personal quest for hidden truth. Both the *Calender’s* author and the poem’s purpose itself are unknown. E.K.’s letter clearly indicates that much of the *Calender’s* meaning is shadowed and

¹⁰¹ See Angel Day, *The English Secretary* (London, 1599), Part 2, 102-3. This is available in facsimile edition with an introduction by Robert O. Evans (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967).

¹⁰² Richard Rambuss, “The Secretary’s Study: The Secret Designs of the Shepherdes Calender” *ELH* 59.2 (Summer, 1992), 325.

¹⁰³ Rambuss, “The Secretary’s Study,” 325. See also the term “empty secret” in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 163-167.

¹⁰⁴ Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of George Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), 335, 338.

¹⁰⁵ See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984). Chapter 2 explains how “narrative desire” draws the reader into the narrative trajectory.

hidden. And as the author only reveals his own face through these other voices, we begin to realize that we are dealing with an unreliable narrator, who might know a little but certainly does not know everything. E.K. confirms, albeit obliquely, his own unknowing, “Now as touching the general dryft and purpose of his AEclogues, I mind not to say much, him selfe laboring to conceale it” (168-170). We know E.K. is an unreliable narrator, or rather, an unreliable editor, as he provides glosses that are in turn bombastic, rambling, and sometimes just plain incorrect;¹⁰⁶ yet E.K.’s entire *ethos* is built on the premise that he is privy to the secrets and mysteries of the *Calender*, either because he is especially erudite, or because he is such a careful reader, or even a “right reader” (a representation of one) who seeks to guide those who might wish to be properly enlightened as to the veiled purpose of the eclogues. E.K. writes, “I was made privie to his counsell and secret meaning in [the verses], as also in sundry other works of his” (188-189). As if to call attention to Spenser’s unique style and the complexity of the eclogues, he explains that the “old wordes and harder phrases” used in the *Calender* require his glosses and commentary, as they are “unknowen” (179, 184). Unfortunately, E.K.’s glosses most often serve to make the words and phrases of Spenser’s poem even more difficult to understand, as if he is purposefully confusing the reader at every turn. If this state of unknowing can be extended to E.K.’s rough formulation of genre in “The general argument of the whole booke,” then the generic divisions of the *Calender* are similarly unknowable. Although he divides the eclogues into “three formes or ranckes,” which he names “Plaintive . . . Recreative . . . [and] Moral,” the latter division “which for the most part be mixed with some Satyricall bitterness,” indicates these generic categories are

¹⁰⁶ Steinberg provides an excellent account of how E.K. serves to bring humor and parody to the poem, in addition to misreadings and factual inaccuracies, that mislead the reader. Concerning these inaccuracies, E.K. incorrectly defines the following: *cremosin*, *coronet*, *frenne*, *glen*, and *yblent* in “April”; *cherisaunce* and *inly* (correctly defined in “September”) in “Maye”; *pousse* in “July”; *miscreaunce* in “August”; *prive* or *pert* in “September”; *aequipage* in “October”; and *unkempt* in “November.” 54.

hardly finite, as satire (thanks in part to E.K.) is not confined to the “moral” portions of the *Calender*, but pervades nearly every single eclogue. This is precisely E.K.’s point. Our attention hence moves from the “secret” poet, to the unreliable glossarist attempting to explain the purpose of the poem, to the difficulty of finite generic classification – given the slippage of generic boundaries within the *Calendar* itself. Inevitably, and ironically because E.K. has just explained the *Calender*’s “formes” (as he understands them), the reader may despair of being able to read the *Calendar* within a comfortable and familiar formal frame. As E.K. implies, although he has listed them, the forms do not actually assist in providing a precise summation of each eclogue’s purpose. E.K. reluctantly admits, “[There are] A few onely . . . except, whose special purpose and meaning I am not privie to” (29-39).¹⁰⁷ Many of the *Calender*’s secrets, then, are unknown to E.K. and even in part, perhaps (as writing is a process of learning), to its own “unknown” author – although I would argue that this is a construct designed to highlight the notion that truth is intentionally elusive in the *Calendar*.

Humility (but not really)

As a new man, Spenser’s “newness” also refers to a person that has “recently come into a particular state, position, or relationship; and is newly appointed [or] engaged” (*OED*). As such, he adopts the mask of humility appropriate to a courtly ingénue. The poet-speakers in the *Calender* (Collin and Immerito), and the shepherd-poets within the eclogues, are remarkably well mannered. The former two quite subserviently deny their skill, yet the latter begs praise for the project. Indeed, Spenser’s little book breaks new ground as it places the poet at the center of a complex discussion of art. Both poetic and political ambition is the focus in these eclogues (although this statement is hardly absolute), as is representing oneself

¹⁰⁷ Spenser (E.K.), “The general argument of the whole book,” 2.

as both worthy and unworthy of praise. Paul Alpers explains how the pastoral mode serves Spenser's purpose in regards to humility, as he represents himself as one of the humble shepherd-poets of the calendar: "Writing Virgilian pastorals made a decisive difference because it meant representing a world of shepherd-singers and representing yourself, the poet, as one of them. [Many of] Spenser's lyric predecessors characteristically represent themselves as courtiers."¹⁰⁸

This move of adopting a stance of humility while also being praised by one's friends (who are really versions of the author praising himself) is cleverly calculated in the *Calender*. Catullus is well known for praising the work of his friends and denouncing the bad poetry of others. This method of praising one's own affiliation with the model for "right poetry" is perhaps best illustrated in *Carmen 95*, Catullus's tribute to Cinna's epyllion *Smyrna* (now lost), which relates the incestuous love of Smyrna (or Myrrha) for her father Cinyras:

Zmyrna mei Cinnae nonam post denique messem

quam coepta est nonamque edita post hiemem,

milia cum interea quingenta Hortensius uno

<uerba uolubiliter scribit inepta die>

Zmyrna sacras Satrachi penitus mittetur ad undas,

Zmyrnam cana diu saecula pervoluent.

at Volusi annales Paduam morientur ad ipsam

et laxas scombris saepe dabunt tunicas.

Parva mei mihi sint cordi monimenta <sodalist>,

¹⁰⁸ "Pastoral and the Domain of Lyric in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*," *Representations* 12 (Autumn, 1985): 83-100, 85.

At populous tumido gaudeat Antimacho.¹⁰⁹

Here Catullus manages to praise Cinna's "parva monimenta" [small monument], express his affection and happiness for his friend's successful completion of such a work, which he writes is "mei mihi sint cordi" [dear to my heart], but also insult three other poets: Hortensius, Volusius, and Antimachus. These latter three are all writers of the sprawling, poorly written epic Catullus so detests, working in the exact form the neoterics sought to revise. Cinna's *Smyrna*, according to Catullus, is the exemplar of Roman neoteric poetry: it is brief ("parva monimenta"); and so well crafted it belongs alongside the best of Latin poets, for "Zmyrnam cana diu saecula pervoluent" [when the ages are hoary, Smyrna will still be read]. It is all that a good poem should be, and although here somewhat apotheosized, it is defined primarily by what it is *not*, as the comparisons within highlight how *Smyrna* is a good poem precisely because its erudition, craftsmanship, and miniaturized form is unlike the vulgar, poorly formed, sprawling bad poems of many of his contemporaries.

Although famous for his arrogance, there are glimpses of what perhaps might be real humility in Catullus's work, although any negative self-examination is mostly brief and can nearly always be interpreted as tongue-in-cheek, more fitting perhaps for the hyper-masculine culture of Augustan Rome. In *Carmen 1* he introduces his "nouum libellum / arida modo pumice expolitum"¹¹⁰ in a dedication to his intimate friend Cornelius, "namque tu

¹⁰⁹ *Smyrna*, my Cinna's opus, is published at last, nine harvests / and nine long winters after she was begun, / while Hortensius meantime scribbles five hundred thousand / <ill-chosen words, never pausing, in one short day.> / *Smyrna* will travel as far as Satrachus' sacred streambed; / when the ages are hoary, *Smyrna* will still be read - / unlike Volusius' *Annals*, that'll die by Padua's river, / their regular use to wrap cheap fish. / Dear to my heart is my comrade's small monument – let the / vulgar enjoy their bloated Antimachus. Trans. Peter Green, *The Poems of Catullus*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005. All Catullus translations that follow (in this dissertation) are excerpted from this volume.

¹¹⁰ new booklet / all fresh-polished with abrasive.

solebas / meas esse aliquid putare nugas.”¹¹¹ He bids him “quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli / quaecumque: quod <o> patrona uirgo, / plus uno maneat perenne saeclo.”¹¹² In the second piece of *Carmen 14*, following a scathing denunciation of “pessimi poetae,” he writes, “Si qui forte mearum ineptiarum / lectores eritis manusque uestras / non horrebitis admouere nobis . . .”¹¹³ Spenser’s representation of the poet’s humility is less blatant than that of Catullus, yet it is nevertheless similarly ironic.

Late Republican writers were famous for their wit and irony (how could one live in the age of Cicero and not be), and Catullus was no exception. Another particularly relevant example of Catullan irony is *Carmen 49*, in which Catullus addresses Cicero (one of his greatest detractors) directly, yet in an ingratiating posture:

Gratias tibi maximas Catullus
agit pessimus omnium poeta,
tanto pessimus omnium poeta,
quanto tu optimus omnium patronas.¹¹⁴

Although we don’t know the specifics of the occasion for this poem, we can safely assume that the learned, highborn, and famously arrogant young Catullus does *not* regard his work as trivial, nor himself as the worst of all poets, or the worst of all living poets, as his critiques of what he considers the worst poets (early in *Carmen 14*, and elsewhere) make evident.

¹¹¹ . . . for you always used to / feel my trivia possessed some substance

¹¹² So take this little booklet, this mere trifle, / whatever it may be worth – and Patron Virgin, / let it outlast at least *one* generation.

¹¹³ If maybe there are some of you who’ll read my / stupid ineptitudes, and won’t recoil from / reaching out and laying hands upon us . . .

¹¹⁴ Warmest thanks to you herewith from Catullus, / who’s the worst of all poets, by as much the / worst of all living poets, as yourself are / best of all courtroom lawyers for your clients.

This humble and somewhat paradoxical persona is similarly evident at the outset of “To His Booke,” when Immerito (literally, “unworthy one”) addresses Sidney formally, in the posture of a suppliant and with great emphasis on his own lowly status:

[If] asked, who thee forthe did bring,
A shepheardes swaine saye did thee sing,
All as his straying flocke he fedde:
And when his honor has thee redde,
Crave pardon for my hardyhedde. (8-12)¹¹⁵

In addition to the insecurity expressed in these lines (Spenser is ever-cognizant of how his verse will be received), he continues in the ironic guise of no man, rather than a new man. E.K. often functions to emphasize Immerito’s humble stance. He writes, “Colin, under whose person the Authour selfe is shadowed, how furre he is from . . . vaunted titles and glorious shows, both him selfe sheweth, where he sayth. ‘Of Muses Hobbin. I conne no skill. And, / Enough is me to paint out my unrest, etc.’”¹¹⁶ It is in “June” that Colin declares the sentiment of which E.K. speaks: “. . . I conne no skill: / I play to please my selfe, all be it ill” (65, 72) and “[It is] enough for me to paint out my unrest.” The latter phrase is even more revealing in the context of the entire stanza:

Nought weigh I, who my song doth prayse or blame,
Ne strive to winne renowne, or passe the rest:
With shepheard sittes not, followe flying fame:
But feede his flocke in fields, where falls hem best.
I wote my rymes bene rough, and rudely drest:

¹¹⁵ Spenser, “To His Booke,” 12.

¹¹⁶ Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” 18.

The fyttter they, my carefull case to frame:

Enough is me to paint out my unrest,

And poore my piteous plaints out in the same. (73-80)¹¹⁷

At first sight, the focus of the poem is the persona of the humble shepherd and his alleged lack of skill. Yet Spenser the new man, both on the literary scene and at court, surely wants to “winne renowne” and “followe flying fame,” the prizes he exactly claims *not* to desire in these lines. Note also his attention in this passage to neoteric style (diction that is “rudely drest”) and genre. The focus on the “frame” of his “carefull case” is significant if we understand the former as a reference to genre, “carefull” as a reference to the great care and craftsmanship of his work, and “case” as an affirmation of the plaintive mode, the latter a favorite frame of the neoteric poets.

Spenser’s overall attention to craftsmanship, encapsulated in the above passage, exposes the poet’s stance of humility as a stylized (created) persona. Self-presentation is a way of participating, from the outside, in the presentation of these verses. The humble poet-shepherd transforms himself into a poetic device, inextricable from the rusticity of the pastoral mode. The “rough rymes” are “rudely drest” by a shepherd for shepherds (a poet for poets). The rustic diction of the eclogues not only constructs ornate and stylized verse, but a forum for poets to discuss the art of poetry, and in particular the best manner in which to “paint . . . unrest.” The artful design of Spenser’s “piteous plaints,” the reader will discover, are highly experimental – and this newness of style relies on a portrait of the author himself as a poet-shepherd who inhabits the world of the *Calender*’s eclogues rather than the court, for the pastoral space is a fictional world without boundaries, in which glossarist,

¹¹⁷ Spenser, “June,” 112.

patron, poet, poetic persona, and real-world poets (disguised as humble shepherds who speak their own ornate language) slip in and out of the margins of the text.

Poetic Adolescence

The pastoral frame of the *Calender*, as an innovative space, is a world in which the self-styled, humble shepherd gives voice to his “plaints.” Yet neoteric verse, in its newness, is implicitly “young” verse. Thus, young verse finds its proper place in a world belonging exclusively to poets who are themselves young. One is reminded of Callimachus, urging fledgling Alexandrian writers to follow his advice: “do not drive your chariot upon the common tracks of others, nor along a wide road, but on unworn paths.”¹¹⁸ If the playful, shepherd-poets represented in the *Calender* are any indication, then to be new, and thus treading “unworn paths,” is also to be fresh, young, and recent – although youth, as Spenser well recognizes, implies a certain naiveté. In “Februarie,” these youths come “crowing in pypes made of greene corne” (40), with “yeares greene” (59).¹¹⁹ If we read Februarie’s fable as an aesthetic one or in relation to literary influence, then new poetry labors (albeit not always successfully) to exceed “old poetry,” and Thenot’s admonition of the young tree’s folly stands as a warning to young poets, lest they forget the lessons of their elders: “For Youngth is a bubble blown up with breath, / Whose witt is weakenesse, whose wage is death” (87-88).¹²⁰ Furthermore, Spenser’s newness is engaged with contemporary poetry, for he references fashionable court poets in his allusion to patronage in “Februarie,” as Elizabeth was known to have favored fresh, new (and young) voices at court. The young tree in Thenot’s tale speaks to his caretaker in the manner of a courtier: “With painted words thogan this proude weede, / (As most usen ambitious folke:)” (160-1), and the caretaker is

¹¹⁸ Callimachus, *Aetia*, line 25.

¹¹⁹ Spenser, “Februarie,” 41-2.

¹²⁰ Spenser, “Februarie,” 43.

named “my sovereign, Lord of creatures all, / Thou placer of plants both humble and tall” (163-4).¹²¹

A celebration of youth is similarly yoked with poetic potential in late Republican poetry. Youth suggests a virility and spring-like flowering. In Catullus, youth is most affectively represented by its loss, in keeping with the mode of the complaint (although with considerably less overt irony than in Spenser’s complaints). The most moving portion of Attis’s lament in *Carmen* 63, for example, is when the young Attis mourns the loss of his youth and virility, painted with descriptive emphasis on the attributes of his budding manhood and sexuality. Yet the ever-shifting nature of Attis in these lines, as well as his metonymic association with flowers, oiled athleticism, and bedchambers (ego gymnasi fui flos, ego eram decus olei) function in such a way that Catullus presents him as an art object to be verbally and visually consumed, for in spite of the emphasis the poet places on transformation, Attis’s situation is one of stasis (what is done cannot be undone); there is no evolution of his character in the narrative, apart from this moment of regret. He has been transformed into a puppet of Cybelé. And Catullus portrays him in a manner that points up both visual artistry and masculine eroticism:

quod enim genus figuraest, ego non quod obierim?
ego mulier, ego adolescens, ego ephebus, ego puer,
ego gymnasi fui flos, ego eram decus olei:
mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida,
mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat,
linquendum ubi esset orto mihi Sole cubiculum. (62-67)¹²²

¹²¹ Spenser, “Februarie,” 45.

The repetition of “ego” has an unmistakably phallic connotation in these lines, as the poet draws the reader’s attention to what is lost.¹²³ The exclamation “iam iam dolet quod egi, iam iamque paenitet”¹²⁴ immediately follows this celebration of the glory of young manhood (thus highlighting, again, absence), and subsequently incites the rage of Cybelé. Masterfully, Catullus has woven an allegory of emotional and physical transformation into this lament, such that the reader is witness to transformative craftsmanship itself, as Attis moves (psychologically) from man to no man, his plight framed and stylized by the ever-present poet.

Just as in his posture of humility, Spenser’s emphasis on the folly of youth is ironic, for the focus on young poets implies that the *Calender’s* poet was part of an erudite community of young men concerned with scholarship and the significance of poetry in both the private and social sphere. E.K. makes a point to mention in the epistle that the *Calender’s* audience is comprised of other poets:

Now as touching the generall dryft and purpose of his Aeglogues, I mind not to say much, him selfe labouring to conceale it. Onely this appeareth, that his unstayed yough had long wandred in the common Labyrinth of Love, in which time to mitigate and allay the heate of his passion, or els to warne (as he sayth) the young shepheards .s. his equals and companions of his unfortunate folly, he compiled these xii. Aeglogues.”¹²⁵

¹²² What variation of human figure exists that I haven’t appropriated? / This I, now woman, was I the ephebe, the child; this I the young teenager, / this I the gymnasium’s finest flower, the glory of oil-smooth athleticism. / For me all thresholds were warm, for me all hallways were crowded with visitors, / for me the house was a riot of posies, of flowers all looping and garlanded, / when the sun came up and the time was on me to rise and abandon my bedchamber.

¹²³ In Latin, the word ego can be translated as “I, myself” in an emphatic sense.

¹²⁴ Now, ah now, what I’ve done appalls me; now, ah now, I repent of it!

¹²⁵ Spenser, “Epistle,” *The Shepheardes Calender*, 19.

Many characters within the narrative, the “equals and companions of his unfortunate folly,” are themselves poets who are “new” in their youth. His audience of “young” shepherds are also poets; thus Spenser create literary communities both inside and outside of the pastoral space (with E.K. loitering in the margins). A comprehensive list of speakers and audience within the *Calender* includes E.K., Colin Clout (meant to represent Spenser the poet), Thenot (an elder shepherd and apparent friend of Chaucer), Cuddie (a young shepherd who provides a voice for the often absent Colin), Willye and Thomalin (adolescent shepherd boys / assistant shepherds who provide much comedy and lightness), Hobbinoll (who may or may not represent Gabriel Harvey), Piers (a satirical proto-Protestant shepherd), Tityrus (first Chaucer, and later Virgil, the “Romish Tityrus” of “October”), Gabriel Harvey himself, Queen Elizabeth I, and (from the dedicatory verse) Sir Philip Sidney.

Youth, virility, and poetic potential are crafted alongside love (the favorite pastime of youth), in the *Calender*’s “March.” The poet also, in the manner of Catullus’s Attis poem, places emphasis on youth and eroticism, although the latter is appropriately veiled for his Elizabethan audience. Spenser’s young poet-shepherds appear as over-sexed adolescents, who seek to “sporten in delight, / And learne with Lettice to wexe light” (19-20).¹²⁶ Thomalin’s tale that he “. . . cast to goe a shooting. / Long wandring up and downe the land,” at a time “When shepheardes groomes han leave to play” (63-4, 62) indicate that he is a mere shepherd’s apprentice on an amorous quest.¹²⁷ Thomalin’s section in “March” expands *Idyll* 4 of the Greek pastoralist Bion, which tells a similar tale of a boy’s attempt to net a bird, and Spenser was likely familiar with the Latin translation of Bion’s work, which

¹²⁶ Spenser, “March,” 58. Lettice here refers to both the Lat. *laetitia* and Lettice Knolles, countess of Essex, who secretly married Leicester in 1579, much to Elizabeth’s displeasure (thus Spenser’s suggestion that to associate with her is to “become wanton”).

¹²⁷ Spenser, “March,” 60.

was circulated by Angelo Poliziano and paraphrased by Ronsard. Bion's boy was much younger, however, in keeping with the emphasis in "March" on youth, yet Spenser's version is more sexually suggestive than Bion's (although not quite approaching the eroticism of Catullus's verse), a fitting revision that yokes burgeoning adolescence with the coming of Spring.¹²⁸ Thus by turns, the world of Spenser's pastoral is a space of resistance, undiscovered "secrets," ironic humility, and experimental newness. It is a world inhabited by young poets whose verse breaks new ground, thus providing a foundation for aesthetic "newness" in Elizabethan lyric poetry.

Neoteric Revision

In advertising itself as the medium the young, Spenser's neoteric poetry labors to transform older, traditional forms, yet these forms are rejected with a lighter irony than Catullus's scornful attacks on those of his contemporaries who embraced traditional forms. There is indeed a juxtaposition of "old" poetry and "new poetry" in the *Calendar*. Yet although newness, in one sense, is defined by not being old, it is also a quality that relies on what has come before. As the fable of "Februarie" brings to light, the experimental style of the *Calendar* relies on an awareness of tradition. The newness therein is an aesthetic that culls material from the ancient masters, poetic style in particular, as Spenser's preoccupation with archaisms makes evident. Yet this unique style points up the mutability of traditional styles in the hands of subsequent generations, taking "new" in the sense of "other than or replacing the former or old; different from that previously existing, known, or used; changed (*OED*)."¹²⁸ Newness, then, is equivalent to change, revision, and transformation.

¹²⁸ William A. Oram, "Editor's Preface to 'March,'" *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, 55.

Spenser claims his style is derived from Chaucer, whom E.K. evokes as *Tityrus* in the very first line of his epistle to Harvey: “And firste of the wordes to speake, I graunt they be something hard, and of most men unused, yet both English, and also used of most excellent Authors and most famous Poetes.”¹²⁹ This working with the style of the ancients serves to emphasize Spenser’s status as a scholar-poet in the manner of Catullus’s Alexandrian models, for as E.K. insists “. . . our Poet hath bene much traveiled and throughly read,” thus “having the sound of those auncient Poetes still ringing in his eares, he mought needes in singing hit out some of theyr tunes.” Spenser’s imitation of what had come before is because of his mastery of the ancients, thus due to his great learning.¹³⁰ The poet’s use of the style of the traditional masters, E.K. argues, brings “great grace and . . . auctoritie to the verse.”¹³¹ Indeed, Chaucerian diction appears to serve a function for Spenser not unlike Callimachean style for Catullus, although both poets likely made use of such stylistic transformation for artistic ambition, rather than merely to lend their verse the gravitas it somehow lacked (as E.K. implies). Whereas Catullus’s adaptation of Hellenistic tradition was a complex one, the classical neoterics were highly educated and bilingual in Greek (Greek being the language of the learned, much like Latin would become for the humanists). Thus, from Callimachus they adopted a stance of learned allusiveness, an obsession with brevity, originality and preciseness of phrase.¹³² The labor Catullus speaks of in *Carmen 116*, “Saepe tibi studioso animo uenante requirens / carmina uti possem uertere Battiadae,”¹³³ suggests he sought to imitate a specifically Alexandrian stylistic model.

¹²⁹ Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” 14.

¹³⁰ Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” 14.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Green, “Introduction,” 10.

¹³³ Though often with studious mind attempting to render / Callimachus’ pregnant verses for your delight.

However, the tradition that E.K. proposes, and the one that is revised by Spenser via his archaic style, is distinctly “English,” while many of his formal models, as his learned audience is undoubtedly aware, are distinctly classical. E.K. ironically asserts that Spenser exhibits a devotion to the purity of his native language. He even implies that Spenser’s unique style improves upon the English language:

this Poete . . . hath laboured to restore, as to theyr rightfull heritage such good and natural English words, as have ben long time out of use and almost cleare disinherited” for the English language (and its poetry) had become “a gallimaufrey or hodgepodge of al other speches.”¹³⁴

Here E.K. both appears to bring bad poetry to task and he insinuates that the *Calender* will follow in the footsteps of Joachim Du Bellay’s *la Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Françoyse*, although E.K.’s playful mimicry of its intention seems more a parody than a reiteration; Spenser’s alleged poetic defense is hardly as straightforward as Du Bellay’s prose, and plays with language (in a national sense) much like rhyme, in that his archaisms or “English-isms” are stylistic devices. E.K. himself points this out in both the “Epistle” and his glosses throughout the *Calender*, remarking that the new poet follows the paths of Theocritus (Greek), Virgil (Latin), Mantuan (Italian), Petrarch (Italian), Boccaccio (Italian), Marot (French), and Sanazarius (Italian), among others. E.K. writes that Spenser’s eclogues were composed “. . . following the example of the best and most auncient Poetes, which devised this kind of wryting, being both so base for the matter, and homely for the manner, at the first to trye theyr habilities.”¹³⁵ Spenser’s small portraits of shepherds piping, then, follow a number of ancient pastoral traditions. His models are themselves composed of a

¹³⁴ Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” 16.

¹³⁵ Spenser, “Epistle,” 18.

“hodgepodge” of other languages, and challenge E.K.’s claim that Spenser is somehow the savior of the English language, unless saving it means making it new by contact with the strange and foreign.

E.K. indeed dances around the formal purpose of Spenser’s Chaucerian revision, claiming these archaisms are the fitting speech of humble shepherds and will at the same time restore the English language to greatness. In so doing, however, what E.K. inevitably highlights is the notion that words (of whatever nationality) are a medium that can serve a multiplicity of purposes. The Roman neoterics played with language in a similar way, although they were unapologetic in their attempts to Grecosize Latin verse rather than purify it, primarily because the attempts of their contemporaries to Latinize Greek verse (in their renderings of traditional Greek epic in Latin) were so badly done. In satirical epigram, for example, Peter Green points out, “[the neoterics] looked back to their own, old, outspoken native tradition, [at the same time] sharpening it with stylish Greek invective borrowed from the iambographer Hipponax and his successors.”¹³⁶ Traditional language thus becomes “new” and therefore “changed” for the classical neoterics as it is transformed into the poet’s paint, so to speak – traditional language and form is blended according to artistic purpose.

Newness, for both Spenser and Catullus, involved selectively revising traditional forms, and this was of course the original project of the Roman neoterics, whose newness relied on a cultivated “distaste for long, sprawling, pompous and cliché-ridden poetry, epic in particular, which they modified [via revision] into the shorter, offbeat version known to us as the epyllion.”¹³⁷ The epic, for Catullus, was a precise reiteration of a tired tradition, as in the case of the *Thebaid* of Antimachus, which was, according to Peter Green, clearly [considered

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Green, “Introduction,” 10.

a typical example of] ‘big book big evil’ syndrome,” and which Catullus refers to, in opposition, as “bloated Antimachus,” enjoyed only by the vulgar.¹³⁸ The Roman neoterics’ artistic, miniaturized epic revisions were also in response to contemporary imitators of Homer such as Ennius, who was known to many as the “second Homer,” and Livius Andronicus, whose translation of the *Odyssey* into Saturnians, was so famously disastrous that Horace rejoiced in how “coarse Saturnian metres faded” when Roman poets turned to Greek models following the Punic Wars.¹³⁹ Cicero referred to the neoterics as “praise-singers of Euphorion” precisely for their dismissal of the work of Ennius, whose *Annales*, in hexameters, laid the foundation for Virgil’s *Aeneid* by framing the Trojan War as a myth of origins for the Roman people. (Euphorion was an Alexandrian poet and slightly later contemporary of Callimachus.)

As if culled from the aesthetic rebellion initiated by his poet-ancestors, Catullus’s preference for quality over quantity is a topos in his work that demonstrates his adaptation of Alexandrian values. In *Carmen* 22, he criticizes a poet known for excessive length and inadequate substance:

Suffenus iste . . .
 homo est uenustus et dicax et urbanus,
 idemque longe plurimos facit uersus.
 puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura
 perscripta . . .¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸Green, “Antimachus” from “Glossary,” 273.

¹³⁹ See Horace *Epist* 2.1.158-160.

¹⁴⁰ That Suffenus / [He] is a delightful fellow, witty, quite urbane, / and so prolific, number one for churned-out verse - / ten-thousand lines, I reckon - could be more - / he’s written . . .

Suffenus apparently prefers to write on royal papyrus rather than the usual palimpsest, although it fails to improve the quality of his verse:

haec cum legas tu, bellus ille et urbanus
Suffenus unus caprimulgus aut fossor
rursus uidetur: tantum abhorret ac mutat.¹⁴¹

In person, Suffenus is apparently quite well-spoken and witty, yet his wit transforms into something else entirely in his poetry:

idem infaceto est infacetior rure,
simul poemata, attigit, neque idem umquam
aeque est beatus ac poema cum scribit:
tam gaudet in se tamque se ipse miratur.¹⁴²

In spite of the critical tone of these lines, Catullus (writing to his friend Varus) uses the situation of poor Suffenus to demonstrate the perils of over-writing, so to speak. His mean-spiritedness is ironic (you get a sense that Suffenus is not a bad fellow), yet Suffenus is held up primarily as an illustration of what to avoid while composing poetry:

nimirum idem omnes fallimur, neque est quisquam
quem non in aliqua re uidere Suffenum
possis. . .¹⁴³

Neoteric writers, Catullus warns, should pay closer attention to poetic artistry rather than the length of their verse – as these practitioners of rather exhausted epic forms have

¹⁴¹ But when you *read* it, then that same smart urbane man / Suffenus seems a country lout, clod, clown, / he's so remote from what he was, *so* changed.

¹⁴² He comes on hicker than a backwoods hick / the minute he tries a poem – yet this guy / is never so happy as when composing verse, / thinks he's so marvelous, such a real fly boy.

¹⁴³ Ah well, we all make that mistake – there's not / one of us whome you can't in some small way / see as Suffenus . . .

demonstrated. In keeping with his Alexandrian project, Catullus valorizes epic revision and specifically miniaturization as a model for good poetry. In his characteristically defiant manner, he drives home this point via juxtaposition; for one can only truly understand the values of neoteric poetry by first understanding the aesthetic to which it stands in opposition.

Yet neoteric poetry, in all its resistance, relies on the stories of Homeric epic for narrative material. Although the Catullus with which we are familiar fails to acknowledge this point, as it would undoubtedly undermine his rejection of contemporary reiterations of traditional epic, the fable of “Februarie” demonstrates Spenser’s awareness that the new and the old must be intertwined in order for the eclogues to have “auctoritie” (although this is an external flourish rather than an internal need – or perhaps both). Here Spenser deviates somewhat from Catullan braggadocio: new poetry cannot thrive without the foundation of the traditional masters, and it is foolish and prideful to suggest otherwise. The placement of these sentiments early in the *Calender* demonstrate Spenser’s awareness that the work of the young is often not taken seriously and not expected to endure in posterity: “Now stands the Brere like a Lord alone, / Puffed up with pryde and vaine pleasaunce: / But all this glee had no continuaunce” (222-3). The fable of “Februarie” warns that new poetry must be backed by scholarship, lest it be dismissed as schoolboy scribblings and perish in the passing fashion of seasons:

For eftsones Winter gan to approche,
The blustering Boreas did enchroche,
And beate upon the solitarie Brere:
For now no succoure was seene him nere.

. . . That nowe upright he can stand no more:

And being downe, is trodde in the durt. (225-8, 234-5).

As if to prove his great learning, Chaucer is often invoked as a source of the new poet's inspiration. In June, Colin claims he learned both style and mode from Chaucer - the elegiac or complaint mode, as well as his stylized rustic language:

The God of shepheards *Tityrus* is dead,

Who taught me homely, as I can, to make.

He, whilst he lived, was the soveraigne head

Of shepheards all, that bene with love ytake:

Well couthe he wayle hys Woes, and lightly slake

The flames, which love within his heard had bredd. (81-88)¹⁴⁴

Colin explains that if only he could claim some of Chaucer's inspiration, "I soone would learne these woods, to wayle my woe, / And teache the trees, their trickling teares to shedde." (95-96), an interesting reference, as Chaucer is a peculiar choice when so many Roman elegists (Tibullus, Propertius) were read so popularly in Spenser's time.¹⁴⁵ This statement about the work of Chaucer, however, may shed light on what Spenser considers successful poetry, and implies that what truly moves the reader is the tragedy of love (which perhaps serves to replace the heroic in these eclogues – the war of young shepherds is a war of the heart, so to speak), and the representation of its loss. What is also significant is that *Tityrus* / *Chaucer* is distinctly referred to as "dead," whereas the poetry of the *Calender* brims with life, youth, and possibility.

¹⁴⁴ Spenser, "June," 112.

¹⁴⁵ Spenser, "June," 113.

For all its dependence on tradition (and scholarship), newness must inevitably stand in opposition to tradition and traditional forms, at the same time that it operates within them (within the pastoral, in this case). Colin's broken pipe at the outset of "Januarye" indicates revision (and in, I would argue, "November" as well). New poetry destroys the traditional shepherd's pipe; thus enacting the death of Chaucer and what has come before, in order to create something new. As we anticipate the coming of Spring, we likewise anticipate that from the destruction of Colin's old pipe, something new will emerge (i.e. Colin will again take up a pipe, but a new one). This is further supported by the Emblem at the close of "Januarye," which E.K. glosses as "notwithstande his extreme passion and lucklesse love, yet leaning on hope, he is some what recomforted."¹⁴⁶ Cuddie boldly defies tradition in "Februarie" and asserts that although in new poetry the old and new come together, the freshness of youth is the inevitable victor, as it builds on the pallor of what has come before. Indeed, the freshness of youth brings a Golden Spring: "For Age and Winter accord full nie, / This chill, that cold, this crooked, that wrye. . . / But my flowring youth is foe to frost" (27-28, 31).¹⁴⁷ And again, "Ah foolish old man, I scorne thy skill, / That wouldest me, my springing youngth to spil" (51-2).¹⁴⁸ In "Februarie," at times the young tree's rhetoric seems to silence the old tree:

Wherefore soone I rede thee, hence remove,
 Least thou the price of my displeasure prove,
 So spake this bold brere with great disdain:
 Little him answered the Oake againe,
 But yieldd, with shame and greefe adawed,

¹⁴⁶ Spenser, "Januarye," 35.

¹⁴⁷ Spenser, "Januarye," 41.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

That of a weede he was overcrawed. (137-142)

The weight and significance of the tradition are never fully dismissed. The young tree dies without the protection of the elder, and even the axe the husbandmen wields is hesitant:

As halfe unwilling to cutte the graine:

Semed, the sencelesse yron dyd feare,

Or to wrong holy eld did forbear.

For it had bene an auncient tree,

Sacred with many a mysteree. (204-8).¹⁴⁹

Newness, then, is not successful merely for its difference, but the “auncient . . . mysteree” it interprets in revision, and its use of what has come before to fashion that difference. What is “old” is the palette of the “new.”

Neoteric Artistry

There is a curious focus on artistry and poetic skill in the *Calender*. The persona Spenser adopts in E.K.’s “Epistle” boldly asserts his own talent, albeit veiled in another’s words. E.K. writes, in the epistle to Harvey, “But doubt not, so soon as his name shall come into the knowledge of men, and his worthines be sounded in the tromp of fame, but that he shall be not onely kiste, but also beloved of all, embraced of the most, and wondred at of the best.”¹⁵⁰ The *Calender*’s characters similarly boast of their artistic potential. The young tree of “Februarie” asserts its ability to bear “Colours meete to clothe a mayden Queene.” (132) He proclaims that his skill is self-evident in the colorful artistry of his blossoms: “Seest, how fresh my flowers bene spredde, / Dyed in Lilly white, and Cremsin redde, / With Leaves

¹⁴⁹ Spenser, “Februarie,” 47.

¹⁵⁰ Spenser (E.K.), “Epistle,” 13.

engrained in lusty greene” (129-131).¹⁵¹ Cuddie, standing outside the tale, nevertheless demonstrates the same brash confidence as the young tree, as Thenot responds that young shepherds “thinken to be Lords of the yeare” (41).¹⁵² Likewise, in “Aprill,” Hobbinoll praises Colin’s finely crafted verses above all others. Thenot inquires why Hobbinoll is so upset that such a young shepherd, who is obviously not in control of his emotions, has stopped piping: “What is he for a Ladde, you so lament? . . . And hath he skill to make so excellent, / Yet hath so little skill to brydle love?” (17, 19-20).¹⁵³ In response, and as a demonstration of Colin’s great skill, Hobbinoll recites a

. . . laye
 Of fayre *Elisa*, Queene of shepheardes all:
 Which once he made, as by a spring he laye,
 And tuned it unto the Waters fall. (33-36)¹⁵⁴

The verses serve to showcase Colin’s artistry, his alignment with poetic inspiration (represented in the trope of a spring) and his potential to serve his patron. Colin has such talent, apparently, that Hobbinoll tells him in “June” that *Calliope* and the other muses leave their place by the fountain, where they have been composing poetry, to pursue the sound of his “oaten pype”:

[They] Renne after hastely thy silver sound.
 But when they came, where thou thy skill didst showe,
 They drewe aback, as halfe with shame confound,
 Shepheard to see, them in theyr art outgoe. (61-64)¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Spenser, “Februarie,” 44.

¹⁵² Spenser, “Februarie” 4

¹⁵³ Spenser, “Aprill,” 71.

¹⁵⁴ Spenser, “Aprill,” 72.

Here Colin's art is represented as exceeding the muses' own verse. His talent shames them, as does his humble guise – a stance in keeping with his feigned humility, set against an excessive self-compliment from a poet-friend (and fellow shepherd).

The *Calender's* shepherds repeatedly assert the fine artistry of their verse and of Colin's. Whereas such boasting might be easily dismissed as Spenser's attempt to establish himself in a literary community or to secure the patronage of the Queen, it is important to recognize that the erudition and great craftsmanship of neoteric verse are significant elements of both the classical and Elizabethan neoteric aesthetic, for artistry functions as an implicit defense of both the poem at hand and of poetry itself. Returning to Catullus's devotion to a Callimachean programme as set forth in the prologue to the *Aetia*, take particular note of Callimachus's reference to artistry:

. . . let the crane, delighting in the blood of the Pygmies, {fly far} from Egypt to the land of the Thracians and let the Massagetae shoot their arrows from a great distance at {the Medes}; but poems are sweeter for being short. Begone, you baneful race of Jealousy! hereafter judge poetry by {the canons} of art, and not by the Persian chain, nor look to me for a song loudly resounding. It is not mine to thunder; that belongs to Zeus.¹⁵⁶

If poetry is to be judged “by [the canons] of art,” then its erudition and artistry are essential. Furthermore, in this passage it becomes apparent that the necessary brevity heralded by Callimachus and the classical neoterics functions to serve this focus on fine craftsmanship. For, if each line is a tremendous labor for the poet, then how does one enact such precise labor in thousands of lines, within the short span of a lifetime? If we consider Catullus's

¹⁵⁵ Spenser, “June,” 111.

¹⁵⁶ Callimachus, *Aetia* I.1.21, in *Aetia, Iambi, Lyric poems, Hecale, minor epic and elegiac poems, fragments of epigrams, fragments of uncertain location*, trans. Contantine Athanasius Trypanis (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1958).

praise of the brevity of Cinna's *Smyrna*, for example, and take at face value that the poem took nine years to compose and is yet a "small monument" (the poem is lost, so we don't know the actual length, although it was certainly considered an epyllion), then it appears Cinna composed perhaps a line or two every month. Although it is likely that Catullus is exaggerating, as he is known to do, nevertheless the poem's artistry is much more significant than its length.

The eclogues focused on Colin (Januarye, Aprill, June, August, November and December) are especially concerned with a display of formal complexity.¹⁵⁷ "Aprill" is a particularly fine example of the self-referential nature of neoteric style, in the sense that it is highly imagistic and ornate, and depicts an allegory of artistic creation. The multi-layered narrative of *Carmen 64* is similarly focused on "making" in its portrayal of a sequence of visual art objects that the reader discovers (rather late in the narrative) are in themselves in the process of creation, as they are analogous, in part, to the stories told by the weaving spindles of the Fates. The poem itself might be considered a quasi-Arcadian pastoral in its reminiscence of a lost age:

O nimis potato saeculorum tempore nati

heroes, saluete, deum genus! O bona matrum

progenies, saluete iter < um saluete bonarum!>

uos ego saepe, meo uos carmine compellabo. (22-23b, 24)¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ William Oram writes, The [*Calender*] contains an anthology of verse forms (thirteen in the eclogues and two more in the introductory "To His Booke" and the coda), most of which Spenser was never to use again. Some of them, like the sestina in "August" (the first published in English) or the elaborate stanzas of "Aprill and "November," are recognizably Continental; others, like the humble sixain (*ababcc*) that Colin employs in "Januarye" and "December," are common English stanzas; and still others, like the rough four-beat meters of "February," "Maye," and "September" or the rhymes of "March," look back to native fourteenth and fifteenth century practice." *Edmund Spenser*, ed. Arthur Kinney, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997, 25.

¹⁵⁸ O born in those days most missed through later ages, / you heroes, hail, gods' scions! noble offspring / of noble women, all hail! I shall have occasion / to invoke you in the course of my poem.

This passage serves the tone of loss, yet here Catullus respectfully hails the very characters that serve as his medium, before he asserts the latter point with what might be termed pomposity. What follows is elaborately descriptive: A portrait of Peleus's seat "fulgenti splendent auro atque argento"¹⁵⁹ (44); the famous coverlet which depicts Ariadne's lament; the story of Theseus; assorted figures in the midst of a Dionysian frenzy (50-265); and finally, a "catalogue" of the Gods who attended the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, each bearing the gifts of the natural world. Chiron brings gifts of the forest and arrangements of flowers (278-289), and Peníos brings uprooted beeches, laurel, and trees of poplar and cypress (285-292). What follows upends the notion of time entirely, as the Fates spin their simultaneously prophetic, destructive, and analeptic weaving or "crafting" – as figures created by the poet, who are characters in the poem, yet serve in their own aesthetic creation.

Spenser's "Aprill" is a song of skillful poetic creation, with the image of Elisa functioning as a significant aesthetic hand who participates in the process of her own making. At the same time, with the poet's imperative voice asserting his own mastery over that image. "Aprill" is also interestingly concerned with epic, as it provides both an epic invocation (to the muses) and a pastoral catalogue. Colin calls upon assistance for his song from a medley of pastoral muses:

Ye daynty Nymphs, that in this blessed Brooke
do bathe your brest,
For sake your watry bowres, and hether looke,
at my request:

¹⁵⁹ a shining delight of gold and silver.

And eke you Virgins, that on *Parnasse* dwell,
 Whence floweth *Helicon* the learned well,
 Helpe me to blaze
 Her worthy praise,
 Which in her sex doth all excell. (37-45).¹⁶⁰

Colin is quite promptly answered by a triumph of inspiration, as he sees “*Calliope* [goddess of poetical invention] speede her to the place, / where my Goddesse shines” (100-101).¹⁶¹ The epic frame serves two purposes: to present the poet’s skill to the Queen; and to point up Spenser’s poetic potential by showcasing his ability. “Helpe *me* to blaze / Her worthy praise” is a self-referential maneuver. Here, in this mini-epic, this story within a story, Spenser advertises his ability to serve his sovereign and assist in the construction of nationhood.

Like many of Spenser’s neoteric works, “Aprill” is an allegory of creation whose subject is the artistic process. Thus, the poet makes use of his great skill (which he ostentatiously advertises), moved by allegedly divine inspiration. Colin’s imperative commands engender a portrait of Elisa bedecked with a catalogue of flowers¹⁶² by “ye shepheardes daughters” (127), who perform the poetic process, as they “adorne her grace.” (130):

Bring hether the Pincke and purple Cullambine,
 with Gelliflowers:
 Bring coronations, and sops in wine,

¹⁶⁰ Spenser, “Aprill,” 72.

¹⁶¹ Spenser, “Aprill,” 74.

¹⁶² Gordon Campbell writes, “Spenser’s catalogues of flowers derive from classical pastoral, and include the conventions of presenting flowers to one’s beloved (Theocritus II.45, 56-7; Virgil’s *Eclogues* 2.45-50; cf *SC*, *Aprill* 136-44), adorning the grave with flowers . . . and the tempting garden of *Muiopotmos* (187-200). A related botanical list is the catalogue of trees at *FQ* I.i.8-9.” See “Catalogue” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al, Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 137.

worne of Paramoures.

Strowe me the ground with Daffadowndillies,

And Cowslips, and Kingcups, and loved Lillies:

The pretie Pawnce,

And the Chevisaunce,

Shall match with the fayre flower Delice. (136-144).¹⁶³

As Rambuss reminds us, “flowers are a conventional Renaissance figure for the display of eloquence and learning.”¹⁶⁴ Elisa is thus represented as an art-object crafted by a skilled and learned poet, and subsequently ornamented by his other creations (the shepherdes daughters) who are commanded (“Bring hether,” “Bring coronations,” and “Strowe me the ground”) to create vicariously a vivid icon of the Queen:

Upon her head a Cremosin coronet,

With Damaske roses and Daffadillies set:

Bayleaves betweene,

And Primroses greene

Embellish the sweete Violet. (59-63)¹⁶⁵

After she is artistically stylized and properly embellished, Colin, again in the imperative voice, bids his poetic creation to arise, for the first time, as a newly fashioned creation (which is, at the same time, a “thing” of poetry): “Now ryse up *Elisa*, decked as thou art, / in royall array.” (144-145).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Spenser, “Aprill,” 76.

¹⁶⁴ Rambuss, “The Secretary’s Study,” 313.

¹⁶⁵ Spenser, “Aprill,” 73.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Although Spenser's catalogue of floral ornamentation poetically engenders the portrait of the Queen in "Aprill," this representation of Elisa, according to the poet, was engendered by the union of Syrinx and Pan, an interesting reference in light of Elisa's participation with the poet in the process of making:

For shee is Syrinx daughter without spotte,
Which Pan the shepheards God of her begot:
So sprong her grace
Of heavenly race

No mortall blemishe may her blotte. (50-54)

The story of Pan and Syrinx is related in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* I.710. Pan pursues and attempts to rape Syrinx, but she calls out to Diana for assistance. The goddess relents, and Syrinx is transformed into water. Pan subsequently fashions a lute out of the reeds that spring from this water – a shepherds pipe. Spenser's invocation of this story highlights both Elizabeth's sexual purity, as Elisa is immaculately conceived as the source of poetic inspiration, and the instrument that enables the poet to "play" her song. Furthermore, as Patrick Cullen explains, "As the 'child' of Pan and Syrinx [explained by E.K. in his gloss], Elisa is, quite simply, Song; more particularly, pastoral song."¹⁶⁷ Although the crux of Elizabeth's representation in "Aprill" is visual, this attention to sound is significant, for Colin is above all a creator of "songs" on his pipe, which is broken at the outset of Januarye and appears resurrected or re-fashioned in this eclogues. The in-set of Pan and Syrinx also points up Spenser's attention to miniaturization, for in this brief reference to Elisa's origins, the reader is presented with a story (of Pan and Syrinx), within a story (the creation of an icon of Elisa), within a story (the dialogue of Thenot and Hobbinol).

¹⁶⁷ Patrick Cullen, *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1970, 114.

Spenser's advertisement of poetic skill in "Aprill" focuses attention on the "making" of iconic images of Elisa. In turn, the eclogue's narrative of the process of composition refers back to Colin's skill and artistic potential. Elisa is, after all, a crafted "thing" in Spenser's world. The focus on the body of Elisa in "Aprill" (and its creation), David Lee Miller asserts, is an attempt to reconcile the idea of the body of the monarch with the representation of that body. He writes that the representations of both Elisa and Gloriana bring together the body of the queen herself and the idea of an aesthetic creation, which combine to become the visionary form, or image, manifest in the eclogue.¹⁶⁸ His apt notation that "Aprill" is concerned with the work of creation and production is signification here. "Spenser works this into the narrative of his pastoral debut, making "Elisa," queen of shepherds, the fruit of an immaculate union between Pan and Syrinx."¹⁶⁹ (176) The aesthetic form of Elisa is a crafted icon that fills the space opened up by Pan's loss of Syrinx. William Oram writes, "In fact as child of Pan and Syrinx she is identical with the oaten reeds or panpipe that conventionally symbolizes the pastoral poet's ability to compose."¹⁷⁰ Thus, the true creation of "Aprill" is a new pipe to rival Collin's previous one, broken in Januarye. It is essential to understand, however, that the imperative voice of "Aprill" insists on the poet's individuality – his choice of flowers, his artistry, are the matter that truly fashions the representation of Elisa.

Although the discussion of poetry's purpose in "October" might appear to be an attempt to defend the social function of poetry, the focus lingers, neoteric-style, on the unique skills of the poet. The eclogue claims that poetry is the truest art, as it is created by

¹⁶⁸ David Lee Miller, "The Poem's Two Bodies," *PMLA*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Mar., 1986): 170-185.

¹⁶⁹ David Lee Miller "The Poem's Two Bodies," 176.

¹⁷⁰ William Oram, ed., "Introduction to 'Aprill,'" *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1989.)

more than mere skill; poetry is engendered by divine inspiration. “[Poetry is] indede so worthy and commendable an arte: or rather no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both: and poured into the witte by a certain . . . celestiaall inspiration.”¹⁷¹ Pierce claims that although poets may be poor, the significance of poetry is its own reward, for a poet may use his talent to both teach and delight:

. . . the prayse is better, then the price,
 The glory eke much greater than the gayne:
 O what an honor is it, to restraine
 The lust of lawlesse youth with good advice:
 O, pricke them forth with pleasaunce of thy vaine,
 Whereto thou list their trayned willes entice (19-24).

Although young poets may be ambitious, the glory of their art lies not on earthly reward, but instead in the satisfaction of having produced something divinely inspired – some kind of wisdom of their own. However, these eclogues demonstrate a concern with the experimental and a focus on artistic creation that is very much grounded in the real world, in which patronage is withheld, and glory elusive. “October’s” “Argument” purports that the eclogue complains of the “contempt of Poetrie, and the causes thereof,” suggesting the poem might provide a defense of the craft; yet although the eclogue manages to assert poetry’s significance via the poet as *vates*,¹⁷² the place of poetry at court, “O pierlesse Poesye, where is then thy place? / If nor in Princes pallace thou doe sitt” (79-80), and an urging that Colin take up the epic career path, “Abandon then the base and viler clowne . . . And sing of

¹⁷¹ Spenser (E.K.), Argument to “October,” 170.

¹⁷² Cuddies Embleme reads *Agitante calescimus illo etc.*, which Oram glosses in the Yale edition as “part of a line from Ovid *Fasti* 6.5: [there is a god in us and] when he stirs we glow.”

bloody Mars, of wars, of guists,” (37, 38) so his poetry might serve the building of nationhood, “October” is more about the problem of being a poet than a clear defense of poetry itself. And it fails to provide that clear defense precisely because, for Spenser, the *Calender*’s artistry *is* its own defense.

Conclusion: “O Carefull Verse”

In this chapter, I have argued that the layers of personae and gamesmanship within the eclogues radically innovate the pastoral form. A number of poetic devices indicate the *Calender* can be read as a manifesto of Elizabethan neotericism. Spenser makes deliberate use of archaisms, personae, and the trope of secrecy to stylize the eclogues in a way that points up paradox and disjunction. The poet also presents himself (via persona) in a posture of humility that ironically functions to elevate rather than subvert his literary status. Additionally, the aesthetic project of the *Calendar* defiantly insists that neoteric poetry is young verse, written by young poets, and that assertion is established via a dramatic juxtaposition of youth and age. Furthermore, at the same time that he renounces “old poetry,” Spenser boldly revises traditional forms, as he picks and chooses from conventions in order to highlight his erudition, all the while advertising his poetic skill and artistry in an ostentatious manner, and thus fulfilling, in his own way, a distinctly Catullan aesthetic. The chapters that follow will show how Spenserian neotericism is most clearly evident in renderings of finely wrought art-objects and allegories of creation and the artistic process. As a radical neoteric poet concerned with revision, Spenser appears curiously preoccupied with the destruction of art. Although these seemingly antithetical topoi abound in a great number of his shorter poems, and are perhaps best understood in the context of his late poetry (particularly in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*), “November” invites a meditation on the meaning of

such destruction in the context of the *Calender*, as a finely wrought elegy whose subject is loss engaged in the revision of a familiar classical literary character.

In its reflection on the dying year, the poetic excellence of “November” may be held up as the epitome of neoteric design in its unusual treatment of an epic figure, its allusive erudition, formal complexity, and evocative refrain. E.K.’s gloss indicates that Spenser means for us to read it as such: “This AEglogue is made in imitation of Marot his song, which he made upon the death of Loys the frenche Queene. But farre passing his reache, and in myne opinion all other the Eglogues of this booke.”¹⁷³ This is the elegiac form descended from Theocritus’s first *Idyll* and Virgil’s fifth *Eclogue*, expressing grief and a subsequent consolation – evident in the shift of the refrain from “O heauie hearse . . . O carefull verse” to “O happie herse . . . O joyfull verse.” Yet interestingly layered between these repetitions is a voice that insists upon collective mourning: “Let streaming teares be poured out in store” (60). The poet similarly commands his comrades to “Breake we our pypes, that shrild as lowde as Larke (71). The significance of these lines is the way in which they feature the voice of the poet as an all-controlling entity who controls all poetic creation and mourns Dido in a manner that points up her loss (and retreat into oblivion – her erasure), for “Now is time to dye. Nay time was long ygoe” (81). The pipe-breaking indicates revision and also the power of the poet to choose his pipe, in both a formal and topical sense. The impulse to miniaturize is represented in an in-set refrain “Mourne nowe my Muse, now morne with teares besprint (110) . . . Mourne nowe my Muse, now mourne with heauie cheare (151) . . . Cease now my Muse, now case thy sorrowes sourse (171) . . . Ceasse (sic) now my song, my woe now wasted is (201).”

¹⁷³ Spenser (E.K.), “Argument for ‘November,’” 187.

Dido is a familiar figure in Augustan poetry that is most often remembered for her voice. She echoes the lament of Ariadne in a particularly evocative manner. Yet Spenser's revision interestingly renders her voiceless, for his revision of the Dido story is meant to emphasize poetic artistry rather than narrative. Recall that "the lineaments of Callimachean genre [include] generic and tonal variety, digressions within digressions, obsession with the erotic and with female emotions, psychological realism and sentimentality,"¹⁷⁴ and Catullus reiterates this Callimachean aesthetic in his epyllia. The famous lament of Ariadne in *Carmen* 64, which is in turn repeated (or rather borrowed) in Ovid's *Heroides* 15 and in Dido's lament in Book IV of the *Aeneid*, provides an origin for later female complaints in both epic and pastoral poetry. Dido is perhaps the most obvious and well-known link between Virgil and Catullus; thus Spenser's introduction of this character near the end of the *Calender* is significant. Indeed, Virgil's portrayal of Dido is borrowed from *Carmen* 64, and from other poems in the Catullan oeuvre. "At *Aeneid* 6.458, Aeneas, on encountering Dido's silent ghost in the underworld, attempts to explain his abandoning of the Carthaginian queen: *invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi*, [Unwilling, queen, I departed from your shore] borrowing the words of Catullus' lock [from *Carmen* 66]: *invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi*. [Against my will, O Queen, was I parted from your crown then]"¹⁷⁵ The line is quoted nearly verbatim from Catullus's translation of the *Coma Berenices* of Callimachus.¹⁷⁶ Virgil's excessive borrowings from Catullus are in part due to the fact that he ". . . began his career at about the same time of

¹⁷⁴ Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), 160-161. For a fine analysis of a Callimachean aesthetic in the *Amores*, see Donald Lateiner, "Ovid's Homage to Callimachus and Alexandrian Poetic Theory," *Hermes* 106.1 (1978): 188-196.

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin Acosta-Hughes and Susan A. Stephens, *Callimachus in Context: From Plato to the Augustan Poets* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2012), 233.

¹⁷⁶ For a fine analysis of this moment in the *Aeneid*, see R. Drew Griffith, "Catullus' *Coma Berenices* and Aeneas' Farewell to Dido" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 125 (1995), 47-59.

Catullus' death, when the fame of the latter's poems would have been at its height."¹⁷⁷ Yet near the end of the *Calender*, Spenser presents us with a figure that comprises an unquestionable link between Virgil's Dido and the work of Catullus, and then goes on to further innovate the primary characteristic of that borrowing – Ariadne / Dido's voice. In Spenser's revision, Dido is silenced in her death, and her voice is transferred to that of the poet and his display of literary prowess. To further complicate the artistry of this eclogue, the neoteric trope of secrecy reappears as well, for E.K. writes, in the "Argument," "The personage [of Dido] is secrete, and to me altogether unknowen."¹⁷⁸ Thus, this eclogue's evocative and erudite craftsmanship, its destruction of a classical character in a manner that enacts a radical revision, and its clear reference to Catullus, indicate that "November" embodies the "newness" of an Elizabethan neoteric aesthetic, just as it gestures, quite clearly, to the neo-Alexandrianism of Catullus.

¹⁷⁷ Gerard Kilroy, "The dido episode and the sixty-fourth poem of Catullus" *Symbolae Osloenses: Norwegian Journal of Greek and Latin Studies* 44.1 (1969), 48.

¹⁷⁸ Spenser (E.K.), "Argument to 'November,'" 187.

Chapter 3: *Denique Testis*: Murder and Mourning in *Muiopotmos*

currere ducentes subtegmina, currere, fusi.
namque uelat densas praecerpens messor aristas
sole sub ardenti flauentia demetit arua,
Troiuenum infesto prosternet corpora ferro.

currere ducentes subtegmina, currere, fusi.
testis erit magnis uirtutibus unda Scamandri,
quae passim rapido diffunditur Hellesponto,
cuius iter caesis angustans corporum aceruis
alta tepefaciet permixta flumina caede.

currere ducentes subtegmina, currere, fusi
denique testis erit morti quoque reddita praeda,¹⁷⁹
~Catullus, “Song of the Fates,” *Carmen* 64, 352-365

O where shall I finde lamentable cryes,
And mournfull tunes enough my grief to show?
~Spenser, *Muiopotmos*, 411-12

Near the end of *Carmen* 64, the reader is introduced to the original storytellers of Catullus’s narrative, the Fates who weave the mythological history from which the poet culls his craft. In the above passage, Catullus emphasizes the essential figure of a *testis* to the *magnis uirtutibus* of the character Achilles, the progeny of the union of Peleus and Thetis, whose wedding is the alleged subject of Catullus’s poem. The personification of the waters of the Hellespont, however, as that witness, merely underscores the notion that the violent acts described are carried out in a manner unseen, so far-removed from the present experience that they appear covert fictions. Catullus’s readers have heard this story before, but they have never heard it told in this particular manner; thus, the narrative itself is subjugated to its artistic frame. This strategic artistry heightens the ironic affect of the story

¹⁷⁹ *Run, drawing the weft out, run, you spindles!* / Just as a reaper, culling close-packed wheat ears / under a burning sun harvests the umber fields, / so with fierce steel shall he lay low his Trojans. / *Run. drawing the weft out, run, you spindles!* / Witness to his great virtues shall be Scamander’s water, / discharging every way in the swift Hellespont. / He’ll choke its flow with piles of slaughtered bodies, / warm its deep channel with that slaughter’s blood. / *Run, drawing the weft out, run, you spindles!* / Final witness shall be recompense even in death . .

of Achilles, although such irony is veiled in the poem's evocative imagery and the rhythmic and imperative refrain of "currite," in mimicry of the rolling movement of the Fates' spindles.

The portrait of Achilles' alleged valiant deeds (that as readers we are urged to witness) is the *unda Scamandri* that flows red with blood, and this fact sheds a curious light on our remembrance of Achilles' heroism. Whereas the reader knows this story has been told and will be retold for centuries in epic literature, such stories are twice removed from the initial *testis* to which Catullus refers in the above passage – the painted waves that are crafted by the storyteller. In the process of storytelling, the poet also fashions the reader as the witness "at the end of things" or, more properly, witness to the end of things, or to things that are brought to a bloody end by the great strength and hubris of Achilles. As witness, our narrative desire to share in this communal memory is engendered by a highly imagistic, multi-layered, artistic frame, and characterized by a significantly elegiac voice.

The Fates' story, like the poem itself, is a narrative of creation and destruction, and one that, I will argue, resounds in Spenser's *Muiopotmos*. Spenser's ironic and self-conscious retelling of Catullus's story of Achilles shows how Elizabethan neoteric poetry exhibits a preoccupation with visual and formal artistry. The weaving and painting metaphors, and the continual references to art, dressing, and adornment (and the setting within an Eden-esque garden), signify that *Muiopotmos* is a poem whose subject is art and its process. Although Spenser tells the tale of a battle "Betwixt two mighty Ones of great Estate," Clarion and Aragnoll are soon identified as creatures not only generally considered tiny and delicate, but most often associated with art; the butterfly displays his painted wings for our gaze and the spider intricately weaves a web of words designed to ensnare us. These early narrative cues

reveal that the subject of the poem is an aesthetic one, and the miniaturized characters will in turn provide a miniaturization of the epic form.

Muiopotmos is presented within a neoteric frame (as an epyllion), for it opens with an indication that the poem is epic in nature. The poet calls to the tragic Muse to help him fashion a “complaint” concerning the woeful fate of his tiny hero, “sad Clarion” the butterfly:

The Root whereof and tragical Effect,
Vouchsafe, O thou the mournful'st Muse of Nine,
That wont'st the tragick Stage for to direct,
In funeral Complaints and wailful Tine,
Reveal to me, and all the Means detect,
Through which sad Clarion did at last decline
To lowest Wretchedness; and is there then
Such Rancour in the Hearts of mighty Men? (9-16)

In many ways, *Muiopotmos* is a rather overt representation of a “pure” neoteric epyllion, in a formal sense. It is considered a minor epic in that it provides an epic invocation (to the muses), the story of a mythological battle (albeit interpreted and revised), a complaint (the narrator’s insistence on the tragedy of the events of the poem), and the typical self-consciousness and irony that pervades the neoteric genre. Furthermore, Spenser intertwines both form and sound in the poem, thus the boundaries of the genre of “epyllion” are revealed as more fluid than have been previously recognized, as the genre borrows not only from epic, but also elegy, pastoral, and complaint. *Muiopotmos*, then, is a poem about revision, transformation, and new imaginings of narrative, voice, and image.

The poem is also an excellent example of neoteric ornamental style. What is exploited in Spenser's adaptation of a Catullan (rather than a Virgilian or Ovidian) paradigm is a meta-poetic focus on artistic plasticity and attention to the hyper-artificiality of word employed as image. Whereas Catullus, as I will show, appears to celebrate his role as craftsman, stepping effortlessly into his position as the creator of the poem and the master of the reader, Spenser at times expresses a profound anxiety concerning the pseudo-divinity of this role. Literary images used in such a way (as ornamental or stylistic devices) insist on the representation of a verbal image that merely approaches visual art; it is *not quite* a visual image, and this *not quite* existence of the image is made so both by the poet and a reader who is, at the same time, not quite looking. *Muiopotmos* demonstrates how "ornamental" images in neoteric poetry insist on their status as art (thus urging the reader, so to speak, to "look") yet at the same time convey the poet's awareness of the precariousness of their ontological presence. In Elizabethan poetic discourse, the intimation exists that there is something polluted in images created by poets – and this plays out in *Muiopotmos* as a drama of literary iconoclasm – a circuitous narrative of craftsmanship and erasure represented in a series of dynamic images that call attention to their artificiality and subsequently labor to destroy themselves. The ambiguity and mutability of the images, allegorized by the fashioning of art and its violent and bloody murder (the latter represented as a spectacle of destruction), opens up a space in Spenser's poem for the reader to make his or her own meaning. Is Spenser pointing up the artificiality of these images because of their polluted nature, or is Clarion's death somehow a necessary part of the artistic process?

Reading *Muiopotmos* in Context: *The Complaints*

Muiopotmos was entered into the Stationers' Register on 29 December 1590, and debuted in 1591 in the printer Ponsonbie's collection of Spenser's shorter poems, curiously titled *The Complaints*. An explanation of what the Elizabethans would have considered a "complaint" may assist in providing a better understanding of the volume's title. Hugh Maclean explains that "in the Elizabethan era, [a complaint] signifies a plaintive lyric or narrative poem, ordinarily in the form of a monologue, expressing grief for unrequited love, the miscarriage of a speaker's hopes or expectation, or the sorrows of the human condition in a fallen world."¹⁸⁰ Spenser's popularity had reached a peak at that time, and Ponsonbie's edition came on the heels of his printing of the first three books of the *Faerie Queene* in 1590. Obviously trying to capitalize on its popularity, Ponsonbie's preface, "The Printer to the *Gentle Reader*," indicates not only an assumed aristocratic and learned audience, but also the eagerness of that audience for more volumes of Spenser's work: "Since my late setting foorth of the *Faerie Queene*, finding that it hath found a fauorable passage amongst you; I haue sithence endeuoured . . . to get into my handes such smale Poemes of the same Authors [from] sundrie hands, and not easie to bee come by."¹⁸¹ His emphasis on the rare and valuable nature of this particular collection suggests that copies of Spenser's work were in particular demand, so much so that rumors of the existence of his shorter poems had likely reached the ears of his readers. In spite of Ponsonbie's seeming arrangement with

¹⁸⁰ Hugh Maclean, "Complaints," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 177.

¹⁸¹ Edmund Spenser, *Complaints. Containing sundrie small Poemes of the World Vanitie. Whereof the next Page maketh mention*, London: Imprinted for VVilliam Ponsonbie, dwelling in Paules Churchyard at the signe of the Bishops head, 1591, (first edition), The Newberry Library. Print.

Spenser (who doubtless had a hand in the printing of the volume),¹⁸² the printer's competition labored to keep pace. In the same year, John Windet produced a reprinting of *The Shepheard's Calendar*, for John Harison. The volume was dedicated to Sidney and prefaced by the epistle to Harvey, with the seeming intention of calling attention to the "newness" of these shorter poems by the explicitly named (by E.K.) "new Poete."¹⁸³

The *Complaints* have received less critical attention than the volume is due, and certainly less than Spenser's famous epic-romance. Katherine A. Craik has noted that Spenser's short poems have been endowed with a "higher degree of impenetrability than [they] perhaps deserve," because the poems not only resist inclusion in the schematic trajectories of Spenser's laureate career proposed by Richard Helgerson and Patrick Cheney,¹⁸⁴ but also because we misunderstand the neoteric frame of the complaint. Craik writes, "Spenser's particular version of complaint . . . may be more accurately described as a literary mode than a genre since it participates in other seemingly discrete literary kinds."¹⁸⁵ Yet perhaps the Elizabethan understanding of "discrete literary kinds" is more fluid than ours, for Ponsonby's classification indicates he noticed a commonality in tone among the

¹⁸² Maclean explains Spenser's hand in the printing of the volume: "Collations of multiple copies show that the text underwent very careful proofreading during printing; many of the variants suggest that one of the proofreaders was Spenser himself," 178.

¹⁸³ Edmund Spenser, *The shepheards calendar. Conteyning twelue aeglogues proportionable to the twelue monethes. Entitled, To the noble and vertuous gentleman most worthie of all titles, both of learning and chivalry, Maister Philip Sidney*. London: Printed by Iohn Windet, for Iohn Harrison the younger, dwelling in Pater noster Roe, at the signe of the Anger, 1591.

¹⁸⁴ See Patrick Gerard Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993). Cheney's argument refutes the three-phase Virgilian model in which the laureate poet progresses from pastoral to georgic to epic, and instead proposes a four-phase model which moves from pastoral to epic to love lyric to hymn; Richard Helgerson, *Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). Helgerson argues that Spenser saw himself as a laureate poet who followed the nationalistic career path of Virgil, and that this role was in opposition to the popular belief that poetry was affiliated with youthful dalliance and illicit pleasure. For Helgerson there are three types of poets: 1) Amateur poets like Ralieghe who labor to prove their ability; 2) Professional poets like Shakespeare who work for money; and 3) Laureate poets who serve to craft epics of nationhood. Helgerson's work is unique in that he reads within the laureate role a tension between the work of poetry and the work of nationalism.

¹⁸⁵ Katherine A. Craik, "Spenser's 'Complaints' and the New Poet," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 64.1 & 2 (2001), 65.

nine poems. He writes, “[they are] all complaints and meditations of the worlds vanitie; very grave and profitable.” Certainly, one can easily ascertain either the elegiac mode or the manner of the complaint in *The Teares of the Muses*, *The Ruines of Time*, the Du Bellay translation *The Ruines of Rome*, the three sonnet sequences (also translations): *Visions of the Worlds Vanitie*, *Visions of Bellay*, *Visions of Petrarch*, and the two mock-heroic poems *Virgil’s Gnat* and *Muiopotmos*. *Mother Hubbard’s Tale*, however, a beast-fable and political satire, does not appear fit with the tone of its companion pieces. Yet within the flexibility of the mode, the poem might be considered an excellent example of a political “complaint.”

Although there is hardly room for an exhaustive critique of each of the nine poems in this chapter, I would argue that they are each neoteric permutations of different sorts, in part because of their “plaintive” nature. The volume points up other Spenserian complaints: the four complaint eclogues of *The Shepheardes Calender* (“Januarye,” “June,” “November” and “December”), Alcyon’s complaint in *The Daphnaida*, and the complaints of characters such as Arthur, Britomart, Cymoent, Timias, and Scudamour in *The Faerie Queene*, as well as the complaint of Dame Mutabilitie in the *Cantos*.¹⁸⁶ The volume is vastly significant in that it is generally considered an example of Spenser’s “mature” work, and as such promises a fuller understanding of Spenser’s poetic concerns. Maclean writes of the poems’ importance to Spenser studies: “*Complaints* presents a profile of the ground from which the major poems spring,” as well as “evidence of Spenser’s . . . developing capacity to manipulate and combine many genres, with particular but not in every sense primary reference to complaint.”¹⁸⁷ Both Bond and Maclean recognize that Spenser exhibits a fascination with the mode of the

¹⁸⁶ Ronald Bond, “Introduction” to the *Complaints*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al. (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1989), 218-219.

¹⁸⁷ Maclean, “Complaints,” 179.

complaint “from the beginning to the end of his career.”¹⁸⁸ This is evident as early as *A Theatre for Worldlings*, in which Spenser’s translations “took good note of his originals’ sober reminder that in the fallen state, where ‘all is nought but flying vanitie,’ only grief endures (*Theatre* epigram 6, sonnet I).”¹⁸⁹ Spenser’s awareness of the complaint mode as both an oppositional and evocative mechanism informs the set of poetic values inherent in the neoteric paradigm, as the genre is built on the renovation, so to speak, of both lyric and epic. Maclean also aptly identifies that the *Mutabilitie Cantos* “were structured about what is in effect a woman’s complaint raised to a higher power, reflecting the poet’s dismay in a world ‘woxen daily worse,’ governed by ‘the ever-whirling wheele / Of *Change*’ (*FQ* VII vi I, 6).”¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, “The accents of complaint regularly sound in *The Shepheardes Calender* and *FQ* I-III, as well as in the *Complaints* volume itself, which includes plaintive materials of greater range and interest than the publisher’s prefatory summary.”¹⁹¹

Reading *Muiopotmos*: The Critics

Critics seem unsure what to make of *Muiopotmos*, as their interpretations of the poem are so diverse. Spenser’s story of Clarion’s demise has been construed as a moral, spiritual, historical or political allegory, as well as in terms of renaissance aesthetics. Anne Lake Prescott muses that strangely, *Muiopotmos*, “The most likeable poem in the complaints [is yet] the most puzzling.”¹⁹² Ayesha Ramachandran usefully summarizes the multiplicity of interpretations: “[The poem] has been described as an epyllion, a mock-epic, an Aesopian fable, a parable, an allegory of the fall of man, a roman-a-clef of court intrigue, a statement

¹⁸⁸ Bond, “Introduction” to the *Complaints*,” 219.

¹⁸⁹ Maclean, “Complaints,” 178.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Anne Lake Prescott, “Spenser’s shorter poems,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001): 143-161, 148.

of Spenser's Protestant poetics, a satire on envy at court, [and] a declaration of Spenserian aesthetics."¹⁹³ Ramachandran focuses on genre as she identifies a number of analogies between Clarion's garden and Acracia's Bower in Book II of the *Faerie Queene*, and infers that the tropes of sensual excess and erotic abandon are re-inscribed in *Muiopotmos* alongside the tension between Nature and Art, and Romance and Epic. She interprets the setting and allusions to classical and vernacular texts, myth and emblem, as the poem "announcing itself as an allegory." What type of allegory, however, is widely debated. Critics have posited political or topical allegory, theological or moral allegory, and aesthetic allegory (or an allegory of mimesis and poesis).¹⁹⁴ Most recently, critics have proposed some rather interesting historical readings. Thomas Herron provides a creative interpretation as he reads the poem in terms of Irish politics: "*Muiopotmos* fancifully describes a butterfly's . . . fall from grace in a treacherous yet fertile territory [and thus] warns readers about Ireland's rancorous politics, while encouraging further conquest of the country by the English planter-soldier,"¹⁹⁵ and Elizabeth Mazzola interestingly focuses on the similarities in the representation of Clarion's death and the death of Sir Philip Sidney at Zutphen.¹⁹⁶

The ornamental style of Spenser's epyllion is apparent in the poem, as many have recognized. James Morey identifies that *Muiopotmos* is structured around a series of ekphrastic scenes in an order not unlike the panels of a tapestry, just as Chaucer did in his early poems – in particular *The Book of the Duchess*, in which he adapts the Ovidian myth of Ceyx and Alcyone to the story of the Black Knight. Morey reads *Muiopotmos* as a response to

¹⁹³ Ayesha Ramachandran, "Clarion in the Bower of Bliss: Poetry and Politics in Spenser's 'Muiopotmos.'" *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 20 (2005): 77-106, 80.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Herron, "Plucking the Perrot: *Muiopotmos* and Irish Politics," in *Edmund Spenser: New and Renewed Directions*, ed. J.B. Lethbridge (Madison & Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2006, 80-118, 80.

¹⁹⁶ See Elizabeth Mazzola, "Spenser, Sidney, and Second Thoughts: Mythology and Misgivings in *Muiopotmos*," *Sidney Journal* 18.1 (Summer 2000): 57-81.

Chaucer's poem and asserts that Spenser's retelling of Ovidian myth provides thematic clues. Whereas it is perhaps useful to identify the manner in which Spenser departs from Ovid's myth in a revisionary sense, Morey concludes that we are to read Clarion's fall as an example of our own inner depravity.¹⁹⁷ W.L. Renwick also hails from the aesthetic camp, as he calls the poem "a decorative fancy,"¹⁹⁸ a sentiment echoed by Judith Dundas in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. S.K. Heninger finds no correspondence, in the poem, to any "particular event nor . . . malpractice at large in Elizabeth England." The poem is, he asserts, "a fictive narrative that leads us gently and divertingly to well-doing."¹⁹⁹ Craig Rustici²⁰⁰ and Richard Danson Brown²⁰¹ similarly shy away from political readings of the poem and instead focus on renaissance aesthetics and artistic imitation. Anne Lake Prescott notices that the elegiac tone in *Muiopotmos* is used throughout the *Complaints* and thus serves to unify the poetics of the larger collection:

Some have obliged allegories in this story of a malicious spider's brutal murder of a careless butterfly, but their failure to agree upon one dominant meaning has led others to take the poem as more general satire and complaint, a delicate comment on mutability, mortality, and the constrictions put on innocently self-pleasing if imprudent desire by envy, slander, fate, and chance."²⁰²

Prescott's words here are apt in that to look for a "theme" or unifying topos in Spenser's work is to do it a disservice, yet her reading of the manner in which the poem fits into the the *Complaints* overall speaks to the fact that what is framed in this poem is artistry itself.

¹⁹⁷ James Morey, "Spenser's Mythic Adaptations in *Muiopotmos*," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 9 (1988): 49-59.

¹⁹⁸For Renwick's reading, see Edmund Spenser, *Complaints*, ed. W.L. Renwick (London: Scholartis Press, 1928), 249.

¹⁹⁹ S.K. Heninger, Jr., *Sidney and Spenser: The Poet as Maker* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989), 363.

²⁰⁰ Craig Rustici, "*Muiopotmos*: Spenser's 'Complaint' against Aesthetics," *Spenser Studies* 13 (1999): 165-77.

²⁰¹ Brown, *The New Poet: Novelty and Tradition in Spenser's Complaints*, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999), chapter 6.

²⁰² Prescott, "Spenser's shorter poems," 148.

Framing *Muiopotmos*

Both *Carmen 64* and *Muiopotmos* take the guise of an epyllion, a classical kind defined by its revisionary nature. Both poems contain an etiological component. Catullus, on the one hand, presents the “lesson” of *Carmen 64* backwards, so to speak, at least after the narrative has been spun / unraveled in all of its complexities, although from the beginning, the loss of the Golden Age is implied:

sed postquam tellus scelere est imbuta nefando
iustitiamque amnes cupida de mente fugarunt,
perfudere manus fraterno sanguine fraters,
. . . quare nec talis dignantur uisere coetus,
nec se contingi patiuntur lumine claro.²⁰³

Because of our mortal misunderstanding of the line between good and evil, or virtue and intemperance, the Golden Age is denied us and the reader is thus implicated in Achilles’ crimes. The tale of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, within which is embedded a series of sub-narratives that highlight sorrow, betrayal, thwarted desire, and bloodshed, inevitably ends in negation. Here is a story of what may never have been, and what will surely never be. Spenser’s outlook, as the Protestant allegorist who explores the nuances of virtue, is perhaps more optimistic, yet anxious to remind us of the poet’s presence in the poem as creator. Thus we can rephrase in Spenser’s case: Here is a story of what will surely never be (beauty destroyed by corruption and greed) if one pays attention to the details of my narrative.

²⁰³ But after the earth was imbued with unspeakable wrongdoing / and all sent justice packing from their covetous thoughts, / brothers now drenched their hands with the blood of brothers . . . / we alienated the gods’ once-tolerant understanding, which is why they neither deign to be present at such meetings / nor let themselves be exposed to open daylight.

The sound of a classical epyllion is elegiac; thus the “complaint” is implied as the mode of such a form, yet it is difficult to mourn the demise of Clarion, a mere fly ornamented by fancy regalia. When viewed through a Catullan lens, this epic hero in miniature undertakes a task both less than and equivalent to that of the fearless Achilles (less than the mythological hero, equivalent to his representation). Clarion the butterfly is a picture-warrior and static being that, like Catullus’s Achilles, is both story and portrait simultaneously. Spenser’s mock-heroic tone in *Muiopotmos* speaks to Elizabethan poetry’s inability to represent the elegiac voice of the heroic mode in the manner of ancient Rome. It resurrects Achilles with an acknowledgement that the story of his death has been retold and exhausted, thus the vehicle that relates that story must be revised accordingly. The very lightness and comedic tone of the declared tragedy or “Fate” in *Muiopotmos* masks the “lamentable cries” beneath its surface.

What Catullus and Spenser share in a poetic sense is a near-obsessive attention to art, to vision, and to voice. These latter two devices function in tandem, as the images in the poem conjure an elegiac tone. Catullus calls upon the reader to be the *denique testis* of what are arguably represented as Achilles’ crimes. The “testis . . . magnis uirtutibus” are the bloodied waves of the Hellespont, piled with corpses, and the “denique testis” which follows in line 362 can testify not only to bloodshed but the waste of young lives: “alta Polyxenia madefient caede sepulcra; / quae, uelat ancipiti succumbens uictima ferro, / proiciet truncum summisso poplite corpus” (368-70).²⁰⁴ As witnesses to this destruction, mourning both Achilles and Polyxena, and revolted by the image of the latter’s dismembered corpse, it is difficult for us to imagine that “illius egregias uirtutes claraque facta / saepe fatebuntur

²⁰⁴ His high tomb will be drenched with the blood of Polyxena, / and she, like a victim undone by the two-edged steel, / shall slump down there, knees folding, a headless body.

gnatorum in funere matres” (348-9).²⁰⁵ And the odd turn that follows, “quare agite optatos animi coniungite amores. / accipiat coniunx felici foedere diuam, / dedatur cupido iam dudam nupta marito,” (350-3)²⁰⁶ is an abrupt call to celebrate a union which, as the Fates’ song has shown, will serve to bring about not fertility and abundance, but its slaughter; thus, in a self-referential sense, the poem narrates an ironic union of craftsmanship and erasure. The making represented therein (the story of the revelry and excess surrounding the marriage) is the making of what must inevitably pass away (by the hand of their son). Although we are accustomed to celebrating Achilles, the portraits spun by the Fates do not depict his *virtus*, but rather his savagery; thus *Carmen 64*’s frame is contradictory in its inclusiveness, as an epyllion that could also be considered an elegy and an epithalamion. Similarly, the speaker of Spenser’s poem paradoxically claims to be embarking on an epic tale, yet instead presents use with an ironic glorification of the mundane.

Ponsonbie chose to refer to these poems as “complaints,” in keeping with the literary tradition of that poetic kind. Yet what exactly makes the poems in Spenser’s volumes *complaints*? The etymology of the word indicates that a complaint is “the *action* of complaining; the *utterance* of grief, lamentation, grieving . . . an *expression* of grief, a lamentation, a plaint; *outcry against* or because of injury; *representation* of wrong suffered; [and / or] utterance of grievance.”²⁰⁷ The diverse elements of this definition cohere in the action each connotation describes. A complaint is something voiced; it is an expression of perceived injustice, an attempt to represent an emotion that is inextricable from a wrong action against which the speaker stands in opposition; thus it is an oppositional form. In a

²⁰⁵ His virtues preeminent and most noble deeds / mothers shall oftentimes confess at their own sons’ obsequies.

²⁰⁶ Come, therefore, unite the loves your hearts have longed for, / let your consort accept the goddess in happy compact, / and the bride be given at last to her ardent bridegroom.

²⁰⁷ OED, emphasis mine.

poetic sense, a complaint differs from an elegy in that it is a lamentation voiced by a lover who has been unjustly abandoned, often in a cruel or scornful manner. An elegy, alternately, is a lamentation for the dead, although the sense of injustice is not entirely absent, depending on who or what has brought about that death. Both formal paradigms center on expressions of suffering that defy quantification, or attempt to give voice to emotions for which there are no words. Thus, one could infer that the most prominent subject of both the elegy and the complaint is the limits of language, an inference verified by the fact that such poems are often accompanied by an acknowledgement of the failure of words to truly communicate the truth of human experience.

Epyllia, in particular, reference this topos via images of voicelessness and bodily expressions of grief (usually via painful transformation). While both the elegy and the complaint are classifications of particular poetic kinds, they are also common to the pastoral eclogue. Thus, one can speak of the elegiac mode or the manner of the complaint as strategic formal mechanisms. As an epyllion proper is the treatment of a selection from a larger epic narrative, such poems often tell of the injustice of a spurned lover, the desire (and attempt) to regain what is lost, or portray the experience of mourning in what we would consider the traditional sense (grieving a death). In both the elegy and the complaint, lamentation is traditionally directed towards a person or memory; these are stories of unfulfilled desire. However, if one traces the historical development of the epyllion in a classical context (within which both formal models are contained), one finds that such lamentation is directed towards a rather different object of the poet's affection – an object that exists outside the narrative yet is, at the same time, the narrative itself.

The epyllion uses the conventions of the complaint to voice a lament for poetry, for

what it has become, what it ought to be, or for what it once was. As its initial function, established by the Classical neoterics, is to revise history (in epic revision), it must engage with cultural memory, and therefore, in a Spenserian and Humanist context, with allegory. Often, an epyllion identifies a function that poetry should accomplish by complaining of those against whom the poet stands in opposition, a characteristic not unique to sixteenth century writers, who often begin with a defense. Classical writers of epyllion often “complained” about the improper use of the epic genre, thus defending the brevity of their preferred form. This strategy is evident in the prologue to the *Aetia*, as Callimachus extols the virtues of the epyllion:

Often the Telchines grumble at my song—
 Fools who are not friends of the Muse! —
 because I haven’t written a single continuous song
 in thousands of verses on kings or
 [...] heroes, but I [tell my stories] little by little just like a child,
 though the decades of my years are not few. (1-6)²⁰⁸

The answer (which the school of writers against which Callimachus stands should doubtless recognize) is that smallness is synonymous with artistic polish and fine craftsmanship:

Henceforth judge poetic skill by art, not by the Persian chain.
 Don’t search for a huge noisy song to be born from me;
 it is not for me to do the thundering, that’s Zeus’ job.²⁰⁹ (18-20)

Thus, in the sense that it was imagined by Callimachus and later, Catullus and his circle, the

²⁰⁸ Callimachus. “Aetia.” In *Aetia, Iambi, Lyric poems, Hecale, minor epic and elegiac poems, fragments of epigrams, fragments of uncertain location*. Translated by Contantine Athanasius Trypanis. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958.

²⁰⁹ Callimachus. “Aetia.” In *Aetia, Iambi, Lyric poems, Hecale, minor epic and elegiac poems, fragments of epigrams, fragments of uncertain location*. Translated by Contantine Athanasius Trypanis. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958.

epyllion is a counter-genre that “complains” of contemporary epic. In the context of such import, epyllia function to subvert the narrative of their traditional epic selections in order to highlight and draw attention to the problems of poetry. If we consider that this genre represents a group or school of poems about poetry, the lamentation expressed therein is not for a person per se, but rather a set of ideas towards which the poet, like the speaker of the complaint, cannot help but feel ambiguous. In classical terms, whereas traditional epic has been exhausted, the poet yet grieves its loss. Likewise, whereas the Spenserian epyllion seeks to revise the manner in which allegory is implemented, it fears the loss of its inherent idealism – the failure of the allegorical image as a vehicle for truth, or the image as a text that can be read. The neoterics strive to critique the concept of poetry and even language itself, which, in its relation between signifier and signified, is always, essentially, allegorical.

Dressing the “Flie”

To call attention to the crafted-ness of the poem, Spenser uses the trope of “dressing.” Spenser employs, at the outset, a description of the butterfly’s armor that alludes to the perhaps most famous ekphrasis (a work of art in verbal form) in epic history – the shield of Achilles. In doing so, he conjures the hero’s grief at the death of Patroclus (which precedes the initial ekphrasis in the *Iliad*) and his intemperate rage in the battle that follows – thus the story serves the elegiac voice, the precedent of which is set early on in the poem by Ariadne’s lament. Yet Spenser’s tale is not a traditional epic, and the poet’s voice lightly, luxuriantly and pointedly refers to this ornamented fly as a caricature:

His breastplate first, that was of substance pure,
Before his noble heart he firmly bound,
That mought his life from yron death assure,

And ward his gentle corpses from cruell wound:

For it by arte was framed, to endure

The bit of balefull steele and bitter stownd,

No less than that, which *Vulcane* made to sheild

Achilles life from fate of *Troyan* field. (57-64)

The digression continues to include the additional accoutrements of Clarion's armor (including his decorative wings) and extends for several more stanzas, yet this first introduction to Spenser's butterfly is telling. Clarion's armor is "No less than" that of Achilles, although we know it is decidedly less than that of Achilles in a number of ways. The narrative here, as the reader is acutely aware from the poem's context, is a hyperbolic projection of heroic regalia onto a tiny "Flie," as Clarion is described no less than eight times in the course of the poem. He is "of . . . the race of silver-winged Flies" (17); "the fresh yong flie" (33); "this flie [who] outstretch[es] his fearefull hornes" (87); "the gorgeous Flie" (109); "unhappie happie Flie" (234); "this Flie so maliced [by Aragnoll]" (257); "the foolish Flie" (389); and "the fond Flie entangled" (425).

If neoteric poetry is poetry about craftsmanship, then the notion that its primary audience is composed of readers who are themselves craftsmen is implicit in its self-referential stylistic features, just as a coterie of aristocratic readers is implied in the extravagance of its visual affect. Neoteric poetry is a display of literary prowess that demands attention to its rhetorical polish and status as poetry, yet it is meant to be "seen" the reader, thus its often hyper-visual nature. Among the first expressions of this awareness of an audience of both poets and literary aficionados in Spenser's work specifically is evident in his first debut as the new Poete. In the prefatory epistle to *The Shepheardes Calender*, E.K. refers to

a set of stylistic idiosyncrasies in which the poem is framed as an art-object from which the reader experiences a certain detachment. The new poetry (in this case, Spenser's) accomplishes this objective by calling attention to the way in which poetry is made. The reader is directed to an awareness that "new" verse is created from the materials of the erudite, truly known only to the learned, and transposed via poetic voice from word to image:

. . . I am of the opinion, and eke the best learned are of the lyke, that those auncient solemne wordes are a great *ornament*, both in . . . labouring to set forth in hys worke an eternall *image* of antiquitie, and [in] carefully discoursing matters of grauitie and importaunce.²¹⁰

E.K.'s presence as readerly guide (reminding us the poetic "ornament" and "image" is composed, after all, of words) is a device that shifts the reader's frame of reference from the narrative to its commentary, which at times comes to dominate the poem. E.K. is difficult to ignore. He insists that in order to understand the weighty matters set forth in the *Calender*, we must pay attention to its style – to the manner in which the poet chooses his words and figures ("auncient solemne wordes"), and particularly to the way rustic (archaic) and polished (high style)²¹¹ – language function symbiotically (a paradox that indicates the poet's skill). Spenserian style, or more properly, Spenser's neoteric style, makes use of antiquarianism as ornament, the practice of which lends "grauitie" and "auctoritie" to this new type of verse.

The word "ornament" is also significant in the above passage, as it implies the performative - something 'put on' as a dressing or decoration for the purpose of spectacle, something trivial or peripheral. Reading E.K.'s reference to ornamental diction as indicative

²¹⁰ Spenser, "Epistle," 15.

²¹¹ For more on "high style," see David Wilson-Okamura, *Spenser's International Style* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2014).

of a stylistics of ornamentation, we can then infer that neoteric style makes use of the ornamental to highlight both art and artistry in such a way that the process of art is framed as the subject of the poem, thus the reader occupies a position separate from the narrative experience. According to Patricia Fumerton, style is a process that involves “the urge to dismember,” for “to turn life into art is to take life apart and select only the fragments that are best.”²¹² What is fragmentary for Spenser – the verbal bits and pieces – are re-assembled into an “eternall image,” as the new poetry asserts its place in the literary canon. Neoteric style, then, involves negation and display, erasure and creation (often inverted, as we shall see), for in the impulse to dismember, the poet must reconstruct a new and better cohesive whole, and so craftsmanship in regards to style can more properly be described as the urge to dismember and selectively reassemble. However, in this case, what is often lost in the process is our suspension of disbelief, to use Coleridge’s phrase anachronistically, for as readers, our attention is continually transferred from the narrative to the narrator, and thus inevitably to the poem as art. In this way, the poet invites us to step into his illusions while at the same time forcing us to acknowledge their artificiality. We thus view the poem through a glass darkly, in the manner of allegory, opposite a gap that is both bridged and obscured by the presence of the poet. In our distance from the poem, we are presented with a performance of craftsmanship. Yet it is precisely this vision of the world that is meant to serve as a vehicle to convey something like truth – and its stylistic artificiality and transformational capacity defines such a poetics as progressive, forward, avante-garde, or “new.”

²¹² Fumerton, 25.

A Theatre For Worldlings: Murderous Birth

In the neoteric project's embrace of fragmentation, Spenser at times appears to grapple with the problem of the poetic ambiguity inherent in image-making, particularly in the face of a theology that declared such decadence and aesthetic ornamentation idolatrous. This concern with the doctrine of literary iconoclasm begins quite early in Spenser's career. His preoccupation with the problematic intersection of the visual and the verbal, sign and referent, was first manifest in a series of translations he prepared for Jan van der Noot's *A theatre wherein be represented as wel the miseries & calamities that follow the voluptuous worldlings as also the greate ioyes and plesures which the faithfull do enioy. An argument both profitable and delectable, to all that sincerely loue the word of God* (1569) while still a teenager. Andrew Hadfield writes of *A Theatre*,

This combination of text and image was pioneering in conception, and the form of *A Theatre* undoubtedly had an influence on Spenser's first major poem, *The Shepheardes Calendar*, a work that, like van der Noot's, was multi-layered in style and conception, and that was eager to highlight its careful combination of different traditions and translations. As has often been pointed out, Spenser's imagination was notably visual in style.²¹³

In Van der Noot's volume, each of Spenser's Petrarchan revisions is accompanied by a woodcut illustration that reinforces the narrative of each image's demise in a two-part schema; as the poem's speaker describes the image and its fall, the accompanying woodcut supplements that description with a before/after portrayal. Spenser's sequence functions as a preface that rises in gradual crescendo to set the tone for Van der Noot's radical Protestant

²¹³ Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 42.

polemic. In the subsequent move from Petrarch to Du Bellay, the affect shifts from the auditory to the visual, representing increasingly complex allegorical (and increasingly static) images in the movement from the “Epigrams” to the “Sonets.”

In spite of the poems’ function as iconoclastic narratives, the Petrarchan sequence in particular suggests an ambiguity concerning the destruction of the images presented. The first begins with the image of a hind, “So faire as mought the greatest God delite” pursued and murdered by hounds, a fate the narrator laments: “and thus Cruell death vanquishing so noble beautie” (Epigram 1). The next presents a finely crafted ship “Made all of Heben and white Iuorie, / The sailes of Golde, of Silke the tackle were” destroyed on a rock by the sudden appearance of a storm, and once again the narrator expresses his grief:

O great misfortune, O great grieve, I say,

Thus in one moment to see lost and drownde

So great riches, as lyke can not be founde. (Epigram 2)

The third epigram portrays a Laurel tree filled with birds singing such beautiful music that the narrator claims “My sprites were rausht with these pleasures there[...].” Similarly, the tree’s subsequent destruction by lightning causes the speaker “much and euer to complaine.”

The grief expressed over the destruction of these images is particular to the narrator of Petrarch’s dream-visions and the creator of images for the reader (the assumed poet). The poet stands in as the implied speaker who mourns the loss of such beauty. Following the cue of the laurel tree and the songs therein, the fourth epigram likewise shifts the narrative trajectory to consider the act of making as it alludes to poetic inspiration in its representation of a spring, alongside of which (and accompanied by the muses and a gathering of pastoral nymphs) is perched a clearly identifiable poet and perhaps early permutation of Colin Clout:

The homely Shepherde, nor th[...] ruder cloune,
But many M[...]ses, and the Nymphes withall,
That sweetely in accorde did tune their voice
Vnto the g[...]ntle sounding of the waters fall.

The affect of the speaker is most pronounced in this particular epigram – his delight at the fountain or “spring” of inspiration (“The sight wherof dyd make my heart reioyce”), which he calls his “chiefe delight,” and the pain he experiences as the Spring is literally devoured by the earth. This loss, he claims, “yet agreues my heart euen to this houre,” the perpetuity of affect functioning to highlight the poet’s grief.

The speaker’s grief is less pronounced in the du Bellay sequence, although the theme of destruction remains the same. Sonnet 10 of that sequence similarly relates, in first person, a description of a pastoral fount, this time defiled by “a naked rout of Faunes / With hideous cry” (11-12):

I saw a fresh spring rise out of a rocke,
Clere as a Christall against the Sunny beames,
The bottome yellow like the shining land,
That golden Pactol driues vpon the plaine.
It seemed that arte and nature striued to ioyne

There in one place all pleasures of the eye. (1-6)

Spenser often portrays such images, in which “arte and nature” come together and are subsequently destroyed, in the *Faerie Queene*. Guyon’s destruction of Acrasia’s Bower in Book II and the rape of Hellenore (by satyrs) in Book III are familiar examples. Hadfield

reads this moment in the du Bellay sequence as a “reflection on tyrannous invasion and the pains of exile,” a strange formulation in that *A Theatre* was published years before Spenser’s departure for Ireland. Hadfield claims, however, that such “pains of exile,” which infused this genre of “muted apocalypse,” were vicariously experienced by Spenser in response to Van der Noot’s situation as part of the sophisticated, cosmopolitan culture of the Dutch and French immigrants who had recently come to live in the centre of the English capital,” an odd extrapolation of Van der Noot’s concerns as a means of explaining Spenser’s poetic. However, what Hadfield rightly identifies is that “The description of the spring proving alluring to ‘all pleasures of the eye’ prefigures Spenser’s exploration of the problem of seductive delights of the visual imagination . . . one of the key debates throughout post-Reformation Europe.”²¹⁴

Van der Noot’s objective, to represent iconoclasm via religious allegory, is understood quite clearly by the reader (particularly after his preface to the English version, which hyperbolically praises Elizabeth’s Protestantism) but is curiously at odds with Spenser’s objective. The idolatry of the old faith must be destroyed in order for the new Protestantism to take hold, and significant to that process is the role of the reader as an interpreter of biblical truth. However, Spenser’s expression of grief over the destruction of verbal images tells a quite different story, albeit in the disguise of a transposition of the medieval *ubi sunt* topos. The speaker mourns the loss of these images rather than praising their destruction, and the consequence is poetic as well as theological: the things of the world must pass away because of their vanity. Spenser places, alongside this narrative of the fall of idolatry, a story of the poet’s fall from grace for a failure unrecognized – unless we are to read the images’ destruction as a reconsideration of poetic ambition. Nevertheless, the

²¹⁴ Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012, 46.

ambiguity points up an anxiety particular to the act of making, for as the poetic images are destroyed, the *res* fails as a vehicle for truth and the spring of inspiration is swallowed (literally in the narrative) by the earth and the progression of time.

The significance of the demise of the Phoenix in Epigram 5 intimates that perhaps something new and transcendent will rise from the ashes of these earlier destructions, as such destruction will function as a literary-theological purging, yet the Phoenix appears to indicate negation rather than rebirth. Alarmed by the sight of the “deuoured” spring, the Phoenix enacts a self-destruction that is to become a motif in Spenser’s work – that of the image that is not merely destroyed, but destroys itself:

What say I more? Eche thing at length we see

Doth passe away: the Phoenix there, alas,

Spying the tree destroyde, the water dride,

Himselfe smote with his beake, as in disdaine,

And so forthwith in great despite he dide.

For pitie and loue my heart yet burnes in paine[. . .] (Epigram 5)

The rebirth of the Phoenix is markedly absent in the poem, although implied. What rises from the ashes of these broken images, then, is not something new that will soar (a new poetry, a new flight, the new poet or, more traditionally, salvation), but rather a bird who self-destructs when confronted with things that “doth passe away.” The speaker’s voice intrudes, as before, in the final line, expressing lamentation over these events. As the sequence moves to Epigram 6, we again raise our hopes that something new might arise from the destruction of these images, yet are again denied the satisfaction and left to witness an image that extends the notion of the death of poetry in the corruption of a muse-like

figure: a fair, proud, scornful, Petrarchan mistress-esque lady clad in glittering garment, shrouded by a dark cloud with a stinging serpent at her heel. Our lament concerning this loss is thinly comforted by assurances of her salvation and the constancy of mutability:

And well assurde she mounted vp to ioy.

Alas in earth so nothing doth endure

But bitter grieve that dothe our hearts anoy. (Epigram 6)

Although we are given a sense that the destruction of these images is somehow necessary, the sorrow expressed by the poet concerning their loss is profound. We are left with the certainty that iconoclasm must persist, robbing the visual image of its theological import and transforming it into a mere element of poetic design. The poet, however, perpetually mourns this loss.

We can infer that this tendency to frame complaints about the nature of poetry in the representation of visual images that ambiguously represent both truth and its absence continues throughout Spenser's career, as the young poet's work on Van der Noot's volume took place during his formative years. Spenser experiments with the communication of this "bitter grieve" in lighter tones in *The Shepheardes Calender*, and carries out a number of episodic dramas in *The Faerie Queene* in which beauty and deceit converge in an allegorical image or character that must be slain by a hero of virtue. The height of this iconoclastic drama, however, is concentrated in his shorter poems, particularly in *The Complaints*.

The Poet-Creator and Guide

In *Carmen 64* the poet serves as our guide in a quasi-allegorical journey, manipulating the reader's perception. An example of the way the reader as spectator is managed in *Carmen 64* first appears in a frame that stands as the precedent of many subsequent indications that

we should pay attention to art in the poem. The manner in which Catullus begins the narrative, with the insertion of “dicuntur” alongside an elaborate description of the setting, implies an auditory experience of storytelling: “Peliaco quondam prognatae uertice pinus / dicuntur liquidas Neptuni nasse per undas/ Phasidos ad fluctus et fines Aeeteos.”²¹⁵ Yet the poet quickly shifts our attention from the song of the rhapsode to the mind’s eye, as we enter a colorful scene dominated by vivid water images and portraits of sea-nymphs rising from the waves.

Following this shift from sound to sight, the poet manipulates our frame of reference as he interjects with a narrative reminiscence (a seeming personal reflection) in a direct address to Peleus, one of the characters in his story and literally, a device of the poet’s own making: “tene Thetis tenuit pulcerrima Nereine? / tene suam Tethys concessit ducere neptem, / Oceanusque, mari totum qui amplectitur orbem?” (28-30).²¹⁶ The poet addressing his own art in this fashion serves to remind the reader of his presence as master of a finely polished rhetorical piece, its polish reinforced by the witty shine of “tene Thetis tenuit” which opens the address.²¹⁷

Although as “neoteric readers” of this “heroic” version of history we yearn for what has been lost, the ethics of the Golden world are repeatedly called into question, as if the poet is examining his role as the mouthpiece of a selective history that may not be quite as heroic as it is oft-represented. For example, the idyllic water-images that dominate the poem’s first frame are shortly revealed to be a deceit. As Julia Haig Gaisser relates, “we seem

²¹⁵ Once on a time pine trees from Pelion’s summit / are said to have swum through Neptune’s crystal ripples.

²¹⁶ Did Thetis, most lovely of Nereids, then embrace you? / Did Tethys permit you to wed her granddaughter, / and Ocean, who rings the whole globe with his waters?

²¹⁷ For an additional reference to stylistic polish in Catullus, see 1.1-2: Cui dono lepidum nouum libellum / arida modo pumice expolitur? [Who’s the dedicatee of my new witty / booklet, all fresh polished with abrasive?]

to be in a poem about the Argonauts, and one, moreover, with Medea as its protagonist, for the allusive signposts [suggest it].”²¹⁸ Yet amid this hyper-visual scene, the poem’s true subject is abruptly revealed in what Gaisser calls “the elegant and arresting threefold polypoton of 19-21.”

tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore,
 tum Thetis humanos non despexit hymenaeos,
 tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit.²¹⁹

Here, as he does many times in the course of the poem, Catullus makes a move that suggests these tales of the gods and goddesses are set in a time not only long past, but long and forever lost: “illa, atque <haud> alia, uiderunt luce marinas / mortales oculis . . .”²²⁰ So we are expected, apparently, to mourn this time, yet the irony of this poetic manipulation is amplified in that what follows is a tale of treachery, greed, and gore, strangely couched as a wedding song.

If we look closely, there are more cues that all is not as it should be. Following the acknowledgement that the Golden Age of the gods’ presence has passed (and thus the poet literally cannot call on them for assistance with his poem), Catullus forms an anti-invocation in which he *seems* to call upon a divine muse, yet in his assertion of “ego” and “meo carmine,” he clarifies 1) his own agency as the creator of this story; 2) a claim on his own art; and 3) his own power ‘compellare’ his characters:

o nimis potato saeculorum tempore nati

²¹⁸ Gaisser, Julia Haig. “Threads in the Labyrinth: Competing Views and Voices in Catullus 64.” *American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995): 579-616, 579.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Gaisser’s translation (fitting here, as she points out the artistry of this passage) reads: Then with Thetis’ love Peleus is said to have been set on fire, / then did Thetis not disdain marriage with a mortal, / then to Thetis the father felt Peleus must be joined.

²²⁰ That was the day, never matched, when mere mortals witnessed / marine [nymphs et cetera]

heroes, saluete, deum genus! o bona matrum
progenies, saluete iter<um saluete bonarum!>
uos ego saepe, meo uos carmine compellabo.²²¹

The poet then asks a series of questions designed to incite our interest in the details of the romance and highlight the necessity for inquiry before shifting narrative frames a third time, and moving the scene indoors to the Palace of Thessaly, in which preparations for the wedding have begun. Again, our perception is meticulously guided. Although the fourth frame is perhaps the most discussed by critics as it tends to overwhelm the poem's alleged subject, the meandering ekphrastic digression of the figures adorning the coverlet of Thetis' bridal couch tell a story that ends with a message not as far from the subject of the wedding as it might, at first glance, appear. Something is not right about this love affair and nothing good will come of it.

As if to further highlight craftsmanship and call attention to the status of these tales as "stories" manipulated by the poet, Catullus moves to a denial of the natural world and a subsequent celebration of the mortal arts as he lingers on the glitter of Peleus' throne and Thetis' bridal couch:

ipsius at sedes, quacumque opulenta recessit
regia, fulgenti splendent auro atque argento
candet ebur soliis, collucent pocula mensae,
tota domus gaudet regali splendida gaza.
puluinar uero diuae geniale locatur
sedibus in mediis, Indo quod dente politum

²²¹ O born in those days most missed through later ages, / you heroes, hail, gods' scions! noble offspring / of noble women, all hail! I shall have occasion / to invoke you often in the course of my poem.

tincta tegit roseo conchyli purpura fuco.²²²

The now explicitly visual frame is thus transferred from a cerulean natural world to a room full of glittering, costly objects, (“opulenta”; “tota domus gaudet regali splendida gaza”) and we have similarly moved from an elegiac to a celebratory voice as the plastic arts, the plasticity of the wedding-story (the love of which is a construct and a mis-remembering, as we shall see, of the true myth), and the poet’s presence as master is heightened.

As if to further focus our attention on the shine of these crafted objects, the move indoors, from sea-scene to wedding chamber, is preceded by an anaphoric denunciation of the pastoral sphere:

non humilis curuis purgatur uinea rastris,
non glebam pronò conuellit uomere Taurus,
non falx attenuat frondatorum arboris umbram
squalida desertis rubigo infertur aratris.²²³

Whereas the fields and foliage are denied in this particular frame, having been abandoned by the farmers so that they might attend the wedding celebration, it must be noted that these men (the farmers) are also craftsmen, although they approach their medium with rakes and ploughs and pruning hooks. As readers who participate in the crafting of the poem’s truth, we stand in a room with common laborer-craftsman, the poet-storyteller, and the weaver-storyteller, all of us in anticipation of the fourth frame, the revelation of the bridal coverlet, the first of two episodes of weaving which will come to dominate the poem. As readers, we

²²² But Peleus’s seat, for the whole of its opulent rearward / length is a shining delight of gold and silver, / gleaming ivory thrones, cups glinting on their tables, / the entire house glittering proudly with royal treasure, / and there at its heart is set the goddess’s own bridal / couch, all smoothly inlaid with Indian ivory, / its purple drapery dipped in the mollusc’s blushing dye.

²²³ No curved rake clears the weeds from the low-set ground vines, / no teams now split the sod with deep-thrusting ploughshares, / no pruning hook lessens the shade of leaf-thick trees, while / the ploughs, deserted, are scarved with rust’s scaly tetter.

are to be the *testis* to a revelatory experience of finely crafted art.

Spenser similarly makes use of a heightening of the visual aspects of his poetry in order to call attention to their status as art, but rather than serving to amplify the affect of mourning (as in Catullus), Spenser's images engender an affect of detachment that indicates the poet's ambiguity towards the verbal image as a vehicle for truth. The practice of image-making in the Renaissance was controversial in the face of the Protestant intolerance of idolatry, yet the making of images was Spenser's trade. In keeping with a Sidneyan poetic, Spenser was invested in a furious insistence on the visual as a poetic device. As Jane Grogan has noted, "Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1595) inspired Spenser's bolder experiments with vision and the visual."²²⁴ Sidney's "perfect pictures" were to become Spenser's palette:

For whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, [the poet] giveth a perfect picture of it in some one by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth.²²⁵

Grogan notes that, "Where Sidney innovates is in adopting the risky affectiveness of images to serve his poetic cause, which for him is also an art of affect . . . Speaking pictures, perfect pictures, best colours, the sight of the soul . . . the language and principles of Sidneyan poetics are anchored in endorsements of the visual."²²⁶ Critics like Grogan often note that Spenser aspires to this model; yet a number of cues exist in his poetry that he feels these "perfect pictures" are yet an inadequate means of expressing truth, emotion, or "the sight

²²⁴ Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser*, Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate: 2009, 7.

²²⁵ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989), 107.

²²⁶ Grogan, 7.

of the soul.” His method, while rooted in the sensory, continually calls attention to the plasticity of the verbal image, a method that only underscores the inadequacy of the visual, as craftsmanship is something rooted in mortal experience and thus subject to the fallen nature of mankind. The mastery of our sensory desires, as the narrative of *The Faerie Queene* demonstrates, is necessary for the fashioning of virtue.

The Murder of Art

Thus the Catullan legacy of emphasizing the poem as an objet d’art through a poetics of stylistically visual decadence is idiosyncratically transposed in Elizabethan neoteric poetry, as Spenser’s poetics both point up rhetorical prowess (in a proper Catullan manner), yet gesture to the limitations of the verbal image (an Elizabethan concern). In *Muiopotmos*, the poet’s seeming anxiety concerning his “perfect pictures” is expressed via a repetition of the artistic process as a self-defeating act. Spenser’s narrative in *Muiopotmos* is a story of creation and destruction, and in some respects it is one of redundancy, in that both spider and butterfly participate in the process of making and subsequently bring about their own demise. Spenser clearly sets up a rhetorical analogy between what he frames as ‘crafted objects’ – the butterfly’s wings and the spider’s web, yet both are a trap of sorts. Clarion’s wings are defined by comparison:

Painted with thousand colours, passing farre
All Painters skill, he did about him dight:
Not halfe so manie sundrie colours arre
In *Iris* bowre, ne heaven doth shine so bright,
Distinguished with manie a twinkling starre,
Nor *Iuno*es Bird in her ey-spotted traine

So manie goodly colours doth containe.

Ne (may it be withouten peril spoken)

The Archer God . . .

Beares in his wings so manie a changefull token. (89-98)

The anaphora of “Not . . . Not . . . ne . . . Nor . . . Ne” subjugates a series of artistic and mythological exemplars: Clarion’s wings are more beautiful than the sum skill of “All” visual artists, more colorful than a rainbow, shinier than the stars, prettier than a peacock, fairer than Cupid’s wings, et cetera. In being more than these things, however, Clarion’s wings, as an objet d’art, are decidedly *not* any of the transcendent objects to which they are compared, thus the comparison is ironic. When measured by the eye and framed by the artist, the object appears more beautiful, yet when considered ideologically in contrast to elements of the natural world or, more clearly, that which is crafted by and thus belongs to the divine, the object falls short in its negative comparison precisely *because* it is not.

Whereas the lightness of Clarion’s wings, also set up vis-à-vis their comparison with other weightless objects, points to the possibility of transcendence, we are made aware that the verbal portrait is a failed attempt to capture a transcendent idea, and thus creation has also become ruinous, as rubbing dust from butterfly wings:

Full manie a Ladie faire, in Court full oft

Beholding them, him secretly envide,

And wisht that two such fannes, so silken soft,

And golden faire, her Love would her provide;

Or that when them the gorgeous Flie had doft,

Some one that would with grace be gratified,

From him would steale them privily away. (105-112)

The lady's envy gestures to the possibility (and impossibility) of the object's capture, here pointed up as an ornamental robe that can be donned or "doft" at will. The reader is then invited to entertain the notion that Clarion is merely a common fly that the poet has "dressed up" for the narrative's encounter. What the reader knows, however, is that a lady can never fully possess butterfly wings capable of flight, and their delicacy would prove difficult to hold. The only butterfly, in fact, that a lady might possess is a *dead* butterfly. As a coveted object that cannot be held, Clarion's decorative wings approach the idea which they are meant to represent (transcendence, lightness, the beauty of the natural world), yet their status as artifice, a type of clothing for the fly (a garment coveted by ladies) grounds them in the material world.

Similarly, the workmanship woven by the fly's opponent, the "cursed creature," is presented as a contrast of negatives, and both the artificiality of the web and its fallen nature are apparent when it is placed in apposition to the workmanship of various mortal craftsmen. The parallel is sealed musically by the transformation of the repetition of "manie" in the first passage, to "anie" in the second:

Not anie damzell, which her vaunteth most

In skilfull knitting of soft silken twyne;

Nor anie weaver, which his worke do boast

In dieper, in damaske, or in lyne;

Nor anie skil'd in workmanship embost;

Nor anie skil'd in loupes of fingring fine,

Might in their divers cunning ever dare,

With this so curious networke to compare. (361-368)

This passage serves as a rhetorical denial of mortal weavers, or artists, who work in different media – knitting, weaving fine cloth, embroidery, the weaving of “loupes,” – and do so with “cunning.”

Spenser names himself among these weavers, so we know them to be poets. The textual cue is in the “I.” The next stanza begins with a final negative “Ne doo I thinke.” The intrusion of the poet’s voice into this sequence is telling, as is the miniature epic simile that follows: the story of Vulcan’s net, a jealous weaver – placed hierarchically below the spider’s web. The rival poets of whom Spenser speaks are differentiated by the materials they use to weave, as well as their style of weaving, and fail to compare with Spenser’s ‘curious networke’ (another objet d’art), which emerges victorious. What follows this seeming expression of victory, however, is a portrait of Aragnoll, like some English caricature of Achilles (and to follow this metaphor, one must consider Aragnoll / Clarion as a sort of two-sided Achilles), striding across the length of his creation “In the pride of his freedome principall,” the inevitability of his tragic fall encapsulated in the couplet that closes the stanza: “He likest is to fall into mischaunce, / That is regardles of his governaunce.” Spenser’s formal signature is present here in the characteristically Chaucerian endings (the employment of the Frenchified –aunce of the High Style ME lyric). Is the poet checking himself for his own pride in the ‘curious networke’ of his own creation? Has he become trapped in his own web?

Spenser’s images indeed labor to destroy themselves. Whereas Aragnoll’s web is literally designed to ensnare its prey, the potential of Clarion’s wings to enact the butterfly’s

demise is not unveiled until the final stanzas of the poem, in which both web and wing are undone. As Clarion struggles in the spider's web, he becomes further entangled, his own wings an extension of the spider's trap. Like the poet-weaver, the butterfly (again an ornamented 'Flie') is murdered by his own cunning:

There the fond Flie entangled, struggled long,
Himself to free thereout; but all in vaine.
For striving more, the more in laces strong
Himself he tide, and wrapt his winges twaine
In lymie snares the subtil loupes among;
That in the end he breathlesse did remaine.
And all his youthly forces idly spent,
Him to the mercie of th'avenger lent. (425-432)

If we consider Clarion as a common fly augmented by a 'plastic' accessory (his wings), it would appear that the butterfly's end is a performance of self-defeat framed as a spectacle. Rhythmically, the heavily enjambed passage locates the end of the butterfly's "striving" near the end of "twaine," and what follows is a commentary of sorts on the portrait of the butterfly stilled by "subtil loupes" – his last breaths spent in the service of "th'avenger." Clarion, then, wraps himself up exhaustively and subsequently displays his destroyed body to Aragnoll, who is able to find his Achilles' heel only after seeing its display: "... when the greisly tyrant did espie ... / ... he seized greedily" (433, 435).

The demise of Clarion shifts subtly in the last stanza to the demise of Aragnoll, the weaver whose last task is the creation of a spectacle that stains his lovely web with gore. In the slaughter of the butterfly, Aragnoll destroys something beautiful, transcendent, and

seemingly pure, thus the demise of that beauty is also the triumph of his vice, formerly named as ‘pride’ but with the suggestion, in the allusion of the final lines, of rage:

Like a grimme Lyon rushing with fierce might
Out of his den, he seized greedelie
On the resistles pray, and with fell spight
Under the left wing stroke his weapon slie
Into his heart, that his deepe groning spright
In his bloodie streames foorth fled into the aire,
His bodie left the spectacle of care. (434-440)

Overcome by his “fell spight,” the craftsman-spider turns predator and consumes that which has wrapped itself in the spider’s web and become “resistles pray.” Thus he appears to consume his own design rather than the butterfly itself whose blood escapes “foorth fled into the aire,” and serves to heighten the portrait of destruction.

The spectacle of Clarion’s demise most directly mirrors the abrupt ending of the *Aeneid*, which closes with an image of the defeated Turnus, exhausted from raising an enormous rock to hurl at his enemy, and similarly stilled by his own strivings. As in Spenser’s poem, and as in Catullus’ epyllion, Virgil evokes the struggling craftsman – here the poet – who struggles to brandish the weapon of his words:

ac velut in somnis, oculos ubi languida pressit
nocte quies, nequiquam avidos extendere cursus
velle videmur et in mediis conatibus aegri
succidimus; non lingua valet, non corpore notae
sufficient vires, nec vox aut verba sequuntur:

sic Turno . . . (XII. 908-913)²²⁷

The conflation of voice and words is in keeping with the epic nature of Virgil's song of a nation, but what follows reflects badly on the character of our epic hero, as Aeneas is faced with an enemy who is both exhausted and pleading for his life, imploring him to "ulterius ne tende odiis" [go no further down the road of hatred] (XII.938). What enrages Aeneas is the spectacle of Turnus' body adorned with the sword-belt of Pallas. Faced with an object that Aeneas considers his own, or rather, emblematic of his comrades, he gives himself over to rage. Like the spider who "stroke his weapon slie / Into his heart" (*Mniopotmos* 437-8), Aeneas "plants / his iron sword hilt-deep in his enemy's heart" (Virgil XII. 1119-10).²²⁸ As critics have aptly noted, "Vergil concludes his epic by drawing our attention not to the triumphant Aeneas, but to his adversary's pathetic and premature death."²²⁹ The tragedy of Turnus' death is hardly one the reader applauds, particularly when faced with his evocative pleas: "if some care for a parent's grief can touch you still, / I pray you – you had such a father, in old Anchises" (1085-6).²³⁰ What lingers is something incomplete and unresolved: Aeneas' intemperance, the resolution of which, in the epic tradition, remains to be taken up by another poet. Even more so, if we consider the tinge of doubt in the heroism represented in Catullan epyllia, here we are given a similarly ambiguous interpretation of epic heroism. We are witness not to heroism, but murder.

The unwilling soul that leaves Turnus' body dissipates at the close of Virgil's poem: "His life breath fled with a groan of outrage down to the shades below" (1111-12).

²²⁷ "Just as in dreams / when the nightly spell of sleep falls heavy on our eyes / and we seem entranced by longing to keep on racing on, / no use, in the midst of one last burst of speed / we sink down, consumed, our tongue won't work / and tried and true, the power that filled our body / fails – we strain but the voice and words won't follow. / So with Turnus." Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Trans. Robert Fagles, New York: Penguin, 2006.

²²⁸ Fagles' translation and line numbers.

²²⁹ Carl P.E. Springer, "The Last Line of 'The Aeneid,'" *The Classical Journal* 82.4 (Apr-May, 1987): 310-313, 311.

²³⁰ Fagles' translation and line numbers.

Conversely, in *Muiopotmos*, although there is a sense that the “bloodie streames” which leave Clarion’s body are infused with “deep groning,” the personification of the departing life force is not so much associated with Clarion as much as the body that remains. The true spectacle at the end of Virgil’s *Aeneid* lies in the white space at its close: the victor, the breathless Aeneas, “keepsake / of his own savage grief – flaring up in fury, terrible in his rage,” who must come to terms with the moral realization that he has just killed a man, defenseless, in the act of surrendering. There is no such evocative force in the plastic puppet-creatures of Spenser’s allegory, who are themselves both craftsman and crafted. We perceive the blood that mockingly flees “into the aire” like the transcendent soul of the butterfly, as a splash of paint that serves to heighten the visual affect of the spectacle that mars the cursed cobweb, torn by the strivings of Aragnoll’s prey. Spenser’s amplification of the visual is in keeping with his stylistic methods, and serves to call attention not to the human fallibility of the epic hero (who is, after all, not human) but to the image itself.

Catullus’s poem also ends in a spectacle of death about which we are not quite sure how to feel. What defines the elegiac mode is in part the backward half-look,²³¹ so to speak; an elegy is a song of reminiscence, a song of the past, informed by our reluctance to let go of what is lost. For the Roman elegists (Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid), the elegy was also defined metrically as a couplet: a dactylic hexameter matched by a pentameter.²³² Although 64 is written in hexameters (as in Homer, Virgil, and Lucan), a fitting meter for the epyllion as it narrates an epic selection, Catullus was no stranger to the song of elegy, as the first of the Roman elegists. Furthermore, as in 16th century editions his work was usually bound with

²³¹ T.S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages (Four Quartets)*, “The backward look behind the assurance / Of recorded history, the backward half-look / Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.” In context, Eliot describes the experience of regret.

²³² For a thorough explanation of the nuances of dactylic hexameter and the elegiac couplet, see Green, “Introduction,” 39-41.

that of other elegists (Propertius and Tibullus),²³³ we can speculate that Spenser read Catullus with a particular eye to the elegiac voice. Additionally, while we cannot be sure as to the ordering of the poems, 64 is poised on a metrical turn within the Catullan corpus. All of the *Carmina* from 65 onwards are written in elegiac couplets. Regardless, 64 in all its epithelamic and epic guise, is a song not only of the death of an age long past, but a song of the dead and of death itself.

For Catullus, the heroism of such poetic characters as Achilles (the example in the poem) is a misremembered majesty far removed from the human condition, as the true human experience of the heroic is encapsulated in the bloody repercussions of war, thus the manner of heroism represented in the story of Achilles is a literary construct. Readers of epic poetry hold such communal memories dear, mourn the loss of the Golden Age, of beauty and fearlessness; yet such longing is not for the past, but for *stories* of the past. Thus, the elegiac voice expressed in *Carmen 64*, although moving and evocative, is inherently ironic. This song exhibits the interdependence of the elegiac voice (the auditory element of the poem) on the visual pictures crafted by the artisan. The ambiguity here is not in the suggestion that the synchronicity of the auditory and the visual is somehow false (as is intimated in Spenser's images) but in the reader's attitude towards the conflation of myth and history. Catullan images, in calling attention to themselves as art, force the reader to recognize that however we may feel about Achilles' heroism, his story is above all a rendering of an ever-shifting communal memory that is subjective in its status as a poetic medium that functions to deconstruct the rigid boundaries of the epic genre.

²³³ Of the sixteenth century editions of Catullus's poetry in the Newberry Library's special collections, four are bound with Propertius and Tibullus: (1502); (1503); (1515); and (1531). The Library holds a single independent copy of Catullus (1552) with commentary by Marc Antoine Muret, yet it appears to be the first in a three-part series that included Propertius (1558) and Tibullus (1558).

This ambiguity, and the irony inherent in the Catullan elegiac can only be experienced if we participate and acknowledge death; thus we are confronted, in *Carmen 64*, with permutations of its image. As in the epigram that heads this chapter, an excerpt from the aforementioned Song of the Fates, Achilles is by turns a hero and a scoundrel. The brilliant formal elements serve to heighten the pathos of the scene, particularly in the refrain that I mentioned earlier in this chapter, propelling us forward through the song with the imperative insistence of “currite,” conjuring both the spindle of the Fates and the fleet-footed Achilles; hence aligning creation and destruction. Yet the heroism of Achilles is complicated as the reader is called to stand as *testis* to an excess of bloodshed. What we see and what we remember in Catullus’s poem is not so much the greatness of Achilles but what he left behind.

Whereas the elegiac mode may be generically appropriated from a variety of sources, a Catullan elegiac and a specifically *neoteric* elegiac is unique in that it expresses a condition of art and is always yoked to the process of art and to the artisan (and thus is more properly considered a “complaint”). Furthermore, it is an ironic voice; as the readers mourn, their attention is drawn to the misrepresentation of the object of their thwarted desire (here, the Golden age and its characteristic heroism). Continually shifting in time and perspective, from poet to character to reader and back again at will, the craft of making is externalized in the narrative. In *Carmen 64*, the story moves from the wedding feast to the frame of the Fates’ song (an auditory ekphrasis and distinct lament) as, in an analeptic metaphor congruent with the preceding narrative digression, the Fates spin the fibers of the wedding coverlet, a story already told:

haec turn clarisona pectentes uellera uoce

taliam diuino fuderunt carmine fata,

carmine, perfidiae quod post nulla arguet aetas.²³⁴

Here the irony is that the “god-inspired song” that “no future age would accuse of falsehood” may tell familiar stories, but the only god here is Catullus the craftsman, weaving a narrative that is almost certainly a falsehood in the sense that it is not a true prophecy but decidedly a story of the past. The details of carding wool that precede these lines are particularly out of place, as the neoteric reader would have most certainly been familiar with this common household process, and here is our clue that we should pay attention not so much to the story itself, but the manner in which it is told. This is a poem about art that both celebrates and mourns the union of craftsman and craft (the narrative itself).

Spenser’s revision of Catullan irony amplifies Catullus’s representation of the heroic mode, within which is an implied critique of the epic genre. If this new heroic mode, in Catullus, takes the elegiac form in its traditional sense – in that it is a voice of lamentation for the dead and a longing for stories of the past – and the elegiac form in an ironic sense as it is a mourning that takes place when the reader is positioned as witness to specific visual portraits represented as conditions of art inextricable from the process of craftsmanship – it is rightly transferred in Spenser’s work as mock-heroism in both the narrative and metaphoric miniaturization of the epic hero. Catullan irony, in its new Elizabethan and Spenserian context then, is comedic and playful, as humanist allegory always already celebrates the classical past, yet never denies its status as literary construct (as did many of Catullus’ contemporaries in conflating myth and history in their epic reiterations). What the Elizabethan neoterics’ adaptation of Catullan irony accomplishes, however, is something

²³⁴ They now, still carding their fleeces, in clear articulate tones / poured forth in god-inspired song these prophecies – / a song no future age would accuse of falsehood.

quite different from that of the classical neoterics; it reaches beyond a criticism of the heroic mode to address poetic concerns specific to humanist allegory. We are accustomed to Spenserian hyper-plasticity, to the violent gap between image and idea in allegory, thus the bite of the mock-heroic is less clear to the modern reader than it would have been to the Elizabethan or, if we may presume historical audience, the Elizabethan poet-reader. A closer look at *Muiopotmos* reveals, in its ironic representation of an epic hero, an undercurrent of mourning – not for the loss of the Golden Age, but for what has been lost in the inevitable process of narrative erasure. The ironic expressions of grief in *Muiopotmos* stand in as mourners for the limitations of language and the *verba* that cannot be.

In *Muiopotmos*, Spenser places emphasis on the visual and *crafted* nature of his images in order to frame the poem as a “spectacle of care.” Craftsmanship is highlighted in order to reveal its status as both a labor of love and a labor of frustration. One could say that the unfulfilled desire that drives the narratives of Elizabethan epyllia are echoed in the poetic process. Surely, representations of makers that bring about their own undoing are not so much expressions of the inadequacy of the craftsman, but the seeming impossibility of translating inspiration onto the page. Such narratives speak particularly to poet-readers as a challenge of sorts: How do we close the gap between inspiration and image? These questions about what we are called to witness are conditioned by who exactly is doing the witnessing. Spenser’s narrative is an example of the way poetry can serve as a dialogue for Elizabethan neoterics to both examine the disjunction between image and idea and seek (theoretically and methodologically) its resolution. Spenser’s short poems are characterized by a set of stylistics that function to call attention to poetry as art and they function to engender an affect of fragmentation and detachment, thus highlighting the disjunction between image

and idea inherent in the allegorical mode. We can consider both *Muipotmos* and *Carmen 64* as epyllia, or literary forms that present a narrative or emblematic selection from epic literature in a revisionary or formally oppositional manner, and make use of the elegiac mode or the manner of the complaint for ironic affect. Just as the representation of Achilles is reconsidered in *Carmen 64*, his portrait is further detached from its epic source in Spenser's poem, in which Achilles becomes not a character, but a device. Clarion "borrows" the armor of Achilles so that the poet might metonymically conjure a remembered heroism for an affect of comic amplification. As poets have historically employed the revisionary nature of the epyllion to reevaluate traditional and culturally predominant literary forms, we can infer that its boundaries, as in the case of the epic and the allegory, are fluid. What I have proposed, in this chapter is that a new descriptive category is called for that accounts for the permeable boundaries between the complaint and the epyllion, and the two should be considered in tandem with one another. Rather than laboring to demarcate the line between epyllia and complaint, critics would be better served to consider these poems not as minor epics, allegorical revisions, epyllia or complaints (although they are, by turns, all of these things), but as neoteric poetry modeled after the work of Catullus.

Chapter 4: Death by Rhetoric: Seeking Silence in Spenser's *Daphnaïda*

Cease foolish man (saide he half wrothfully)
To seeke to heare that which cannot be told:
For the huge anguish, which dooth multiplie
My dying paines, no tongue can well vnfold:

~Spenser, *Daphnaïda*, 71-74

Non ingrata tamen frustra munuscula diuis
promittens tacito suscepit uota labello.²³⁵

~Catullus, *Carmen* 64, 103-104

Silence is implicit in visual representation. The gaze does not speak. Because of the active role of the gaze, visual images are conventionally employed in the representation of unfulfilled desire – for true grief, in all of its complexities, is a state of being that tends to resist description. Spenser's *Daphnaïda* is a narrative of unfulfilled desire, but it is decidedly not a narrative of silence. In fact, it appears to rely almost entirely on noise. If Sidney renders speaking pictures, then Spenser's pictures scream. Alcyon's voice dominates the poem and is at times so loud we would apparently prefer he just "shut it," so to speak. In *Muiopotmos*, Spenser's neoteric strategy lies in stylistic ornamentation; thus the poem is highly visual, and the images serve to foreground the subject of art and artistry. At the same time, the mode of the complaint is employed in an ironic manner – we neither grieve for Clarion nor Achilles. In the *Daphnaïda*, however, the complaint that comprises the central narrative is decidedly elegiac. This poem that is often considered by critics to be Spenser's "worst" poem is meant to dramatize a very real loss. Hence, Spenser's characteristically neoteric irony is highly inappropriate, considering the occasion. Yet there are clues within Spenser's narrative that this lack of propriety is not due to carelessness; rather, it is intentional.

²³⁵ Yet the giftlets she offered the gods, the vows she pledged / with silent lips – these were not in vain, not unpleasing.

The *Daphnaïda*'s primary character is hardly "likeable" in his hyperbolic declarations of grief. His seeming insincerity is in part to blame for our distaste. A.B. Grosart asserts that both Alcyon's histrionics as well as Spenser's inappropriate "poetical convention[s]" are responsible for the poem's failure:

The long iteration of grief and doleful scenery exhibited in this and similar pieces is, - how far, who should say? - a poetical convention . . . which, without paradox, we might define as a style of natural artificiality²³⁶ . . . Yet the convention seems inevitably to carry with it no slight obstacles to two elements which poetry can hardly dispense with, - contrast and sincerity. And the sense of this latter deficiency is intensified by the pastoral form here used without any specific appropriateness, and prolonged through more than eighty stanzas.²³⁷

Thus, unlike the imagistic *Visions of Bellay and Petrarch*, the allegorical *Tears of the Muses*, and the ornate *Muiopotmos*, the latter of which Anne Lake Prescott has called "the most likeable poem in the *Complaints*,"²³⁸ the *Daphnaïda* is not only one of the most visually bare but assuredly the most maligned of Spenser's minor poems. William Oram, in his preface in the Yale edition of Spenser's shorter poems, refers to it as "unrelievedly gloomy . . . despite passages of considerable beauty it often seems heavy-handed and shrill . . . Alcyon is too self-involved and self-pitying to evoke much sympathy, and the poem seems in many ways a

²³⁶ This is Grosart's phrase

²³⁷ A.B. Grosart, see *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, 1827-1899; Spenser Society, (Manchester: Hazell, Watson and Viney, limited, London and Aylesbury, 1882-84), lxxvi-viii. Grosart cannot be aligned with those who "malign" (no pun intended) the poem. He writes, "though we cannot rank it with the few loftiest specimens of imaginative Elegy, renders admirably the impression of eternal grief proper to the style: reaching this more by a musical monotone, a low-voiced iteration, than by strong strokes either of sentiment or of natural imagery."

²³⁸ Anne Lake Prescott, "Spenser's Shorter Poems," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001): 143-161, 148.

pastoral elegy manqué.”²³⁹ In an earlier essay in the second volume of *Spenser Studies*, Oram had described it as “a gloomy, tenacious, obsessive and long-winded poem; its mood . . . unvaried and its writing too obviously rhetorical for modern tastes.”²⁴⁰

In addition to being too “loud” the poem is a formal conundrum in that it refuses generic classification. Jonathan Gibson points out, “Early twentieth-century critics, assuming that Spenser had vainly intended Alcyon’s lament to be read sympathetically, generally considered [the poem] a grotesque authorial miscalculation, an embarrassing failure to obey generic rules.”²⁴¹ Oram rightly identifies the *Daphnaïda* as an experimental work and claims it is most traditionally admired by numerologists for its “meaningful orderliness”²⁴² yet “the impression [it] leaves is not one of intricate harmony. Rather, [it] seems ragged and even shapeless.”²⁴³ William Nelson, in a numerological reading, begrudgingly admits the poem is “not the happiest of [Spenser’s] experiments.”²⁴⁴

Widely referred to as an elegy, the poem has been called a pastoral eclogue, in that it is populated with familiar pastoral figures from the *Shepheardes Calender* and adheres to the pastoral elegiac tradition – introducing a proper dirge (in seven sections, each of which is seven lines long), in “Weepe, Shepheard! weepe, to make my undersong.” The thematic ordering of the themes in the dirge’s sections, however, is seemingly random, and the poem’s resistance to the consolation that earmarks the elegiac model defies the poem’s classification as a proper elegy in the Greek tradition, unlike the more traditional

²³⁹ William Oram, “Daphnaïda,” in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al. (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1989), 487-491.

²⁴⁰ William Oram, “*Daphnaïda* and Spenser’s Later Poetry,” *Spenser Studies* 2 (1981): 141-158, 141.

²⁴¹ Jonathan Gibson, “The Legal Context of Spenser’s *Daphnaïda*,” *Review of English Studies* 55.218 (February 2004): 24-44, 25.

²⁴² Prescott notes that the poem is obsessed with the number seven – there are eighty-one seven-line stanzas. 151.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ William Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (New York: Columbia UP, 1963), 69.

“November” in the *Shepheardes Calender*.²⁴⁵ Spenser’s reference to Alcyon’s lament as a “plaint” in line 4 suggests that we might classify the poem as a complaint (the primary distinction between the two being that the latter refers to a living subject), yet the complaint is a common device of the pastoral eclogue, and Alcyon’s unusually discordant plaint – “. . . here no tunes, save sobs and grones shall ring” (14) – is further problematic, as Alcyon is certainly not figuring forth a “song” and henceforth proceeds to denounce the pastoral mode (along with the rest of the world) in his grief.²⁴⁶

Yet implicit in such readings is a tendency to dismiss the complexity of the *Daphnaïda*’s “poetic” complaint, a subject that is highlighted by the problematic nature of both the poem’s voice and generic slipperiness. This chapter will reexamine the manner in which Alcyon is represented, the style in which he speaks, the loudness of his voice, Spenser’s manipulation of the mode of the complaint, and assert that the *Daphnaïda*’s “noise” is indicative not of the poem’s failure, but rather, its success. I will show that a reading of the *Daphnaïda* alongside the complaints of Attis and Ariadne in Catullus’ *Carmen* 63 and 64 reveals that Spenser’s dark, unusual poem is a unique and intentional experiment – an ironic elegy that represents grief in a manner that underscores the ineffability of such representation in a manner that relies on affect.

Historical Readings

Critics have attempted to reclaim the poem’s value and explain its dissonance by examining its historical origins and the curious context of its composition. The *Daphnaïda* was originally written for Arthur Gorges, an acquaintance of Spenser’s, on the occasion of

²⁴⁵ J. Erskine, qtd., in *The Works of Edmund Spenser, A Variorum Edition, The Minor Poems, Volume One*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 430.

²⁴⁶ Erskine notes, “the only other theme that is distinctly reminiscent of the Greek model [of the elegy] is the complaint that the good are taken and the less worthy spared. As Spenser . . . states it, however, it is rather a fatalistic doctrine than a complaint. 430.

the death of his young wife 19-year-old Douglas Howard. The poem appears to allegorize Gorges' grief just as it paints a rather unflattering portrait of Spenser's friend.²⁴⁷ Oram has argued that Spenser may have meant for the poem to advise his friend concerning the perils of excessive grief. He writes, "Such a suggestion appears in the contrast between the narrator of the elegy and Alcyon. Although the narrator is grieving when he meets the mourner, he puts aside his own sorrow in an attempt to help his friend, where Alcyon seems incapable of such self-forgetfulness."²⁴⁸ This reading is plausible if we consider the poem as an historical allegory that dramatizes Gorges' plight, yet the sympathetic narrator is not an unusual generic device in the larger context of the Elizabethan complaint, where a listening ear is often provided within the narrative. Thomas Lodge's *Scyllaes Metamorphoses* (1589), for example, begins similarly, with the sorrowful narrator "Walking alone (all onely full of grieffe) . . . / Weeping my wants, and wailing scant reliefe" (1, 3) until he is joined by the sea god Glaucus, whose complaint comprises the primary narrative. The narrator of Lodge's poem, like the narrator of the *Daphnaïda*, urges the mourner to temperance, and Glaucus indeed contemplates (albeit briefly) self-correction: "Alas why talke I? Sea-God cease to mourne her" (187). Although Lodge's narrator similarly sets aside his grief in sympathy for his friend, it is more plausible to read Glaucus's complaint as a projection of the narrator's grief rather than a coded conversation between two young men, as Oram suggests we read the *Daphnaïda*.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ This is a traditional reading. The poem overtly references the couple's daughter 2-year-old daughter Ambrosia: "my yong Ambrosia, in lieu of mee / Love her: so shall our love for ever last;" (lines 290-291) and the Lion which graces the Howard coat-of-arms: "For being borne an auncient Lions haire, / And of the race, that all wild beastes do feare" (lines 122-123).

²⁴⁸ Oram, *Yale Edition*, 490.

²⁴⁹ The sympathetic narrator could also be attributed to Spenser's adaptation of the *Book of the Duchess*. As Thomas William Nadal has noted, "The circumstances attending the composition of the *Duchess* [are such that] Chaucer's friend, John of Gaunt, had lost his wife, the Lady Blaunche. Chaucer wrote his poem in memory of the Duchess, and we may readily believe that he . . . was moved to write, not only by the 'great good fame' of

Jonathan Gibson provides a fine account of the way in which the poem speaks to Gorges' legal troubles following the death of his young bride, a reading that assumes Spenser meant for us to understand Alcyon's voice as a fictionalized expression of Gorges' grief. Indeed, at the time of the poem's publication, Gorges (the alleged "Alcyon") was embroiled in a battle over his daughter Ambrosia's claim to her deceased mother's lands. The sustained lament of his fictional counterpart would then serve to affirm the emotional bonds of his marriage and express sympathy for the manner in which the legal suit against Gorges had served to exacerbate his mourning. If Spenser intended the portrait of Alcyon to bolster Gorges' case, this emotional affirmation was a necessary move, for Douglas's father questioned Ambrosia's legitimacy, as he had neither approved the marriage nor its issue.

Arthur Gorges had indeed made an ambitious match, for Douglas Howard had an impressive pedigree and accompanying fortune. She was the daughter of Henry Howard, Second Viscount Bindon, the grandson of the third Duke of Norfolk. Marriage to a Howard heiress would have significantly advanced Gorges' career and position at court. In 1584, Douglas's mother sanctioned the betrothal of Gorges to the then thirteen-year-old Douglas without the consent of her father. This consent was likely difficult to obtain because, at the time, Howard was imprisoned in the tower, his widely known cruel mistreatment of Douglas and her mother having incited the displeasure of the Queen. Helen E. Sandison has written, "her father, Henry Howard, [was] clearly a mental case . . . violent and outrageous."²⁵⁰ Whether or not Gorges only intended to financially benefit, as the Viscount later claimed,

the Lady, but as well by 'the particular goodwill' he bore 'unto her husband.'" Whether or not Spenser fashioned himself a sympathetic narrator because of the "'particular goodwill' he bore 'unto [Gorges]'" is unclear, but it is certainly Nadal's implication. See Thomas William Nadal, "Spenser's *Daphnaïda* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," *PMLA* 23.4 (1908): 646-661.

²⁵⁰ Helen E. Sandison, "Arthur Gorges, Spenser's Alcyon, and Raleigh's Friend," *PMLA* 43.3 (September, 1928): 645-674.

through marriage to a Howard heiress, or the marriage was also Gorges' attempt to nobly rescue the young girl from an unpleasant family situation, is unclear. In his legal defense, Gorges claimed he was given no choice but to move forward with his suit, "thinking it a matter almost Impossible to obteyne the good will and consent of bothe the parentes in such theire discord and discontentment of myndes."²⁵¹ Yet, as Sandison details, Howard quite vehemently forbid the marriage, and considered Gorges a criminal who had forced his wife's hand, as Howard soon after "brought suit against Gorges for theft of his daughter."²⁵²

The child Ambrosia²⁵³ was born on Christmas night in 1588 and christened with Ambrose, Earl of Warwick, Mary Countess of Pembroke, and Lady Elizabeth Carew as godparents. Her mother died just two years later on the 13th of August 1590. Following her death, Viscount Bindon disputed not only the legitimacy of his daughter's marriage, but also charged that Ambrosia was not Douglas's true child. Perhaps anticipating Bindon's charge, Gorges quickly sought, within mere days of his wife's death, the written testimonies of the midwives who had been present at Ambrosia's birth.²⁵⁴ On the 17th of November 1590, Gorges forwarded a bill in Chancery Court that denied Bindon's allegations. When Bindon died shortly after on the 1st of December, the matter had yet to be resolved. Thus, Ambrosia became ward to the Crown for her lands, which were then leased by her father. Although Ambrosia's legitimacy was officially established on October 6, 1591, her great-uncle, Thomas Howard (the third Viscount Bindon), continued his brother's suit posthumously, and the

²⁵¹ See the following: 10 BL MS Lansdowne 43, fos. 53r and 56r; Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) STAC5 H20/3; The Poems of Sir Arthur Gorges, ed. H. E. Sandison (Oxford, 1953), p. xvii.

²⁵² Sandison, 645-674.

²⁵³ Daphne's ghost appears in the poem and implores Alcyon "My yong *Ambrosia*, in lieu of mee / Love her: so shall our love for ever last." (lines 290-1)

²⁵⁴ Gibson explains: "According to records kept in a notebook by Thomas Howard (a later antagonist), on 17 August 'Gorges procured a certificate under the handes of diverse woemen of Ambrosias birth: written by Philips Scrivener by charing crosse', rounding up all the women who had been present at Ambrosia's birth to testify that Ambrosia was Douglas's child. The same document claims that the servants' signatures were 'drawne without their privy by Gorges.'"

case apparently remained unresolved in 1596, the year of the *Daphnaïda*'s second publication.²⁵⁵ The matter was still in turmoil when the four-year-old Ambrosia tragically died on October 10, 1601.²⁵⁶

If we consider the poem's existence as a means to an end in that it was written to function primarily as either a defense of Gorges' case or a dramatization of his emotional and legal circumstances, then Gibson's argument and the critical historicization of the poem overall appears to resolve two of the *Daphnaïda*'s alleged aesthetic failings: 1) The stylization of its primary voice as hyperbolic; and 2) The poem's resistance to formal classification. If Alcyon is a caricature of Gorges who laments his wife's death whilst complaining of his legal situation, then Alcyon's hyperbole speaks to the necessity of his temperance and the poem can be classified, as Gibson claims, as "both a poetic and a legal complaint."²⁵⁷

David Lee Miller's recent essay "Laughing at Spenser's Daphnaida" affirms the historical arguments of Oram and Gibson in that he locates the primary value of the poem in its status as an historical artifact. His reading, however, brings to light a number of Spenser's poetic concerns, albeit obliquely. He writes that the poem is "deliberately bad and indeed advertises itself as such," and in many ways he extends (yet transposes) the assertion that Alcyon's voice is meant as a parody of intemperate behavior.²⁵⁸ As Spenser first published the *Daphnaïda* alone in 1591 and again as a companion-piece to the *Fowre Hymnes* in 1596, Miller's essay addresses the question of why Spenser would have sought to publish such a bad poem not once, but *twice*. He claims, "with aesthetic motives ruled out we must look to the historical context for clues," and these clues indeed comprise a compelling, if

²⁵⁵ 11 Dorset County Record Office, Dorchester (hereafter DRO) D10/L8 (Howard's notebook); PRO C3/225/41 (Gorges's bill); Sandison, 'Arthur Gorges', 652; BL MS Lansdowne 43, fo. 59^{r-v}.

²⁵⁶ See Sandison.

²⁵⁷ Gibson, 24.

²⁵⁸ David Lee Miller, "Laughing at Spenser's Daphnaida," *Spenser Studies* 26 (2011): 241-250, 241.

somewhat embellished, narrative.²⁵⁹ Miller's reading can be aligned with Gibson's in that both concur the poem was intended to address Gorges' legal problems, yet Miller interestingly posits Alcyon's extravagant grief as evidence of a less-than-cordial relationship between Spenser and Raleigh,²⁶⁰ who provided him with the assignment of writing the elegy. Spenser was perhaps unwilling to take on the task, and expressed his displeasure by thus writing a "bad" poem.

Miller reads the character of Alcyon as a parody not of Gorges' intemperate grief, but of Raleigh's rather comical histrionics during his banishment from court. He recounts an event witnessed by Arthur Gorges himself during Raleigh's imprisonment in the tower. In a letter to Cecil, Gorges writes, "I could wish her Majesty knew . . . a strange Tragedye that this day had like to have fallen out between [Raleigh and his jailor] – If I had not by great chaunce cummen at the very instant to have turned it into a Comedy." Apparently, seeing the Queen's barge pass, Raleigh flew into a fit "as a man transported with passion; he sware to Sir George Carew that he would disguise himself; and get into a payer of oars to ease his mind but with a sight of the queen; or else he protested his heart would break." Both men drew their daggers, at which time Gorges, intervening, bloodied his hands, and the men relinquished their battle in concern for Gorges' injury. Nevertheless, "the Jailor had his new periwig torn off his crown" and Gorges writes, "[I] cannot tell whether I should more allow of the passionate lover or of the trusty Jailor . . . Sir Walter Raleigh will shortly grow Orlando Furioso."²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Miller, p. 244.

²⁶⁰ Sandison details Gorges and Raleigh's lifelong friendship, which began either in their Devonshire childhood or their days at Oxford. Both were present at Court and associated during the Oxford-Leicester affair, and served together on a parliamentary committee. Gorges wrote to Cecil on Raleigh's behalf while the latter was imprisoned for his marriage to Elizabeth Throckmorton. Gorges was also a frequent guest at Raleigh's Durham House and captain of Raleigh's ship in the Islands Voyage of 1597, a feat for which Gorges was later knighted.

²⁶¹ H. E. Sandison, "Arthur Gorges, Spenser's Alcyon and Raleigh's Friend," *PMLA* 43 (1928), 645-74, 657-8.

Having thus apparently explained the hyperbolic voice of the wretched Alcyon with this entertaining anecdote, Miller turns to an explanation of the poem's subversive nature, which he traces, as I previously mentioned, back to Spenser's resistance to Raleigh's literary assignment. What Miller aptly recognizes, however, in spite of "rul[ing] out" the poem's "aesthetic motives," is that the poem's rhetoric illustrates an unusual method of resistance, and although his reading is primarily historical and contextual, implicit in his thesis is an acknowledgement of the *Daphnaïda*'s unusually contentious nature and the poetic purpose of such contention. He explains the subsequent publication of Spenser's "deliberately bad" poem alongside the *Fovre Hymnes* as a "stubborn counter-strategy designed to accentuate the [*Daphnaïda*'s] combination of perversity and ineptitude."²⁶² As a companion-piece to the *Hymnes*, the *Daphnaïda* is useful in that it calls attention to a "strategy of seeming" in both works. He writes:

Juxtaposing the hymns to the "Daphnaïda" invites us to see further connections between the process of meditative purification that the hymns appear to advocate and the process of mourning that the elegy repudiates. It invites this second look by a curious act of mirroring, one in which a work of mourning from which the death has been subtracted is followed by an elegy for a deceased beloved that refuses the work of mourning. This juxtaposition invites a yet another dialectical reversal: a critique of the idealizing motives that seem initially to govern the hymns, which appear now as an unacknowledged work of mourning.²⁶³

What Miller rightly identifies here is that the *Daphnaïda* is a poem that is not only historically, but also aesthetically subversive. In denying the work of mourning, the *Daphnaïda* relies on

²⁶² Miller, 248.

²⁶³ Miller, 249.

an inherent sense of negation and opposition. In part it is precisely this issue, the way in which the poem's formal mode is self-negating, that causes it to appear "bad" in the eyes of the critics.

More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the oppositional nature of the *Daphnaïda* identifies the poem as significant to the neoteric project, for rhetorical and iconoclastic self-negation – poems that labor to destroy the words and images they bring into being – essentially function as complaints about poetry itself, thus calling into question the very poetic devices on which they rely. Given the critical consensus concerning the *Daphnaïda*'s lack of aesthetic value, the poem's contribution to Spenserian poetics has been largely ignored, yet a closer look at the "bad" aspects of the poem function to reclaim that value. In the very oppositional nature of its form, as an anti-pastoral, anti-elegy that begins with an anti-invocation to invoke the Furies rather than the Muses, the *Daphnaïda* takes up the revisionary work of the epyllion in a unique manner. Whereas in *Muiopotmos*, Spenser provides a representation of images that self-destruct, in the *Daphnaïda* we are denied the silent repose of ornamentation and are instead confronted with a clanging rhetorical narrative of formal negation. The poem is a comic elegy, a complaint that complains too much, and a pastoral eclogue that denounces the pastoral. Itself a paradox, the *Daphnaïda* loudly mourns, complains, sings, and writes itself to death.

Tradition and Revision

In its formal resistance, the *Daphnaïda* participates in the revisionary project of Elizabethan neotericism, for such poetry, in its style and form, advertises itself as standing against traditional formal modes, reinventing them in a manner that defamiliarizes its readers and often, as in the case of Spenser's poem, makes them uncomfortable. Spenser's depiction

of the shepherd Alcyon's extravagant complaint for his lost beloved is a curious revision of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*.²⁶⁴ Traditional readings of the poem have placed great emphasis on the "unusually clear case of literary borrowing" evident in Spenser's poem.²⁶⁵ The *Daphnaïda* and the *Duchess* are in agreement on several points:

1. The poet describes himself at the outset as sorely troubled in mind.
2. The exact cause of this trouble is left unexplained.
3. The poet goes forth and meets, by accident, a man in sorrow, clothed all in black.
4. The poet hears this man in black uttering a sorrowful moan, whereupon he approaches, and greets him gently.
5. The man in black at first ignores the greeting and refuses to be comforted. He finally discloses his secret only on persuasion of the poet.
6. He describes his sorrow in the form of a riddle, which the poet asks to have explained.
7. The bereaved man not only tells of the death of his wife, but also rehearses the story of his early love.
8. He rails against Fortune, who has played false with him and robbed him of his love.
9. He pours forth a formal plaint, 'a maner song,' which in each case the poet quotes verbatim. (In the *Duchess*, this plaint comes at the beginning of the narrative. In *Daphn.*, it comes at the end.)
10. The ending in both poems is similarly abrupt and dramatic . . .²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ See Normand Berlin's excellent line-by-line comparison, "Chaucer's Book of the Duchess and Spenser's Daphnaïda: A Contrast," *Studia Neophilologica* 38.2 (1966): 282-9.

²⁶⁵ Nadal's phrase.

²⁶⁶ Nadal, 647-8.

As an accomplished poet near the end of his career, Spenser significantly returns to Chaucer, from whom he first adapted (and thus continues here) what Grosart has referred to as the style of “natural artificiality”²⁶⁷ debuted in the *Calender*. The coincidence in the circumstances of the two poems’ composition is undeniable, as Chaucer’s *Duchess* was composed as an elegy for the departed Lady Blaunche, wife of Chaucer’s close friend and patron John of Gaunt.²⁶⁸ W.L. Renwick, who has claimed the poem was “taskwork, or payment of a social – or, for all we know a material – debt” for Spenser, calls it “the result of *contaminatio* of pastoral allegory and mediaeval symbolism – of Virgil and Chaucer” with a ghastly result. Nevertheless, he writes, “the *Daphnaïda* stands with *Lycidas* among attempts to compensate with ingenuity of craftsmanship for the lack of genuine feeling.”²⁶⁹

Yet it is precisely the *Daphnaïda*’s “craftsmanship” and revisionary metrical sophistication that has traditionally incited much of the poem’s critical appreciation. H.S.V. Jones has written,

The *Daphnaïda* deserves higher praise for its meter than for its rhetoric. Here Spenser has achieved a notable success by a slight variation of Chaucer’s seven-line, rhyme-royal stanza. The variation consists in the transposition of one rhyme, so that instead of ababbcc, the result is ababcbc on the whole . . . the meter of the poem leaves with us the impression of ease and fluidity which is broadly characteristic of Spenser’s versification.”²⁷⁰

Ernest de Sélincourt similarly noted how Spenser apparently found Chaucer’s octosyllabics

²⁶⁷ Grosart, *Complete Works*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, lxxvi-viii.

²⁶⁸ Nadal makes much of this coincidence. He writes, “. . . Spenser could hardly have found an elegiac model more admirably adapted to his purpose. The fact that he was already familiar with the *Duchess* would make it altogether natural that his mind should revert to it when casting about for a form in which to compose an elegy, the occasion of which was so strikingly similar to that of Chaucer’s poem,” 647.

²⁶⁹ W.L. Renwick, *Edmund Spenser* (University Paperbacks, 1964), 62-3

²⁷⁰ H.S.V. Jones, *A Spenser Handbook* (New York: F.S. Crofts, 1930), 319.

“unsuited both to the subject and to his own genius” and argues that Spenser’s intricate revision is a culmination of the poet’s experimentation with the five-foot line in different combinations throughout the *Complaints*: “. . . here, in *Daphnaïda*, by transposing the fifth and sixth lines of the verse royal and thus avoiding the couplet ending, he invents a new stanza of singular sweetness and beauty.”²⁷¹

The strange un-musicality of these “singular” stanzas that critics find too loud, long, and shrill, hearken back to the counter-poetic revisions of the original neoterics, the writers of epyllia who reshaped and transformed epic into metrically intricate and highly stylized verse characterized by its brevity. The classical neoterics, like E.K. for Spenser in the *Calender*, presented their “experiments” with an avant-garde flourish and the braggadocio of self-promotion, arrogantly describing their poetry as “highly polished.”²⁷² Their voices did not whisper. The continual references to craftsmanship and polish in classical neoteric verse, itself a pomposity evident in Catullus’ praise of Cinna’s opus (“*Zmyrna mei Cinnae nonam post denique messem / quam coepta est nonamque edita post hiemam*”),²⁷³ refer to the labor and intention involved in the skillful selection of choice Alexandrian elements. To reiterate, the very term *neoteric* means “new” in the sense of a simultaneous poetic act of creation and erasure; just as the new poetry must replace the old, so must the new poet transform and reinvent what has come before.²⁷⁴

To accomplish this revision, the quintessential neoteric voice is ironic; it is designed

²⁷¹ Ernest de Sélincourt, in J.C. Smith, *Spenser: The Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest de Sélincourt (Oxford Paperbacks, 1930), xxxiv.

²⁷² *Carmen 1* begins “Cui dono lepidum nouum libellum / arida modo pumice expolitum? [Who’s the dedicatee of my new witty / booklet, all fresh-polished with abrasive?]”

²⁷³ Smyrna, my Cinna’s opus, is published at last, nine harvests / and nine long winters after she was begun. Note the “*mei Cynnae*” in this passage, as if Catullus is asserting his own hand in the epyllion’s composition.

²⁷⁴ See Oliver Lyne, “The Neoteric Poets,” in *Collected Papers on Latin Poetry*, ed. R.O.A.M. Lyne (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 67. Lyne explains that the neoterics preference for the epyllion “ostentatiously dissociated itself from traditional *epos* . . . employing a narrative technique that was often willfully individual and selective; and yet largely maintaining epic language, metre, and style.”

to cause outrage and offense whilst showcasing wit. Cicero's letters to Atticus frame the *cantores Euphorionis* as young upstarts whose stylistic idiosyncrasies were marked by their difference from the traditional epic writers of their day. Tully's mockery of neoteric syllabics was pejorative and specifically referred to practitioners of Catullan meter. These metrically savvy writers of experimental verse were the "bad poets" of the Late Republican period, according to Cicero. Their preference for biting irony is evident in Catullus' curious response to Cicero's mockery of the *poetae novi* in *Carmen 49*.²⁷⁵ Like the *Daphnaïda*, *Carmen 49*, Catullus's poem to Cicero is often read as an occasional poem, and in a manner that similarly obscures its meaning. The poem, although it refers to Cicero's verbal prowess in the courtroom, is hardly intended to laud Tully's rhetorical fortitude. Just as Catullus facetiously assumes the role of humble suppliant, in *Carmen 49*, he masterfully turns Cicero's own rhetoric against him. As Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson acknowledges, "one does sense imitation of style in the use of the superlative and the choice of words [such as] *disertissimus*, the vocative *Marce Tulli*, and the expression of thanks, all of which are reminiscent of Cicero's style."²⁷⁶

Furthermore, the self-deprecation Catullus exhibits in *Carmen 49* is in conflict with the characteristic voice of his corpus overall, which most often gives praise to fellow-poets by aligning them with his own poetic values and denigrating what must be cast out as old-fashioned poetry (traditional epic). As Oliver Lyne has noted, "the neoteric poets seem more prone to complimenting *each other* as a coterie of equal talent than to acknowledging any one

²⁷⁵ See Chapter 1 for a further reading of *Carmen 49*.

²⁷⁶ Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson. "On Catullus 49," *The Classical Journal* 95.2 (Dec. 1999): 131-138, 132. Svavarsson goes on to explain that "Cicero seems to have used [*disertissime* as an] epithet quite often, and this may be significant. An address to Cicero framed in a way in which Cicero himself is wont to address others may well be intended to have some ironical effect, not simply nor by itself, but in conjunction with the rest of the poem, and in particular with the rest of line 1. Catullus need not be saying that Cicero in fact is not *disertissimus*, but he may be employing the device of addressing the rhetorician in a way the rhetorician is accustomed to address someone else, i.e. parodying."

as master.”²⁷⁷ Just as Renaissance poets often prefaced their poetry with a “defense” to address their detractors, often specifically addressed (if we think of something like Thomas Lodge’s *Reply to Gosson*), Cicero’s criticism of these “new poets” must be proactively refuted. Thus, the currency of the term *neoteric* should be understood as oppositional and transferred as such. The speaker of *Carmen 49* is an ironic affectation – a stylization of the poet-self that stands against (yet works within as it manipulates) a literary tradition. As such, neotericism must be understood as a counter-poetic movement that relies on self-referential irony to accomplish its aesthetic purpose – which is often, ironically, a re-evaluation of the very formal techniques it employs.

Self-Stylization: Alcyon and E.K.

As a poetics concerned with the revision of traditional formal modes, neoteric poetry often makes use of the pastoral space to express poetic discontent. In doing so, that space is revised in its appropriation, and its self-consciousness is heightened, as pastoral complaints serve to highlight the fictional potential of its Golden Worlds, while at the same time pointing up their status as fictions. As Patrick Cullen has explored at length, “Spenser used not only pastoral, but also a division within pastoral, as a means of portraying and exploring a conflict of values.”²⁷⁸ Alongside ‘Astrophel,’ *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, and the *Faerie Queene VI*, the *Daphnaïda* is indicative of Spenser’s turn to pastoral experimentation in the early 1590’s. Within this series of pastoral experiments Spenser places thinly disguised versions of four actual poets: Gorges, Sidney, Raleigh, and Spenser himself. Imagined

²⁷⁷ R.O.A.M. Lyne, “The Neoteric Poets,” in *Catullus: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 140.

²⁷⁸ Patrick Cullen, *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1970), 2.

discussions between them serve as loci, as both Patrick Cheney²⁷⁹ and Oram have recognized, for Spenser's exploration of the vocation of poetry. When considered as a participant in these conversations, "Alcyon appears (unlike the narrator) as a poet whose art is paralyzed, limited to mere repetition of his 'endlesse plaints of pittie.'" ²⁸⁰ In this way, his voice satirizes the complaint mode just as it figures forth a voice of poetic discontent.

As this study explores at length in my first chapter, Spenser's experimentation with pastoral forms marked his debut as the new Poete and first advanced the potential of neoteric style, or to reiterate Grosart's useful descriptive phrase, a style of "natural artificiality" which would later expand idiosyncratically among other writers as the genre came to fruition in the 1590's. *The Shepheard's Calender* (1579) was Spenser's first exploration of the pastoral mode as a vehicle for commentary on poetic craftsmanship, as well as his first exploration of the complaint mode (although there is certainly evidence of such a voice in *A Theatre for Worldlings*). The *Calender* is a metrically and stylistically experimental volume that both marks Spenser's self-invention and introduces a curious poetic counterpart in E.K. In a manner not unlike the early neoterics, the *Calender* plays with self-representation as an artifice that is both part and product of neoteric poetry. The introductory letter by the enigmatic E.K. is addressed to Spenser's mentor and confidante Gabriel Harvey, and the writer – fiction or friend – boldly situates the poet's first volume of poetry within the evolutionary arc of the English literary tradition. E.K. implies that the volume inaugurates a new era of English verse. His letter refers to the *Calendar's* author as "The New Poete," because of his unusual style – his "seemely symplicitie" and rustic revival of Chaucerian English. Thus,

²⁷⁹ Patrick Gerard Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

²⁸⁰ William A. Oram, "Daphnaida," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 209.

Spenser is counted among the humble shepherds in the *Calendar* while the voice of E.K. functions as both critic and metacritic.

The “problem” of the *Shepherd’s Calendar* is precisely the ironic voice of its glossarist, which purportedly serves to showcase the poet’s skill. Like Alcyon, he speaks in an inappropriate manner and resists readerly expectations. The supposition that E.K. functions to call attention to the crafted nature of Spenser’s narrative relies on the presumption that E.K. and Spenser are collaborators of a sort. Yet E.K., as a glossarist, appears at times inept, other times deliberately misleading, and his citations, which often provide inadequate and incorrect definitions²⁸¹ serve more to offer the poem a complex, meta-poetic polish than to properly “gloss” Spenser’s allusions. Spenserians have devoted countless pages to arguments concerning the identity of E.K. in an attempt to transpose an aesthetic conundrum into an historical one, much (we might presume) to our departed poet’s glee. They have posited Edward Knight, Edward Kirke, Fulke Greville, Gabriel Harvey and Spenser himself as possible candidates for the authorship of the *Calendar’s* glosses.²⁸² Yet, as enticing as hunt for history’s mysteries may be, what these studies miss, as Ted Steinberg has written, is that E.K.’s glosses, however misleading, are central to the *Calendar’s* argument, and “implicit in . . . a demonstration [of the glosses’ centrality to the poem] is the assumption that Spenser wrote [them] himself and created the persona of E.K. in order to illustrate by example and

²⁸¹ For example. cremosin coronet, frenne, glen, and yblent in “April”; chevisaunce and inly (correctly defined in “September”) in “Maye”; pousse in “July”; miscreaunce in “August”; prive or pert in “September”; aequipage in “October”; and unkempt in “November” are all glossed in a manner that leads the reader away from their true meaning. See J.W. Draper, “The Glosses to Spenser’s ‘Shepherd’s Calendar,’” *JEGP* 18 (1919): 568.

²⁸² For further discussion as to the identity of E.K., see Agnes D. Kuersteiner, “E.K. is Spenser,” *PMLA* 50 (1935): 140-55; C. Margaret Grieg, “The Identity of E.K. of *The Shepherd’s Calendar*,” in *N&Q* 197 (1952): 332-4; McLane, *Spenser’s Shepherd’s Calendar: Chapter 17*, Goldberg, *Sodometries*: 64-7; Theodore L. Steinberg, “E.K.’s Shepherd’s Calendar and Spenser’s,” *Modern Language Studies* 3 (1973): 46-58; Louise Schleiner, “Spenser’s ‘E.K.’ as Edmund Kent (Kenned / of Kent: Kyth (Couth), Kissed, and Kunning-Conning,” *ELR* 20.3 (Sept. 1990): 374-407.

irony much of what he says in his poetry.”²⁸³

E.K., like Catullus in his “praise” of Cicero, and like Spenser’s representation of Alcyon as a fellow poet-shepherd, is an ironic stylization that points up how neoteric poetry is inherently tongue-in-cheek. This stylization of the poet is evident to those familiar with Spenser’s oeuvre. Critics such as Louise Schleiner have noted that it is common practice for Spenserians (Humphrey Tonkin, Isabel MacCaffrey, and David L. Miller) to speak of the “mind” of Spenser and E.K. as one and the same,²⁸⁴ meaning that it is important that we understand E.K. as “a riddle-designation for Spenser the scholarly glossarist” or, in other words, a persona.²⁸⁵ As Steinberg reminds us, “[E.K.’s] role is to present positions which oppose, and thereby highlight, the positions which Spenser supports in the *Calendar*.”²⁸⁶ Furthermore, Schleiner has brought to light textual evidence that indicates it is likely contemporary readers of the *Calendar* would have easily recognized E.K. as an obvious Spenserian persona.²⁸⁷ In Andrew Hadfield’s recent biography of Spenser, Hadfield seemingly acknowledges the likelihood that Spenser wrote E.K., inferring that it is probable “[Gabriel] Harvey and Spenser wrote the notes. . . as a means of self-promotion but also as a

²⁸³ Theodore L. Steinberg, “E.K.’s Shepheard’s Calendar and Spenser’s,” *Modern Language Studies* 3 (1973): 46.

²⁸⁴ Schleiner, “Spenser’s ‘E.K.’,” 375-6.

²⁸⁵ Schleiner, “Spenser’s ‘E.K.’,” 379. Schleiner proposes that the solution for the E.K.-as-Spenser riddle can be located in the poet’s imagining of himself as “Edmund of Kent.” Setting aside any contention with the “Edmundus Kalendaris” thesis (which is quite plausible), Schleiner’s argument is based not only on Kent as the poem’s “mental locale,” but on the fact that Spenser was, during the period of the *Calendar*’s composition, employed by the Bishop of Rochester in Kent and hence would have chosen to refer to himself as “Edmund of Kent.” The punning of “unkent,” “uncouth,” (unkyth), and “unkissed” in the poem’s dedicatory pieces, she infers, serve as clues to the *Calendar*’s authorship.

²⁸⁶ Steinberg, 54.

²⁸⁷ Schleiner, 379 cites this evidence, “On the title page of Robert Burton’s copy of the first edition of the Shepheardes Calendar is written, under the title, the words ‘by E. K.’ The inscription is apparently not in Burton’s handwriting nor in that of John Rouse, the librarian who must have catalogued the book upon its acquisition by the Bodleian Library in 1640. The catalogue of 1674 continues listing the author of this book as ‘E. K.’, not showing it under Spenser. Still partially legible on the title page is the name of an earlier owner, Johannes H-rd-ma-, possibly “Johannes Herdsman” (a pseudonym?-John Shepherd?). Who wrote the inscription ‘by E. K.’ we do not know, but whoever it was clearly assumed that the initials referred to the book’s author . . .”

self-regarding joke,” a move that suggests while we cannot truly know that E.K. was Spenser, we can safely assume that he had a hand in the composition of the glosses.²⁸⁸

This lengthy digression concerning the identity of E.K. posits an analogue between the problem of the *Daphnaida* and the problem of the *Calender*. Critics obsessively desire a historical explanation for both: Alcyon is hyperbolic because he is meant to represent Arthur Gorges; E.K. and Spenser are one and the same. A poetic rather than a historical explanation for the stylization of these characters looks instead to the deliberate formal elements of Elizabethan neoteric poetry and the manner in which they are expressed in Spenser’s fashioning of the poet-self. The construction of multiple speakers who stand in for the poet is a formal strategy that calls attention to the crafted-ness of the poem.

In its quest for “natural artificiality,” neotericism is highly dependent on “style” as a formal element, and the ensuing manipulation of self-representation is in itself stylistic. As Patricia Fumerton explains, in the Renaissance, “the aristocratic self needed to be reinvented to claim a new position able to overcome marginality by making marginality one with cultural centrality.”²⁸⁹ We can thus understand the self on the margins as a fragment, or piece of a larger cultural whole. The stylization of the self is an attempt to incorporate the self, for Spenser, into a literary trajectory that stands in for a cultural whole. Stylistic artistry thus includes self-representation, as writing the self is the process of making the real into the ideal. We can refer to self-representation as stylistic because it involves a fragmentation of the self – an exteriorization that “. . . applies to living beings and artifacts equally: to pleasing personalities.”²⁹⁰ To transform the self into a poetic trope is to artificialize the natural. Hence, we cannot reduce Alcyon to Gorges or E.K. to Spenser because the poetic

²⁸⁸ Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 123.

²⁸⁹ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 26.

²⁹⁰ Fumerton, 25.

commentary these characters provide functions to call attention to what is fragmented rather than analogous – oppositional rather than congruous – poetic and stylistic rather than historical.

Stylizing the self and creating multiple personae can also serve as a means of establishing the authority of one's verse. As Jane Grogan has noted, "[The] epistolary rhetoric of supplication, explanation, and promotion of one's poetic principles had become devalued [in the Renaissance], and writers with serious poetic intent faced the significant challenge of making themselves believed."²⁹¹ Whereas E.K.'s distinctive persona facilitates the elucidation of poetic principles in a constructed and public voice (albeit with a wink to Harvey), Spenser's persona as 'Spenser' in the *Letter to Raleigh* brings together, Grogan suggests, the public and private voices, all the while exploiting the potential of the private voice to preserve the authenticity of poetic principles. Thus, "Where E.K.'s epistle and glosses seek to conceal, the Letter to Raleigh prodigiously reveals."²⁹² I would argue, however, that the distinction Grogan makes between public and private is tenuous at best, for neoteric poetry is invested in the ironic voice as poetic technique; thus, we might say, all voices are suspect. Whether public or private, these pastoral voices each have a different complaint to make about poetry, and in the manipulation and division of the poet-self into a multitude of oft-conflicting voices, neoteric poetry becomes discursive or circuitous; it is a method of self-presentation and self-examination, composition and criticism.

Plundering the Pastoral

Neotericism plays with the traditional formal modes that it seeks to revise, creating upheaval, division, and dissonance. The *Daphnaïda*'s narrator makes use of verbal expressions

²⁹¹ Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 38.

²⁹² Grogan, 38.

of grief to enact a destruction of the pastoral mode, thus the poem defies its own pastoral setting. As the traditional pastoral mode mourns a lost age, the voices of Spenser's shepherds call attention to the disjunction between the "happy past" and the "sad present." Returning again to *The Shepheard's Calendar*, the "October" eclogue begins with such a contrast, yet the true subject of Spenserian pastoral is not so much the lost heroic age in which poetry was golden, but a very present moment in which the topics of artistry (inspiration, formal choice, poetic vocation) are explored at length. Piers juxtaposes the past and present as he sadly reminds the lovelorn Cuddie, that once upon a time, his friend wrote good poetry:

Whilome thou wont the shepheards laddes to leade,
In rymes, in riddles, and in bydding base:
Now they in thee, and thou in sleepe art dead. (4-6).

As "October" makes clear, unfulfilled desire, love, or excessive preoccupations concerning love bring about the demise of the pastoral – or at least dampen the inspiration of he who leads the other poets in pastoral song. Yet perhaps such a demise is not so terrible, as Piers suggests that Cuddye, having abandoned his pastoral ambitions, might turn to the heroic mode for inspiration:

Abandon then the base and viler clowne,
Lyft up thy selfe out of the lowly dust:
And sing of bloody Mars, of wars, and guists . . .
There may thy Muse display her fluttryng wing. (37-39, 43)

Cuddye disagrees with Piers's claim that his muse might be revived in the composition of epic, reminds him, "great Augustus long ygoe is dead" (62). Thus, if one is to write an epic, it must be something entirely different and new, for traditional epic is the medium of old men

whose wit is destined to wither:

But after vertue gan for age to stoupe,
And mighty manhode brought a bedde of ease:
The vaunting Poets found nought worth a pease,
To put in preace among the learned troupe.
Tho gan the streames of flowing wittes to cease,
And sonnebright honour pend in shamefull coupe. (lines?)

Although youth may undertake the poetic aspirations of old men, Cuddye's belief in such a path is laced with cynicism, for ". . . if that any buddes of Poesie, / *Yet of the old stocke* gan to shoote agayne: /. . . it wither must agayne." (73-4, 77).²⁹³ The insinuation here is that the pastoral mode is somewhat spent – an ironic claim in a work by the new Poete that is itself an unrivaled pastoral experiment. The self-consciousness here is underscored by E.K.'s concluding notes to "October," which read "The style hereof is . . . that in Theocritus, is more loftye than the rest, and applied to the heighte of Poeticall witte."

"October" provides an interesting parody of the complaint mode that is useful as a comparison to the *Daphnaida*. Much of October's claims of pastoral demise appropriately (according to the sequence of seasons) follow the manner in which the mode flourishes in "August" alongside, and in tandem with, the "paynes" of love. In contrast, Willye and Perigot's rendering of Colin's song of heartache is joyful:

PER. But whether in paynefull love I pyne,

WIL. hey ho pinching payne,

PER. Or thrive in welth, she shalbe mine.

²⁹³ I highlight this line in order to point up the expressed belief that epic will fail if it is "that of the olde stocke," yet a new type of epic might succeed.

WIL. but if thou can her obtaine

PER. And if for gracelesse greefe I dye,

WIL. hey ho gracelesse greefe, . . .

PER. And you, that sawe it, simple shepe,

WIL. hey ho the fayre flocke,

PER. Fore priefe thereof, my death shall weepe,

WIL. and mone with many a mocke. (109-114, 117-120)

Thus Colin's heartache is turned into a lovely and ironic comedy, with a final pun that turns the "hollye eve" (PER, line 121) on which Colin met his love, into "hey ho holidaye" (WIL, 122). Although Cuddie corrects Willye and Perigot with a proper somber complaint, he not only inhabits the pastoral space (pointedly) while giving voice to grief, but calls on the landscape to assist him:

Let streames of teeres supply the place of sleepe:

Let all that sweete is, voyd: and all that may augment

My doole, drawe neare . . . (62-4)

The pastoral world functions to enable his expressions of grief. The nightingale, in particular, helps to amplify his emotion, accompany his sleeplessness, and generally awaken the whole world with "shrieking sound:"

Helpe me, ye banefull byrds, whose shrieking sound

Ys signe of dreery death, my deadly cryes

Most ruthfully to tune. And as my cryes . . .

You heare all night, when nature craveth sleepe,

Increase, so let your yrksome yells augment. (173-5, 177-8)

The transformation of the idyllic pastoral into a discordant space in this passage is an interesting juxtaposition to Alcyon's own shrieking which, as we shall see, stands in direct opposition to nature – more along the lines of the argument of “October” (somerly claiming the inevitability of pastoral demise alongside love) yet in the ironized tone of “August.”

In the *Daphnaïda*, Alcyon's intemperate grasping for his lost beloved affirms not only the demise of the “happy past,” but the pastoral space in which his love was (rather strangely) born. Daphne was the lion among the sheep, and however allegedly gentle, her presence foreshadows what her death inevitably affirms. Yet she is oddly aligned with the pastoral and her presence gives life to that mode, thus her absence destroys it:

But now ye Shepherd lasses, who shall lead

Your wandering troupes, or sing your virelayes?

Or who shall dight your bowres, sith she is dead. (316-318)

Daphne is both the life and undoing of the pastoral – like the poet's hand that writes and erases, she both creates and destroys. The greater consequences of her death are manifest in Alcyon's fierce and unrelenting denunciation of the elements of the pastoral landscape:

Let birds be silent on the naked spray,

And shady woods resound with dreadfull yells:

Let streaming floods their hastie courses stay,

And parching droughth drie up the christall wells;

Let th'earth be barren and bring foorth no flowers,

And th'ayre be fild with noyse of dolefull knells,

And wandring spirits walke untimely howres. (330-336)

The imperative voice of “Let” constructs a different kind of poet, one who holds a withering power over the landscape. This rhetorical destruction continues for several stanzas, in which Alcyon bids nature to bring forth “hideous monsters full of ugliness” (340), tells his “little flocke,” (344) whom he later calls “sillie sheepe” (351) to “Feede ye hencefoorth on . . . stinking Smallage and unsaverie Rew” (346-7) and “Be ye the pray of Wolves” (349). The refrain that is intricately woven into Alcyon’s lament, “Weep Shepheard, weep to make my under song,” is a song of mourning for a mode against which he appears not only to reject, but actively destroy. In his excessive grief, Alcyon levels the pastoral with his voice. The affect, however, is a keen awareness that this destructive voice, however loud, is inevitably powerless in that it fails to convince us the world should die, or even that others should shed tears for Alcyon’s loss.

Alcyon’s Excessive “Noise”

Alcyon’s “shrill” and “heavy-handed” voice is undoubtedly intentional, as the *Daphnaïda* does not apologize for its tone; rather, it celebrates discordance. Although Alcyon initially feigns deference in his claim that “Ne doo I care, that any should bemone / My hard mishap,” (75-76) upon the narrator’s suggestion that he explain his dejected state, Alcyon is not shy about his loudness. In fact, he screams his pain, imploring his unwilling listeners to join him in a cacophonous ruckus that announces how death lurks around every corner. His “song,” can best be described as a hysterical, multitudinous complaint about the injustice of a world in which beloveds die. He warns,

And ye more happie Lovers, which enjoy
 The presence of your dearest loves delight,
 When ye doo *heare* my sorrowfull annoy,

Yet pittie me in your empassiond spright,
And thinke that such mishap, as chaunst to me,
May happen unto the most happiest wight . . . (512-517)

Following this gloomy proclamation which calls the attention of the fortunate to Fortune's wheel and affirms that Alcyon expects his "annoy[ing]" complaint will reach many ears and generally spoil the fun of "happie Lovers," he likewise implores "fellow Shepherds" to wail and bemoan his fate:

And ye my fellow Shepherds which do feed
Your carelesse flocks on hils and open plaines,
With better fortune, than did me succeed,
Remember yet my undeserved paines,
And when ye *beare*,²⁹⁴ that I am dead or slaine,
Lament my lot, and tell your fellow swaines,
That sad *Alcyon* dyde in lifes disdaine. (519-525)

Alcyon is confident that not only will other poets hear his voice, they will also hear of his death (because he is either an extraordinarily famous shepherd or an extraordinarily loud one), sympathize with him, and continue his complaint post-mortem.

While this is obviously not the case, the poem is clearly meant to be something heard. However, it does not sound like a song (as one would expect in poetry), but a stream of seemingly ineffective rhetoric. The assumed purpose of all this screaming – the sympathy of other shepherds – is fiercely denied. The narrator implores Alcyon to "*tell* the cause which thee theretoo constrained," and what follows is an oral rendering that assails our ears:

I will to thee this heavie case *relate*,

²⁹⁴ The emphases on "heare" in these two passages is mine.

Then *harken well* till it to ende bee brought

For never didst thou *heare* more haplesse fate. (96-98)

The images in the poem – the lion that points up the Howard pedigree, and the quasi-allegorical revision of the Faerie Queene’s rendering of the Palmer – do not take center stage in the *Daphnaïda*. For Spenser the allegorist and maker of images, the *Daphnaïda* is a peculiar anomaly that resists our expectations. Where are the ornate images for us to interpret? Unlike Spenser’s *Muiopotmos*, a neoteric poem that relies on pictures to tell a story, in the *Daphnaïda* it is clear that we are not to look, but are instead implored to listen to a complaint that declares its purpose is to bring about the opposite of the emotion that it actually invokes.

Tears of Absence

Much of the poem’s discordance lies in its focus on Alcyon’s pain rather than the loss of Daphne. She is a peripheral figure in that the true subject of the poem is Alcyon’s weeping, and his tears are a significant rhetorical device. After recounting the murder of his “Lyonesse” by “a cruel *Satyre* with his murderous dart,” he spouts stanzas of inconsolable lamentation that underscore his self-defeating intention, to “dye alone.” The poem becomes downright soggy as it progresses. Alcyon initially “seeke[s] alone to weepe . . .” (77), yet in the lines that follow he is joined by other voices. After recounting his tale (with feigned reluctance), “he gan afresh to waile and weepe,” accompanied by the narrator, who “. . . for pitie of his heavie plight, / Could not abstaine mine eyes with teares to steepe” (169-171). He describes his weeping as bleeding: “In stead of teares, whose brackish bitter well / I wasted have, my heart blood dropping weares” (250-1); is implored by the ghost of his beloved not to weep “Ah why does my *Alcyon* weepe and mourne” (266); and repetitively

urges others to weep along with him as back-up singers to his performance: “Weep, Shepherd weep, to make mine undersong” (lines 294, 343, 392, 442, 490). He declares that he will consume his own tears: “My bread shall be the anguish of my mind / My drink the teares which from mine eyes do raine,” (375-6) and even “. . . hate[s] the Sea, because it teares supplyes,” (406).

Whereas these tears appear to be more about Alcyon than Daphne, their abundance interestingly functions to reinforce her affiliation with water, which has been somewhat undone by her personification as a lion. In Ovid’s rendering of the myth, it is the power of the rivers that inevitably bring about Daphne’s destruction and transforms her into an object that bears the leaves which function as emblems of praise for poets. Following Apollo’s pursuit, she calls to the waters for assistance in what might be described as a creative suicide:

Her strength was gone, worn out by the long effort
Of the long flight; she was deathly pale, and seeing
The river of her father, cried “O help me,
If there is any power in the rivers,
Change and destroy the body which has given
Too much delight!” (l.543-548)²⁹⁵

The etiological component of the myth is employed as Apollo declares his continued love for Daphne, in spite of her transformation:

. . . “Since you can never be my bride,
My tree at least you shall be! Let the laurel
Adorn, henceforth, my hair, my lyre, and my quiver:
Let Roman victors, in long procession,

²⁹⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1983).

Wear laurel wreaths for triumph and ovation.” (I.558-562)²⁹⁶

Daphne is transformed via water into a non-entity that exists for the use of the poet – we might say she is transformed, then, for Spenser’s purposes, into a poetic device or trope. Indeed, in the tradition of Petrarch’s Laura poems, poets often invoke Daphne to personify the poetic confusion between the literal and figurative objects of their amorous pursuits. In “The Garden,” Marvell writes, “*Apollo* hunted *Daphne* so, / Only that She might Laurel grow” (l29-30). Spenser was no stranger to Ovid’s story of Daphne and Apollo (*Metamorphoses* I.452-567), as it provided a source for the lover’s pursuit that appears repeatedly in *FQ* III and IV and, as he himself states, the laurel is “the meed of mightie Conquerours / And Poets sage” (*FQ* I.i.9).

Whereas the most obvious Daphne allusion is to Douglass Howard, to whom Gorges referred to in his poetry as “Daphne,” Spenser’s revises the myth of Daphne in that his focus is on the powers that transformed her, rather than Apollo’s desire. Thus, we might reconsider the meaning of the title, as Spenser not only transforms Daphne into an object, but a poetic device – a new way of representing the unrepresentable – with tears, or in the case of the *Daphnaida*, words written in tears. In transforming tears into words, Spenser reinforces the uselessness of both and attempts to endow a silent expression of ineffability with a *voice*. The impossibility of the poet’s task is precisely the point. This is an elegy that denies the comfort of the elegiac. The object of Alcyon’s affection is not Daphne, but an image deferred on which the poet can hang his laurels. In her affiliation with fountains and streams, she is a fount of inspiration that simultaneously takes the form of a fount of tears. This is in keeping with the fountain of inspiration depicted in the Petrarchan sequence in the *Theatre*. In this light, we can reconsider the excessive nature of Alcyon’s grief as an attempt

²⁹⁶ Ibid

to conjure this association with water not for the purposes of representing Daphne, but to highlight both the illusion of the poet's power over her representation and the insufficiency of the elegiac mode to truly represent grief.

Tears and the ineffability of grief are common elegiac topoi, and their affiliation is not unusual. In the work of Catullus, tears are often associated with voice, but they paradoxically point up silence instead of noise, as the poetic emphasis in such moments is on the act of looking upon a picture of grief, rather than the vocal expression of grief. Accordingly, when the image (the representation of unfulfilled desire – the character) speaks, s/he speaks with tear-filled eyes. In *Carmen 63* the neutered Attis, an acolyte of the goddess Cybele, having castrated himself in a moment of frenzy, looks out over the ocean towards the country s/he abandoned, filled with the regret of exile and lost manhood, eyes filled with tears. In the following passage s/he is first represented as a silent image reflecting indescribable emotion. As such, the elegy rendered here is subjective. The reader supplies the thoughts of Attis in this moment:

ita de quiete molli rapida sine rabie
simul ipsa pectore Attis sua facta recoluit,
liquidaque mente uidit sine quis ubique foret,
animo aestuante rusum reditum ad uada tetulit.
ibi maria uasta uisens *lacrimantibus oculis*,
patriam allocuta maestast ita uoce miseriter. (44-49)²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ So after slumber, now abandoned by her frenzied paroxysm, / Attis reflected on the deed that she herself had initiated, / saw where she was, what things she'd lost, mind purged to diaphanous clarity. / Back to the shore she forced her footseteps, heart full of simmering bitterness, / and there, as she gazed *with tear-filled eyes* at the ocean's lonely immensity, / thus she addressed her distant homeland in saddest accents and piteously.

It is immediately following this moment, in which the character's psychological state and weeping are conflated, that Attis's voice rises in a soliloquy of lamentation that anticipates both future misery and the continuation of the elegiac song, yet these words fail to give shape to her grief, but instead take the form of a series of open-ended questions that highlight absence, tears, and sounds for which there are no words:

patria, bonis, amicis, genitoribus abero?

abero foru, palaestra, stadio et gymnasii?

miser a miser, querendum est etiam atque etiam, anime.

. . . iam iam dolet quod egi, iam iamque paenitet. (59-61,73) ²⁹⁸

The goddess Cybele, offended by Attis's blasphemous regret, unleashes none other than a lion, to “. . . age ferox <i>, fac ut hunc furor < agitet <” (78)²⁹⁹ and drive him back from the shore and into submission. The lion, one of the two who pulls Cybele's chariot, is described as “the left one, cattle-killer,” ³⁰⁰ suggesting its ferocity and, if we read this passage alongside Alcyon's lament, interestingly emphasizes the oddity of the Daphne-lion who protects rather than attacks livestock.

In *Carmen* 64, Ariadne similarly speaks with tear-filled eyes as she looks out over the water at Theseus' departing ship.

saepe illam perhibent ardenti corde furem

clarisonas imo fudisse e pectore voces,

ac tum praeruptos tristem conscendere montes,

²⁹⁸ Absent from country, from my possessions, from friends and those who engendered me / absent from forum and from palaestra, from race-course and from gymnasium? / Ah wretch, ah wretch, whose life henceforward is nothing but wailing and misery! / . . . Now, ah now, what I've done appalls me; now, ah now, I repent of it!

²⁹⁹ . . . go, pursue him, plague him with savage dementia.

³⁰⁰ Green's interpretation. The reference is as follows: “ibi iuncta iuga resoluens Cybele leonibus / laeuumque pecoris hostem stimulans ita loquitur. [Cybelé then, unyoking the reins that harnessed the lions to her chariot pole, / goaded the left one, the cattle killer, kindling its wrath with her urgency] (lines 76-77).

unde aciem <in> pelagi uastos protenderet aestus,
tum tremuli salis aduersas procurrere in undas
mollia nudatae tollentem tegmina surae,
atque haec extremis maestam dixisse querellis,
frigidulos *udo* singultus ore cientem:
“sicine me patriis auectam, perfide, ab aris,
perfide, deserto liquisti in litore, Theseu?” (124-133)³⁰¹

The sense of a third person – the storyteller – is pronounced in these lines, calling attention to the fact that, in the context of the poem, these are the words of a speaking picture; Ariadne is not a character in the narrative, but rather a depiction of a story woven into the wedding coverlet of Peleus and Thetis. Yet the complexity of her psychological state and the ardency of her grief serve to confuse the reader, drawing us into the web-like labyrinth of Catullus’s art and begging the question – what exactly *is* the true subject of this narrative? Like Attis, Ariadne helplessly voices an unanswered question.

Here, the representation of unfulfilled desire is fully realized in the yoking of image and sound – we watch Ariadne undressed by the wind as she throws her curses windward. Indeed, the futility of these curses were recognized by Renaissance readers and interestingly associated with a similar elegiac voice. A 1554 edition of Catullus, for example, with Commentary by Marc Antoine Muret, bears a faded gloss next to Ariadne’s curse that reads:

³⁰¹ Often (they tell us) heart burning, wild with passion, / she’d pour forth shrill cries fetched up from her innermost breast, / and then in her misery would scramble up steep mountains / from where she could see further across the sea’s vast motion; / then, again, would rush into the briny’s toppling breakers, / light skirt hitched up, exposing her naked thighs, / and in the abyss of her sorrow heaving cold little sobs, / face streaked with tears would cry “Is *this* the way, then, / that – after taking me far from my ancestral altars - / you leave me on this lonely beach, perfidious, Theseus?”

“Tus.lib.4.L.22.”³⁰² which references the following lines in Tibullus: “Nec iurare time: Veneris periuria venti / Inrita per terras et freta summa ferunt.” (Book IV, lines 21-22)³⁰³ Ariadne’s words, then, are not unlike the tears that accompany them, and they serve to further represent her as a stilled image devoid of agency (on which the reader projects thoughts and emotions) rather than a true character within the narrative. Although her curse comprises some of the most eloquent lines of the poem and are arguably as powerful as the analeptic Song of the Fates, the melody that spins the threads of the tapestry that gives Ariadne life, they are inevitably futile in that they cannot capture what they are intended to represent: the absence of Theseus. Although Ariadne’s curse is one of the most lengthy vocal expressions in the poem, continuing for no less than 70 lines and containing the poem’s etiological component (nunc iam nulla uiro iuranti femina credat, / nulla uiri speret sermons esse fideles) (143-144)³⁰⁴ that refutes the promise of Peleus and Thetis’s future happiness and blurs the line between epithalamion and elegy, they are little more than sobs, as Ariadne recognizes: “sed quid ego ignaris nequiquam conqueror auris, / externata malo, quae nullis sensibus auctae / nec missas audire queunt nec reddere uoces?” (164-166)³⁰⁵ Curses thrown to the wind return only silence.

A Desire for Silence

Why is such futile speech so powerful? If we take in the image of the slowly retreating figures of Theseus’ ships, pursued in vain by the curses thrown by Ariadne, and the example of Attis grieving for something precious and forever lost, we can infer that the

³⁰² Catullus, Gaius Valerius, *Catvllus, et in eum commentarius M. Antonii Mvreti*, Venetiis: Apvd Pavlvu Manvtivm, Aldi Vilivm, M.D. LIIII. [1554]. The Newberry Library.

³⁰³ Don’t be afraid to swear: the winds bear vain oaths of love / over the lands and over the surface of the sea.

³⁰⁴ Henceforth let no woman trust a man’s sworn promise, / or hope that he’ll ever be true to his given word.

³⁰⁵ Oh, why do I uselessly plead to the indifferent breezes, / grief-stricken though I am? Being unendowed with senses / they can neither hear nor answer the words I utter.

emotion Catullus is attempting to capture in these elegiac moments is (both literally and metaphorically, in the case of Attis) *absence*. The most powerful expression of grief, then, gives voice to absence, and absence is expressed by silence – even if metonymically – through an association with wind, water, waves, or tears. This, I would argue, is something Spenser well knew, for the *Daphnaiida* is a poem almost formulaically written in tears as if he means to parody the trope of weeping that is such an oft-employed elegiac convention. If the reader is to sympathize with Alcyon's grief, then Alcyon needs to be quiet – or at least affiliate himself with the absence of noise. And Spenser, although he denies us that silence, is well aware of this necessity. There is a seeming attempt on Alcyon's part to deny his own senses by talking them to death. He performs a rhetorical self-blinding:

Hence foorth mine eyes shall never more behold
Faire thing on earth, ne feed on false delight
Of ought that framed is of mortall moulde,
Sith that my fairest flower is faded quight:
For all I see is vaine and transitory,
Ne will be helde in anie stedfast plight,
But in moment loose their grace and glorie. (lines 491-497)

This self-blinding is followed by a denial of all the senses – beginning (of course) with speech:

I hate to speake, my voyce is spent with crying:
I hate to heare, lowd plaints have duld mine eares:
I hate to tast, for food withholds my dying:
I hate to see, mine eyes are dimd with teares:

I hate to smell, no sweet on earth is left:

I hate to feele, my flesh is numbed with feares:

So all my sense from me are bereft.” (414-420)

Just as we are beginning to “hate” Alcyon because he refuses to be quiet, he brazenly invokes the voiceless Philomena: “With Philumene, my fortune to deplore, / With Philumene, the partner of my plight” (475-6) as if inciting in the reader a desire to literally *cut out* his tongue. Yet, much to our dismay, after these lines Alcyon continues to wail for no less than nine additional stanzas. It is as if Spenser is attempting to incite in his reader more than a desire for silence, but rather a visceral *need* for it. Thus, he requires that his readers seek to manufacture silence by their perceived rejection of noise.

In a discussion of another unusual Spenserian poem about tears, *Tears of the Muses*, Anne Lake Prescott writes, “It is not mere cynicism to say that grief, like generosity, can be aggressive.” Certainly, as Prescott affirms, one can “hear the resentment that gives urgency to the muses’ tears and the faint implication that there is something futile about inspiration so secret, so embowered.”³⁰⁶ The *Daphnaida* is indeed an angry poem. Whereas Ariadne’s curse ends with a call to the Furies, the *Daphnaida* appears to begin with something akin to such an invocation:

Let those three fatall Sisters, whose sad hands

Doo weave the direfull threds of destinie,

And in their wrath breake off the vitall bands

Approach hereto: and let the dreadfull Queene

Of darkenes deepe come from the Stygian strands,

And grisly Ghosts to heare this dolefull teene. (15-21)

³⁰⁶ Prescott, 146-7.

Such anger is an appropriate mode for the neoteric writer who seeks formal opposition and upheaval. If Spenser, then, wrote a viscerally angry poem in which language alone brings about utter destruction, defaces the name of the one who mourns via hyperbolic caricature (a radical stylization of the poet-self), curses the pastoral landscape in an imperative voice that commands it to wither and die, writes as “loudly” as possible in the most silent medium one can imagine (tears), acknowledges that Daphne’s absence is the agent of all this destruction, discord, and upheaval, and announces that blind, deaf, voicelessness is Alcyon’s preferred state of being, could the poet perhaps be imagining absence, and the silence by which it is characterized, in a similarly paradoxical way? Is it possible that we have been so busy “laughing” at this dark and highly unusual poem that we have failed to acknowledge that the affect we experience – a desire for silence – is precisely the poet’s intent?

A successful elegy embraces the ineffable and accepts that words are not enough. In making words fail, it brings us the closest it can to a picture of grief. But what is the *sound* of grief? With its unrelenting rhetoric, repetition, and noise, the *Daphnaida* takes us down a very real path we would rather not follow into a world inhabited by one so engulfed by the darkness of sorrow and pain that there is no sublime. Grief takes many forms, and it is, by turns, furious, comical, and prolonged. But it is above all an emotion we experience when faced with something that was, but is no longer, present. Silence is defined in the *OED* as a state of being characterized by the absence of noise. Silence (n.) is “the fact of abstaining or forbearing from speech or utterance.” We can discover a rendering of silence in the *Daphnaida*, but not in the places that familiar elegies have taught us to look – in the wind, in water, in tears – but in absence. Silence is absence, thus a truly successful elegy would, in effect, say nothing. The *Daphnaida*, in all its dissonance, is the most radical and innovative of

Spenser's experimental poems in that it plays with our expectations. Rather than showing us the emotion it seeks to represent, it leads us there. In affectively erasing itself (by becoming so loud we desire silence), Spenser has perhaps painted a true representation of grief.

Chapter 5: “They Decay Thou Seekst by Thy Desire”: *The Mutabilitie Cantos*

Spenser’s *Mutabilitie Cantos* express a fascination with endings, as if the *Faerie Queene’s* poet keenly felt the manner in which his epic project resisted completion. It would outlive him, as an entity in itself, beyond his control. A plethora of Spenser scholars have chosen to end their monographs with the *Cantos*, as it is fitting, perhaps at least chronologically, to provide a reading of the poems last. They were published a decade after Spenser’s death, and were likely composed in his final days. The persona of the Spenser-poet, the historical storyteller, is a powerful presence in the *Cantos*, as is his Irish experience, which one cannot help but read in lines like the following:

Ne shee the lawes of Nature onely brake,
But eke of Iustice, and of Policie;
And wrong of right, and bad of good did make,
And death for life exchanged foolishlie:

Since which, all liuing wights haue learn’d to die. (VII.vi.1-5)

The shades of the Irish landscape inhabit the space in which *Dame Mutabilitie* voices her complaint on *Arlo Hill*,³⁰⁷ and our awareness of the presence of the dead, alongside the aging Spenser-poet, points up the tremendous force of this nemesis of “Constancie” who is, if her claims have merit, herself the most constant, or at least the most consistent.

The notion of constancy has been largely ignored by critics, to the extent that Christopher Burlinson, in a recent article, calls it the “elephant in the room of Spenserian criticism,” and asks, “Is this a poem about mutability *and* constancy . . . or mutability rather

³⁰⁷ The mountain, according to both Hadfield and Hamilton, is Galtymore, the highest point of the Galtee Mountains (919 meters), otherwise known as “Dawson’s Table.” Spenser renames it after the glen of Aherlow that lies beneath. English colonists would have avoided all densely wooded areas (such as Aherlow) as they feared Irish rebels hiding within them. See Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 198. See also Hamilton’s footnote to VII.vi.36.

than constancy? Will constancy be allegorized in story of Mutabilitie? Do the Mutabilitie Cantos have anything to do with constancy at all?”³⁰⁸ Indeed, the *Cantos* comprise a poem that has more to do with the nature of mutability and little to do with the virtue it allegedly declares to allegorize. Its very foundation is paradox. *Dame Mutabilitie* is checked by Nature in the end, yet provides a compelling case for her own sovereignty. If the fragment is an “ending” to the *Faerie Queene*, then *Mutabilitie* emerges as the final book’s knight-ess rather than its dragon. The epic trajectory is exposed as circular, for mutability unites endings and beginnings, constancy and change, destruction and creation. The ever-shifting and contradictory nature of change perhaps requires such treatment; yet for the reader an awareness of human mortality is unusually dominant in this poem. The poem reads as a meditation on the “first estate” of all things, yet also on death itself and for us perhaps even the poet’s own death.

Spenser’s Irish experience echoes in the *Cantos* more than in any of his other neoteric works; thus it is hard not to read the poem’s aesthetics in part as an expression of its historicity. Although Nature rules change in the *Cantos*, Nature herself is chastened, as *Mutabilitie* asserts her power over the elements of the natural world, out of which poetry is fashioned in imitation. She rules Nature’s children, who are changed, in the poetic process, into a Sidneyan “new nature,” only to confront, in time, the same tragic endings. As Gordon Teskey writes, “thematic exploration is bound up with the temporality of its own composition [in the *Cantos*], one which, if its poet were immortal, would never cease drawing into itself new materials for combination and reflection, making the possibility of a conclusion increasingly remote . . .”; indeed, the *Cantos* appear a poem in which both art and

³⁰⁸ Christopher Burlinson, “Spenser’s ‘Legend of Constancie’: Book VII and the ethical reader” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 201.

life are sickly, as birth is transformed into the first breath of what will become a prolonged process of dying.³⁰⁹

For many desirous of a conclusion to the *Faerie Queene*, the *Cantos* at least highlight the possibility that Spenser wished to provide his readers with an ending, or at least a trace of the promised twelve books that were never delivered. And indeed, the Irish landscape that comprises the pastoral space in which the narrative plays out reminds us that this is Spenser's personal world, the land of Colin Clout, and the dominion of Faerie. *Dame Mutabilitie* is the tempestuous monarch, yet her representation is as ever-shifting as the change she enacts. As the poem opens, she appears an ally of Time, a servant of Nature – calling upon Nature as the only true judge for her case. Yet all natural things despise her:

For, she the face of earthly things so changed,
That all which Nature had establish first
In good estate, and meet order ranged,
She did pervert, and all their statutes burst:
And all the worlds faire frame (which none yet durst
Of Gods or men to alter or misguide)
She alter'd quite, and made them all accurst (VII.vi.5, lines1-7)

Although, I will argue, Dame Mutabilitie is the hand of creation, operating in tandem with *tempus edax rerum*,³¹⁰ she destroys. In spite of the fact that creation and growth are undoubtedly entangled with change, it is because of mutability that all things must inevitably

³⁰⁹ Gordon Teskey, "Night Thoughts on Mutability," in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 27.

³¹⁰ "tempus edax rerum, tuque, invidiosa vetustas, / omnia destruitis vitiataque dentibus aevi / paulatim lenta consumitis omnia morte! [Thou tyme, the eater up of things, and age of spyghtfull teene, / Destroy all things. And when that long continuance hath them bit, / You leysurely by lingring death consume them every whit.] Ovid, *The fyrst fower bookes of P. Ouidius Nasos worke, intituled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into Englishe meter*

die.

The tone of the above passage suggests that Spenser writes with a sense of defeat or worse, a despair of his unfinished epic project, and indeed the poem is often read as a reconsideration of epic. While I agree with the latter, this chapter will extend such a reading in its argument that *Dame Mutabilitie's* rendering as the world's artist is an extraordinarily innovative manner of aesthetic defiance that deconstructs the very frame of epic. Whereas the Spenser-poet (as we understand him) has not necessarily failed in the design of such a frame for his work, the *Cantos* are rather a backwards-looking reflection on and a radical reconsideration of that frame. The fragment, which this chapter will read as an independent poem rather than the final book of *The Faerie Queene* is a wiser, more seasoned representation of a neoteric poetic – one that speaks with a particular eye to human frailty, yet is characteristically preoccupied, as in Spenser's other shorter works, with the poetic process and with artistic control. The *Cantos* stand as both a public affirmation of refined artifice in the neoteric manner, and a meditation on the shadow-nature of artifice itself.

The presence of the Spenser-poet in both the text itself and in the margins – in part, as a persona brought to the text by the reader – indicate that this fragment should be considered in the context of the neoteric project, which is itself entangled with epic in a revisionary manner. This is even more apparent when one considers the narrative frame (a miniaturization of the epic project –i.e. an epyllion), the bold and defiant complaint at its center, the poem's aesthetic subject (poetic creation), its veiled parody, and its strangeness. This formulation appears at first complicated by the continuity in stanzaic form, setting, and style that one discovers in the movement from the *Faerie Queene* to the *Cantos*; yet, as this

by Arthur Golding Gent. *A worke very pleasaunt and delectable* (Imprinted at London : By VVillyam Seres Anno, 1565), 15.234-236.

chapter will illustrate, the *Cantos* look backwards in an oppositional and at times even a satirical manner.

Mutability's collaboration with Time, Nature, and destruction is also significant, for Spenser has brought us to the birth of Faerie to upend both epic and pastoral in part by yoking their representation with decay and demise. Herein is his final story, and we might perhaps look to the manner in which Spenser's historical circumstances have altered the poetry's aesthetic, as if the Spenser-poet (the hero of the reader's tale of history), is himself so altered that his poetry is thus bent. Indeed, Catullus provides a classical neoteric precedent for such a reading. In *Carmen* 65, he laments the death of his brother, invoking, from the most ancient of stories, the "Daulian nightingale" whose songs mourn Itylus,³¹¹ her slaughtered child:

<nunquam ego te potero posthac audire loquentem?>

numquam ego te, uita frater amabilior,

aspiciam posthac? at certe semper amabo,

semper maesta tua carmina morte canam,

qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris

Daulias, absumpti fata gemens Ityli – (lines 9-14)³¹²

³¹¹ The story of Itylus is as follows: Itylus' mother was Aedon, daughter of Pandareus of Ephesus and wife of King Zethus of Thebes. Envious of the great fertility of Niobe, the wife of her husband's brother Amphion, she planned to kill the eldest of Niobe's sons, but by mistake killed her own son instead. Zeus transformed her into a nightingale, and henceforth she forever was to sing songs of grief. The story is thought to be even more ancient than Homer's epic, for readers are apparently expected to know it in the *Odyssey* xix.519-24, for Penelope refers to the myth of "Pandareos' daughter" in her description of her nightly grief to the disguised Odysseus.

³¹¹ Shall I never henceforth be able to hear you speaking?> / Shall I never, brother dearer to me than life / see you again? But for sure I shall cherish you always, / always make songs that are saddened by your death, like those sung under the dense and shady branches / by the Daulian nightingale mourning Itylus' fate –

³¹² Shall I never henceforth be able to hear you speaking?> / Shall I never, brother dearer to me than life / see you again? But for sure I shall cherish you always, / always make songs that are saddened by your death, like those sung under the dense and shady branches / by the Daulian nightingale mourning Itylus' fate –

Catullus writes that his lyric will be changed by his brother's death, “. . . at certe semper amabo, / semper maesta tua carmina morte canam,” [but for sure I shall cherish you always, / always make songs that are saddened by your death] and although earlier in the same poem he writes of how his sorrow has become an impediment to his muse rather than an inspiration – “nec potis est dulcis Musarum expromere fetus / mens animi, natnis fluctuat ipsa malis”³¹³ – what this statement implies is that the physicality of death, when mediated by the artistic process, can distill into an aesthetic difference. This conflation of life and art, or the assertion of their interdependence, means that neither can escape the inevitability of mortal demise. It is as if Catullus imagines his own death in this haunted landscape, so too Spenser.

Such an historical fascination with Ireland threatens to lead us away from the poem itself, yet the backdrop of the *Cantos* is by no means irrelevant to Spenser's meditation on his trademark pastoral space and the innovation that lies within. Neither can the land of Faerie be utterly divorced from Ireland. Although Thomas Herron writes that an aesthetic or philosophical reading of the *Cantos* that “ignores or downplay[s] the Irish situation” is akin to “dancing wonderfully without first reconnoitering the dance-floor [and] such theorizing might break an ankle over an inconvenient reality,” I will attempt such a maneuver.³¹⁴ At the same time, whereas my argument indeed downplays the specific historical circumstances of Spenser's Irish experience, it does not ignore them. An aesthetic reading of the poem must delve – at least speculatively – into the mind of the poet, and to do so is impossible without an acknowledgement of Spenser's engagement with nation building in Ireland. I will ask the

³¹³ my imagination [is] unable to bring forth to birth sweet issues / of the Muses, so storm-tossed with trouble as it is . . .

³¹⁴ Thomas Herron, “The Irish property and propriety in the Faunus episode and *Colin Clout Come Home Again*,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 136.

reader to embrace, at least for now, the schism between history and the extant poem, for my reading functions to mediate between the two.

Furthermore, it is at the same time necessary to imagine a divide between Book VI of the *Faerie Queene* and the fragment that follows. For this chapter will show how, as Spenser ponders his role in nation building, he looks back not just to his epic project, but also to his overarching poetic project. Thus, he revises – a recursive task that inevitably involves a destruction and subsequent re-creation. The *Cantos*' preoccupation with death, then, might be considered a contemplation of the death of art alongside the artist – for the two cannot be separated – particularly for Spenser, who appears caught up in micromanaging not only his poetry, but also its reception. Can Spenser's poetic project exist without the Spenser-poet as a character within its frame? Can a national epic be rendered in a state of fragmented nationhood, or in an awareness of the failure to “make” a new nation in a tumultuous landscape that is itself the setting of death and destruction so unimaginable it resists representation? Who is to take up the mantle of “newness” in the absence of the new Poete?

The Fragment and the Critics

The matter of the *Cantos* relation to the *Faerie Queene* is widely debated. A.C. Hamilton clearly considered it a coda of sorts, as he included it in his annotated edition of the *FQ*. Robert Lanier Reid suggests that although it is plausible that the poems are “a medullar episode of an uncompleted legend,” the cantos might be read as a transitional poem in the sense of “the first stage of re-ascent to a vision . . . of the heavenly *urbs orbis*,” or as a “spiritual blueprint for building a morally acceptable earthly city.” His reading brings the poems' argument full circle with Redcrosse Knight's brief glimpse “of the celestial city

and the angelic ladder connecting it with the mutable earthly city.”³¹⁵ James Nohrnberg speculates inclusively on the matter as he refers to the *Cantos* as “an indispensable supplement to [the] *Faerie Queene*”³¹⁶ while noting that Spenser “has discharged his obligation in writing [his larger] work,” and implies that the poem is indeed a coda or ending of sorts.

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Andrew Zurcher’s recent article on the printing history of the *Cantos* opens the door for a reading of the poem as a miniaturization of the final book of Spenser’s epic-romance, and thus, I would argue, an epyllion. He argues that likely the poem was written in the last four or five years of Spenser’s life, as “consonance of narrative and allegorical matter between ‘The Legend of Sir Calidore’ and the tale of Faunus and Molanna strongly suggests coincidence of composition.”³¹⁸ The reason that their publication was delayed until 1609 was due to the transfer of printer’s rights. Spenser had a working relationship with William Ponsonby, the printer and publisher of most of Spenser’s works as well as editions of Sidney’s and of the Countess of Pembroke.³¹⁹ Upon Ponsonby’s death in 1604, the rights of printing for Spenser’s work and that of Sidney’s *Aradia* were passed through several channels before they were acquired by Matthew and Humphrey Lownes, who printed the 1609 edition, which included the *Faerie Queene* with the *Mutabilitie Cantos* presented as Book VII, along with a number of Spenser’s shorter poems.

³¹⁵ Robert Lanier Reid, “Spenser’s mutability song: conclusion or transition?” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 79.

³¹⁶ James Nohrnberg, “Supplementing Spenser’s supplement, a masque in several scenes: eight literary-critical meditations on a Renaissance numen called *Mutabilitie*,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 85.

³¹⁷ James Nohrnberg, “Supplementing,” 125.

³¹⁸ Andrew Zurcher, “The printing of the *Cantos* of *Mutabilitie* in 1609,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 40.

³¹⁹ Andrew Zurcher, “The printing of the *Cantos*,” 41.

Interestingly, the 1609 edition was apparently fashioned from a 1596 copy, as it reiterates a number of that copy's errors. Perhaps even more relevant to an understanding of Spenser's intentions for the poem's publication, Zurcher explains, is the fact that "the copy of 1596 used by Lownes in 1609 appears to have included some light annotations of a kind that smell of authorial intervention."³²⁰ Indeed, the hand of Spenser was perhaps not as far from the *Cantos* publication process as we might presume. He writes,

It is likely that this marked up copy of the poem from 1596 included the *Cantos*, or perhaps that Ponsonby, Waterson or Lownes acquired it from some unknown source at some point between Spenser's death and the publication of the edition in 1609 [and] Lownes provided the heading that suggests the cantos are a "parcel" of an additional book of the *FQ* titled "The Legend of Constance."³²¹

Although the notion of a "parcel" implies, in one sense, a larger work, and some partial manuscripts of Spenser's, as Zurcher explains, "were circulating fairly widely in the years before and after Spenser's death," we are never to know whether or not he ever intended to complete a Book VII, nor whether it would have been entitled "The Legend of Constance," an odd choice of endings with Elizabeth's death looming and both the Irish problem and the monarchical succession in a perpetual state of uncertainty.

Zurcher is not the first to argue that the *Cantos* are a fragment that was meant to remain a fragment. Some time ago, Humphrey Tonkin suggested that the *Cantos* might be considered a work that advertises its fragmentary nature, and thus should be interpreted in the manner of an independent work of art, such as the way in which we look to Aphrodite

³²⁰ Andrew Zurcher, "The printing of the *Cantos*," 43.

³²¹ Ibid.

of Milos, a sculpture famous for her missing arms.³²² Tonkin asserts that a more complete knowledge of Spenser's epic project might be gleaned by reading the *Cantos* apart from the *Faerie Queene*, as the latter is structured in such a way that, if the *Cantos* did not exist, we might look to Spenser's epic as "finished." He writes,

The air of completeness springs in part from Spenser's cumulative technique: each book deepens and expands the material preceding it. All the virtues spring from the first and greatest of them, Holiness, and are summed in Book VI, with its climactic vision of the Graces. Yet it seems that at any stage, if the work were to be cut off, we could discern in it a certain completeness. It is a useful exercise to imagine a shorter work and to consider how we might justify reading [*The Cantos*] as a finished whole.³²³

My reading of the poem's frame is aligned with Tonkin's, as well as with Zurcher's subsequent assertion that "given the playful stanza [Spenser] added on fugitive manuscripts, and given the narrative and allegorical preoccupation throughout the *Cantos* with looking and with exposure . . . this 'parcell' manuscript was intended, in this form, to remain just that."³²⁴ Although we must, to some extent rely on conjecture, Tonkin and Zurcher's premise has tremendous implications for Spenser's epic project, for it means the poet concludes by embracing the fragmented nature of epic (in a revisionary sense, its ruin) and its reliance on a series of "parcels." Thus the poet renders a mini-ending in which the point is the process of poetic composition – not only of Spenser's epic project, but also of his earlier poems. Zurcher's reading of "looking" and "exposure" may very well indicate Spenser

³²² Also known as Venus de Milo (130-100 B.C.E.). It is said that King Louis XVIII commissioned sculptors from around the world to fashion new arms, yet no one presented an appropriate alternative to her armlessness, thus she was left to be regarded in the beauty of her original form.

³²³ Humphrey Tonkin, *The Faerie Queene* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 43-44.

³²⁴ Andrew Zurcher, "The printing of the *Cantos*," 59.

meant us to read these just as they are, for these tropes also gesture to the poem's subject, which is both metaphysical (a meditation on death) and aesthetic (a meditation on poetic process).

The *Cantos* are a bit of a critical darling, for as poems about making, transformation, and change, they speak to the incongruence of image and idea embodied in allegory. Louise Gilbert Freeman writes that it is allegory rather than mutability that is on trial, and Spenser's anxieties about the accessibility of the ideal via the poetic image (or allegorical sign, in her formulation) are made explicit in the poet's critical self-reflection on the act of making. In so doing, "Spenser associates poetic invention with metamorphosis."³²⁵ Here, her reference to metamorphosis is more of an attempt to read the poems through an Ovidian lens than to suggest the tremendous possibilities of poetic invention (as a Catullan reading might suggest). Yet in the *Cantos*, Spenser indeed mediates between the natural world and the poet's world of forms, thus exposing the frailty of the larger poetic project. She writes, "For all allegory operates by relating two incongruous terms (the abstract and the physical, the ideal and the material) and by attempting to understand one term as mediated by the other." Thus, she posits an incongruity that heightens the possibility that allegory may be misconstrued."³²⁶

Freeman cites Walter Benjamin's influential essay "Allegory and Trauerspiel" as a theoretical paradigm for pointing up the disjunction between sign and referent on which Spenser reflects in the *Cantos*. She paraphrases Benjamin's argument as follows:

In all cases, readers tend to deny imaginatively the rift between an allegorical sign and the intelligible structure of significance in order to allow the allegory to operate.

³²⁵ Louise Gilbert Freeman, "Vision, Metamorphosis, and the Poetics of Allegory in the 'Mutabilitie Cantos'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45.1 (Winter, 2005): 65-93, 66.

³²⁶ Louise Gilbert Freeman, "Vision," 67.

While reading allegory always requires some measure of negation in order to mentally construct something that is absent . . . Benjamin goes on to argue that what is most consciously apparent in allegory is not a “truth” or an idea, but rather the absence of the idea.³²⁷

Hence Freeman proposes that the modernity of the *Mutabilitie Cantos* lies in the way in which Spenser calls attention to the “breach between the material and the ideal”; indeed, there is a sense that this tear in the fabric of the allegorical sign is reflected in the torn nature of Spenser’s allegory, in its fragmented-ness, its status as something meta-poetically incomplete, and the manner in which it advertises an awareness of that fact.³²⁸ Yet Freeman’s reading reiterates a familiar theoretical concern with allegory, in which the space between sign and referent is hardly concealed. My reading locates Spenser’s “modernity” in the impulse to highlight the disjunction between sign and referent, but also in the manner in which he insists on ruin, deconstruction and fragmentation as a premise to poetic composition. The revisionary project of neotericism implies a circularity – the notion that sign and referent, generic convention, and the very materials of nature with which the poet works, must be created, destroyed, and inevitably reborn.

The “Things” of Mutability

The function of this rift between sign and referent, the manner in which the materials of poetry are detached from the trueness of nature (and likewise tradition) via metaphors of ruin and demise, indicates a strategic focus on “things” in the *Cantos*. In its exploration of the character of change, the poem asks, “What is a thing? What is a poem?” and indeed these questions are particularly relevant to a reading of the *Cantos* as a narrative

³²⁷ Louise Gilbert Freeman, “Vision,” 67.

³²⁸ Louise Gilbert Freeman, “Vision,” 68.

of poetic creation. Gordon Teskey writes that the contest represented in the poem is not religious but metaphysical, “it is the underlying question of traditional metaphysical inquiry, analogous to the principle of identity in logic: what is a thing? Once one attends to it, one is startled at how often the word *thing* appears in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, usually in connection with *change* . . .”³²⁹ Mutabilitie herself is a thing, but as that thing she lacks a true essence as she embodies change. “If the ‘euer-whirling wheele / Of *Change*, the which all mortall things doth sway’ (VII.vi.2) is enemy to the thing, then the made thing, the poem, is founded on what is other than itself, and inimical to itself.”³³⁰ If the root of things, then, is otherness, then what is crafted from these materials (things) is by its very nature oppositional. Neoteric poetry’s very topoi are self-negating (in their existence as paradox) as their nature is inherently oppositional.

In mutability’s inconstancy, the immortality of the image and thus the poem is called into question – hence calling into question the mode of allegory, the epic genre, Spenser’s revision of that genre, and his own fate as a poet concerned with nationhood and nation-making (in Ireland). Teskey writes, “Images are traditional, having been handed down through time, but are none the less difficult to hold in the mind; images fade.”³³¹ Spenser is keenly aware of this fact. Conflating “things” with “things of the natural world” and hence with the materials of poetry, the *Cantos* point up the poetic process:

. . . for what could be more in the nature of the materials of poetry – diction, meter, rhythm, rhyme, enjambment, syntactical complexity, decaying and re-forming images, stanzas, structures, stories, visions – than for those materials always to long

³²⁹ Gordon Teskey, “Night Thoughts on Mutability,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2010), 25.

³³⁰ Gordon Teskey, “Night Thoughts,” 30.

³³¹ Gordon Teskey, “Night Thoughts,” 32.

to turn into something other and better than themselves, such as the truth, even as they continually return to themselves.”³³²

Hence “the processes of the natural world offer things to our sight when we impose a certain thing-ness on them, when we see the things as such, and the highest form of this seeing is vision such as we find in poetry.”³³³ How can poems change, how are they mutable, after they are brought into being? Why Spenser’s focus on “things”?

The Neoteric Poet: Mistress of Change

The *Cantos* make clear early on that Mutabilitie works with “things”; she is the artist of the world, so to speak. She holds dominion over all things on the earth – made and unmade (formed by Nature), for “. . . not men onely (whom she soone subdued) / But eke all other creatures, her bad dooings rewed” (VII.vi.4). In her brash assertion of sovereignty, Mutabilitie is a persona-driven force of control in the *Cantos*. Nature, as a formed entity (by Spenser) appears in all her thing-ness for the trial, “like an image in a glass” (VII.vii.6). Spenser’s description of Nature characterizes her as less a motherly figure that masters earthly things, and more as a reflective mirror. She is covered by a reflective dressing of sorts: “Her garment was so bright and wondrous sheene / That my fraile wit cannot deuize to what / It to compare, nor finde like stuffe to that” (VII.vii.7). The poet’s insistence here on his “fraile wit” is a characteristically Spenserian under-assertion of poetic persona, but more importantly, he affiliates Art and Nature by entering the narrative as the master of Nature. Even more telling is the crafted setting from which Nature hears Dame Mutabilitie’s complaint, which the Spenser-poet, at the same time, insists is entirely un-crafted:

In a fayre Plaine vpon an equall Hill,

³³² Gordon Teskey, “Night Thoughts,” 37.

³³³ Gordon Teskey, “Night Thoughts,” 35.

She placed was in a pavilion;
Not such as Craftes-men by their idle skill
Are wont for Princes states to fashion: (VII.vii.8)

A man-made pavilion in the midst of the Irish wilderness is certainly a curiosity, but we must recall that this is also Spenser's domain – his particular pastoral, over which he asserts mastery as an English colonist, and therein are the pastoral materials that comprise his poetic landscape. The pavilion's strangeness, in the green of Ireland, denies its crafted nature; it is greater than something crafted for Princes, thus not crafted, yet obviously crafted in the context of the narrative of mutability – appropriately shifting in the hands of an artist whose project is change.

It is from this structure that looms so large in Spenser's Irish pastoral that we are witness to the fertility of Nature who, placed within this crafted / uncrafted pavilion, provides abundance seemingly without intention:

But th'earth her self of her owne motion,
Out of her fruitfull bosome made to growe
Most dainty trees; that, shooting vp anon,
Did seeme to bow their bloosming heads full lowe,
For homage vnto her, and like a throne did shew. (VII.vii.8)

Similarly, everything around her seems to fashion itself rather than present itself as something fashioned: "*Mole* himself, to honour her the more, / Did deck himself in freshest faire attire" (VII.vii.11), and ". . . all the earth far vnderneath her feete / Was dight with flowres, that voluntary grew / Out of the ground, and sent forth odours sweet" (VII.vii.10). The shifting things of Nature, then, are not under the dominion of Nature – they merely

spring forth and are reflected by Nature. Spenser thus asserts that Nature is more of a fertile ground or set of materials to be crafted rather than something that is herself crafted (or herself a craftsman), for as mother of all things, she does not appear to control what she births. She is exposed as the mother of “thing-liness” instead.

The ambiguity of Spenser’s representation of Nature, particularly in regards to her gender and what she keeps hidden, further points up her status as a “thing” from which other “things” arise. Perhaps because of her fertility, she is referred to as feminine, yet she is covered from head to foot “For, with a veile that wimpled euery where, / Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare” (VII.vii.5). Not only is she faceless, she also lacks a gender. The poet significantly points up her androgyny “Yet certes by her face and physnomy, / Whether she man or woman inly were / That could not any creature well descry” (VII.vii.5). All descriptions of her are ambiguous and paradoxical. She is young and old, moving and unmoving, seen and unseen (VII.vii.13). Within her is contained all things and from her is made all things.

Catullus exerts control over the “things” of the natural world via speaking objects that in turn speak of their status as art. A fun example is the house door in *Carmen* 67, which is asked (by the poet) to gossip about the inhabitants of the house. Comedy ensues. The character “Catullus” greets the door with a flattering description, and wishes that the door be blessed with the progeny of more doors (a rather impossible feat): “O dulci iucunda uiro, iucunda parenti, / salve, teque bona Iuppiter auctet ope,” (1-3)³³⁴ followed by an inquiry as to the sexual activity of the house’s inhabitants. The house door responds with a claim that it is not his (the door’s) fault that the inhabitants are so licentious: “uerum istuc populi ianua

³³⁴ Catullus: O delight to a pleasant husband, delight to a parent, / greetings, and may Jove grant you good increase.

quicque facit, / qui, quacumque aliquid reperitur non bene factum, / ad me omnes clamant: ianua, culpa tua est."³³⁵ In a more somber context, Catullus similarly gives voice to a speaking object in *Carmen 68b* in a permutation of a trope familiar to Renaissance poets: the notion that poetry is somehow the progeny of the poet – a living, speaking being rather than a mere legacy. Catullus as he explains how his poem's very paper will speak and thus conquer and triumph over death:

sed dicam uobis, uos porro dicite multis
 milibus et facite haec carta loquatur anus
 <sic per opus nostrum crescat sua fama per annos>
 notescatque magis mortuus atque magis.³³⁶ (45-48)

In fact, via posterity fame “crescat” [grows, becomes augmented, dilates] in a manner not unlike Nature's verdict that what springs from her does not change from its first estate by the hand of mutability, “But by their change their being doe dilate: / And turning to themselues at length againe, / Doe worke their owne perfection . . .” (VII.vii.58).

Catullus's awareness of the interdependence of art and nature and his assertion of his own power over these materials is further developed as he traces “nature” within a crafted object by giving to crafted “things” etiological stories. The cutter of *Carmen 4* – the boat that was born from trees – tells a story that asserts its thing-ness via a return to its origins. The voice of the cutter is prominent, even majestic. The poet-creator endows its majesty in a manner that metonymically and recursively returns praise to her master:

ubi iste post phaselus antea fuit

³³⁵ But you know what the folk say, “Blame the door for everything” - / whenever some peccadillo is discovered, / a chorus goes up at once: “Door, that's *your* fault!”

³³⁶ No, I shall tell you, and you thereafter tell countless / thousands, making this paper speak in its old age. / <Thus through my work let his fame with time be augmented>/ and yet greater renown accrue to him in death.

comate silua; nam Cytorio in iugo
loquente saepe sibilum edidit coma.
Amastri Pontica et Cytore buxifer,
tibi haec fuisse et esse cognitissima
ait phaselus: ultima ex origine
tuo stetisse dicit in cacumine,
tuo imbuisse palmulas in aequore
et inde tot per impotentia freta
derum tulisse, . . . (10-19)³³⁷

We know this cutter is finely crafted, as the speaker goes on to boast of her ability to master the waves, in a manner that augments the speaker's ethos and inflates his persona – he is a fine man with a fine boat and thus is himself master.

In the context of Catullan epyllia, there is much “speaking” going on by the inhabitants of the woven coverlet in *Carmen 64*, apart from Ariadne's lament (which is by now familiar.) The narrator strategically inserts his voice in the narrative as Ariadne ceases her weeping and cursing. The poet thus tells of the dialogue between Theseus and Aegeus upon his initial departure:

namque ferunt olim, classi cum moenia diuae
linquentem gnatum uentis concrederet Aegeus,
talìa complexum iuueni mandata dedisse
gnate mihi longa iucundior unice uita,

³³⁷ the destined future cutter, started out her life / as leaf-maned trees, which on | Cytórus's mountain ridge / would often whisper with soft-speaking foliage. / Pontic Amastris and | you, groved Cytórus's slopes, / to you this setting was, and still remains, well known, / the cutter says, in her remote beginning she / claims it was on your summit that she stood, that yoru / waters were then the first to handsel her trim oars, / and from that moment on, through strait on hazardous strait / carried her master.

gnate, ego quem in dubios cogor dimittere casus,³³⁸

The use of “namque ferunt olim” reminds the reader that the narrator is present, telling a story that has already been told, in a new manner that is layered and miniaturized. The coverlet as a “speaking object” even sings and dances: following the story of Theseus’ grief for his father, Bacchus enters with a band of shrieking satyrs: “euhoe bacchantes, euhoe capita inflectentes.”³³⁹ The poetic persona of Catullus speaks as a poet through his stories and he forms a persona-esque object to speak for him. Similarly, Dame Mutabilitie stands in for the neoteric poet, whose defiant mastery over “things” points up the transformative power of poetic creation, framed as an epyllion in which the poet provides an ever-present assertion of self and difference. Dame Mutabilitie asserts her power over the natural world, and she insists that her power should be inflated and “augmented,” an assertion that Nature affirms in her verdict, even though it is framed as a denial of Mutabilitie’s claim.

Dame Mutabilitie is indeed represented as a disruptive force, and her representation is framed by an etiological myth of origins, a trope that is characteristic of the form of the epyllion³⁴⁰ and serves the Callimachean³⁴¹ aesthetic of miniaturization as it presents a tiny story within a tiny story: “She was, to weet, a daughter by descent / Of those old *Titans* that did whylome striue / With *Saturnes* sonne for heauens regiment” (VII.vi.2). Spenser elaborately details the etiology of her family tree:

For, *Titan* (as ye all acknowledge must)

Was *Saturnes* elder brother by birth-right;

³³⁸ For when Aegeus, they say, was entrusting the winds his / son and his son’s fleet on departure from Athen’s ramparts, / he embraced the young man and gave him these instructions: / “My only son, dearer to me than long life, my son / whom I’m forced to send forth to a perilous destiny. . .

³³⁹ Line 255: screaming “*euhoe, euhoe*,” heads jerking madly.

³⁴⁰ See Georgia Brown, *Redefining English Literature* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 107. She writes, “The epyllion is constructed out of etiological myths, including myths about the birth of the poet, myths about the origin of names, and myths about the origin of genres.”

³⁴¹ As in the *Aetia*, “Big book, big evil.”

Both, sonnes of *Vranus*: but by vniust
 And guilefull meanes, through *Corybantes* slight,
 The younger thrust the elder from his right:
 Since which, thou *Ioue* iniuriously hast held
 The Heauens rule from *Titans* sonnes by might;
 And them to hellish dungeons downe hast feld:

Witnesse ye Heauens the truth of all that I haue teld. (VII.vi.27)

Dame Mutabilitie's very heritage is one of opposition, defiance, and upheaval and, in an interesting sense in regards to the *Cantos*, her heritage is one of injustice, as her birthright has been rudely snatched away. Her status as a Titanesse establishes her power over Jove (for the reader – despite Jove's denial), for she claims he is “no equall Iudge” (VII.vi.35). and “I greater am in blood (whereon I build) / Then all the Gods, though wrongfully from heauen exil'd” (VII.vi.26). She is a powerful and terrifying force who consistently “ . . . did this *Titanesse* aspire, / Rule and dominion to her selfe to gaine; / That as a Goddess, men might her admire” (VII.vi.4). Even the gods desire to flee from her presence: “At sight of her they suddaine all arose, / In great amaze, ne wist what way to chose” (VII.vi.24). Her very origins are oppositional, and thus establish her as an appropriate voice to insist on the power and might of the artist's hand.

Catullus renders an interesting precedent for Spenser's representation of Dame Mutabilitie – an Earth-goddess in the process of enacting radical transformation. In *Carmen* 63, in a manner similar to Spenser's Nature, Attis is sculpted as a non-gendered entity– a neutered male (gendered neuter in the original Latin) whose self-transformation is brought about by the shadow of Cybelé who, as an agent of change, strikes terror into the hearts of

both her readers and acolytes. Her song initially echoes in the voice of Attis, who seems a possessed puppet as he urges others to join him in viciously unmaning their bodies:

agite ite ad alta, Gallae, Cybeles nemora simul,
simul ite, Dindymenae dominae uaga pecora,
aliena quae petentes uelut exules loca
sectam meam excecatae duce me mihi comites
rapidum salum tulistis truculentaque pelagi,
et corpus euirastis Veneris nimio odio;
hilarate erae citatis erroribus animum.³⁴² (12-18)

Attis emerges from this trance in an ambiguous state as a woman who is at the same time not a woman, waking from a sleep at sunrise, in full awareness and understanding, as a new creation: “simul ipsa pectore Attis sua facta recoluit, / liquidaque mente uidit sine quis ubique foret.”³⁴³ (45-46) His / Her repentance, however, is met with fury by Cybélé, who asserts her dominance over this new (and malleable – being ungendered) creation, and urges him back into a trance-like state, thus subjugating him to her control as she instills fresh terror via pursuing lions, to whom she addresses the following: “‘agedum,’” inquit, “‘age ferox <i>, fac ut hunc furor <agitet>, / fac uti furoris ictu reditum in nemora ferat, / mea libere nimis qui fugere imperia cupit’”³⁴⁴ (78-80). The smallness of Attis under the dominion

³⁴² “On together with me, you Gallae, seek the high forests of Cybelé, / on together, you roving herd of the Dindyménian Dómina, / who like exiles in pursuit or new and alien territory, / following me as a leader, comrades to my orders obedient / bore the salt sea’s tidal swiftness, its rough oceanic truculence, / and now have all unmanned your bodies | from too great hatred of ventry - / by your impetuous wanderings let your | mistress’ heart be exhilarate! . . .”

³⁴³ Attis reflected on the deed that she herself had initiated, / saw where she was, what things she’d lost, mind purged to diaphanous clarity.

³⁴⁴ “Go now, my fierce one, go, pursue him, plague him with savage dementia, / make the stroke of his frenzy drive him back to the groves of my habitat, / he who yearns so overfreely to shake off my mastering dominance!”

of Cybélé (in his terror) further reinforces the notion that he is both her creature and her creation.

If we look to Dame Mutabilitie's similar assertion of dominance over Nature (albeit in the ironic guise of deference), the similarities between her representation and that of Cybélé are remarkable, particularly in their shared duality. Nature's representation, like Attis, is that of one who is ungendered, in that she cannot be interpreted as man or woman, for she is hidden: "Yet certes by face and physnomy, / Whether she man or woman inly were, / That could not any creature well descry" (VII.vii.5). The known colloquial phrase "mother nature," as well as Mutabilitie's reference to Nature as "mother" – "Lo, mighty mother, now be iudge and say," (VII.vii.47) upsets this formulation and further heightens the ambiguity of her depiction. Her uncertain gender indicates her malleability, and serves as a mirror that reflects (yet resists) Dame Mutabilitie's bold attempts to control her. In the process, she shows us again the self-reflective nature of Spenser's *Cantos*. She is considerably over-dressed for the event, in the manner of ostentatious neoteric style, such that she is "wondrous": Her garment was so bright and wondrous sheene, / That my fraile wit cannot deuize to what / It to compare . . ." (another instance of the ironic humility so characteristic of the Spenser-poet). Her stylization by the Spenser-poet, indicates Dame Mutabilitie serves as a liaison of sorts – creating within the poem while the Spenser-poet, at the same time, creates from without.

Spenser implies that Nature's over-dressing is contrived to hide her terrifying face, an unusual statement, as no one has apparently seen her face: "That some doe say was so by skill deuized, / To hide the terror of her vncoth hew, / From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized" (VII.vii.6). Yet this mirroring of the poet (here, Dame Mutabilitie) is in keeping

with the description of Nature as “like an image in a glass” (VII.vii.6). She is thus ambiguous, reflective, malleable, and asserts her “thing-ness” via her clothing and the crafted setting from which she judges Dame Mutabilitie’s complaint. Spenser even provides a permutation of Cybelé’s Lion, here reflected in her face: “For that her face did like a Lion shew, / That eye of wight could not indure to view” (VII.vii.6). The language indicates the radical and oppositional multiplicity of what can be formed in the process of her poetic unmasking (although here she is currently hidden). Her countenance, in the brief three-stanza verdict that concludes the second canto, is telling:

So hauing ended, silence long ensewed,
 Ne *Nature* to or fro spake for a space,
 But with firme eyes affixt, the ground still viewed.
 Meane while, *all creatures, looking in her face*
 Expecting th’end of this so doubtfull case,
 Did hang in long suspence what would ensew. (VII.vii.57)

Nature may declare her rule over mutability, yet when presented with its evidence in the natural world, she is unmasked and mastered, only to “. . . vanish, whither no man wist” (VII.vii.59) and retreat into oblivion.

Revision from Ruin

Virgil’s *Georgics* are an interesting counterpart to Spenser’s representation of change as something that can be brought into a state of submission by the poet’s hand, as well as the notion that life springs forth from fragmentation and decay. It is a text that exhibits both significant Catullan influence and traces of an Alexandrian aesthetic, in its miniaturization of epic matters (the nation of bees in Book IV is an apt example) and its address to learned

readers, familiar with mythological poetry: “omnia iam uulgata: quis aut Eurysthea durum / aut inlaudati nescit Busiridis aras.”³⁴⁵ (3.4-5) The riddle of the *Georgics* in part lies in its frame as a handbook of husbandry, yet as Nicholas Horsfall writes, “We should not suppose that with a sharp separation between intended reader and imagined addressee we have solved the problem(s) for good and all. The learned reader was a good deal nearer the land than might seem at first sight likely to the modern scholar.”³⁴⁶ The “in-setting” of Orpheus in Book IV is indebted to that of Theseus and Ariadne in *Carmen* 64, and the poem overall indicates the influence of other members of Catullus’s circle. Classical scholars have identified references to the work of Helvius Cinna, Varro Atacinus, and Varius.³⁴⁷ More obvious perhaps are the explicit borrowings of Catullan metaphors. Consider the following from the *Second Georgic*:

sed neque quam multae species nec nomina quae sint,
est numerus: neque enim numero comprehendere refert;
quem qui scire velit, Libyci velit aequoris idem
discere quam multae Zephyro turbentur harenae.³⁴⁸

Then note its similarities to the following passage from *Carmen* 7, in which the speaker describes the number of his lover’s kisses that he desires:

quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae
laserpiciferis iacet Cyrenis
oraclum Iouis inter aestuosi

³⁴⁵ “Those other songs are now waxed common: Who has not heard the story of the harsh king Eurysthéus? Who has not heard of cruel Busiris’s altars?” All excerpts from Virgil’s *Georgics* in this chapter are taken from *The Georgics of Virgil*, translated by David Ferry (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 93. As Ferry does not provide line numbers, I will indicate the page for each quotation. For interpretation of these particular lines, see Nicholas Horsfall, *A Companion to the Study of Virgil* (Leiden, Boston, and Koln: Brill), 65.

³⁴⁶ Nicholas Horsfall, *A Companion to Virgil*, 70.

³⁴⁷ Nicholas Horsfall, *A Companion to Virgil*, 83-84.

³⁴⁸ There are so many kinds, so many names, I couldn’t possibly hope to list them all. To try and do so would be tantamount to trying to count how many grains of sand whirl up when the west wind strikes the Libyan desert. *Georgics*, Ferry, 55.

et Batti ueteris sacrum sepulcrum.³⁴⁹

Although it is possible that Libya was famous for its sand, it is unlikely that Libya was the only place Virgil had ever encountered the substance. *The Georgics* are in direct conversation with their neoteric predecessor. Although the frame of Virgil's text is that of a handbook from which mankind can learn to exert his power over nature, such power is represented in such a way that farmers are both masters and makers subject to mutability (as "students" of the poet). In the *Second Georgic*, Virgil describes how to "discipline" new trees, thus shaping them into the farmer's desired design:

et saepe alterius ramos impune videmus
vertere in alterius, mutataque insita mala
ferre pirum et prunis lapidosa rubescere corna.
Quere agita o proprios generatim discite cultus,
agricolae, fructusque feros mollite colendo,
neu segnes iaceant terrae.³⁵⁰

The disciplining of wildness, and the "making tame" of the fruit trees in this passage is the evident point, yet in the attempt to impose order, a riotous growth of hybrid fruit bursts forth. Thus, the farmer's new creation is itself continually evolving and changing, escaping the limits imposed upon it.

A darker example of this phenomenon of making and the way life bursts forth extemporaneously when fashioned by its master in a particular way, the steps of which Virgil

³⁴⁹ Match them to every grain of Libyan sand in / silphium-rich Cyrene, from the shrine of / torrid oracular Jupiter to the sacred / sepulcher of old Battus.

³⁵⁰ . . . and often have we seen how shamelessly the branches of one tree have turned into the branches of another, the altered pear tree bearing grafted apples, or stony cornels reddening on a plum tree. Therefore, O farmers, learn what you have to know, the appropriate way to cultivate each kind, to discipline their wildness, make them tame. Don't let your land lie uselessly unused. *Georgics*, Ferry, 49.

carefully and sequentially lays out, lies in the narrator's disclosure of a "secret" that will remedy the farmer's predicament if all of his stock of bees are lost and he is without the knowledge of how to replenish that stock:

Sed si quem proles subito defecerit omnis
nec genus unde novae stirpis revocetur habebit,
tempus et Arcidii memoranda inventa magistri
pandere, quoque modo caesis iam saepe iuvenis
insincerus apes tulerit cruor. altius omnem
expediam prima repetens ab origine famam.³⁵¹

The reader's skepticism concerning this phenomenon as to whether or not bees can be born from nothing, so to speak, in the blood of a slaughtered bull, is only heightened when the great physical and emotional labor of the procedure is brought to light. The bull is to be shut into a tiny shed (as if this will force his being into miniature) and subsequently beaten to death "until his innards collapse" (another process of miniaturization). Thus a wild and unruly creature known for his savage virility is contained, compressed and flattened. As his carcass is left there to rot, the process of creation occurs naturally:

interea teneris tepefactus in ossibus umor
aestuat, et visenda modis animalia miris,
trunca pedum primo, mox et stridentia pinnis
miscentur, tenuemque magis magis aëra carpunt,
donec ut aestivis effusus nubibus imber

³⁵¹ But if it suddenly happens that the whole stock is utterly lost and you don't know how to go about establishing another, it's time to disclose the legendary secrets of the Arcadian master, by means of which bees were engendered from the putrid blood of a slaughtered bullock. I will go back to the very origin of the legend to tell about it. *Georgics*, Ferry, 163.

erupere, aut ut nervo pulsante sagittae,
prima leves inuent si quando proelia Parthi.³⁵²

Although the farmer performs this procedure in order to enact the result, it quickly becomes clear to the reader that a bit of trickery is taking place, for what is born from rot (as is evident in the passage – what is footless is undoubtedly worm-like) are maggots and swarming blackflies rather than bees. And the question that follows “Quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis extudit artem?”³⁵³ points up the fact that this is an artistic maneuver – a segue-way into a process of miniaturization, and hence Virgil’s transition into the epyllion within the *Fourth Georgic* that details Aristaeus’s quest for the golden hive. The wild, artless, rambling bull is thus transformed, via progressive miniaturization, into the tiny insects that burst forth as new creations, yet the reader is aware that this particular breed of “bee” is not sufficient, for like artless poems, they are not capable of creating “golden honey.”

Perhaps the most identifiable poetic form that arises from a death is the elegy, a close cousin of the complaint, yet neoteric poetry, in a number of ways, springs forth from ruin and fragmentation. If Dame Mutabilitie is to be understood as the world’s poet, who strives to be heaven’s poet, and voices a complaint about her right to sovereignty, her association with decay and demise is a necessary, strategic move. As I have said before, the project of neotericism is revisionary, thus Spenser’s images of creation and ruin are recursive and hence circular. Likewise Virgil, in this shorter work that is often considered a transitional poem in the context of his career trajectory (as he moves from a shorter poem containing a series of in-set narratives to the subsequent composition of the *Aeneid*, which would become his

³⁵² Meanwhile, the fluid grows warm in his softening bones, and it ferments, and wonderful new creatures come into view, footless at first, but soon, with humming wings; they swarm, and more and more try out their wings on the empty air, and then burst forth like a summer shower from summer clouds, or like a shower of arrows from the bows of Parthian warriors entering the fray.

³⁵³ What God was it, O Muses, who devised an art like this?

magnum opus), makes use of metaphors of death and decay to transition his *Fourth Georgic* into an epyllion; thus he revises for miniaturization. The epyllion that celebrates the nation of bees is revised (via the death of the bees) so that the etiological story of bees might be more finely crafted, and in turn provide a transition into a larger epic project. Likewise, Dame Mutabilitie's work on earth is initially represented as that of ruin. In the opening lines of the *Cantos*, the Spenser-poet declares that this truth is self-evident, as all men know, "How *MVTABILITY* IN THEM DOTTH PLAY / Her cruell sports, to many mens decay." Yet at her trial, Dame Mutabilitie concludes the procession of that which she rules over – the evidence of her power – with life and death. Yet the latter is subjugated to the former. Their position in the following stanza highlights their significance:

And after all came *Life* and lastly *Death*;
Death with most grim and grisly visage seene,
Yet is he nought but parting of the breath;
Ne ought to see, but like a shade to weene,
Vnbodied, vnsoul'd, vnheard, vnseene. (VII.vii.46)

The absence that is death is not unlike the vanishing figure of nature that follows the trial. Art, like all other formed things, must die. Interestingly, however, the final allegorical figure in the procession is Life:

But *Life* was like a faire young lusty boy,
Such as they faine *Dan Cupid* to haue beene,
Full of delightfull health and liuely ioy,
Deckt all with flowres and wings of gold fit to employ. (VII.vii.46)

This final turn from death to life indicates a revisionary and strategically optimistic all-powerful poetic hand of change that is responsible, ultimately, for creation.

The *Shepherdess Calender* in Faerie Land

As the Spenser-poet reflects on life and death, youth and love, first estates and creation, and art controlled by the hand of change, the neoteric poet (encapsulated in Dame Mutabilitie) in a state of self-reflection looks back to his own beginnings. The comedic representations of the seasons curiously dominate the procession that Dame Mutabilitie presents as “evidence” of her supremacy. Spenser spends seventeen cantos discussing the seasons. At first glance, Dame Mutabilite appears to be establishing her thralldom over Time – the great destroyer and subsequent creator, as generations of mankind move forward, and her power over Time (or her partnership with Time) is definitely her most convincing argument, for Time and Fate are intertwined in a God-like way.

The representation of Time becomes increasingly smaller, as the Spenser-poet begins with the four seasons, and then moves to the months of the year, then to day and night, and finally to hours. Yet each month is inappropriately dressed for a poem that initially appears to be a reflection on death and decay. As in the earlier procession, the order of their rendering is significant. The first month to proceed is March, most closely affiliated with war, and hence with epic. He is armed as a warrior, yet curiously sows the earth as he proceeds, generating not the glory and heroism of epic, but rather the abundance and fertility of pastoral. Aprill is happily dressed for love:

Next came fresh *Aprill* full of lustyhed

And wanton as a Kid whose horne new buds:

Vpon a Bull he rode, the same which led

Europa floting through th' *Argolick* fluds:
 His hornes were gilden all with golden studs
 And varnished with garlonds goodly dight
 Of all the fairest flowres and freshest buds
 Which th'earth brings forth, and wet he seem'd in sight
 With waues, through which he waded for his loves delight. (VII.vii.33)

The focus on dressing in this representation of Aprill is interesting in that he is a stylistically embellished object of art (riding on a bull with varnished and gilded horns); yet Aprill also gestures to epic in Spenser's reference to the story of Europa. The other seasons are similarly dressed. May is also artistically adorned with flowers (as are the horns of the mount of "lusty" Aprill). May is also generative, throwing flowers all around as she proceeds. She also inspires laughter in the creatures that she passes: "Lord! how all creatures laught, when her they spide, / And leapt and daunc'd as they had rausht beenel" (VII.vii.34). This construction is an interesting paradox in regards to the manner in which Dame Mutabilitie is construed earlier in the poem, as the agent of death. June is dressed as an actor on a stage (here, on the stage of Spenser's poem): "All in greene leaues, as he a Player were; / Yet in his time he wrought as well as playd" (VII.vii.35). June's status as both an artist and an actor gestures to the artistic subject of the poem, and comedy ensues as Spenser places him atop a crab (appropriate for the subsequent zodiac sign of Cancer) walking backwards in "crooked crawling steps."

July follows, similarly suggesting inspired creation in his generative virility, for he proceeds while ripping off his clothes (because of the heat of the month), and riding on a raging lion. August retains her clothing, for she is "rich arrayd" in "gold" and foreshadows

the coming abundance of the harvest, which September carries, as he walks behind on foot. October is “full of merry glee,” and November, as in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, is the finest of them all – albeit the funniest:

Next was *November*, he full grosse and fat,
As fed with lard, and that right well might seeme;
For, he had been a fatting hogs of late,
That yet his browes with *sweat*, did reek and steam. (VII.vii.40)

Spenser's representation of November, when considered in terms of both a neoteric aesthetic and Nature's final ruling in Dame Mutabilitie's trial, is the clearest indication (apart from the dramatic difference in tone) of Spenser's satirical reprise of the *Shepherd's Calendar*. The tone in the procession of seasons here is not only at odds with the *Cantos* initial meditation on death and decay, its rendering is nearly the antithesis of the stately “November” in the *Calendar*, the most finely wrought of the twelve eclogues (as E.K. points out in his initial “Argument”). In light of Nature's verdict, in which a changed thing, or we might say, things crafted by the neoteric poet embodied in Dame Mutabilite, “by their change their being doe dilate” is literally expressed here in the plump, sweaty, ostentatious and “dilated” figure which provides a satirical counterpart to the elegy of the “November” eclogue.

Catullan poetry is rife with self-reflective parody, as Catullus engages with his friends, teasing them about their sex life, expressing his happiness in seeing them, picking on their idiosyncrasies, all with a light and playful tone. An example of such self-reflection is apparent in *Carmen 8*, as Catullus chastises himself for his failure to relinquish his love for Lesbia:

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,

et quod uides perisse perditum ducas.
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum uentitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantam amabitur nulla.
ibi illa multa cum iocusa fiebant,
quae tu uolebas nec puella nolebat,
fulsere uere candidi tibi soles.
nunc iam illa non uolt: tu quoque inpote<ns noli>.³⁵⁴

This moment of looking to the happy past with the ability to reflect on one's own naiveté, while acknowledging the great pleasure of the experience of being in love, when the "sun shone bright," is something, I would argue, Spenser enacts in the *Cantos* as he revisits the *Calender* in a manner not unlike revisiting the art and experience of his own youth. This backwards look is further evident in the paradox of the "dilation" rather than deterioration represented in the later months. Unlike in the *Calender*, in which the fall and approaching winter are portrayed with a sense of decay (as if the year is dying), the tone of the monthly progression in the *Cantos* becomes both increasingly robust and entertaining. Here Spenser provides a sense of beginnings, and in a reminiscence of beginnings, an acknowledgement of Time as something that brings life and health and progeny, just as it brings death.

Imagining Mutability

Perhaps we are too enmeshed in historical readings of Spenser's work when we read his poetry as personal reflection. It is difficult not to create for ourselves a history of his

³⁵⁴ Wretched Catullus, stop this tomfool stuff / and what you see has perished treat as lost for good. / Time was, every day for you the sun shone bright, / when she scurried off wherever *she* led *you* – / that girl you loved as no one shall again be loved. / There, when so many charming pleasures all went on, / things that *you* wanted, things *she* didn't quite turn down, / then for you truly every day the sun shone bright. / Now she's said *No*, so you too, feeble wretch, say *No*.

poetics via his personal intentions, however impossible we know the task to be. Spenser's continual presence in his work is perhaps our temptation. We know a great deal about Spenser's life, particularly since the recent publication of Andrew Hadfield's copious biography. Less material is available, however, to piece together a narrative of the life of Catullus. Apart from his persona-driven verse, there is little verifiable fact of his circumstance that might feed our musings on his poetic intentions or his thoughts concerning mortality and change. To further complicate matters, much of his poetry is now lost. Albeit seemingly unconcerned with his own demise, we know Catullus died young (around age 30), and particularly young for a late Republican aristocrat. Cicero, comparatively, died at the age of 63, at the hand of an assassin; thus we know his younger contemporary may have lived quite a long life, even in such turbulent times. That made plain, like Spenser, we know he was confronted with death (in mourning his brother), although likely not on as grand a scale as Spenser's Irish experience. Yet both poets reflect on the course of their life, their youth, and their art. Catullus does so particularly poignantly in *Carmen 68a*:

tempore quo primum uestis mihi tradita pura est
iucundum cum aetas florida uer ageret
multa satis lusi: non est dea nescia nostri
quae dulcem curis miscit amaritiem.³⁵⁵ (15-18)

In keeping with his continually youthful spirit, Catullus does not appear to harbor regret, a sentiment perhaps best encapsulated in "multa satis lusi" meaning "I played to the limit." Spenser, conversely, not only appears to imagine his own death, but accept its inevitability.

³⁵⁵ From the day when I first put on the white gown of manhood, / when my budding years were in their enchanted spring, / I played to the limit. The goddess who duly mingles / cares with sweet bitterness is not unaware of me.

In the final stanza of canto vii, Nature bids Dame Mutabilitie (the neoteric poet) to embrace what will be, for art and the artist, the end of all things:

Cease therefore daughter further to aspire,

And thee content to thus be rul'd by me:

For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire;

But time shall come that all shall changed bee,

And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see. (VII.vii.59)

Even change, it appears, is mortal, yet in all the contemplative backwards half-look of the procession of seasons in the *Cantos*, what one finds is not despair, but the hope of continuance – both in the sense of art and its progeny.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

... Outwitting
the fairies, befriending the furies,
whoever again
and again says, "I'll never give in," never sees

that you're not free
until you've been made captive by
supreme belief, - - credulity
you say? When large dainty
fingers tremblingly divide the wings
of the fly for mid-July
with a needle and wrap it with peacock-tail,
or tie wool and
buzzard's wing, their pride,
like the enchanter's
is in care, not madness.

~Marianne Moore, "Spenser's Ireland," lines 30-44

As literary critics and Spenserians perhaps "made captive" by a post-postmodern existence, our reading of the grand design of Spenser's poetry ever seeks to recreate narratives, to write stories of history and aesthetics that are, we must acknowledge, inevitably *our* stories – for when one deals in words, one deals in shadows of meaning. In her own interpretation of the shadow-nature of language, the modern Irish poet Marianne Moore acknowledges both the circularity of literary creation and the dissonance inherent in Spenser's transformation of his Ireland into a pastoral space. "Discommodity makes / them invisible; they've dis- / appeared (60-62)," she writes. The "discommodity" of the "things" Spenser creates via words renders his images esoteric and irretrievable artifacts of history. In this sense, Spenser's word-images are "invisible," yet in the space created by the line break between "dis-" and "appeared" lies a sense of both undoing and formation. Moore's poem lingers on the notion of "enchantment," and whereas it revisits the memory of the Spenser-poet in an ambiguous manner, her words acknowledge the "care" of Spenser's verse and the

meaning he labored to create – not in the grasp of “madness,” *divinus furor*, or even as a product of the chaos of sixteenth century Irish rebellion, but with grave attention to craftsmanship, to language, and to artistic choice. For Moore, this stylistic fashioning was perhaps a vicious pretending; an attempt to “wrap [the wings of a fly] in a peacock-tail,” as we might assume Spenser endeavored in *Muiopotmos*. Here she implies that the poetic dressing of deterioration and death in a beautiful disguise is to mask truth with a captivating illusion, for her poem ends with unmistakable discontent: “I am troubled, I’m dissatisfied, I’m Irish.”

Moore’s recognition of the disconnect between art and the grit of human experience in Spenser’s work is remarkably insightful, for it was never the project of Elizabethan neotericism to represent life in all its ugliness, but rather to mythologize the real, or gloss existing myth with transformative polish. This study is concerned with such craftsmanship, the dissonance in the space between truth and illusion, and with fragments reconstructed into beautiful “things” that remain, essentially, fragments – for the epyllia, as a carefully chosen component of a greater national narrative, is a fragmentary form marked by stylistic fragmentation, marked by the breach between “things” and what they represent. The title of this study “O Carefull Verse,” repeats a refrain from the “November” eclogue of the *Shepheardes Calender*, and I interpret “care” as two-fold. In the first sense, it refers to the plaintive nature of a neoteric aesthetic, to poetry written in a voice of sorrow, yet as Moore well recognizes, neoteric verse is written with “care” that advertises the “careful” choices made in its composition. What is neoteric is something crafted with great thought and attention to skill and learning.

The initial project of this dissertation sought an understanding of what Spenser meant by “newness,” following E.K.’s declaration in the *Shepheardes Calender* that the twelve eclogues were the work of the “new Poete.” Such a title (or self-definition), I surmised, is not superfluous; Spenser originally set out to establish a poetic in these poems that was different, innovative, and “new.” So I sought to excavate how this newness was manifest and how it is further illuminated by the term *neoteric* and the intricate layering of literary influence the term carries with it. I wanted to more clearly understand the “puzzle” of Spenser’s shorter poems, the way they fit into the model of Spenser’s epic career trajectory, and to seek an answer to why the shorter poems are so different than the *Faerie Queene*. Why are they so formally intricate and stylistically ornate? Why they are written in such a plaintive and dissonant voice? This venture has also been an attempt to understand why these “small monuments” are driven by such an unusual poetic design. Why is their narrative a mere backdrop for such dazzling ornamentation and artistic polish? Why do they defy and oppose traditional formal design as well as engender such an unusual affect? In other words, why do they guide the reader in such an inventive (and often confusing) manner?

The Elizabethan neoteric paradigm proposes that Spenser, via his engagement with Catullus, is a sixteenth century neo-Alexandrian of sorts in that his primary project is epic and generic renovation. Additionally, the paradigm I have set forth in this study posits that the primary values of Spenser’s aesthetic in his shorter poems function to call attention to artistry: to its complexity, its creative potential, its imagination, and its plasticity, artificiality, or thingliness. “Renovation” is a fitting term, for to revise a genre is not merely to build on what has come before, but to aggressively demolish the epic paradigm and construct an entirely new set of poetic values that seek not to reiterate, but rather to re-imagine the

purpose of such a genre. At the same time, Spenser's poetics as a whole appear to rely on paradox: his epic seeks to glorify Elizabeth as it recognizes the ambiguity inherent in nation building. Although his aesthetic project, this study asserts, was declared quite early in his poetic career (and prior to his Irish career), it follows a recursive trajectory. The devastation of poetic and material images that characterize *A Theatre for Worldlings* is a topos that resonates throughout Spenser's poetry – in Colin Clout's willfully broken pipe, the ringing of Artegall's sword in the *FQ Bk V*, Guyon's destruction of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss in the *FQ Bk II*, in the blood of the butterfly that stains (and effectively defiles) Aragnoll's web in *Muiopotmos*, in the shrillness of Alyon's voice as it razes the pastoral landscape, and in Nature's final declaration that Dame Mutabilitie's own death is at hand. In this way, Spenser's miniaturized epic narratives, in his shorter poems, acknowledge that "newness" is built from the wreckage of what has come before – for not to defy, not to "complain," not to oppose, would be merely to repeat. For neoteric poetry to *be*, the mythology, or the literary artifacts of history, must be broken down into the pieces that constitute poetic creation.

This concern with Spenser's poetic drive to construct, dismember, and discriminately reassemble warrants further explication beyond the limits of this study, for it is a notion that has revealed itself as significant only in the process of exploring neoteric formal design. What I hope the findings of this study will accomplish, for Spenser studies, is a new vocabulary that helps us more fully understand Spenser's experimentation in his shorter poems. In particular, the manner in which this study shows the extent of Spenser's engagement with classical scholarship will not only shed light on Spenser's neoteric project, it will, at the same time, help scholars aesthetically situate this genre in relation to the *Faerie*

Queene. The relationship between the shorter poems and the *FQ* has long been problematic because the former are thought to be, as Anne Prescott has remarked, “non-epic ventures.” Yet as a scholar who purportedly spent some fifteen years of his life composing an epic venture, it is difficult to imagine Spenser as anything but an epic poet; thus, to read Spenser’s shorter poems as “minor epics” is to include rather than exclude them from his epic project, while at the same time differentiating his poetics in the shorter poems from the driving force of the *FQ*. As a neoteric poet, Spenser proves himself an epic poet who manages both the capacious and the miniature.

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Vita

Melissa Joy Rack was raised in the small seaside town of Anna Maria Island, Florida. Inspired and encouraged by her father, a teacher of learning disabled children and an advocate for literacy, she was an avid reader, writer, and lover of poetry from an early age. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English and American Literature from the University of South Florida, Tampa, in 2006, and her Master of Arts in English and American Literature from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2008. She has won numerous awards for her research and writing, and has published articles on Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Wyatt, New Formalism, Literary Ekphrasis, and Edmund Spenser. She currently resides in Farragut, Tennessee, with her three children.