

She Who Must be Trapped

The Story of Apollo and Daphne, Expanded

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"Daphne Fleeing from Apollo" (ca. 1500) - Master of the Daphne and Apollo Legend (Florentine, Active 1480-1510), Smart Museum, Chicago

T rue to his style of “mi-dire,” or saying things by half, Jacques Lacan does not tell the full story of Apollo and Daphne, not even the full version of the story Ovid has presented in his *Metamorphosis*.¹ Before the chase scene, Apollo has provoked Eros, perverse imp of love, by mocking his bad archery skills. It seems that “the right people” never fall in love, only “the wrong people,” with disastrous results. Stinging from this critique, the indignant Eros (who does not waste time telling Apollo, a slow-thinker as gods go) that love is “Hamiltonian” — a totalizing sum of all of the energies involved in desire, hate included with love, lack and despair included with consummation and joy, ugliness overlooked and beauty imagined where it does not exist. Rather than correct Apollo on this issue of the totality of love’s energies, Eros fashions a single arrow with two points, or rather an arrow that flies in two directions at the same time.² As soon as it strikes Apollo, inflaming him with love for the water-nymph Daphne, it hits Daphne with the result of hate — a formula of “mutually assured destruction.”

The Hamiltonian motive of Eros’s indignation is also the structure of the story, and possibly the necessary manner in which Lacan has presented half, so that the reader should complete the Hamiltonian circuitry, silently, in the act of reading and comprehending. What, after all, is a text if not *that which should and must be read*? Daphne runs but cannot hide. The nymph is caught in a topological 2-space that is non-oriented, meaning that *as soon as she has desired to escape*, the space of the trap springs into existence. It is the entrapment of fear and loathing.

The beginning of the story is the conclusion. Apollo, seeing that Daphne, after pleading to her father, the River God, for help, he has arranged for her to be transformed into nature’s paragon of paralysis, the tree. The tree in this case was doubly “paralyzed” in that it was a laurel, an evergreen. Apollo realized the virtue of Daphne’s perpetual virginity, her resistance against his desire, but also he appreciated the topology of this resistance. Her perpetual virginity was also her ability to confer immortality, and so he fashioned wreaths from the laurel’s leaves to award to winners of the Olympic Games, conferring on them the same perpetual youth achieved by Daphne. The heroes of the

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 2008).

² It would be appropriate to note that this arrow is really, in terms of projective geometry, a “one-dimensional subspace” that is both a line and a point, or rather *two* points, both of them objectives in the style of the vanishing point of perspective.

games would be the ultimate winners of the tale, and if we reverse-engineer this happy ending, we can revise Daphne's tragic spatial irony, the wish to flee that became the futility of flight, as the ultimate "Escher sentence" of non-orientation, the up made down, the in made out, the there localized to here.³

The term "Hamiltonian" is not familiar for most readers of this fable, but it allows us to connect the ending to the beginning, the fore-story of Apollo's mockery of Eros and Eros's subsequent indignation. At this point we are led to sympathize with the god of love, and realize the Hamiltonian nature of love as something that Eros knows and Apollo doesn't. Our proof of this conjecture is in the Hamiltonian projectile, the arrow — or, rather, vector — that Eros uses to inflame Apollo with love and Daphne with hate. The "as soon as" property of this vector is based on a minimal difference we could label ∂ , the factor of "as soon as," which is the way something that is terminated (i. e. mortal) generates, at the moment of termination, a force that is equal and opposite: the day, at ending, generates night; life, ending, generates death. Where before there has been nothing to this negative apart from lack, privation, there is now an identity, force, and direction.

In addition to this reification from the simple act of negation, there is the imaginary creation of another point of view antipodal to the one presupposed for the positive original. This is the necessity imposed when life, a dynamic composed of multiple parts (moments, stages, periods, etc.) must be unified by externalizing a view that is able to "take in the whole." When the positive term is terminated and its opposite is generated immediately, the view that had taken in the whole of the positive is also created, as it were, at the opposite side of this new dialectical, non-oriented formation.

This new view is the award of the laurel, or rather the judge and judgment that awards the laurel. The contest requires a Law, a rule that recognizes triumph and punishes failure, as well as an Agent to confer it. The end of Daphne's story is omitted, just as the beginning was untold. The full story is an example of a Hamiltonian accounting, an inclusion of *all* of the energies required to make the story a fully energized circuit. From insult to accolade, these energies embody the ambiguity of praise, which can be considered a dangerous and provocative invitation to the spirits of the evil eye to vengefully balance out all things lucky, which leads many cultures to wish for and cultivate insults as a means of staving off this retributive agency of Fate. In the crisscross formula of the uncanny, where the living person, A (who, in running away from something runs toward it) and dead person, D (who continues to run past the instance of literal death as if nothing had happened) can be joined as A_D/D_A , each element is inscribed into its opposite. In this "hair of the dog that bit you" logic, a cure requires a little poison, and the cloud has a silver lining, both sayings that use a Hamiltonian claim without anyone thinking about it.

As the Apollo-Daphne story demonstrates, the Hamiltonian is scalable. The detail of Eros's bi-directional arrow expands to the book-end conditions, the insult at the beginning balanced by the commendation at the end; all confirmed by the universal belief in the "limited good" theory of the evil eye. What is common in all examples and at all levels of each example is the "as soon as" principle, where sublation and emergence are yoked in every instance. This is Lacan's formula for metaphor, where the sublation of one signifier by another immediately buoys up a chain of metonymies linked by a mysterious 'x' presence that serves as the empty middle of the torus, fictional (*ex falso*) but nonetheless able to hold the signifying chains within its gravitational field, rotating in their own local spirals (*quodlibet sequitur*). Placing the latter, as "repetition," on the upper generative corner of the torus's fundamental polygon produces the non-oriented binary which we can fill with Apollo and Daphne's adaptation of the uncanny *matheme*, L_H/H_L , the Hamiltonian of love and hate. The motto is, be careful when you insult the gods of love, they can give you what you asked for: a proper Escherian romance.

³ An Escher sentence is one that makes sense at first but which, upon closer examination, involves self-contradiction or non-orientation. "I feel more like I do today than I did yesterday" captures Escher's idea of a staircase that goes up and down at the same time. The key to the Escher sentence is the element "as soon as." The opposite is generated as the immediate result of the act, whether of speech, thought, or intention. There is a counterpart in the electricity known as "band valence theory," where the slight shift of the valence of atoms in a conductor transform it into a resistor.