

## VENUS AND ADONIS

SOLO  
INSTRUMENTAL  
(INTRO DEL  
PIANO)

Even as the sun with purple-coloured face  
Had tane 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.~~

5

1.1  
[ 'Thrice fairer than myself', ~~thus she began,~~  
'The field's chief flower, sweet above compare,  
Stain to all nymphs, more lovely than a man,

1-6 The poem opens at a fast pace and takes us into the heart of the action (the wooing of Adonis), as recommended by Horace in the *Art of Poetry* (see Introduction p. 3). Both protagonists are introduced immediately, and their contrasting attitudes and desires made apparent by the compound epithets which describe them and by the overall movement of the stanza, which enacts in miniature the conflict that is about to take place.

1 Even as Just when. But it may also carry the force of 'just like', so beginning the stanza on a simile which culminates in Adonis at mid-point; Venus sustains a similar movement over the second part of the stanza, which rounds it out chiastically, or ab> <ba. The rhetorical compass of the poem shows itself at once.

1 purple-coloured red, blushing. The word has classical origins (Lat. *purpureus* meaning brightness or vividness of colour – usually though not necessarily red) and described, for example, the splendour of imperial garments (the status of the sun-god is accordingly underlined). It also occurs in the classically derived genres: in tragedy or epic poetry it describes the colour of blood (invariably shed in a noble action), whereas in lyric or erotic poems it may denote passion or even voluptuousness. Here it may carry several shades of meaning from regality down to embarrassment, especially through associations of debauch, purple being the colour of the grape which signifies the god of excess, Bacchus.

2 tane taken.

2 last lingering.

2 weeping dewy. The metaphor equivocally suggests the morning's distress either at the loss

of the sun's attentions or from his abuse of her. In this way it anticipates both Venus's argument in favour of sexual energy and Adonis's preference for modesty.

3 Rose-cheeked Contrasting pointedly with the sun's 'purple-coloured' to bring out the freshness and innocence of Adonis. Compare Marlowe: 'The men of wealthy Sestos, every year / For his sake whom their goddess held so dear, / Rose-cheeked Adonis, kept a solemn feast' (*HL* 1.91-3). See also pp. 8-9.

3 hied him hurried.

4 The chiastic pattern of the line reflects that of the stanza (see 1n).

5 Sick-thoughted Lovesick.

5 makes amain hurries. Change of tense from past to historic present for dramatic emphasis, as here, is a constant tactic of the poem.

9 Stain . . . nymphs i.e. his beauty makes theirs seem tarnished. Marlowe also uses the word 'stain' effectively: e.g. 'Her kirtle blue, whereon was many a stain / Made with the blood of wretched lovers slain' (*HL* 1.15-16), which plays on 'stain' as 'sign of guilt' and as 'embellishment'. Both he and Shakespeare exploit the dual capacity of the word.

9 more lovely . . . man The female element in Adonis's beauty registers thematically more than once in subsequent passages, for example in the exchanges between him and Venus, in which he extols the virtues of modesty, and in Venus's reading of his fatal encounter with the boar (see particularly 1115-16).

More white and red than doves or roses are;  
~~Nature that made thee, with herself at strife,  
Saieth that the world hath ending with thy life.~~

10

15  
[ '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;

20  
[ '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.'

20

1.2  
[ 'With this she seizeth on his sweating palm,  
The precedent of pith and livelihood,

25

14 rein] raine Q1; reign Q7-10; reine Q11, 13+ 24 time-beguiling] Q1; time-beguiling Q5

10 white . . . red The contrast of white and red occurs in a number of combinations, both in this poem and in *Lucrece*, the purpose being not only decorative but thematic, e.g. passion conflicting with innocence.

11 with . . . strife in competition with herself. Nature as artist was a standard Renaissance idea (just as in *WT* 4.4.86-97, which speaks of 'great creating nature'); as such she has tried to outdo her own best efforts in fashioning Adonis.

12 the world . . . life when you die so will the world. Probably with a double implication: (1) nature has no further purpose, having achieved the perfect form, (2) without Adonis the world will not survive.

13 alight alight from.

14 A method of curbing the horse to prevent it from straying.

14 saddle-bow 'the arched front part of a saddle-tree or of a saddle' (*OED*).

15 meed reward, with a pun on 'mead', whose basic ingredient is honey (see next line).

17 where . . . hisses Venus has just spoken of imparting knowledge (see 16), which in effect gives her the tempter's or serpent's role. Too much ought not to be made of this irony, since Venus is conceived of (by the poem at least) as more than just a temptress; but the remark's dual purposefulness is worth noting. As other examples show almost immediately, Venus is closer to Cleopatra

(who imagines that Antony sees her as his 'serpent of old Nile' – *Ant.* 1.5.25) than to any of Shakespeare's other women. See also 19-20n.

18 set seated.

18 smother Intended by Venus as an inducement, the word clearly signals an aspect of her that Adonis finds repellent. Through such choice of diction the poem contrives to speak both for and against the goddess.

19-20 Compare Enobarbus's comment on Cleopatra: 'Other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies' (*Ant.* 2.2.235-7).

23 an . . . short but a short hour.

24 wasted spent, consumed. Her meaning is that time lies heavy and could be made more interesting – speeded up; but summer's time is already short compared with winter's time (for which her suggestion would be more appropriate). This is another of Venus's temptingly phrased ideas which carry negative connotations (see 18n).

26 The . . . livelihood The sign of vigour and vitality. For similar examples of hints of lubriciousness see *Ant.* 1.2.52-3: 'if an oily palm be not a fruitful prognostication', and *Oth.* 3.4.36-9: *Oth.* 'This hand is moist, my lady. / *Des.* It [yet] hath felt no age nor known no sorrow. / *Oth.* This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart: / Hot, hot, and moist.'