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My LOVE *shall* in my VERSE ever *live* YOUNG

William Shakespeare

SONNETS and Other Poems

EDITED BY JONATHAN BATE AND ERIC RASMUSSEN

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Introduced by Jonathan Bate

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INTRODUCTION

VENUS AND ADONIS

Shakespeare became famous as a poet before most people knew that he also wrote plays. To judge by the frequency of admiring allusions and demand for printed copies, *Venus and Adonis* was the most popular long poem of the Elizabethan age. The language of praise in a poem by Richard Barnfield, published in 1598, is typical:

> And Shakespeare, thou whose honey-flowing vein,
> Pleasing the world, thy praise doth obtain,
> Whose *Venus* and whose *Lucrece* (sweet and chaste)
> Thy name in fame's immortal book have placed.
> Live ever you, at least in fame live ever:
> Well may thy body die, but fame dies never.

In that same year of 1598, Francis Meres, an Oxford graduate with his finger on the pulse of the literary world, sought to dignify contemporary literature by comparing English poets and playwrights to their classical forebears. He numbered Shakespeare among the best for both tragedy and comedy, but also contrived an astute comparison for his non-dramatic poetry: 'As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared Sonnets among his private friends.'

Shakespeare's two long narrative poems, written during the period in 1593–94 when the theatres were closed due to plague, are based on the Roman poet Ovid. They are calling cards which announce his poetic sophistication, perhaps in response to the jibe in *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) about 'Shake-scene', the 'upstart crow', the vulgar jack-of-all-trades from the country. *Venus and*

Adonis takes a one-hundred-line story from the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and expands it into more than a thousand lines of elegant artifice. Ovid provided the narrative framework: the comic idea of the lovely young Adonis' resistance to love, the dark twist of his boar-speared death, and the final release of floral transformation. Shakespeare wove into this structure elaborate arguments for and against the 'use' of beauty. These were opportunities for him to show off his rhetorical skill, while also engaging with an issue much debated in Elizabethan times, namely the relative value of courtly accomplishments and military ones. The successful courtier would have been equally adept in the arts of praise and chivalry. Shakespeare gives the chivalric skills to the hunter Adonis, then inverts the norm of man-praising-woman by having a woman – and not just any woman, but Venus, the Queen of Love, herself – praise a young man. For this, he pulled together different parts of Ovid: the witty persuasions to love are in the manner of the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria*, while the figure of the vain youth has something of Narcissus, and that of the froward woman more than a little of Salmacis, who, in book 4 of the *Metamorphoses*, seduces another gorgeous but self-absorbed boy, Hermaphroditus.

Most distinctively, Shakespeare wrote his narrative poem as if it were a play. Great swathes of *Venus and Adonis* are composed in the form of dialogue, while the eye-contact between male and female subjects is self-consciously theatricalized:

> O, what a war of looks was then between them,
> Her eyes petitioners to his eyes suing,
> His eyes saw her eyes, as they had not seen them,
> Her eyes wooed still, his eyes disdained the wooing:
> And all this dumb play had his acts made plain
> With tears, which chorus-like her eyes did rain.

In both their speech patterns and their accompanying actions, Venus and Adonis are turned into dramatic characters, their story into a theatrical encounter, albeit one that relies on a naturalistic rural setting peopled with animals and natural forces that could not

have been represented on stage – though in the early twenty-first century, the Royal Shakespeare Company achieved a small theatrical triumph by turning the poem into a puppet show, influenced by Japanese *bunraku*, complete with horse, hare and boar, and with an actor adopting the wry voice of the narrator. There was a precedent for this adaptation in Ben Jonson's 1614 comedy *Bartholomew Fair*, in which Christopher Marlowe's poem 'Hero and Leander', a work closely related to *Venus and Adonis*, underwent transformation at the hands of a puppet-master.

The Elizabethan reader's pleasure in Shakespeare's poem lay in its cunning rhetoric, the inventive conceit of its language. The resourceful Venus has many an example:

> I'll be a park and thou shalt be my deer:
> Feed where thou wilt on mountain or in dale,
> Graze on my lips and, if those hills be dry,
> Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.

The double entendre whereby landscape and body parts become as one is typical of the poem: Shakespeare is trying out that language of indefatigable innuendo that will characterize so many of his subsequent plays. He is also experimenting with the idea that sexual attraction is sparked by contrariness and apparent disdain. The dynamic between a pair of erotically-charged horses anticipates not only the relationship of Venus and Adonis, but also those of the speaker of the sonnets and his beloved, not to mention Berowne and Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost* and Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*:

> He looks upon his love and neighs unto her,
> She answers him as if she knew his mind:
> Being proud, as females are, to see him woo her,
> She puts on outward strangeness, seems unkind,
> Spurns at his love and scorns the heat he feels,
> Beating his kind embracements with her heels.

The poem ends with the death of Adonis, described as a pattern that will recur perpetually. This sense of inevitable future repetition is what gives the story its mythic, archetypal quality. In one tradition of interpretation, the tale was read as a vegetation myth: Abraham Fraunce, in a mythography published the year before Shakespeare's poem, interpreted Adonis as the sun, Venus as the upper hemisphere of the earth and the boar as winter. Shakespeare, though, did not go in this direction: he was more interested in the nature of human sexual desire, making the anemone-like Adonis flower symbolize the transience of beauty and the vulnerability that is created by erotic longing. *Venus and Adonis* moves towards an etiology of love's anguish: 'Since thou art dead, lo, here I prophesy / Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend'. And yet the tone throughout remains gossamer-light, as the reader is invited to delight in the reversal of conventions (woman as seducer, man effeminate and passive) and the excursions into a vibrant surrounding countryside of hunted hares and randy horses.

Venus doesn't metamorphose herself into the boar in the manner of Ovid's Jupiter becoming an animal in order to rape a mortal girl. The story is about frustration rather than violation because a woman cannot easily rape a man. The tone is set not by the spilling of blood towards the end, but by the earlier sequences in which the violence is playful and nobody really gets hurt: 'Backward she pushed him, as she would be thrust'.

THE RAPE OF LUCRECE AND 'A LOVER'S COMPLAINT'

While for most of *Venus and Adonis*, sexual desire is a source of comedy, Shakespeare's second narrative poem is unquestionably tragic because Tarquin does rape Lucrece. The story of sexual pursuit is replayed in a darker key. Having made a comic spectacle of the rapacious goddess, Shakespeare makes a tragic spectacle of the raped emblem of chastity. The two poems are opposite sides of the same coin, as may be seen from their structural resemblance: in each, an ardent suitor attempts to gain the reluctant object of her/his sexual desire by means of rhetorical persuasion, fails, and

indirectly or directly precipitates the death of the object of desire. The difference between the two works is that Adonis dies with his chastity intact – he is only metaphorically raped by the boar – whereas Lucrece stabs herself because she has been ravished. Both poems are centrally interested in the way in which linguistic art is instrumental in the pursuit of sexual satisfaction.

The Rape of Lucrece is not only Shakespeare's most sustained imitation of a classical source, it is also a supreme example of the art of 'copiousness' that was recommended by sixteenth-century humanist literary theorists: Shakespeare expanded the seventy-three lines of the Lucrece story in Ovid's *Fasti* into nearly two thousand. As with *Venus and Adonis*, the most significant elaborations are those that invest the characters with linguistic arts. Three extended discourses are introduced: Tarquin's inward disquisition as to whether he should carry through his desire, the disputation between the two characters in the bedroom, and Lucrece's formal complaint after the rape. The genre of the 'complaint' seeks to give a voice to the women who are the victims of history: it is the mode of Queen Margaret in her farewell to the Duke of Suffolk in 2 *Henry VI* and the voice of the team of lamenting women in *Richard III*. 'A Lover's Complaint', published with Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in 1609, is a self-contained foray into the genre.

Nothing provokes desire more than antithesis. The more artless Lucrece is, the more Tarquin wishes to exercise the arts of love upon her. In the Ovidian source, the very fact that Lucrece has not dressed her hair seductively, that it falls carelessly ('neglectae') on her neck, makes Tarquin all the more hot to seduce her. In Shakespeare, 'Her hair like golden threads played with her breath — / O modest wantons, wanton modesty!' The oxymoron comes to the core of the poem's depiction of Tarquin's antithetical desire. *The Rape of Lucrece* is full of puns such as 'for his prey to pray he doth begin': such play of linguistic contraries is not just ornament, for it figures the psychology of contrariness. Tarquin's desire increases in proportion to Lucrece's unattainability. The psychology is similar to that in the sonnet tradition, where it is the frosty disdain of the object of desire that energizes the lover into verse.

Tarquin is inflamed by the very image of Lucrece's exemplary chastity. The word itself is enough to fire him up: 'Haply that name of "chaste" unhapp'ly set / This bateless edge on his keen appetite'. His lust is also bound up with the dynamics of power: the idea of Lucrece's loyalty to her husband provokes envy and the thought that 'meaner men' should not be entitled to possess anything which he, the king's son, lacks. Tarquin is an image of the same thing as Angelo in *Measure for Measure*: a man who is made very excited by the thought of purity and whose dominant social position gives him (he thinks) a freedom to satisfy his desires without paying a price.

On the way to Lucrece's bedroom, Tarquin's torch is almost extinguished by the wind which tries to stay his steps, then reignited by his own hot breath. This kind of enlivening detail is typically Shakespearean: it is no coincidence that the poem's stealthy pacing to the bedroom is reimagined in those great theatrical nightpieces, Macbeth as the embodiment of 'withered murder' en route to Duncan's chamber 'With Tarquin's ravishing strides' and Iachimo in *Cymbeline* emerging from the trunk in Innogen's bedroom with the words, 'Our Tarquin thus / Did softly press the rushes ere he wakened / The chastity he wounded'. Though it was subsequently turned into a play by Thomas Heywood, *The Rape of Lucrece* is not a dramatic poem in the dynamic sense: it is interested in the action of language, not a language of action. Yet it does share with the Shakespearean drama a taste for interior monologue. Tarquin stops in his tracks before reaching the bedroom 'And in his inward mind he doth debate' – for twelve whole stanzas. This retards the action, but opens up the character of Tarquin, allowing the reader to get inside his mind, to see the 'disputation / 'Tween frozen conscience and hot burning will' in a dry run for the soliloquies of Angelo and Macbeth.

At the end of the poem, the final consequence of the rape is played through as the Tarquins are heaved off their throne and the Roman republic is established. It is because loss of empire is the ultimate cost which Tarquin pays for his conquest – the military metaphors are all-pervasive – that his victory is a defeat. The oxymoronic structure of the narrative is thus brought to a climax:

Tarquin's gain is his family's loss, Lucrece's loss is Rome's gain. She is the sacrificial victim required for the bringing of a new political order.

Before Lucrece's suicide, she speaks to herself for more than a thousand lines. First she tries to sublimate her anguish through the traditional mode of the female 'complaint', with its highly formalized expressions of woe. But this tradition is moribund: the elaborate rhetoric simply does not work for her. In a 'helpless smoke of words' she endlessly reduplicates verbal figures without achieving any emotional advance. She achieves a degree of catharsis through her identification with other archetypal female victims: Philomel, who was released from her anguish by being transformed into a nightingale, and the suffering Hecuba in the painting of the fall of Troy that she contemplates (an opportunity for Shakespeare to display his skill in the art of *ekphrasis*, the intricate poetic animation of a scene in a painting).

At the climax of the viewing, a face stares back at Lucrece. It is that of false Sinon, who insinuated the fatal wooden horse into Troy. In Lucrece's mind, Sinon's face is metamorphosed into that of Tarquin, provoking her to scratch Sinon out of the painting in her most vigorous action prior to her suicide. Rape is mental as well as physical spoliation. Lucrece's attempt to erase the image of her attacker from her mind is fruitless: you can't undo a rape, you can't undo history. The fall of Troy and the deed of Tarquin will never be unwritten. Lucrece herself recognizes this, but her action affords her a degree of satisfaction: 'At last she smilingly with this gives o'er: / "Fool, fool!" quoth she, "His wounds will not be sore."' That wry smile is a kind of victory over Tarquin.

The rape of Helen led to the fall of Troy; the rape of Lucrece leads to the rise of the Roman republic. This parallel is the immediate relevance of the sequence concerning Lucrece and the painting. But its profounder relevance is aesthetic as much as historical. Shakespeare concentrates on the art of the painter, the 'imaginary work', the 'Conceit deceitful, so compact', in order to suggest that art may be a lie which outdoes the truth of nature – not a malicious lie, but a comforting one. The comfort has ultimately to be ours, not

Lucrece's. To be true to history, she must commit suicide. And even in the sections of the poem when we are to imagine her gaining comfort through her communion with Philomel and Hecuba, a moment's reflection reveals that the emotions are ours, not hers. To put her in front of a picture is to remind us that we are in front of an artwork ourselves, a verbal picture, an exemplary rather than a particular truth. That is how rhetoric and tragedy work: emotion is created in the listener. The narrative of Lucrece works for us as the image of Hecuba works for her and will work again for the Player in *Hamlet*.

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Shakespeare was much possessed by death, even when – as in *Venus and Adonis* and the comedies – he wrote in the genres of life and love. Venus expostulates against Death because he is the destroyer of beauty. She proposes to Adonis that the beautiful have a duty to reproduce themselves, not to hoard their loveliness in the manner of a miser (or, in the bawdy sub-text, a masturbator):

> What is thy body but a swallowing grave,
> Seeming to bury that posterity
> Which by the rights of time thou needs must have,
> If thou destroy them not in dark obscurity?
> If so, the world will hold thee in disdain,
> Sith in thy pride so fair a hope is slain.

The first seventeen of Shakespeare's sonnets are a set of variations on the same theme. Throughout the entire collection of 154 sonnets, there is a frequent return to questions first explored in *Venus and Adonis*: not only mortality and endurance, beauty and its transience, but also the paradoxes of self and other, truth and delusion, in the dynamics of desire. Adonis' eyes are 'Two glasses' (i.e. mirrors) where Venus 'herself herself beheld / A thousand times'. At the climax of the sonnet sequence, a key pun plays on the same

idea: 'For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye, / To swear against the truth so foul a lie'. The relationship between 'I' and 'eye', inner self and the object of the gaze, is an obsession in the sonnets, while 'perjured' is an example of another hallmark of the collection, the application of legal language to the promises made and broken by lovers. So, for instance, in Sonnet 30 ('When to the sessions of sweet silent thought'), term after term has legal connotations ('sessions', 'summon', 'dateless', 'cancelled', 'expense', 'grievances', 'account', 'restored').

It is probable that Shakespeare began composing sonnets soon after writing *Venus and Adonis*. Several poems in the form are woven into *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, plays that he wrote soon after the theatres reopened in 1594. The testimony of Francis Meres provides firm evidence that others were circulating in manuscript by 1598. But the collection entitled *Shakespeare's Sonnets* was not published until 1609. We know neither whether it was authorized nor whether its arrangement of the sequence was purposeful. Some of the sonnets, however, clearly belong together as pairs or groups, in that successive poems sometimes allude to each other or enact variations on a similar theme.

Though we cannot necessarily trust the order in which the sonnets appear in the 1609 volume, there does seem – as one would expect from the hand of the dramatist – to be a plotline running through the sequence and a 'character' to each of the personae. The first 126 poems appear to be written to a man or conceivably a succession of men. The narrative extends over a considerable period of time and runs a full gamut of emotions. The person addressed is younger than Shakespeare and of higher rank. He is lovely and the image of his mother: 'Thou art thy mother's glass and she in thee / Calls back the lovely April of her prime'. The first seventeen poems are exhortations to breed, in the manner of Venus' address to Adonis: 'From fairest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die'. There is then a modulation towards the idea that the poet's own work of praise may enable the young man to escape the ravages of time and death. Some sort of relationship is then imagined, with the youth in a position of power

and the poet in one of supplication. Absence, travel, 'disgrace', melancholy, estrangement and reunion are variously implied. The young man appears to have an affair with the poet's mistress, thus abusing the bond of friendship. But he is eventually forgiven: 'Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all: / What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?' Later, the poet is discomposed by a rival who claims to have been taught by spirits to write 'Above a mortal pitch' and who, with 'the proud full sail of his great verse', wins the patronage of the fair youth. The sequence ends with its key motif of the battle between love and time. The final poem to the youth is two lines short of the sonnet form's customary fourteen. It ends with a pair of empty brackets, signalling some kind of closure or lacuna.

Sonnets 127–52, by contrast, explore the poet's relationship with a mistress, a dark-complexioned and sexually voracious woman who has 'raven black' brows. Sometimes her dark beauty is wittily defended against the blonde Elizabethan ideal, but more frequently these poems are filled with self-abnegation, misogyny, a lingering sense of the sour taste that comes after sex, and disgust at the way in which the body rules the spirit. The woman is accused of infidelity, including an apparent affair with the 'man right fair' who is the poet's 'better angel' – this seems to allude back to the purported relationship between 'friend' and 'mistress' in the earlier sequence. Some of the 'dark lady' poems are seeringly honest about the deceptions that may occur between lovers: 'O, love's best habit is in seeming trust . . . Therefore I lie with her and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be'. Others are dazzlingly playful, notably 135–36, with their multiple punning on senses of the word 'Will', including a persistent play on Shakespeare's own name. The final two sonnets are imitations of a Greek epigram about the fire of love being quenched in a cool well, with clear allusion to the Elizabethan custom of taking mercury baths as a cure for syphilis. The implicit suggestion is that the poet has been venereally infected by the 'dark lady'.

The surviving documentary evidence about Shakespeare's life is not very exciting. Beyond the bare facts of birth, marriage,

parenthood and death recorded in parish registers, most of the surviving papers are legal and financial documents: real estate transactions, records of his shareholding in his theatre company, payments for performances at court, a steady stream of minor litigation. Not the sort of thing to reveal the heart and soul of the artist. What we know about the life does not help us to understand the greatness of the work. At the same time, since plays are plays, in which feelings and opinions belong to the characters and not the author, the dramatic works cannot be used as reliable evidence of the nature of the man. Indeed, one of the thing most valued about Shakespeare is what John Keats called his lack of 'personality': his ability to mask his own face, to dissolve himself into his characters, to be now Othello and now Iago, now Prince Hal and at the same time Falstaff.

Shakespeare's sonnets are a source of endless biographical fascination because they seem to be the one work in which he speaks in his own voice. 'Scorn not the sonnet', William Wordsworth would write two centuries later: 'With this key, Shakespeare unlocked his heart.' So it is that the sonnets are often believed to bear a wholly different relationship to Shakespeare's biography from that of the rest of his literary work. There is, however, no intrinsic reason why a sonnet – a highly artificial literary form – should not be a dramatic performance just as a play is. It may perfectly well be argued that for an Elizabethan poet to dash off a sequence of sonnets was a kind of exercise, a proof of artistic skill akin to the work of a composer writing a set of variations on a musical theme. If Shakespeare could imagine Hamlet and Romeo and Viola, he could also have invented the 'plot' and 'characters' of his sonnets. Robert Browning responded to Wordsworth's claim: 'If so, the less Shakespeare he!' Maybe the sonnets are best read as assays of Shakespeare's art, demonstrations of the gift of seemingly effortless facility that the Italian theorist of courtship Baldassare Castiglione called *sprezzatura*: 'A singer who utters a single word ending in a group of four notes with a sweet cadence, and with such facility that he appears to do it quite by chance, shows with that touch alone that he can do much more than he is doing.'

We do not know whether the sonnets are dramatic performances written out of sheer *sprezzatura* or poetic reimaginings of real figures and events. Unlike several contemporary sonneteers, Shakespeare does not name names. Because he is so guarded, the circumstances of composition have provoked centuries of speculation. The young man to whom the bulk of the poems are addressed may or may not be synonymous with the mysterious 'Mr W. H.' named in the collection's dedication. The traditional candidates for the role of addressee are the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Southampton, though neither of them was a 'Mr'. A provocative case has been made for the possibility that 'Mr W. H.' is actually a misprint for 'Mr W. S.' and that in the dedication Thomas Thorpe, the publisher, is merely acknowledging Shakespeare as the 'only begetter' of the sonnets ('begetting' was a common metaphor for authoring).

Dozens and dozens of male Elizabethan poets wrote sonnet sequences, but only Shakespeare and Richard Barnfield addressed their poems explicitly to a man. Barnfield wrote in the explicitly homoerotic tradition of ancient Greek pastoral poetry, whereas Shakespeare's sequence emphasizes the spiritual aspects of the poet's love for the fair youth. The only sonnets in the collection where 'Will' is actually in bed with a lover are addressed to the dark lady. The young man's 'thing' (which has been 'pricked out' by nature) is, says the poet in Sonnet 20, 'to my purpose nothing' – though this is supremely ambiguous, since it could mean either that he is not interested in a physical relationship or that the prick serves him in the same way as a woman's 'nothing' (vagina). Taken in their entirety, the sonnets associate heterosexual desire with consummation and disgust, homoerotic attraction with spirituality and an intensity that derives in large measure from the impossibility of consummation. Tempting as it may be to infer Shakespeare's sexuality from this duality, it might be better to read the opposition between dark lady and fair youth as a dramatic device: one is a 'character' representing desire in its sexual manifestation, the other in its idealizing and spiritual.

From the Earl of Surrey's profession of love for a certain 'Geraldine' through the identification of Sir Philip Sidney's 'Stella' as

Lady Penelope Rich, sixteenth-century readers were tantalized with the question of whether love-poetry was an exercise of the wits – in imitation of Virgil or Petrarch or Sidney – or whether there was a real-life story behind a sonnet sequence and, if there was, what was the identity of the players. Some poets positively relished leaving all possibilities open. Giles Fletcher tried to have it both ways in the title of his collection of 1593: *Licia, or Poems of love in honour of the admirable and singular virtues of his lady, to the imitation of the best Latin poets*. Imitations of the best classical examples, but also addressed to a specific lady.

And was he really in love? A prefatory address to the reader explains that:

> *for this kind of poetry wherein I wrote, I did it only to try my humour: and for the matter of love, it may be I am so devoted to some one, into whose hands these may light by chance, that she may say which thou now sayest (that surely he is in love), which if she do, then have I the full recompense of my labour, and the poems have dealt sufficiently for the discharge of their own duty.*

So Giles Fletcher may just be 'trying his humour', persuading you by his art that he is in love when actually he is not. Or he may really be in love, though if he is in love, it may only be a matter of chance if the poems fall into the hands of the person he loves. His pose is that he does not care whether they do or not. What he really wants to do is show you, the reader, how clever he is.

And the identity of his beloved?

> *If thou muse what my LICIA is, take her to be some Diana, at the least chaste, or some Minerva, no Venus, fairer far; it may be she is Learning's image, or some heavenly wonder, which the precisest may not mislike: perhaps under that name I have shadowed Discipline. It may be, I mean that kind courtesy which I found at the patroness of these poems; it may be some college; it may be my conceit, and portend nothing.*

Fletcher's watchwords are 'if' and 'may be'. His refusal to explain himself is a key element of his self-conscious art. Who is Licia, what

is she? Perhaps a goddess, perhaps a mortal, perhaps an allegory of Learning or intellectual Discipline, perhaps a patroness, perhaps a college, perhaps nothing.

Fletcher's refusal to unshadow Licia's identity should be remembered by everyone who tries to decode Shakespeare's sonnets. It may be granted that we would be on fairly safe ground in assuming that Shakespeare's dark lady is not an allegorical representation of 'a college' (he wasn't, unlike most contemporaneous sonneteers, a university man), but we cannot rule out the possibility that she is not so much a real person as an embodiment of Venus. Or that she is Shakespeare's conceit and portends nothing beyond her reality in the text itself.

So too with the 'fair youth' who seems to be the addressee of most of Shakespeare's sonnets. He does not *have* to be a real person. He may be a figuration of a patron, ideal or real. Or he may be an earthly shadowing of Adonis or an imitation of Alexas, the lovely boy addressed in one of the most influential poems of classical antiquity, Virgil's second *Eclogue*. The climactic sonnet in Shakespeare's sequence to his beautiful young 'friend' begins 'O thou, my lovely boy', which is a translation of Virgil's 'O formose puer'.

Shakespeare, alas, left no reader's guide to the sonnets. If he had done so, it would probably have been as enigmatic and mischievous as that of Giles Fletcher.

OTHER POEMS

The extraordinary commercial success of *Venus and Adonis*, together with Shakespeare's increasing celebrity as a playwright and the knowledge that he had been circulating 'sugared sonnets among his private friends', led the publisher William Jaggard to produce in late 1598 or early 1599 a tiny volume of twenty sonnets and songs called *The Passionate Pilgrim By W. Shakespeare*. Jaggard had obtained manuscript versions of two of Shakespeare's best and most characteristic sonnets (one on the duplicities of love, the other contrasting the fair youth and the dark lady). He began his volume with them, then filled it up with poems from the sonnet-smattered

comedy of *Love's Labour's Lost* and a variety of other sources. Cleverly, he included several sonnets that, though not Shakespearean, were clearly inspired by *Venus and Adonis* – readers could easily be led to imagine that these accomplished little gems were by Shakespeare. *The Passionate Pilgrim* includes several poems that were unquestionably by other authors and some of unknown authorship. It is fascinating testimony both to Shakespeare's popularity by the end of the 1590s and to the way in which Elizabethan publishers and readers were more relaxed than we are about questions of attribution and authorial property.

Shakespeare must have composed a body of occasional poetry, in the form of either commissioned work or prologues and epilogues for particular theatrical performances. Many short poems of the period have been attributed to him at one time or another, but in only two cases is the attribution secure. One is a beautifully-turned epilogue or prayer that meditates on time in an address to Queen Elizabeth at the end of a court performance in February 1599, which remained unknown in manuscript until the late twentieth century. The other is the mysterious poem that has become generally known as 'The Phoenix and Turtle' (though Shakespeare did not give it a title).

In 1601, a minor author called Robert Chester published a long allegorical poem entitled *Love's Martyr*. It begins with a council of the gods 'in the high Star-chamber' (i.e. the cosmos, but also the seat of English government). They debate about what to do now that the phoenix (who is, unusually, female) is growing old and has no heir: 'This *Phoenix* I do fear me will decay, / And from her ashes never will arise / An other Bird her wings for to display, / And her rich beauty for to equalize'. The parallel with the aged and sick virgin Queen Elizabeth is all too obvious. Chester's phoenix then accepts the devoted courtly service of a turtle-dove. He agrees to die in fire with the phoenix, to be 'A partner in this happy Tragedy', in the hope that from the ashes of the two bodies 'may spring one name'. In the closing section of the poem the rhythm changes to trochaic tetrameter as the phoenix and turtle are imagined as emblems of what Shakespeare calls 'married chastity'. Chester's conclusion imagines a new phoenix being born from this asexual union. The

poem seems to be a fantasy of a smooth royal succession, achieved through the loyalty of Elizabeth's male courtiers (but without biological conception of an heir, the queen now being far too old for that). The poem was dedicated to John Salusbury of Llewenni, Denbighshire, and seems to have been printed in honour of his being knighted by the queen in June 1601. Salusbury is therefore a prime candidate for the role of the turtle-dove, though the latter may equally well be regarded as a generic loyal courtier. It is hard to imagine Chester's phoenix as anything other than a symbol for Queen Elizabeth. She was often so portrayed and, what is more, the phoenix was the symbol of her mother's family, the Bullens (Boleyns) – throughout her life she wore a signet ring that opened to reveal images of Anne Bullen and a phoenix.

When Chester's poem was published it was accompanied by 'Diverse Poetical Essays on the Former Subject; viz. The Turtle and Phoenix', also dedicated to Salusbury and dated 1601. One of these poetical essays, beginning 'Let the bird of loudest lay' and written in a much more adept trochaic tetrameter than Chester's, was signed William Shakespeare and is unmistakably in his style. The poem seems to be a response to the closing sequence of Chester's: it imagines a group of birds at the funeral of the phoenix and turtle. Again, the phoenix seems to be Elizabeth, the turtle a loyal subject: 'Distance and no space was seen / 'Twixt this turtle and his queen'. But 'Distance and no space' is more than a metaphor for the combination of propriety and loyalty required by good courtiership. It is also a metaphysical conundrum. On being invited (and presumably paid) to contribute to Chester's volume, Shakespeare took the opportunity to rework the union of phoenix and turtle as a philosophical tour de force instead of a piece of routine poetic flattery. A line such as 'Either was the other's mine' may allude back to a lengthy and tedious section of Chester's poem concerning different kinds of mining, but it works primarily as a brilliant pun on the exchange of selfhood that is the core of true love. Whereas Chester's ambition was to gain or retain Salusbury's patronage, Shakespeare rose above the occasion and indulged a vein of serious intellectual play of a kind much closer to the dazzling mind-bending of John Donne.

Around this time Shakespeare also wrote *Twelfth Night*, with its learned allusions to Pythagoras and its perspectival drama of twinning. Fascinated by the oxymoron of two becoming one, he turned the union of phoenix and turtle into an emblem of how 'Beauty, truth and rarity' can confound 'reason' and 'property'. The latter word simultaneously means ownership, propriety or decorum, and the philosophical principle that particular qualities inhere in one entity alone. 'Single nature's double name, / Neither two nor one was called': these paradoxes are akin to some of the key enigmatic utterances in the plays, such as Iago's 'I am not what I am' and the talk in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of seeing 'with parted eye, / when everything seems double'. 'Neither two nor one' could serve not only as an epitaph for the phoenix and the turtle, but also as an epigraph for the double vision that shapes Shakespeare's dramatic universe.

The mythical phoenix, which regenerates from its own ashes.

KEY FACTS

AUTHORSHIP: *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, 'Let the Bird of Loudest Lay' and *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are all indisputably by Shakespeare. *The Passionate Pilgrim* was attributed to him on publication, but is a mix of poems by Shakespeare, by others and of uncertain authorship. 'To the Queen' was an epilogue for a court performance by Shakespeare's company and is wholly Shakespearean in metre and vocabulary. 'A Lover's Complaint' was published with the sonnets and attributed to Shakespeare, but his authorship has often been doubted and a strong case has been made for that of John Davies of Hereford (1565?–1618), an admirer and imitator of Shakespeare. This poem is included, with grave reservations, in order to respect the integrity of the *Sonnets* volume, just as the whole of *The Passionate Pilgrim* is included, even though some poems in it are by Richard Barnfield and Bartholomew Griffin. Various other short poems, notably several epigrams and epitaphs, have early attributions to Shakespeare, but none sufficiently secure to merit inclusion.

LINGUISTIC MEDIA: *Venus and Adonis* is in a six-line stanza rhyming *ababaa*, *Lucrece* and 'A Lover's Complaint' in a seven-line stanza rhyming *ababbcc* (known as 'rhyme royal'), both staple metres for poetic romance. Shakespeare's sonnets, like most other English examples of the period, are shaped as three quatrains and a couplet (typically rhyming *ababcdcdefefgg*), in contrast to the Petrarchan or Italian structure of an octave and a sestet. 'Let the Bird of Loudest Lay' and 'To the Queen' are both written in trochaic tetrameters (as is, for example, the Fairies' song at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

DATES: *Venus and Adonis* was published in 1593, *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594, *The Passionate Pilgrim* in late 1598 or 1599 (though it included poems from *Love's Labour's Lost* that were written some time earlier). 'To the Queen' was written for a court performance on 20 February 1599. 'Let the Bird of Loudest Lay' was commissioned for a book published in 1601. The date of the sonnets is much disputed: the published volume was registered for publication in May 1609, but the vogue for sonneteering was at its height around the time of the 1592–94 plague closure of the theatres. According to Francis Meres, some of Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets' were circulating 'among his private friends' in manuscript by 1598 (variant manuscript texts exist for several of them). Sonnet 107 apparently alludes to Queen Elizabeth's death (spring 1603). Analysis of rare words suggests that 1–103 and 127–54 may date from the 1590s, 104–26 from the early 1600s.

SOURCES: *Venus and Adonis* is based on a story in book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with some use of other Ovidian stories such as those of the lovely boys Narcissus (book 3) and Hermaphroditus (book 4). *Lucrece* derives from book 2 of Ovid's *Fasti* and perhaps a translation from Livy's *History* in William Painter's *Pallace of Pleasure* (1566). 'A Lover's Complaint' is in a long tradition, going back to Ovid's *Heroides*, of 'complaint' poems written in the voice of women deserted by their lovers; there are many examples in the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) and Samuel Daniel included 'A Complaint of Rosamond' as a tailpiece to his sonnet collection *Delia* (1592). The *Sonnets* draw on, but also parody, an array of sonneteering conventions in the tradition that goes back to Petrarch; Ovidian interests such as desire and narcissism, time and change, and the durability of poetry are also pervasive.

TEXTS: The well-printed 1593 Quarto of *Venus and Adonis* was reprinted in 1594, 1595?, 1596, 1599, 1599, 1602?, 1602, 1602, 1617, making it by a considerable margin Shakespeare's bestseller in print. The well-printed 1594 Quarto of *Lucrece* was a little less popular but still much in demand (reprinted 1598, 1600, 1600, 1607, 1616). *The Passionate Pilgrim* appeared in a small Octavo

edition (title page lost) sometime after September 1598; a second edition was published in 1599; poems 1 and 2 are versions of sonnets subsequently published in the 1609 collection; the three other definitely Shakespearean poems are from *Love's Labour's Lost*; a reprint of 1612 included additional poems by Thomas Heywood, a practice to which Heywood and apparently Shakespeare objected. 'To the Queen' remained in manuscript until 1972. 'Let the Bird of Loudest Lay' was included in *LOVES MARTYR OR, ROSALINS COMPLAINT. Allegorically shadowing the truth of Loue, in the constant Fate of the Phoenix and Turtle* (1601), a verse collection dedicated to Sir John Salusbury, which included work by John Marston, George Chapman and Ben Jonson appended to a long allegorical poem by the little-known Robert Chester; Shakespeare's contribution is untitled and only became generally known as 'The Phoenix and Turtle' (i.e. turtle-dove) from 1807. *SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS. Never before Imprinted* was published in 1609, with 'A Louers complaint. BY WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE' filling up the final leaves. Littered with printing errors, it was little noticed upon publication and not reprinted. In 1640, John Benson published a collection of *Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent.*, mainly based on the 1609 volume, but with considerable additions and alterations, including occasional regendering of the addressee from male to female. The sonnets and poems did not enter the tradition of 'Complete Works' Shakespeare until Edmond Malone edited them for his supplement to the 1778 Samuel Johnson/George Steevens edition.

VENUS AND ADONIS

Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HENRY WRIOTHESLEY, EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON AND BARON OF TITCHFIELD
RIGHT HONOURABLE,

I KNOW not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden; only if your honour seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour. But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather and never after ear so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest. I leave it to your honourable survey, and your honour to your heart's content, which I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation.

Your honour's in all duty,
William Shakespeare

Epigraph *Vilia*...*aqua* 'Let the rabble admire worthless things, / May golden Apollo supply me with cups full of water from the Castalian spring' (from Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.35–6; Apollo is the sun god, and the Castalian spring on Mount Parnassus was sacred to him and to the Muses) **Dedication HENRY WRIOTHESLEY** poets commonly sought noble patrons for their work; the Earl of Southampton was nineteen in 1593 when the poem was published **idle hours** a conventionally modest disclaimer, but may refer to the closure of the theatres due to an outbreak of plague **some graver labour** Shakespeare may be thinking of *The Rape of Lucrece*, published the following year and also dedicated to Wriothesley **graver** more important, substantial **first**...**invention** i.e. first published work/first poetic work (deemed more literary than a play) **ear** plough **survey** literary examination, evaluation

EVEN as the sun with purple-coloured face
Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
Rose-cheeked Adonis hied him to the chase.
Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.
Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him
And like a bold-faced suitor 'gins to woo him.

'Thrice-fairer than myself', thus she began,
'The field's chief flower, sweet above compare,
Stain to all nymphs, more lovely than a man,
More white and red than doves or roses are:
Nature that made thee, with herself at strife,
Saith that the world hath ending with thy life.

'Vouchsafe, thou wonder, to alight thy steed
And rein his proud head to the saddle-bow.
If thou wilt deign this favour, for thy meed
A thousand honey secrets shalt thou know:
Here come and sit, where never serpent hisses,
And being set, I'll smother thee with kisses.

'And yet not cloy thy lips with loathed satiety,
But rather famish them amid their plenty,
Making them red and pale with fresh variety:
Ten kisses short as one, one long as twenty.
A summer's day will seem an hour but short,
Being wasted in such time-beguiling sport.'

1 EVEN as just when/in the same way as **purple-coloured** red (with connotations of regality or of the flush of dawn) **3 hied him** hurried **chase** hunt **5 Sick-thoughted** lovesick **makes amain** hastens **9 Stain to** eclipsing, making tarnished (the beauty of) **nymphs** beautiful young women/female spirits **lovely** beautiful (usually used of a woman) **10 white and red** i.e. in terms of complexion **12 Saith** says **13 Vouchsafe** deign, condescend **alight** dismount from **14 proud** splendid/high-spirited **saddle-bow** the arched front of a saddle **15 meed** reward **16 honey secrets** sexual sweets (**secrets** has vaginal connotations) **18 set** seated **19 satiety** excess **24 wasted** spent/diminished **sport** sexual entertainment

With this she seizeth on his sweating palm,
The precedent of pith and livelihood,
And trembling in her passion, calls it balm,
Earth's sovereign salve to do a goddess good:
Being so enraged, desire doth lend her force
Courageously to pluck him from his horse.

Over one arm the lusty courser's rein,
Under her other was the tender boy,
Who blushed and pouted in a dull disdain,
With leaden appetite, unapt to toy,
She red and hot as coals of glowing fire,
He red for shame, but frosty in desire.

The studded bridle on a ragged bough
Nimbly she fastens. O, how quick is love!
The steed is stallèd up, and even now
To tie the rider she begins to prove:
Backward she pushed him, as she would be thrust,
And governed him in strength though not in lust.

So soon was she along as he was down,
Each leaning on their elbows and their hips:
Now doth she stroke his cheek, now doth he frown
And 'gins to chide, but soon she stops his lips
And kissing speaks, with lustful language broken,
'If thou wilt chide, thy lips shall never open.'

25 sweating a moist, warm **palm** was thought to be a sign of an amorous, sexually vigorous nature **26 precedent**...**livelihood** indicator of sexual vitality **27 balm** soothing ointment **28 sovereign** superlative/healing **29 enraged** inflamed, ardent **30 Courageously** boldly/lustfully **31 lusty** lively/lustful **courser** large powerful horse **32 tender** youthful **34 leaden** dull, inert (with phallic implications) **appetite** sexual appetite, desire **unapt** not inclined/not able **toy** engage in sexual play **37 studded** ornamented with studs, a sign of luxury **ragged** rough **39 stallèd up** confined, secured **40 prove** try **41 would** wished to **thrust** penetrated sexually **42 governed**...**lust** was stronger than him but unable to arouse him sexually **43 So**...**down** she lay down beside him as soon as he was down **46 chide** rebuke (her) **47 broken** interrupted

He burns with bashful shame, she with her tears
Doth quench the maiden burning of his cheeks,
Then with her windy sighs and golden hairs
To fan and blow them dry again she seeks.
He saith she is immodest, blames her miss:
What follows more, she murders with a kiss.

Even as an empty eagle, sharp by fast,
Tires with her beak on feathers, flesh and bone,
Shaking her wings, devouring all in haste,
Till either gorge be stuffed or prey be gone:
Even so she kissed his brow, his cheek, his chin,
And where she ends, she doth anew begin.

Forced to content, but never to obey,
Panting he lies and breatheth in her face.
She feedeth on the steam, as on a pray,
And calls it heavenly moisture, air of grace,
Wishing her cheeks were gardens full of flowers,
So they were dewed with such distilling showers.

Look, how a bird lies tangled in a net,
So fastened in her arms Adonis lies.
Pure shame and awed resistance made him fret,
Which bred more beauty in his angry eyes:
Rain added to a river that is rank
Perforce will force it overflow the bank.

50 maiden virginal/girlish **53 miss** wrongdoing, misbehaviour **55 empty** unfed **sharp by fast** made hungry by lack of food **56 Tires** pulls, tears **58 gorge** crop, gullet in which partially digested food is stored **61 content** please/be content **63 pray** prayer (puns on 'prey') **66 distilling** falling in minute drops **69 awed** awestruck, terrified **fret** annoyed, vexed **71 rank** full **72 Perforce** of necessity

Still she entreats and prettily entreats,
For to a pretty ear she tunes her tale.
Still is he sullen, still he lours and frets,
'Twixt crimson shame and anger ashy-pale:
Being red, she loves him best, and being white,
Her best is bettered with a more delight.

Look how he can, she cannot choose but love,
And by her fair immortal hand she swears
From his soft bosom never to remove
Till he take truce with her contending tears,
Which long have rained, making her cheeks all wet,
And one sweet kiss shall pay this countless debt.

Upon this promise did he raise his chin,
Like a dive-dapper peering through a wave,
Who, being looked on, ducks as quickly in:
So offers he to give what she did crave,
But when her lips were ready for his pay,
He winks and turns his lips another way.

Never did passenger in summer's heat
More thirst for drink than she for this good turn.
Her help she sees, but help she cannot get,
She bathes in water, yet her fire must burn:
'O, pity,' 'gan she cry, 'flint-hearted boy!
'Tis but a kiss I beg, why art thou coy?

73 prettily ingeniously/coaxingly (sense then shifts to 'attractive') **75 lours** frowns, looks angry **76 'Twixt** between **79 Look . . . can** however he looks **81 remove** withdraw (from a siege) **82 contending** striving, antagonistic **84 countless** numberless/infinitely valuable **86 dive-dapper** dabchick, a small diving water-fowl **90 winks** shuts his eyes/winces **91 passenger** traveller on foot **92 turn** favour (plays on sense of 'sexual act') **94 bathes in water** i.e. weeps **96 coy** shy/reserved/disdainful

'I have been wooed, as I entreat thee now,
Even by the stern and direful god of war,
Whose sinewy neck in battle ne'er did bow,
Who conquers where he comes in every jar,
Yet hath he been my captive and my slave
And begged for that which thou unasked shalt have.

'Over my altars hath he hung his lance,
His battered shield, his uncontrollèd crest,
And for my sake hath learned to sport and dance,
To toy, to wanton, dally, smile and jest,
Scorning his churlish drum and ensign red,
Making my arms his field, his tent my bed.

'Thus he that overruled I overswayed,
Leading him prisoner in a red rose chain.
Strong-tempered steel his stronger strength obeyed,
Yet was he servile to my coy disdain.
O, be not proud, nor brag not of thy might,
For mast'ring her that foiled the god of fight.

'Touch but my lips with those fair lips of thine —
Though mine be not so fair, yet are they red —
The kiss shall be thine own as well as mine.
What see'st thou in the ground? Hold up thy head.
Look in mine eyeballs, there thy beauty lies,
Then why not lips on lips, since eyes in eyes?

98 god of war i.e. Mars, with whom Venus had an adulterous affair **99 sinewy** muscular **bow** acknowledge defeat **100 jar** fight **104 uncontrollèd** unconquered **crest** feathers on the top of a helmet **105 sport . . . dally** all terms that can also signify 'have sex' **107 churlish** harsh, because it signifies war; **red** suggests blood and anger, but in line 110 the colour signifies passion **ensign** battle flag **108 arms** plays on sense of "weapons" **field** battlefield **109 overswayed** ruled, exercised power over **111 Strong-tempered** made strong by tempering (heating steel and then immersing it in cold water) **his . . . obeyed** submitted to his superior strength **114 foiled** defeated **119 there . . . lies** i.e. reflected in the pupils of her eyes

'Art thou ashamed to kiss? Then wink again,
And I will wink, so shall the day seem night.
Love keeps his revels where there are but twain:
Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight.
These blue-veined violets whereon we lean
Never can blab nor know not what we mean.

'The tender spring upon thy tempting lip
Shows thee unripe; yet mayst thou well be tasted.
Make use of time, let not advantage slip,
Beauty within itself should not be wasted.
Fair flowers that are not gathered in their prime
Rot and consume themselves in little time.

'Were I hard-favoured, foul or wrinkled-old,
Ill-nurtured, crooked, churlish, harsh in voice,
O'erworn, despisèd, rheumatic and cold,
Thick-sighted, barren, lean and lacking juice,
Then mightst thou pause, for then I were not for thee,
But having no defects, why dost abhor me?

'Thou canst not see one wrinkle in my brow,
Mine eyes are grey and bright and quick in turning:
My beauty as the spring doth yearly grow,
My flesh is soft and plump, my marrow burning,
My smooth moist hand, were it with thy hand felt,
Would in thy palm dissolve or seem to melt.

121 wink close your eyes **123 keeps his revels** holds his festivities/has sex (the erotic sense continues in **play** and **sport**) **but twain** only two **124 bold** courageous/sexually immodest **in sight** observed **125 blue-veined** suggestive of closed eyes (and perhaps with connotations of the erect penis) **127 tender spring** youthful growth (of stubble) **133 hard-favoured** harsh-featured **foul** ugly **134 Ill-nurtured** coarse, ill-bred **crooked** deformed **135 O'erworn** worn out by age or work **rheumatic** afflicted by catarrh or by the watering eyes of old age **cold** afflicted by a cold/dispirited/sexually passionless **136 Thick-sighted** poor-sighted **juice** vigour/vaginal moisture **140 grey** regarded as a particularly beautiful eye colour **142 marrow** vitality/sexual essence

'Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear,
Or like a fairy trip upon the green,
Or like a nymph with long dishevelled hair
Dance on the sands and yet no footing seen.
Love is a spirit all compact of fire,
Not gross to sink, but light and will aspire.

'Witness this primrose bank whereon I lie,
These forceless flowers like sturdy trees support me:
Two strengthless doves will draw me through the sky
From morn till night, even where I list to sport me.
Is love so light, sweet boy, and may it be
That thou should think it heavy unto thee?

'Is thine own heart to thine own face affected?
Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left?
Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected:
Steal thine own freedom and complain on theft.
Narcissus so himself himself forsook,
And died to kiss his shadow in the brook.

'Torches are made to light, jewels to wear,
Dainties to taste, fresh beauty for the use,
Herbs for their smell and sappy plants to bear.
Things growing to themselves are growth's abuse:
Seeds spring from seeds and beauty breedeth beauty.
Thou wast begot: to get it is thy duty.

146 trip dance lightly **147 nymph** female spirit who lived in the sea **148 footing** footprint **149 spirit** may play on sense of 'penis' **compact** composed **150 gross** heavy, earthy **light** may play on sense of 'unchaste, lustful' **aspire** rise/be ambitious/grow erect **152 forceless** powerless **154 list** please, choose **155 light** unimportant/weightless/unchaste **156 heavy** serious/troublesome/weighty **157 affected** in love **158 upon thy left** i.e. by grasping your left hand **160 on** of **161 Narcissus** in Greek mythology, a beautiful young man who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool; in some versions of the tale he drowned attempting to embrace himself **himself himself forsook** abandoned himself (for himself) **162 shadow** reflection **164 Dainties** delicacies, sweetmeats **the use** enjoyment/sex **165 sappy** sap-filled **bear** bear fruit **168 get** beget, reproduce

'Upon the earth's increase why shouldst thou feed,
Unless the earth with thy increase be fed?
By law of nature thou art bound to breed,
That thine may live when thou thyself art dead:
And so, in spite of death, thou dost survive,
In that thy likeness still is left alive.'

By this the lovesick queen began to sweat,
For where they lay the shadow had forsook them,
And Titan, tirèd in the midday heat,
With burning eye did hotly overlook them,
Wishing Adonis had his team to guide,
So he were like him and by Venus' side.

And now Adonis with a lazy sprite
And with a heavy, dark, disliking eye,
His louring brows o'erwhelming his fair sight
Like misty vapours when they blot the sky,
Souring his cheeks, cries, 'Fie, no more of love!
The sun doth burn my face. I must remove.'

'Ay me,' quoth Venus, 'young and so unkind,
What bare excuses mak'st thou to be gone!
I'll sigh celestial breath, whose gentle wind
Shall cool the heat of this descending sun:
I'll make a shadow for thee of my hairs,
If they burn too, I'll quench them with my tears.

169 increase produce **172 That thine** so that your offspring **175 this** this time, now **177 Titan** another name for the Greek sun god **tirèd** weary/dressed, attired **178 burning . . . hotly** i.e. hotly/lasciviously **179 his team** i.e. Titan's team of horses that drew the sun's chariot **180 So . . . him** provided that Titan could be like Adonis **181 lazy sprite** sluggish spirit **182 disliking** disapproving, reluctant **183 fair sight** beautiful eyes/handsome appearance **184 vapours** clouds or noxious fogs rising from the ground **185 Souring** contracting, pursing **188 bare** poor, unconvincing

'The sun that shines from heaven shines but warm,
And, lo, I lie between that sun and thee:
The heat I have from thence doth little harm,
Thine eye darts forth the fire that burneth me,
And were I not immortal, life were done
Between this heavenly and earthly sun.

'Art thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel?
Nay, more than flint, for stone at rain relenteth:
Art thou a woman's son and canst not feel
What 'tis to love, how want of love tormenteth?
O, had thy mother borne so hard a mind,
She had not brought forth thee, but died unkind.

'What am I that thou shouldst contemn me this?
Or what great danger dwells upon my suit?
What were thy lips the worse for one poor kiss?
Speak, fair, but speak fair words or else be mute:
Give me one kiss, I'll give it thee again,
And one for int'rest, if thou wilt have twain.

'Fie, lifeless picture, cold and senseless stone,
Well-painted idol, image dull and dead,
Statue contenting but the eye alone,
Thing like a man, but of no woman bred:
Thou art no man, though of a man's complexion,
For men will kiss even by their own direction.'

197 done ended **198 heavenly . . . sun** the sun in the sky and Adonis himself **202 want** lack/desire **203 thy mother** Adonis was the incestuous product of his mother Myrrha's love for her own father **204 unkind** cruel/unnatural **205 contemn** disdain, scorn **this** thus **206 suit** request/courtship **213 Statue** Adonis was a descendent of Pygmalion and the statue he had made, fallen in love with and married after she had been brought to life by Aphrodite/Venus **215 complexion** appearance **216 by . . . direction** of their own accord

This said, impatience chokes her pleading tongue,
And swelling passion doth provoke a pause,
Red cheeks and fiery eyes blaze forth her wrong:
Being judge in love, she cannot right her cause;
And now she weeps and now she fain would speak,
And now her sobs do her intendments break.

Sometime she shakes her head and then his hand,
Now gazeth she on him, now on the ground;
Sometime her arms enfold him like a band,
She would, he will not in her arms be bound:
And when from thence he struggles to be gone,
She locks her lily fingers one in one.

'Fondling,' she saith, 'since I have hemmed thee here
Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
I'll be a park and thou shalt be my deer:
Feed where thou wilt on mountain or in dale,
Graze on my lips and, if those hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.

'Within this limit is relief enough,
Sweet bottom-grass and high delightful plain,
Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough,
To shelter thee from tempest and from rain:
Then be my deer, since I am such a park,
No dog shall rouse thee, though a thousand bark.'

219 blaze forth proclaim/burn forth **220 Being . . . cause** i.e. even though she is the goddess of love and supreme judge of amorous affairs, she cannot determine matters in her own favour **221 fain** willingly **222 intendments** intentions **226 would** wants to (bind him) **228 locks . . . one** intertwines her fingers (so that he cannot escape her embrace) **229 Fondling** foolish one/one who is doted upon **230 ivory pale** i.e. fair-skinned arms encircling him (a **pale** is a fence; plays on sense of 'white') **231 park** enclosed tract of land reserved for keeping and hunting game **deer** puns on 'dear' **232 mountain . . . dale** i.e. breasts and vagina (replete with pleasure-giving **fountains**) **235 limit** area defined by a boundary **relief** feeding, pasturing (hunting term)/sexual ease **236 bottom-grass** lush grass growing at the base of the valley/pubic hair (bottom signifies 'lower regions', not 'buttocks/anus', a sense not then in use) **plain** i.e. stomach (possibly pubic mound) **237 hillocks** i.e. buttocks (possibly breasts) **brakes** thickets, i.e. pubic hair **obscure** hidden, secret/dark **240 rouse** cause to issue forth from cover (hunting term); Adonis will instead be 'roused' sexually by Venus

At this Adonis smiles as in disdain,
That in each cheek appears a pretty dimple;
Love made those hollows, if himself were slain,
He might be buried in a tomb so simple,
Foreknowing well, if there he came to lie,
Why, there love lived and there he could not die.

These lovely caves, these round enchanting pits,
Opened their mouths to swallow Venus' liking:
Being mad before, how doth she now for wits?
Struck dead at first, what needs a second striking?
Poor queen of love, in thine own law forlorn,
To love a cheek that smiles at thee in scorn.

Now which way shall she turn? What shall she say?
Her words are done, her woes are more increasing,
The time is spent, her object will away,
And from her twining arms doth urge releasing:
'Pity!' she cries, 'Some favour, some remorse!'
Away he springs and hasteth to his horse.

But, lo, from forth a copse that neighbours by,
A breeding jennet, lusty, young and proud,
Adonis' trampling courser doth espy,
And forth she rushes, snorts and neighs aloud.
The strong-necked steed, being tied unto a tree,
Breaketh his rein and to her straight goes he.

243 if so that if he **247 caves** . . . **pits** i.e. dimples **249 wits** sanity **250 Struck** . . . **first** having already been smitten by love **251 in** . . . **forlorn** helpless and wretched under your own rules/unable to control your own area of authority **257 remorse** pity, compassion **259 neighbours by** is nearby **260 breeding** in heat **jennet** small Spanish horse **lusty** lively/lustful **proud** spirited/sexually aroused **261 trampling courser** stallion stamping on the ground **264 straight** directly/immediately

Imperiously he leaps, he neighs, he bounds,
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder,
The bearing earth with his hard hoof he wounds,
Whose hollow womb resounds like heaven's thunder,
The iron bit he crusheth 'tween his teeth,
Controlling what he was controllèd with.

His ears up-pricked, his braided hanging mane
Upon his compassed crest now stand on end,
His nostrils drink the air and forth again,
As from a furnace, vapours doth he send:
His eye, which scornfully glisters like fire,
Shows his hot courage and his high desire.

Sometime he trots, as if he told the steps
With gentle majesty and modest pride,
Anon he rears upright, curvets and leaps,
As who should say, 'Lo, thus my strength is tried
And this I do to captivate the eye
Of the fair breeder that is standing by.'

What recketh he his rider's angry stir,
His flattering 'Holla', or his 'Stand, I say'?
What cares he now for curb or pricking spur?
For rich caparisons or trappings gay?
He sees his love and nothing else he sees,
For nothing else with his proud sight agrees.

266 girths straps that hold the saddle in place **267 bearing** carrying his weight/enduring his injuries/fertile **272 compassed crest** arched ridge of the neck **275 glisters** sparkles, glitters **276 courage** disposition/sexual desire **277 told** counted **278 gentle** noble/calm **279 Anon** shortly **curvets** springs, frisks **280 As who should** like one who might **tried** proven **283 recketh he** cares he for **stir** fuss, agitation **284 flattering** coaxing, wheedling **Holla** stop (used to a horse) **285 curb** restraining strap passing under the horse's jaw and fastened to the bit **286 caparisons** decorated saddle cloths **trappings gay** colourful ornamental coverings