

VENUS AND ADONIS

A line-by-line translation

Shakespeare

Epigraph: 'Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua.'

Dedication: TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE HENRY WRIOTHESLY,
EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON, AND BARON OF TICHFIELD.

5 RIGHT HONORABLE,
I KNOW not how I shall offend in dedicating my
unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world
10 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
15 invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so
noble a god-father, 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
20 your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation.
Your honour's in all duty,
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

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

30 '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,
35 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:
40 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,
45 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.'

50 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:

Shakescleare Translation

Epigraph: "Let idiots admire worthless things. Golden
Apollo ¹, lead me to the abundant spring of poetic
inspiration."

Dedication: To the Right Honorable Henry Wriothesly, ²
Earl of Southampton and Baron of Tichfield.

Dear sir,

I'm not sure if I'll offend you by dedicating my less-than-
perfect poetry to you, sir, or if the world will criticize me for
choosing someone as powerful as you to validate my
pathetic creation. But if you're happy, sir, I'll feel like I've
been successful—and I'll promise to use all my free time
working until I can write a more serious poem to dedicate
to you. But if my first-ever poem turns out to be bad, I'll
regret dedicating it to you and won't try again ³, since I'll
be afraid of producing another embarrassing poem. I leave
it to up to your judgment. You can decide if it's worthy of
you or not. Of course, I hope that the poem fulfills your
heart's desires and that it can live up to the world's hopeful
expectations.

Your faithful servant,
William Shakespeare

The sun was purple on that rainy morning. Just as it
disappeared behind a cloud, rosy-cheeked Adonis went out
hunting. He loved hunting, but he laughed in the face of
love. Lovesick over him, Venus ⁴ followed him as fast as
she could. She started talking sweetly to him, and as boldly
as a lover would.

"You're three times as pretty as I am," she began, "the
prettiest flower ⁵ in the field, and sweeter than anything
in the world. You put fairies to shame. You're lovelier than
any man alive. Your skin is whiter than a dove's, and your
blushing cheeks are redder than roses. You're the most
perfect creature Mother Nature ever made, and she'll never
make another one like you.

"Hey, handsome, would you be so kind as to get down off
your horse and tie his reins to the horn of the saddle? If
you'll do as I ask, I'll reward you by telling you a thousand
secrets as sweet as honey. Come here and sit by me, where
snakes can never bite you. Once you're here, I'll cover you
with kisses.

"But I won't overload your lips with too much kissing. I'll
make you long for more even as we kiss. I'll change it
up—first your lips will be red, and then pale again. I'll give
you ten quick kisses—all together as long as one normal
kiss. Then I'll give you one long kiss as long as twenty quick
kisses. When you have such a fun way to pass the time, a
summer's day seems to go by in an hour."

As she said that, she grabbed his sweating hand. It pulsed
with all the life in his body. Trembling and passionate, she
said his hand was sweet medicine, the best medicine on
Earth that a goddess could ask for. As she got more

¹ Shakespeare begins his poem with an invocation from Ovid's *Amores*, a work of ancient Latin poetry. The poet asks Apollo, the Roman god of poetry, to take him to the spring of Castalia, a Greek site associated with the Muses, goddesses of the arts and sciences.

² In Shakespeare's day, dedications were a way to receive patronage—financial support, publicity, and sponsorship from nobility. This letter, printed on the front page of the poem when it was first released, recognizes Wriothesly for his philanthropy and advertises the fact that Shakespeare was endorsed by an aristocrat. Shakespeare later dedicated *The Rape of Lucrece* to Wriothesly, and some scholars suspect that Wriothesly could be the "Fair Youth" addressed in the *Sonnets*.

³ Shakespeare pretends to be modest, comparing his poem to a deformed child to which he's given birth and, here, to a pitiful corn harvest from poor soil.

⁴ Venus was the Roman goddess of love.

⁵ Venus makes three observations about Adonis that recur throughout the poem: she compares him to a flower; compliments his red-and-white complexion; and says the world will not be the same after his death. This foreshadows Adonis's transformation into a red-and-white flower after death, and Venus's curse on lovers.

Being so enraged, desire doth lend her force
Courageously to pluck him from his horse.

55 Over one arm the lusty courser's rein,
Under her other was the tender boy,
Who blush'd 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.

60 The studded bridle on a ragged bough
Nimbly she fastens:—O, how quick is love!—
The steed is stalled up, and even now
To tie the rider she begins to prove:
Backward she push'd him, as she would be thrust,
65 And govern'd 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;
70 And kissing speaks, with lustful language broken,
'If thou wilt chide, thy lips shall never open.'

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
75 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,
80 Shaking her wings, devouring all in haste,
Till either gorge be stuff'd 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,
85 Panting he lies and breatheth in her face;
She feedeth on the steam as on a prey,
And calls it heavenly moisture, air of grace;
Wishing her cheeks were gardens full of flowers,
So they were dew'd with such distilling showers.

90 Look, how a bird lies tangled in a net,
So fasten'd 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
95 Perforce will force it overflow the bank.

Still she entreats, and prettily entreats,
For to a pretty ear she tunes her tale;
Still is he sullen, still he lours and frets,
'Twi'x crimson shame and anger ashy-pale:
100 Being red, she loves him best; and being white,
Her best is better'd 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,
105 Till he take truce with her contending tears,
Which long have rain'd, 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,
110 Who, being look'd on, ducks as quickly in;
So offers he to give what she did crave;

aroused, she worked up the courage to pull him down from
his horse.

She threw the horse's reins over one arm and held the
young boy under the other. He blushed and pouted
disapprovingly. He wasn't aroused at all—he didn't want to
play. She was red-hot ⁸ with passion; he was red because
he was embarrassed, but he didn't desire her at all.

⁸ Venus is linked to the heat and hot things (like "coals"). Adonis is linked to the cold, like the "frost" here. These metaphors heighten the contrast between their levels of sexual desire.

She nimbly fastened the horse to a tree branch. Love moves
quickly! Now that the horse was tied, she attempted to tie
the rider, too. She pushed him backward just the way she
hoped he would thrust into her. Her strength made it easy
to throw him around physically, but she couldn't make him
want her.

She laid down beside him. Each of them leaned on their
elbows and hips. When she stroked his cheek, he frowned.
He started to say something, but she kissed his lips to stop
him. As they kissed, she said, between kisses, "if you're
going to argue with me, you'll never open your lips again."

He blushed, embarrassed ⁷. As she started to cry, her
tears fell on his burning, innocent face. Then she dried his
tears with a deep sigh and a toss of her blonde hair. He said
she was being too forward, and that what she was doing
was wrong. She shut him up again by kissing him.

⁷ Shakespeare emphasizes Adonis' virginity—he is not yet a man, and has no sexual experience prior to this. Here, he uses feminine language ("maiden") to describe Adonis' sexual innocence, because the typical power dynamic between male and female is reversed in this couple.

She was like a hungry eagle ⁸ on the prowl: an eagle will
catch a bird, pluck its feather out with its beak, and then
tear the flesh away from the bone. It'll flap its wings, eating
as quickly as it can until it's full or there's no prey left to eat.
She kissed his forehead, his cheeks, and his chin like that,
and then started all over again at the beginning.

⁸ Seeming opposites—life and death, love and predation—unite in the metaphor comparing Venus to an eagle. Because Adonis will later be killed in a hunting accident, the metaphor is significant.

He was forced to take it, but he didn't respond. He lay there,
panting and breathing in her face. She breathed in his
breath, saying it smelled heavenly and felt delightful. She
said that if her cheeks were flowers, the moisture his breath
left on them would make them grow better than any rain
could.

Adonis was trapped in her arms like a bird tangled in a net.
His angry eyes looked even more beautiful as he struggled
against her—ashamed, innocent, and resistant. Since he
was already handsome, anything added to his face only
made him more so ⁹.

⁹ The previous stanza compares Adonis' breath to life-giving rain. Shakespeare reprises the imagery here, comparing Adonis to a river and his angry tears to rain that increases the water level—that is, makes him even more attractive.

She kept asking this handsome boy—and asking nicely. He
remained cold, frowning and pushing her away. His face
was alternately flushed with embarrassment and pale with
anger. She loved him best when he was red—but then she
loved him even more when he grew pale again.

With a face like that, she couldn't help but love him. She
swore she would never take her beautiful, immortal hands
off his soft chest. That is, unless he would give in to her
pleading tears (which had been going on for a long time,
leaving her cheeks all wet) and repay her with a single kiss.

When she promised that, he raised his chin—like a heron
peeking his head out from a wave, and diving back in as
soon as he realizes he's been seen. He acted like he was

But when her lips were ready for his pay,
He winks, and turns his lips another way.

115 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?

120 'I have been woo'd, 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,
125 And begg'd for that which thou unask'd shalt have.

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

'Thus he that overruled I oversway'd,
Leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain:
Strong-tempered steel his stronger strength obey'd,
135 Yet was he servile to my coy disdain.
O, be not proud, nor brag not of thy might,
For mastering her that foil'd the god of fight!

'Touch but my lips with those fair lips of thine,—
Though mine be not so fair, yet are they red—
140 The kiss shall be thine own as well as mine.
What seest thou in the ground? hold up thy head:
Look in mine eye-balls, there thy beauty lies;
Then why not lips on lips, since eyes in eyes?

'Art thou ashamed to kiss? then wink again,
And I will wink; so shall the day seem night;
Love keeps his revels where they are but twain;
145 Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight:
These blue-vein'd 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:
150 Fair flowers that are not gather'd in their prime
155 Rot and consume themselves in little time.

'Were I hard-favour'd, foul, or wrinkled-old,
Ill-nurtured, crooked, churlish, harsh in voice,
O'erworn, despised, rheumatic and cold,
Thick-sighted, barren, lean and lacking juice,
160 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 gray and bright and quick in turning:
My beauty as the spring doth yearly grow,
165 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.

'Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear,
Or, like a fairy, trip upon the green,
170 Or, like a nymph, with long dishevell'd 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.

going to give Venus what she wanted, but when she
puckered her lips, he blinked and turned his lips away.

A traveler on a hot summer day wouldn't have longed for
water as much as Venus longed for his kiss. She saw his lips,
but couldn't make them kiss her. Her cheeks were wet with
tears, but her desire burned in her heart. "Take pity on me,"
she cried, "you hard-hearted boy! All I want is a kiss, why
are you being so coy?"

"The serious, terrifying god of war ¹⁰ flirted with me the
way I'm flirting with you now. He's never been defeated in
battle; he conquers everyone he fights. And yet, I've made
him my captive and my slave. I've made him beg for what
I'd give you without asking.

¹⁰ In Roman myth, Mars (the god of war) was Venus' lover.

"He's hung his sword ¹¹, battered shield, and helmet over
my bed. He's learned to play games, dance, fool around,
waste time, relax, smile, and joke for my sake. He's put
aside his war drum and battle cry, making my arms his
battlefield and my bed his tent instead.

¹¹ The power dynamic between Venus and Mars is reversed, just as that between Venus and Adonis is reversed. In this poem, love is stronger than war, and females conquer males.

"So I overcame the most powerful of the gods. I made him
my prisoner and bound him in chains of red roses. Although
he could defeat the strongest steel swords with his strength,
he gave into my flirtatious tricks. Don't be so proud! Don't
think you're tough for defeating the goddess who trumped
the god of war!

"Just touch my lips with your pretty lips. Mine aren't as
pretty as yours, but at least they're red—you'll enjoy the
kiss as much as I will. What are you looking at on the
ground? Hold your head up; look me in the eye. Your eyes
are your most beautiful feature. If we kiss with lips on lips,
why not with eyes on eyes?"

"Are you too embarrassed to kiss me? Then close your eyes
again, and I'll close mine, too. We can pretend it's
nighttime. Lovers usually meet in the dark of night. So kiss
me; no one can see us! The blue-and-purple violets over
there won't blab—they don't know what we're up to.

"I can tell by the wispy hairs above your lip that you're not a
man yet, but you're not too young for love. Seize the day ¹²
; don't let time pass you by. Beauty in and of itself shouldn't
be wasted. If you don't gather pretty flowers when they're
blooming, they rot and decay quickly.

¹² Venus uses the traditional "carpe diem" (Latin for "seize the day"), common in Renaissance love poetry. She encourages Adonis to have sex while he's still young and beautiful, and in so doing, have children and leave a legacy.

"If I were ugly, gross, wrinkly, old, starving, hunchbacked,
rude, harsh-voiced, over-worked, hated, diseased, cold,
blind, barren, thin, or dry, you might have good reason to
hesitate. Then I wouldn't be worthy of you. But I'm perfect,
so why are you rejecting me?"

"There's not a single wrinkle in my forehead. My eyes are
gray, bright, and can move quickly. I get more beautiful with
every passing year. My skin is soft, my body is plump, and
my bones are healthy. If you would touch it, my smooth,
moist hand would dissolve in your hand, or seem to melt.

"Let me talk for a while—I'll entertain you. Or let me dance
on the grass like a fairy. Or let me fly above the sand—my
hair flowing like a water spirit's, my feet never touching the
ground. The burning power of love doesn't weigh us down;
it makes us lighter, and makes us feel like we can do
anything.

175 '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 shouldst think it heavy unto thee?

180 '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,
185 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:
190 Seeds spring from seeds and beauty breedeth beauty;
Thou wast begot; to get it is thy duty.

'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,
195 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 love-sick queen began to sweat,
For where they lay the shadow had forsook them,
200 And Titan, tired in the mid-day 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 spright,
205 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.'

210 'Ay me,' quoth Venus, 'young, and so unkind?
What bare excuses makest 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;
215 If they burn too, I'll quench them with my tears.

'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;
220 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
225 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?
230 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 interest, if thou wilt have twain.

235 'Fie, lifeless picture, cold and senseless stone,
Well-painted idol, image dun and dead,
Statue contenting but the eye alone,

"Look, see these primroses I'm lying on? These weak
flowers ¹³ support me as if they were sturdy trees. Two tiny
doves can drag me across the sky, and fly me anywhere I
want, from morning until night. Love is so light, sweet boy.
So why do you think it's such a burden?

¹³ Because Venus is a goddess, she is light as air. She can also fly.

"Are you in love with your own face? Can your right hand
make love to your left? Then flirt with yourself and be
rejected by yourself. You can still be free from love, but then
you'll be robbing yourself. Narcissus ¹⁴ fell in love with
himself, too, and he died trying to kiss his own reflection in
a stream.

¹⁴ In classical myth, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection in the water, and drowned trying to kiss it. Venus cites him to imply that Adonis is similarly vain.

"Candles are supposed to be lit, jewelry is supposed to be
worn, desserts are made to be tasted, flowers are supposed
to be picked, herbs are meant to be smelled, trees are made
to bear fruit. Things are supposed to be used for their
purposes. Seeds are planted and produce more seeds.
Beauty breeds beauty. Someone conceived you, so it's your
duty to conceive a child of your own.

"Why should you consume everything the earth produces
without producing something to give back to it? According
to the laws of nature, you're supposed to procreate so that
your children can live on after you're dead. That way, even
when you die, you live on in your surviving children ¹⁵."

¹⁵ This motif of children and legacy in the "carpe diem" argument can also be seen in Shakespeare's first sonnet.

After saying all that, the love-sick goddess started to sweat.
There was no shade where they were lying, and the sun ¹⁶
was directly overhead in the midday heat. The sun-god,
Titan, wished Adonis would trade places with him, so that
Adonis would pull the sun across the sky in his chariot and
Titan could lie down next to Venus instead.

¹⁶ According to Greco-Roman mythology, Titan, a servant of Apollo, pulled the sun across the sky every day in a golden chariot.

Adonis was starting to get bored. His eyes grew heavy and
dark, indicating how unhappy he was. He furrowed his
brow low over his eyes, like clouds ¹⁷ darkening the sky. He
pouted and cried, "stop! Stop talking about love! The sun is
burning my face. I need to leave."

¹⁷ Earlier, Adonis' tears were compared to life-giving rain; now, his face is like a rainstorm. The imagery is consistent even as his emotions change.

"Oh dear," said Venus, "how can someone so young be so
unkind? You're making up such lame excuses to leave! If I
breathe my heavenly breath, it'll cool down the heat of the
sun. I can make a shady spot for you underneath my hair. If
the sun starts to burn my hair, I'll put the fire out with my
tears.

"When the sun shines from the sky, obviously it's warm. But
look—I'm lying between the sun and you. The sun's heat
doesn't hurt me at all; it's your eyes ¹⁸ that set my heart on
fire. If I weren't immortal, I'd be a goner, caught between
the sun and you.

¹⁸ In addition to rain, Adonis is compared to the sun throughout the poem—his beauty "shines," and, according to Venus, he lights up the world.

"Are you really so tough, like a rock? Hard as steel? No,
you're harder than rock—rock erodes in the rain! Didn't you
have a mother—don't you know what love is? Don't you
know how hard it is to be deprived of love? If your mother
was as tough as you, she wouldn't have given birth to you;
she would have died instead.

"Who am I for you to insult me this way? What are you
afraid will happen if you give into me? Would your lips be
that much worse off if they gave me a single kiss? Say
something sweet. Only sweet things; otherwise be quiet.
Give me one kiss, and I'll kiss you back. And I'll kiss you
again if you want another one.

"You're a lifeless picture; a cold, unfeeling stone; a painted
statue; a dull, dead image; a work of art made to please the
eye. You look like a man, but you can't be human! You're

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.'

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

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

'Fondling,' she saith, 'since I have hemm'd thee here
Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;
255 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,
260 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.'

At this Adonis smiles as in disdain,
265 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.

270 These lovely caves, these round enchanting pits,
Open'd 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,
275 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.
280 'Pity,' she cries, 'some favour, some remorse!'
Away he springs and hasteth to his horse.

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

Imperiously he leaps, he neighs, he bounds,
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder;
290 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 controlled with.

not a man, even though you look like one. Men kiss women
of their own accord."

That said, she was overcome with impatience and got
tongue-tied. Her intense emotion forced her to stop talking.
He looked angry with his red cheeks and fiery eyes. Even
though Venus was the goddess of love, she couldn't help
her cause. She cried, then tried to speak, then started to
sob again in the middle of her sentence.

She would shake her head, then pull on his hand. She'd
gaze at him, then at the ground. She'd fold her arms around
him, then, when he struggled to get away and finally
escaped, she'd lace her white fingers together.

"Darling," she said, "since my white arms circle around you
like a fence, I'll be a park, and you can be my deer ¹⁹. You
can nibble wherever you want: in the mountains, or in the
valleys. Graze on my lips. If my lips are dry, look lower,
where the pleasant fountains are.

¹⁹ Again, Adonis is the prey and Venus, the predator; he, the hunter, becomes the hunted.

"You have everything you need within this fence: sweet
grass in the valleys; high, delightful plains up top; round,
rising hills; ²⁰ dark clumps of bush to shelter you from the
wind and the rain. Be my deer, then, since I'm your park. No
dog will ever catch you, even if a thousand tried."

²⁰ Venus' "hills" are her breasts; the "fountains" and "brakes" she describes are euphemisms for her genitals. She uses topographical terms to advertise her own luscious body.

Adonis smiled condescendingly at that. A pretty dimple
showed in each cheek—if only his cheeks were dimpling for
love. A lover can only hope to be buried in a grave as perfect
as that dimple ²¹; he would know that, when he was
buried there, love was all around and could never die.

²¹ Here images of love and death connect again: Shakespeare describes the dimples in Adonis' face as a work of art created by Love (Venus, or the abstract idea of love), and as a grave for Love. Part of this imagery is conventional—"to die" was slang for "to orgasm" in Shakespeare's day. But part of it is the lyric theme of this poem—the idealism of unconsummated love. Adonis dies before he and Venus have sex; their love is thus unfulfilled—dead before it begins.

Venus fell in love with those lovely caves, those round,
enchanting holes; they swallowed her up. She was crazy in
love before, so where was she now? If you're dead after the
first strike, do you really need to be struck again? Poor
goddess of love—she was beat at her own game! She was in
love with a dimple that only showed when he was rejecting
her.

Where could she turn? What could she say? She had no
words left. Her suffering was getting worse, but she'd tried
her best. Her object was trying to leave, straining against
her arms around him. "Have pity on me," she cried, "show
me some love, take it back!" But he jumped out of her arms
and ran over to his horse.

But just then, a female horse ²² came out from behind
some nearby trees. She was young, attractive, energetic,
and ready to breed. Adonis' horse saw her. She rushed over
to him, snorted, and neighed. Adonis' strong-necked horse,
still tied to the tree, broke his reins and went straight to her.

²² In Shakespeare's day, horses often symbolized a lack of self-control, or a complete indulgence of one's (often sexual) desires. By contrast, bridles (pieces of equipment that allow riders to control horses) symbolized self-control.

He leapt up impressively, neighed, and ran. He broke his
saddle from off his back and pawed the earth hard with his
hoof. His hoof in the dirt made a loud, echoing sound like
thunder. He crushed the iron bit with his teeth, controlling ²³
what was used to control him.

²³ The horse bucks off his bridle, representing the triumph of bodily desire over self-discipline. Obviously

295 His ears up-prick'd; his braided hanging mane
Upon his compass'd 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.

300 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
305 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 trapping gay?
310 He sees his love, and nothing else he sees,
For nothing else with his proud sight agrees.

Look, when a painter would surpass the life,
In limning out a well-proportion'd steed,
His art with nature's workmanship at strife,
315 As if the dead the living should exceed;
So did this horse excel a common one
In shape, in courage, colour, pace and bone.

Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide,
320 High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing
strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide:
Look, what a horse should have he did not lack,
Save a proud rider on so proud a back.

325 Sometime he scuds far off and there he stares;
Anon he starts at stirring of a feather;
To bid the wind a base he now prepares,
And whether he run or fly they know not whether;
For through his mane and tail the high wind sings,
330 Fanning the hairs, who wave like feather'd wings.

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,
335 Spurs at his love and scorns the heat he feels,
Beating his kind embracements with her heels.

Then, like a melancholy malcontent,
He veils his tail that, like a falling plume,
Cool shadow to his melting buttock lent:
340 He stamps and bites the poor flies in his fume.
His love, perceiving how he is enraged,
Grew kinder, and his fury was assuaged.

His testy master goeth about to take him;
When, lo, the unback'd breeder, full of fear,
345 Jealous of catching, swiftly doth forsake him,
With her the horse, and left Adonis there:
As they were mad, unto the wood they hie them,
Out-stripping crows that strive to over-fly them.

He pricked his ears up. His braided mane didn't hang down anymore; it stood straight up on his head. His nostrils flared and he breathed out heavily again and again, his breath like steam blowing out of a furnace. His eyes were shining as bright as fire, showing how hot with desire he was, and how far he'd go to get what he wanted.

He trotted gently, majestically, and modestly as if he were counting his steps. Then he reared up on his hind legs, and jumped with his back legs into the air as if to say, "look how strong I am! I'm doing all this to catch the eye of the pretty horse standing over there."

Does he care now that his angry rider is shouting, "hey" and "stay there?" Does he care about his whips and spurs? About fancy harnesses or bright-colored ribbons? He can't see anything but his love; nothing else is worth looking at to him.

It was as if a painter²⁴ had set out to draw an ideal horse that would put real horses to shame—drawing out the right proportions, painting him to his best ability, as if a work of art could be better than life. In just the same way, that horse's body, spirit, color, speed, and form excelled all other horses.

Round hooves; short joints; long, shaggy fetlocks²⁵; a broad chest; full eyes; a small head; wide nostrils; a high forehead; straight legs; exceptional strength; a thin mane; thick tail; broad buttocks; and a soft hide: this horse lacked nothing except a handsome rider on his back to match his handsome self.

He would scurry off and stand far away, staring. Then he'd start at the smallest thing. He was ready to chase the wind, whether he had to run or fly to do it. The wind ran through his mane and tail, fanning the hair out like feathery wings.

He looked at his love and neighed to her. She answered him as if she could read his mind. Like all females, she got prideful when he started flirting with her. She started acting cold and rude, rejecting his love and mocking his passion, kicking him away when he tried to get close.

Then, as if he were depressed, he curled his tail over his backside, shading it like an umbrella. He stamped and bit the flies in his tail. His love could see how angry he was and started acting more kindly; his anger went away.

His grumpy master went to grab him when, all of a sudden, the female horse spooked. Not wanting to lose her, Adonis' horse²⁶ abandoned him and ran after her, leaving Adonis behind. They ran into the woods like crazy horses, running faster than the crows could fly in the air above them.

this is the very course of action Venus is asking Adonis to take; the horses are both parallel and opposite to the two lovers.

²⁴ Art can idealize a kind of beauty that's not found in the natural world; by contrast, Shakespeare says that real life—Adonis' and his horse's beauty—exceeds that which art can depict. Since Shakespeare presents Adonis and the horse through another artistic medium (poetry), this stanza can be read as commentary on the insufficiency of art itself to fully capture life.

²⁵ The fetlock is a horse's joint, near the hoof.

²⁶ The power dynamic between horse and master is flipped just as the power dynamic between Venus and Adonis is flipped (in the Renaissance, men romantically pursued women). Shakespeare implies that the horse's way is the natural order of things.

350 All swoln with chafing, down Adonis sits,
Banning his boisterous and unruly beast:
And now the happy season once more fits,
That love-sick Love by pleading may be blest;
For lovers say, the heart hath treble wrong
When it is barr'd the aidance of the tongue.

355 An oven that is stopp'd, or river stay'd,
Burneth more hotly, swelleth with more rage:
So of concealed sorrow may be said;
Free vent of words love's fire doth assuage;
But when the heart's attorney once is mute,
360 The client breaks, as desperate in his suit.

He sees her coming, and begins to glow,
Even as a dying coal revives with wind,
And with his bonnet hides his angry brow;
Looks on the dull earth with disturbed mind,
365 Taking no notice that she is so nigh,
For all askance he holds her in his eye.

O, what a sight it was, wistly to view
How she came stealing to the wayward boy!
To note the fighting conflict of her hue,
370 How white and red each other did destroy!
But now her cheek was pale, and by and by
It flash'd forth fire, as lightning from the sky.

Now was she just before him as he sat,
And like a lowly lover down she kneels;
375 With one fair hand she heaveth up his hat,
Her other tender hand his fair cheek feels:
His tenderer cheek receives her soft hand's print,
As apt as new-fall'n snow takes any dint.

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

385 Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily prison'd in a gaol of snow,
Or ivory in an alabaster band;
So white a friend engirts so white a foe:
This beauteous combat, wilful and unwilling,
390 Show'd like two silver doves that sit a-billing.

Once more the engine of her thoughts began:
'O fairest mover on this mortal round,
Would thou wert as I am, and I a man,
My heart all whole as thine, thy heart my wound;
395 For one sweet look thy help I would assure thee,
Though nothing but my body's bane would cure thee!

'Give me my hand,' saith he, 'why dost thou feel it?'
'Give me my heart,' saith she, 'and thou shalt have it:
O, give it me, lest thy hard heart do steel it,
400 And being steel'd, soft sighs can never grave it:
Then love's deep groans I never shall regard,
Because Adonis' heart hath made mine hard.'

'For shame,' he cries, 'let go, and let me go;
My day's delight is past, my horse is gone,
405 And 'tis your fault I am bereft him so:
I pray you hence, and leave me here alone;
For all my mind, my thought, my busy care,
Is how to get my palfrey from the mare.'

Thus she replies: 'Thy palfrey, as he should,
410 Welcomes the warm approach of sweet desire:

Filled with anger, Adonis sat down, berating his energetic, misbehaving animal. It was a good time then for lovesick Venus to make a more successful attempt at love. Lovers say that your heart is most in pain when it can't find the words to articulate what it feels.

When you stop an oven, it burns hotter; when you dam a river, it swells higher. It's the same when you try to keep sadness bottled up. Love makes you want to speak up. When you're silent, the words [24](#) will break out of you because you start to get desperate.

He saw her coming and started to get angry, like a dying coal that flames up in the wind. He pulled his hat down over his face and looked down at the ground, angry and disturbed. He didn't look at her as she drew closer. He looked everywhere but at her.

It was a sight to see how she came creeping over to the escaping boy! It was strange to see how her face blushed and grew pale! Her cheek was pale, but a few seconds later it would blush again, as quickly as lightning in the sky.

She reached the place where he was sitting, and knelt down like a humble lover. She pulled his hat up with one hand, and felt his soft cheek with her other hand. His soft cheek, like freshly-fallen snow, felt the imprint of her soft hand on it.

There was a war of looks between the two of them. She looked into his eyes, pleading, begging. He looked into hers like he couldn't see them. Her eyes flirted with him; his eyes rejected her flirting. Their silent looks gave way to an abundance of tears, which rained down from her eyes to explain her sadness.

She took him gently by the hand, encasing his white hand [28](#) in her white one. It was like a lily covered in snow, or ivory wrapped in alabaster; that's how white their two hands were. This beautiful battle between her and him—the willing and the unwilling—was like two silver doves [29](#) pecking at each other.

She started to speak again, saying, "you're the most handsome man that ever walked the earth! If you were a woman and I were a man, and you were the lovesick one instead of me, I'd help you out with an encouraging look, knowing nothing except that my body would cure you!"

"Let go of my hand," he said, "why are you holding it?" "Let go of my heart," she said, "and you can have your hand back. Oh, give it back to me, or your heart will harden mine! And once it's hardened, I'll never be able to fall in love again, not even for the sweetest lover, because Adonis' heart will have made mine hard."

"Shame on you," he cried, "let me go, let me go! I'm tired of this, my horse is gone, and it's your fault that I lost him. Get out of here. Please leave me alone. All I can think about or care about right now is getting my horse back from that mare."

She replied, "your horse is giving into the heat of love (as he should). You have to give desire what it wants; otherwise, if

[24](#) The theme of the inability to express something returns again, providing a self-reflexive commentary on poetry.

[28](#) Here, Shakespeare compares their two hands to several very white things, repetitively emphasizing their equal beauty and the ways that their love is a kind of war between innocence and experience, male and female, discipline and desire.

[29](#) Doves are symbols of peace, so the fighting doves are an oxymoron.

Affection is a coal that must be cool'd;
Else, suffer'd, it will set the heart on fire:
The sea hath bounds, but deep desire hath none;
Therefore no marvel though thy horse be gone.

415 'How like a jade he stood, tied to the tree,
Servilely master'd with a leathern rein!
But when he saw his love, his youth's fair fee,
He held such petty bondage in disdain;
420 Throwing the base thong from his bending crest,
Enfranchising his mouth, his back, his breast.

'Who sees his true-love in her naked bed,
Teaching the sheets a whiter hue than white,
But, when his glutton eye so full hath fed,
His other agents aim at like delight?
425 Who is so faint, that dare not be so bold
To touch the fire, the weather being cold?

'Let me excuse thy courser, gentle boy;
And learn of him, I heartily beseech thee,
To take advantage on presented joy;
430 Though I were dumb, yet his proceedings teach thee;
O, learn to love; the lesson is but plain,
And once made perfect, never lost again.'

'I know not love,' quoth he, 'nor will not know it,
Unless it be a boar, and then I chase it;
435 'Tis much to borrow, and I will not owe it;
My love to love is love but to disgrace it;
For I have heard it is a life in death,
That laughs and weeps, and all but with a breath.

'Who wears a garment shapeless and unfinish'd?
Who plucks the bud before one leaf put forth?
If springing things be any jot diminish'd,
They wither in their prime, prove nothing worth:
440 The colt that's back'd and burden'd being young
Loseth his pride and never waxeth strong.

445 'You hurt my hand with wringing; let us part,
And leave this idle theme, this bootless chat:
Remove your siege from my unyielding heart;
To love's alarms it will not ope the gate:
Dismiss your vows, your feigned tears, your flattery;
450 For where a heart is hard they make no battery.'

'What! canst thou talk?' quoth she, 'hast thou a
tongue?
O, would thou hadst not, or I had no hearing!
Thy mermaid's voice hath done me double wrong;
455 I had my load before, now press'd with bearing:
Melodious discord, heavenly tune harshsounding,
Ear's deep-sweet music, and heart's deep-sore wounding.

'Had I no eyes but ears, my ears would love
That inward beauty and invisible;
460 Or were I deaf, thy outward parts would move
Each part in me that were but sensible:
Though neither eyes nor ears, to hear nor see,
Yet should I be in love by touching thee.

'Say, that the sense of feeling were bereft me,
And that I could not see, nor hear, nor touch,
And nothing but the very smell were left me,
Yet would my love to thee be still as much;
465 For from the stillitory of thy face excelling
Comes breath perfumed that breedeth love by
470

you let it burn, it'll set your heart on fire. The sea has limits,
but deep desire knows no bounds. Don't be surprised your
horse is gone.

"He stood there tied ³⁰ with a leather rein to the tree like
an old nag. But when he saw the female horse, he fell in
love with her. He didn't care about being tied up then. He
threw off his burdens, freeing his head, mouth, back, and
chest.

"Is it possible for a man to see his fair-skinned true love
lying naked on the bedsheets, and just be content with
looking? Don't other parts of your body want to be
satisfied? Who's afraid to go after what they want when
they want it?

"I'm apologizing for your horse, silly boy. You should learn
from him. I'm telling you: take advantage of the opportunity
in front of you. Putting what I've said aside, you can still
learn from his actions. Learn to love! The lesson is simple
and, once you learn it, you never forget it."

"I don't know anything about love," he said, "and I never
want to. All I care about is hunting boars. It sounds like a lot
of work that I'm not willing to put in. All I can say about love
is that I love to reject it. I've heard it doesn't last very long
anyway, and that it makes you have mood swings so that
you're laughing one minute and crying the next.

"Who ³¹ wears a shirt before they're done sewing it? Who
picks a flower before a single leaf has sprouted? If you ruin
something while it's still growing, you never get to see what
it could have become. If you break a horse ³² in and teach
it to obey commands when it's young, it loses its spirit and
never gets big and strong.

"You're hurting my hand by pulling on it so much—let me
go. Forget this nonsense. Forget all this useless chat. Stop ³³
trying to get me to fall in love with you; I'm not
interested. Quit your promises, your fake tears, and your
flattery. I'm not going to give in to you."

"What! What are you saying?" she said, "can you really be
saying this? I wish you couldn't speak at all! I wish I were
deaf! You've hurt me two times over: you lured me in with
your siren song; made me fall in love with you (which was
bad enough); and then rejected me. Your looks are like a
sweet melody, but your words are harsh and dissonant.
Seeing and hearing you at the same time is music to the ear,
but a deep wound to the heart.

"If I had ears and no eyes, my ears would love your internal,
invisible beauty. Or if I had no ears, then I'd fall head over
heels in love with your external attractiveness. And if I
didn't have eyes or ears and couldn't see or hear, I'd still fall
in love with you through touch alone.

"If I lost my sense of touch—if I couldn't see, hear, or touch,
and all I had left was smell—I'd still love you just as much.
You see, the pores of your face produce a sweet smell that
would make anyone fall in love with you just by smelling.

³⁰ The language in this stanza is that
of political revolution. The horse is
"servile" and in "petty bondage"
(slavery) to his "master," Adonis, but
"enfranchises" (frees) himself to
follow his own desires. It is implied
that Adonis, conversely, is enslaved by
his own self-discipline.

³¹ Adonis counters Venus' earlier
"carpe diem" argument, saying that,
rather than enjoying pleasures now,
they should wait until he's more
mature, so that they can better enjoy
sex.

³² Adonis thinks he is the horse
(following his own will) and Venus is
the rider (imposing some external
impediment—in this case, love).

³³ Shakespeare uses warlike
imagery. Adonis' heart is a city to
which Venus is laying siege, but he
refuses to open the gate.

smelling.

'But, O, what banquet wert thou to the taste,
Being nurse and feeder of the other four!
Would they not wish the feast might ever last,
And bid Suspicion double-lock the door,
475 Lest Jealousy, that sour unwelcome guest,
Should, by his stealing in, disturb the feast?'

Once more the ruby-colour'd portal open'd,
Which to his speech did honey passage yield;
Like a red morn, that ever yet betoken'd
480 Wreck to the seaman, tempest to the field,
Sorrow to shepherds, woe unto the birds,
Gusts and foul flaws to herdmen and to herds.

This ill presage advisedly she marketh:
Even as the wind is hush'd before it raineth,
485 Or as the wolf doth grin before he barketh,
Or as the berry breaks before it staineth,
Or like the deadly bullet of a gun,
His meaning struck her ere his words begun.

And at his look she flatly falleth down,
490 For looks kill love and love by looks reviveth;
A smile recures the wounding of a frown;
But blessed bankrupt, that by love so thriveth!
The silly boy, believing she is dead,
Claps her pale cheek, till clapping makes it red;

495 And all amazed brake off his late intent,
For sharply he did think to reprehend her,
Which cunning love did wittily prevent:
Fair fall the wit that can so well defend her!
For on the grass she lies as she were slain,
500 Till his breath breatheth life in her again.

He wrings her nose, he strikes her on the cheeks,
He bends her fingers, holds her pulses hard,
He chafes her lips; a thousand ways he seeks
To mend the hurt that his unkindness marr'd:
505 He kisses her; and she, by her good will,
Will never rise, so he will kiss her still.

The night of sorrow now is turn'd to day:
Her two blue windows faintly she up-heaveth,
Like the fair sun, when in his fresh array
510 He cheers the morn and all the earth relieveth;
And as the bright sun glorifies the sky,
So is her face illumined with her eye;

Whose beams upon his hairless face are fix'd,
As if from thence they borrow'd all their shine.
515 Were never four such lamps together mix'd,
Had not his clouded with his brow's repine;
But hers, which through the crystal tears gave light,
Shone like the moon in water seen by night.

'O, where am I?' quoth she, 'in earth or heaven,
520 Or in the ocean drench'd, or in the fire?
What hour is this? or morn or weary even?
Do I delight to die, or life desire?
But now I lived, and life was death's annoy;
But now I died, and death was lively joy.

525 'O, thou didst kill me: kill me once again:
Thy eyes' shrewd tutor, that hard heart of thine,
Hath taught them scornful tricks and such disdain
That they have murder'd this poor heart of mine;
And these mine eyes, true leaders to their queen,
530 But for thy piteous lips no more had seen.

"And if I could only taste you, it'd be as delicious as a feast!
The taste of you alone would make up for all my other lost
senses. I'd never want the feast to end. I wouldn't mind
giving up my other senses, in fact, because sight, hearing,
touch, and smell might be jealous! If I had all my senses, it'd
disturb the feast of taste!"

He opened the red, gaping door of his mouth again as if to
say something sweet. His mouth was like the red morning
sun that tells sailors that storms are coming; farmers that
the crops will be ruined; shepherds that they'll lose their
flocks; birds that they'll have trouble flying; and cowboys
and cows that they'll have strong winds to deal with.

She took note of this bad omen. Like the way the wind
blows before it rains; or the way a wolf grins before it barks;
or the way a berry breaks before its juice leaks out; or the
way a gun goes off before its deadly bullet strikes, she knew
exactly what he was about to say even before he started.

When she saw his face, she fell down flat. Looks can kill
when you're in love; and loving looks are the only thing that
can set you right again. A smile cancels ³⁴ out all the harm
that a frown does. But even when you have nothing to go
on, you're blessed to be so in love! Thinking she was dead,
the silly boy slapped her pale cheek until he made it red
again.

He stopped what he'd been saying. He had intended to
reject her once and for all, but her clever trick prevented
him from doing so. She was pretty smart to think of that!
She lay there in the grass as if she were dead until his
breath brought her to life again.

He pinched her nose, slapped her cheeks, bent her fingers,
felt her pulse, brushed her lips—he tried a thousand
different things to undo how he'd hurt her. Then he kissed
her. As far as she was concerned, she would never get up as
long as he would keep on kissing her.

All her sadness went away; she was happy now. She opened
her two blue eyes, ³⁵ shining at him like the sun when it
rises in the early morning, waking the earth. Her face
brightened when her eyes opened, just like when the sun
illuminates the sky.

Her eyes were fixed on his hairless face as if they got all
their energy from him. Four such exceptional eyes have
never been in the same place at the same time before or
since. His eyes were overshadowed by his frowning
eyebrows, but her eyes shone through her tears like the
moon reflected in water at night.

"Where am I?" she said, "on earth, in heaven, drowning in
the ocean, burning in fire? What time is it? Is it morning, or
evening? Do I want to die, or live? Just a few seconds ago, I
was alive and couldn't dream of dying, but then I died and I
really enjoyed it.

"Oh, you killed ³⁶ me! Kill me again. You're hard-hearted;
you've been giving me rude, hateful, condescending looks. ³⁷
You've broken my poor heart. As for me—I can usually
control myself. If I hadn't seen your luscious lips I wouldn't
be in this mess.

³⁴ Metaphors of banking (in which lovers borrow and owe smiles and tokens of affection) dominate this stanza, implying that love is a strict business with its own regulations. Adonis refuses to follow love's rules.

³⁵ Eyes are "windows" to the soul, supposedly reflecting a person's innermost feelings, as well as allowing that person's brain to receive images from the outside world through sight.

³⁶ Again, "to die" was a euphemism for "to orgasm" in Shakespeare's day. Venus' language has a double meaning, suggesting her sexual satisfaction from Adonis' mere kiss.

³⁷ Venus blames her eyes for her lovesickness, and blames Adonis' eyes for luring her in with their beauty.

'Long may they kiss each other, for this cure!
O, never let their crimson liveries wear!
And as they last, their verdure still endure,
To drive infection from the dangerous year,
535 That the star-gazers, having writ on death,
May say, the plague is banish'd by thy breath.

'Pure lips, sweet seals in my soft lips imprinted,
What bargains may I make, still to be sealing?
To sell myself I can be well contented,
540 So thou wilt buy and pay and use good dealing;
Which purchase if thou make, for fear of slips
Set thy seal-manual on my wax-red lips.

'A thousand kisses buys my heart from me;
And pay them at thy leisure, one by one.
545 What is ten hundred touches unto thee?
Are they not quickly told and quickly gone?
Say, for non-payment that the debt should double,
Is twenty hundred kisses such a trouble?'

'Fair queen,' quoth he, 'if any love you owe me,
550 Measure my strangeness with my unripe years:
Before I know myself, seek not to know me;
No fisher but the ungrown fry forbears:
The mellow plum doth fall, the green sticks staks,
Or being early pluck'd is sour to taste.

'Look, the world's comforter, with weary gait,
His day's hot task hath ended in the west;
The owl, night's herald, shrieks, 'Tis very late;'
The sheep are gone to fold, birds to their nest,
And coal-black clouds that shadow heaven's light
560 Do summon us to part and bid good night.

'Now let me say 'Good night,' and so say you;
If you will say so, you shall have a kiss.'
'Good night,' quoth she, and, ere he says 'Adieu,'
The honey fee of parting tender'd is:
565 Her arms do lend his neck a sweet embrace;
Incorporate then they seem; face grows to face.

Till, breathless, he disjoin'd, and backward drew
The heavenly moisture, that sweet coral mouth,
Whose precious taste her thirsty lips well knew,
570 Whereon they surfeit, yet complain on drouth:
He with her plenty press'd, she faint with dearth
Their lips together glued, fall to the earth.

Now quick desire hath caught the yielding prey,
And glutton-like she feeds, yet never filleth;
575 Her lips are conquerors, his lips obey,
Paying what ransom the insulter willeth;
Whose vulture thought doth pitch the price so high,
That she will draw his lips' rich treasure dry:

And having felt the sweetness of the spoil,
580 With blindfold fury she begins to forage;
Her face doth reek and smoke, her blood doth boil,
And careless lust stirs up a desperate courage,
Planting oblivion, beating reason back,
Forgetting shame's pure blush and honour's wrack.

Hot, faint, and weary, with her hard embracing,
Like a wild bird being tamed with too much handling,
Or as the fleet-foot roe that's tired with chasing,
Or like the froward infant still'd with dandling,
He now obeys, and now no more resisteth,
590 While she takes all she can, not all she listeth.

What wax so frozen but dissolves with tempering,
And yields at last to every light impression?
Things out of hope are compass'd oft with venturing,
Chiefly in love, whose leave exceeds commission:
595 Affection faints not like a pale-faced coward,

"Kiss me again, and again—you're bringing me back to life!
Never stop kissing me with your luscious red lips! As long as
your fresh, young lips are around, the world will be free
from disease all year round! Astronomers who foretold an
epidemic will have to change their statements, saying the
disease has been cured by your breath.

"How can I keep the sweet, soft seal of your lips pressing ³⁸
against mine forever? What deal do I have to make with
you? I'd be happy to sell my soul—as long as you'd buy it
and treat it nicely. If you buy my soul, you'll have to mark
me as yours by setting the seal of your lips on mine.

"You can buy my heart for a thousand kisses. You can pay at
your leisure, one by one. What would a thousand kisses cost
you? They're over and done with quickly. And, if you didn't
pay me and your debt doubled, would two thousand kisses
really be so much trouble?"

"Beautiful queen" he said, "if you really love me, you'll have
to understand that I'm shy because I'm young. Don't try to
have sex with me before I'm a man. Fishermen don't reel in
minnows. Unripe, green plums are sour-tasting when
they're picked too early.

"Look, the sun is slowly setting in the west. You can tell it's
nighttime because the owl is hooting, 'it's very late!' The
sheep have gone back to their pasture; the birds are asleep
in their nests. The sky is growing dark. It's time to go our
separate ways and say good night.

"Now I'll say 'good night,' and then you. If you say it, I'll give
you a kiss." "Good night," she said. Before he said
'goodbye,' he kissed her sweetly. She threw her arms
around his neck. They seemed to become one person, their
faces pressed together.

Breathless, he pulled back and drew his sweet, moist, pink
mouth away—robbing her thirsty lips of their precious
taste. Even when she was kissing him, she complained she
wasn't getting enough. When he gave her what she wanted,
she pulled him to the ground, wanting more.

Now she had her desired prey within her clutches. She
kissed him again and again, like a hungry person who's
never full. Her lips were conquerors; his lips obeyed, giving
her whatever she demanded. She set the price (in kisses) so
high that she was bound to rob his lips of all they could
give.

Having glimpsed the treasure ³⁹ he had to offer, she
furiously began to look for more. Her face grew hot, her
blood boiled, and her strong desire made her bold. She
forgot herself. She pushed her better judgment aside,
forgetting his innocence and the importance of preserving
reputation.

He was hot, weak, and tired from her aggressive fondling.
He was like a wild bird tamed by a keeper; or a speedy deer
that gets tired of being chased; or a whining baby that
quiets down after being rocked. Now he obeyed her. He
didn't resist anymore. She took everything she could, but
not everything she wanted.

Even frozen wax becomes soft when you melt it, and retains
the shape of every object you press into it. We often try to
achieve things that are impossible to get, especially in love.
When we're in love, we aren't afraid to go the extra mile. We
work the hardest for love when our lover plays hard to get.

³⁸ Shakespeare writes of wax, into which a nobleman or merchant could press a ring or stamp to validate a legal document or seal a letter.

³⁹ Before, Venus and Adonis engaged in a businesslike system of debts and payments. Now, Venus has become a pirate-like robber, taking whatever physical intimacy she can from unwilling Adonis.

But then woos best when most his choice is froward.

When he did frown, O, had she then gave over,
Such nectar from his lips she had not suck'd.
Foul words and frowns must not repel a lover;

600 What though the rose have prickles, yet 'tis pluck'd:
Were beauty under twenty locks kept fast,
Yet love breaks through and picks them all at last.

For pity now she can no more detain him;
The poor fool prays her that he may depart:
605 She is resolved no longer to restrain him;
Bids him farewell, and look well to her heart,
The which, by Cupid's bow she doth protest,
He carries thence incaged in his breast.

'Sweet boy,' she says, 'this night I'll waste in
sorrow,
For my sick heart commands mine eyes to watch.
Tell me, Love's master, shall we meet to-morrow?
Say, shall we? shall we? wilt thou make the match?'
610 He tells her, no; to-morrow he intends
615 To hunt the boar with certain of his friends.

'The boar!' quoth she; whereat a sudden pale,
Like lawn being spread upon the blushing rose,
Usurps her cheek; she trembles at his tale,
And on his neck her yoking arms she throws:
620 She sinketh down, still hanging by his neck,
He on her belly falls, she on her back.

Now is she in the very lists of love,
Her champion mounted for the hot encounter:
All is imaginary she doth prove,
625 He will not manage her, although he mount her;
That worse than Tantalus' is her annoy,
To clip Elysium and to lack her joy.

Even as poor birds, deceived with painted grapes,
Do surfeit by the eye and pine the maw,
630 Even so she languisheth in her mishaps,
As those poor birds that helpless berries saw.
The warm effects which she in him finds missing
She seeks to kindle with continual kissing.

But all in vain; good queen, it will not be:
635 She hath assay'd as much as may be proved;
Her pleading hath deserved a greater fee;
She's Love, she loves, and yet she is not loved.
'Fie, fie,' he says, 'you crush me; let me go;
You have no reason to withhold me so.'

'Thou hadst been gone,' quoth she, 'sweet boy, ere
this,
But that thou told'st me thou wouldst hunt the boar.
O, be advised! thou know'st not what it is
With javelin's point a churlish swine to gore,
645 Whose tushes never sheathed he whetteth still,
Like to a mortal butcher bent to kill.

'On his bow-back he hath a battle set
Of bristly pikes, that ever threat his foes;
His eyes, like glow-worms, shine when he doth fret;
650 His snout digs sepulchres where'er he goes;
Being moved, he strikes whate'er is in his way,
And whom he strikes his cruel tushes slay.

'His brawny sides, with hairy bristles arm'd,
Are better proof than thy spear's point can enter;
655 His short thick neck cannot be easily harm'd;
Being ireful, on the lion he will venture:

Even when he frowned, she kept going—she'd already
tasted the sweetness of his lips and couldn't stop. Angry
words and frowns can't stop a lover. We still pick roses even
though they have thorns; in the same way, a lover pushes
through all the obstacles that keep him from enjoying his
beautiful lover.

She felt bad for him and didn't want to keep him any longer.
The poor boy begged her to let him leave, and she decided
not to hold him down anymore. She said goodbye, and
asked him to be careful with her heart, which she swore ⁴⁰
he carried with him wherever he went.

"Sweet boy," she said, "tonight I'll be overcome with
grief—I'm lovesick over you. My darling, tell me: what time
should we meet up tomorrow? Can we? Will you meet me?"
He told her he couldn't because he already had plans to
hunt boars with some of his friends.

"Hunting!" she said, her cheeks suddenly getting as pale as
white cotton fabric being thrown over a rose. She trembled
at his words and threw her arms around his neck. She sank
down, still hanging onto his neck. She fell on her back, and
he fell on her stomach.

She finally had him where she wanted, mounted ⁴¹ on top
of her and ready to get hot and heavy. But she could only
play it out in her mind: he wouldn't make love to her, even
though he was on top of her. She was being tortured ⁴²
—what she wanted was right there, but she couldn't get it.

She was overcome with how much she wanted him, like a
poor bird that thinks fake grapes are real and, seeing what
looks like food, starves to death. She tried to get him
aroused by kissing him over and over.

But it was all in vain; for the poor goddess it was not meant
to be. She had tried as much as she could. She should have
had better luck with him. She was the goddess of love, she
was in love with him, and yet he didn't love her back.
"Shame on you," he said, "you're crushing me! Let me go.
There's no reason for you to hold me like this."

"I would have let you leave already, sweet boy," she said,
"except that you told me you had to go hunting tomorrow.
Oh, be careful! You don't know how awful and dangerous it
is to stab a boar with a spear. Even after you stab him, he'll
keep swinging his tusks, like an angry butcher on a mission
to kill.

"His curved back is full of bristly hairs that are dangerous,
too. His eyes shine like fireflies when he's angry. He digs
deep holes with his snout wherever he goes. When he's
riled up, he'll knock down anything in his way. He kills
anything he touches with his tusks.

"His thick flanks are covered in hairy bristles, too, which
repel the point of a spear so that you can't wound him. It's
difficult to cut his short, thick neck. When he's angry, he'll
even fight a lion. Even the thorns, brambles, and thick

⁴⁰ In Roman myth, Cupid was Venus' son. He shot arrows to strike humans which forced them to fall in love with one another.

⁴¹ Note that the verb "mount" recalls the horse-and-rider imagery from before.

⁴² In classical mythology, Tantalus' punishment in hell is to stand in chin-deep water under a fruit tree. Starving and dying of thirst, he could neither reach the fruit to eat, nor drink the water.

The thorny brambles and embracing bushes,
As fearful of him, part, through whom he rushes.

660 'Alas, he nought esteems that face of thine,
To which Love's eyes pay tributary gazes;
Nor thy soft hands, sweet lips and crystal eyne,
Whose full perfection all the world amazes;
But having thee at vantage,—wondrous dread!—
Would root these beauties as he roots the mead.

665 'O, let him keep his loathsome cabin still;
Beauty hath nought to do with such foul fiends:
Come not within his danger by thy will;
They that thrive well take counsel of their friends.
When thou didst name the boar, not to dissemble,
670 I fear'd thy fortune, and my joints did tremble.

'Didst thou not mark my face? was it not white?
Saw'st thou not signs of fear lurk in mine eye?
Grew I not faint? and fell I not downright?
Within my bosom, whereon thou dost lie,
675 My boding heart pants, beats, and takes no rest,
But, like an earthquake, shakes thee on my breast.

' For where Love reigns, disturbing Jealousy
Doth call himself Affection's sentinel;
Gives false alarms, suggesteth mutiny,
680 And in a peaceful hour doth cry 'Kill, kill!'
Distempering gentle Love in his desire,
As air and water do abate the fire.

'This sour informer, this bate-breeding spy,
This canker that eats up Love's tender spring,
685 This carry-tale, dissentious Jealousy,
That sometime true news, sometime false doth bring,
Knocks at my heat and whispers in mine ear
That if I love thee, I thy death should fear:

'And more than so, presenteth to mine eye
690 The picture of an angry-chafing boar,
Under whose sharp fangs on his back doth lie
An image like thyself, all stain'd with gore;
Whose blood upon the fresh flowers being shed
Doth make them droop with grief and hang the head.

695 'What should I do, seeing thee so indeed,
That tremble at the imagination?
The thought of it doth make my faint heart bleed,
And fear doth teach it divination:
I prophesy thy death, my living sorrow,
700 If thou encounter with the boar to-morrow.

'But if thou needs wilt hunt, be ruled by me;
Uncouple at the timorous flying hare,
Or at the fox which lives by subtlety,
Or at the roe which no encounter dare:
705 Pursue these fearful creatures o'er the downs,
And on thy well-breath'd horse keep with thy hounds.

'And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare,
Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles
How he outruns the wind and with what care
710 He cranks and crosses with a thousand doubles:
The many musets through the which he goes
Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.

'Sometime he runs among a flock of sheep,
To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell,
715 And sometime where earth-delving conies keep,
To stop the loud pursuers in their yell,
And sometime sorteth with a herd of deer:
Danger deviseth shifts; wit waits on fear:

bushes are afraid of him as he runs and crashes through
them.

"He doesn't care at all about your pretty face, or about how
much I love you. He doesn't care about your soft hands,
sweet lips, and sparkling eyes. He doesn't care that you're
the most perfect boy in the entire world. Once he sets his
sight on you, watch out! He'll destroy your beautiful body
as easily as he tramples over the dirt.

"Oh, leave him alone in the forest. A beautiful boy like you
shouldn't have anything to do with such disgusting
creatures. Don't put yourself in danger on purpose; you'd
do well to take my advice. No joke—when I heard you say
'boar,' I was afraid for you, and I started shaking.

"Didn't you see my face? Wasn't it white? Didn't you see the
fear in my eyes? Didn't I faint? Didn't I fall down? My heart is
pounding in my chest—you can feel it. It won't stop. It's
shaking you like an earthquake as you lay there on top of it.

"When we're in love, we get jealous easily. Jealousy⁴³
makes us quick to panic, even when it's a false alarm. Even
in low-stakes situations, our jealous hearts can make us go
immediately to thinking, 'kill, kill!' Jealousy offsets the
desires of love in the same way that air and water put out
fire.

"Jealousy is a tattle-tale, a double-crossing spy, a worm
that eats up love when it's just blossomed. Jealousy gossips
and causes conflict, sometimes bringing true news and
sometimes fake news. Jealousy is what's making my heart
pound. It's whispering in my ear telling me that, if I love
you, I should be afraid of your death.

"Because I'm so jealous for you, I can see an angry,
charging boar in my mind's eye. I can imagine that,
underneath his sharp fangs, you're lying on your back,
stained with blood. Your blood is falling onto the fresh
flowers underneath, making them droop and hang their
heads with grief.

"What am I supposed to do when I see you that way? My
own imagination is making me tremble. The thought of it is
making my heart weak. Fear is making me see the future. If
you hunt the boar tomorrow, I prophesy that you will die
and that I will live, grieving for you.

"If you have to go hunting, then do as I say: hunt skittish,
scurrying rabbits, or sneaky foxes, or elusive deer. Pursue
any of these easily-hunted animals, and stay put on your
sturdy horse while your dogs do the work.

"And when you're chasing a practically blind rabbit⁴⁴,
watch how the poor thing works as hard as he can to outrun
you, and how he criss-crosses and doubles back, squeezing
through gaps in fences to confuse you and tire you out.

"He'll run through a flock of sheep to make the dogs lose
the scent. Then he'll burrow down underground where the
moles are, so that the dogs can't follow him. Then he'll hide
with a herd of deer. Necessity is the mother of invention;
danger forces us to be clever.

⁴³ Venus personifies jealousy as a figure who acts as a guard-dog for love.

⁴⁴ Venus' extended description of hunting a rabbit values the rabbit's ability to run and hide from its predators, even while pitying its weakness. The rabbit and Adonis are in similar situations; Adonis will soon meet his death in the form of the boar Venus warns him against.

720 'For there his smell with others being mingled,
The hot scent-snuffing hounds are driven to doubt,
Ceasing their clamorous cry till they have singled
With much ado the cold fault cleanly out;
Then do they spend their mouths: Echo replies,
As if another chase were in the skies.

725 'By this, poor Wat, far off upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,
To harken if his foes pursue him still:
Anon their loud alarms he doth hear;
And now his grief may be compared well
730 To one sore sick that hears the passing-bell.

'Then shalt thou see the dew-bedabbled wretch
Turn, and return, indenting with the way;
Each envious brier his weary legs doth scratch,
Each shadow makes him stop, each murmur stay:
735 For misery is trodden on by many,
And being low never relieved by any.

'Lie quietly, and hear a little more;
Nay, do not struggle, for thou shalt not rise:
To make thee hate the hunting of the boar,
740 Unlike myself thou hear'st me moralize,
Applying this to that, and so to so;
For love can comment upon every woe.

'Where did I leave?' 'No matter where,' quoth he,
'Leave me, and then the story aptly ends:
745 The night is spent.' 'Why, what of that?' quoth she.
'I am,' quoth he, 'expected of my friends;
And now 'tis dark, and going I shall fall.'
'In night,' quoth she, 'desire sees best of all

'But if thou fall, O, then imagine this,
750 The earth, in love with thee, thy footing trips,
And all is but to rob thee of a kiss.
Rich preys make true men thieves; so do thy lips
Make modest Dian cloudy and forlorn,
Lest she should steal a kiss and die forsworn.

755 'Now of this dark night I perceive the reason:
Cynthia for shame obscures her silver shine,
Till forging Nature be condemn'd of treason,
For stealing moulds from heaven that were divine;
Wherein she framed thee in high heaven's despite,
760 To shame the sun by day and her by night.

'And therefore hath she bribed the Destinies
To cross the curious workmanship of nature,
To mingle beauty with infirmities,
And pure perfection with impure defeature,
765 Making it subject to the tyranny
Of mad mischances and much misery;

'As burning fevers, agues pale and faint,
Life-poisoning pestilence and frenzies wood,
The marrow-eating sickness, whose attainment
770 Disorder breeds by heating of the blood:
Surfeits, imposthumes, grief, and damn'd despair,
Swear nature's death for framing thee so fair.

"You see, when his scent mingles with other scents, the sniffing dogs aren't able to follow him anymore. They stop barking until they can find the trail again—then they sound the alarm. Their barks echo, as if a second hunt were going on up in the sky.

"The poor rabbit, far away on a hill, hears the barks. He stands up on his hind legs, straining his ears and trying to figure out if his enemies are still pursuing him. When he hears their loud alarms, he's as depressed as a sick man who hears the ringing of the death knell.

"Then you'll see the rabbit covered in dew going back and forth, mixing up his trail. The briars scratch his tired legs. He's afraid of every shadow and every sound. For you see, the miserable are victimized by many others, and the lowest of the low never receive help from anyone.

"Lie quietly and listen to a little more. No, don't fight me! Then I'll never let you up. It's unlike me to lecture like this, but I'm trying to convince you not to go hunting for boars. I'm putting this speech together because I'm in love with you and have a vested interest.

"Where was I?" "It doesn't matter," he said, "let me go. End your story there. The night is over." "What does that matter?" she said. "My friends are expecting me," he said, "and it's getting dark. I need to go, even if I am going to die the way you say." She replied, "The best sex happens in the dark..."

"...but if you are injured in the hunt, then imagine this: the earth ⁴⁵ is in love with you, so it trips you to try and get you to kiss it. The promise of riches will make even an honest man a thief. In the same way, your lips would make a modest virgin ⁴⁶ fall in love with you to the point where she'd die just to get a single kiss from you.

"Now I can see why this night is so dark. The moon is covering her silvery face because she's embarrassed that you're more beautiful than she is. Mother Nature should be condemned for treason for making you so beautiful as to put the moon and the sun to shame.

"You see, the moon has bribed the Fates ⁴⁷ to work against Mother Nature. That way, beauty eventually succumbs to ugliness, and pure perfection is always mixed with deformity. For that reason, the most beautiful people ⁴⁸ are subject to oppression, bad luck, and misery.

"They suffer from burning fevers, shivers, poisonous insect bites, mental illness, bone cancer, blood disease, swelling, tumors, grief, and damned despair. These are the curses that counteract the fact that Mother Nature made you beautiful.

⁴⁵ Venus animates the entire world as a lover for Adonis. In her mind, the earth itself wants to kiss Adonis' lips. This hyperbole casts a romantic light on her earlier predictions of Adonis' death, again drawing love and death together.

⁴⁶ Diana was the Roman goddess of virginity. Her supposed love for Adonis (in spite of her vow of chastity) constitutes a further hyperbole to illustrate Adonis' sexual allure.

⁴⁷ The Fates were three sisters in Roman mythology who controlled the lives of men; each life, represented by a thread, was spun and cut according to the Fates' direction.

⁴⁸ Venus' argument in the next few stanzas is that "bad things happen to pretty people," which she justifies by claiming the gods are jealous of beautiful humans. This argument foreshadows Adonis' death.

775 'And not the least of all these maladies
But in one minute's fight brings beauty under:
Both favour, savour, hue and qualities,
Whereat the impartial gazer late did wonder,
Are on the sudden wasted, thaw'd and done,
As mountain-snow melts with the midday sun.

780 'Therefore, despite of fruitless chastity,
Love-lacking vestals and self-loving nuns,
That on the earth would breed a scarcity
And barren dearth of daughters and of sons,
Be prodigal: the lamp that burns by night
Dries up his oil to lend the world his light.

785 '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,
790 Sith in thy pride so fair a hope is slain.

'So in thyself thyself art made away;
A mischief worse than civil home-bred strife,
Or theirs whose desperate hands themselves do slay,
Or butcher-sire that reaves his son of life.
795 Foul-cankering rust the hidden treasure frets,
But gold that's put to use more gold begets.'

'Nay, then,' quoth Adon, 'you will fall again
Into your idle over-handled theme:
The kiss I gave you is bestow'd in vain,
800 And all in vain you strive against the stream;
For, by this black-faced night, desire's foul nurse,
Your treatise makes me like you worse and worse.

'If love have lent you twenty thousand tongues,
And every tongue more moving than your own,
805 Bewitching like the wanton mermaid's songs,
Yet from mine ear the tempting tune is blown
For know, my heart stands armed in mine ear,
And will not let a false sound enter there;

'Lest the deceiving harmony should run
810 Into the quiet closure of my breast;
And then my little heart were quite undone,
In his bedchamber to be barr'd of rest.
No, lady, no; my heart longs not to groan,
But soundly sleeps, while now it sleeps alone.

815 'What have you urged that I cannot reprove?
The path is smooth that leadeth on to danger:
I hate not love, but your device in love,
That lends embracements unto every stranger.
You do it for increase: O strange excuse,
820 When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse!

'Call it not love, for Love to heaven is fled,
Since sweating Lust on earth usurp'd his name;
Under whose simple semblance he hath fed
Upon fresh beauty, blotting it with blame;
825 Which the hot tyrant stains and soon bereaves,
As caterpillars do the tender leaves.

'Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,
But Lust's effect is tempest after sun;
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain,
830 Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done;
Love surfeits not, Lust like a glutton dies;
Love is all truth, Lust full of forged lies.

'More I could tell, but more I dare not say;
The text is old, the orator too green.
835 Therefore, in sadness, now I will away;
My face is full of shame, my heart of teen:
Mine ears, that to your wanton talk attended,

"Any one of these diseases would ruin someone's beauty instantly. Good looks, forms, colors, and qualities that might have impressed you one minute are gone the next. They're erased, vanishing as fast as mountain snow that melts in the midday sun.

"So you see, nuns and virgins that take a vow of chastity are being **wasteful**.⁴⁹ They're depriving the earth of daughters and sons that might have been born—they're wasting their fertility. When a lamp burns at night, it uses up its oil to provide light.

⁴⁹ Venus reprises the "carpe diem" argument here.

"Your body is just a wide-open **grave**.⁵⁰, burying the children which you're bound to have in due time. Why would you prevent your children from being born? If you did, the world would hate you. You would have withheld a blessing from the world on account of your pride.

⁵⁰ Like the earlier comparison of dimples to graves for Love, this body-as-grave metaphor draws together the opposites of birth and death.

"By preventing your future children from being born, you'd be annihilating yourself—it's a worse crime than civil war, or suicide, or a man who kills his own son. Rust eats away at precious metals, but gold that's invested produces more gold after a while."

"Oh, stop," said Adonis, "you're just saying the same thing over and over again. It was pointless for me to kiss you, and it's pointless for you to fight this uphill battle. The way you're going on in the dark of night and trying to convince me to have sex with you is making me like you less and less.

"If you had twenty thousand tongues and each of them talked even more convincingly than you do—and if each of them was as bewitching as a mermaid song—I still wouldn't listen. You have to understand that I'm not interested—nothing you can say is going to change my heart.

"I wouldn't let a single one of your words disturb the quiet of my hard heart. Otherwise, my little **heart**.⁵¹ would have no peace; he wouldn't be able to sleep in his own bed, that is, my chest. No ma'am, my heart's not interested in love. It prefers to sleep—and sleep alone.

⁵¹ Adonis personifies his heart as a cranky old man who just wants to sleep. The heart's "bed" is the human chest.

"I've pushed back against everything you've asked. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. I don't hate love, I just **hate**.⁵² the way you're going about it. I hate the way you're willing to sleep with any random stranger. You say you're doing it for posterity, but that's a strange excuse to justify your own lust!

⁵² Here, Adonis argues for sexual morality and discipline, perhaps best symbolized earlier by his horse's bridle (which the horse discards). Adonis is set in his refusal of Venus.

"Don't call it 'love.' Love is a higher thing than the bodily lust you've shown me today. It's easy to call it 'love' when you just want to taste my fresh beauty and soil my reputation. You're happy to have sex and then leave me behind, like a leaf that's been munched by caterpillars.

"Love is soothing, like sunshine after a rainstorm. But lust is the opposite—it's like a storm after the sun. Love is fresh and gentle like the spring; lust gets old quickly, like an early winter. You can never have too much love; lust is always excessive. Love is pure truth; lust is built on lies.

"I could say more, but I won't. It's an old story and I'm too young to tell it. I'll leave now. As you can tell by my face, I'm sad and ashamed, and my heart hurts. My ears are burning from all the offensive things you've said to me today."

Do burn themselves for having so offended.'

840 With this, he breaketh from the sweet embrace,
Of those fair arms which bound him to her breast,
And homeward through the dark laund runs apace;
Leaves Love upon her back deeply distress'd.
Look, how a bright star shooteth from the sky,
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.

845 Which after him she darts, as one on shore
Gazing upon a late-embarked friend,
Till the wild waves will have him seen no more,
Whose ridges with the meeting clouds contend:
So did the merciless and pitchy night
850 Fold in the object that did feed her sight.

Whereat amazed, as one that unaware
Hath dropp'd a precious jewel in the flood,
Or stonish'd as night-wanderers often are,
Their light blown out in some mistrustful wood,
855 Even so confounded in the dark she lay,
Having lost the fair discovery of her way.

And now she beats her heart, whereat it groans,
That all the neighbour caves, as seeming troubled,
Make verbal repetition of her moans;
860 Passion on passion deeply is redoubled:
'Ay me!' she cries, and twenty times 'Woe, woe!'
And twenty echoes twenty times cry so.

She marking them begins a wailing note
And sings extemporally a woeful ditty;
865 How love makes young men thrall and old men dote;
How love is wise in folly, foolish-witty:
Her heavy anthem still concludes in woe,
And still the choir of echoes answer so.

Her song was tedious and outwore the night,
870 For lovers' hours are long, though seeming short:
If pleased themselves, others, they think, delight
In such-like circumstance, with suchlike sport:
Their copious stories oftentimes begun
End without audience and are never done.

875 For who hath she to spend the night withal
But idle sounds resembling parasites,
Like shrill-tongued tapsters answering every call,
Soothing the humour of fantastic wits?
She says "'Tis so:' they answer all "'Tis so;'
880 And would say after her, if she said 'No.'

Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty;
885 Who doth the world so gloriously behold
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd gold.

Venus salutes him with this fair good-morrow:
'O thou clear god, and patron of all light,
From whom each lamp and shining star doth borrow
890 The beauteous influence that makes him bright,
There lives a son that suck'd an earthly mother,
May lend thee light, as thou dost lend to other.'

This said, she hasteth to a myrtle grove,
Musing the morning is so much o'erworn,
895 And yet she hears no tidings of her love:
She hearkens for his hounds and for his horn:
Anon she hears them chant it lustily,
And all in haste she coasteth to the cry.

With that, he broke free of her arms, which had held him
pinned to her chest. He ran homeward through the
darkness, leaving Venus lying there, deeply distressed. He
glided away from Venus in the night like a shooting star,
streaking across the sky.

She watched him go the way someone standing onshore
watches a friend depart on a ship—keeping sight of him
until the waves swallow him up, and the ship disappears on
the horizon. So, too, did the merciless darkness of the night
make it hard for her to see Adonis.

She was stunned, like someone who accidentally dropped a
precious jewel in the water; or like a sleepwalker suddenly
woken up in the woods, their candle blown out in the
darkness. She was lying there, confused, and didn't know
which way to go.

She pounded on her chest and groaned—the sound
echoing for miles around as if the whole world were as
upset as she was. Her passion was doubled as the echo
repeated it. "Poor me!" she cried. She said, "the tragedy,
the tragedy" twenty times, and then twenty echoes
followed.

Noticing the echoes, she wailed and then started to sing an
improvised, sad tune. She sang about how love holds
young men captive and makes old men silly; she sang
about how love is blind and foolish. She concluded her
heavy song sadly, the choir of echoes continuing on.

Her song was long; it went on all night. Lovers lose track of
time and don't realize how quickly the hours go by. Lovers
assume that other people will be delighted by their own
happiness, so they tend to tell long, boring stories that are
never done—and no one listens.

The annoying sound of the echoes was her only company
that night, shouting back to her like a bartender shouting
down a rowdy group of customers. Whether she said,
"that's the way it is," or "no, it isn't," the echoes would
repeat it.

A little bird who was tired of sleeping scurried out of his
nest, which was damp with dew, and chirped to announce
that morning had come. The sun rose in its majesty, making
the whole world—the treetops, the hills—look as if they
were made of gold.

Venus saluted the [sun-god](#) and said good morning,
continuing, "you bright god, you're the god of all light.
Every candle and shining star has you to thank for the
beautiful light that makes them bright. And yet, there's a
man on earth who's brighter than you, if you can believe it!"

 Titan is established as a rival of
Adonis' "bright" beauty.

Having said that, she ran over to a group of myrtle trees,
thinking how late in the morning it was getting. And yet, she
couldn't hear Adonis coming. She listened to see if she
could hear his dogs or his hunting horn. Suddenly, she
heard the loud trumpet and went as quickly as she could
toward the sound.

And as she runs, the bushes in the way
 900 Some catch her by the neck, some kiss her face,
 Some twine about her thigh to make her stay:
 She wildly breaketh from their strict embrace,
 Like a milch doe, whose swelling dugs do ache,
 Hasting to feed her fawn hid in some brake.

905 By this, she hears the hounds are at a bay;
 Whereat she starts, like one that spies an adder
 Wreathed up in fatal folds just in his way,
 The fear whereof doth make him shake and shudder;
 910 Appals her senses and her spirit confounds.

For now she knows it is no gentle chase,
 But the blunt boar, rough bear, or lion proud,
 Because the cry remaineth in one place,
 Where fearfully the dogs exclaim aloud:
 915 Finding their enemy to be so curst,
 They all strain courtesy who shall cope him first.

This dismal cry rings sadly in her ear,
 Through which it enters to surprise her heart;
 Who, overcome by doubt and bloodless fear,
 920 With cold-pale weakness numbs each feeling part:
 Like soldiers, when their captain once doth yield,
 They basely fly and dare not stay the field.

Thus stands she in a trembling ecstasy;
 Till, cheering up her senses all dismay'd,
 925 She tells them 'tis a causeless fantasy,
 And childish error, that they are afraid;
 Bids them leave quaking, bids them fear no more:—
 And with that word she spied the hunted boar,

Whose frothy mouth, bepainted all with red,
 930 Like milk and blood being mingled both together,
 A second fear through all her sinews spread,
 Which madly hurries her she knows not whither:
 This way runs, and now she will no further,
 But back retires to rate the boar for murder.

935 A thousand spleens bear her a thousand ways;
 She treads the path that she untreads again;
 Her more than haste is mated with delays,
 Like the proceedings of a drunken brain,
 Full of respects, yet nought at all respecting;
 940 In hand with all things, nought at all effecting.

Here kennell'd in a brake she finds a hound,
 And asks the weary caitiff for his master,
 And there another licking of his wound,
 'Gainst venom'd sores the only sovereign plaster;
 945 And here she meets another sadly scowling,
 To whom she speaks, and he replies with howling.

When he hath ceased his ill-resounding noise,
 Another flap-mouth'd mourner, black and grim,
 Against the welkin volleys out his voice;
 950 Another and another answer him,
 Clapping their proud tails to the ground below,
 Shaking their scratch'd ears, bleeding as they go.

Look, how the world's poor people are amazed
 At apparitions, signs and prodigies,
 955 Whereon with fearful eyes they long have gazed,
 Infusing them with dreadful prophecies;
 So she at these sad signs draws up her breath
 And sighing it again, exclaims on Death.

As she ran, the bushes on the way grazed her neck, slashed
 at her face, and wrapped around her legs to try and stop
 her. She wildly broke free of them, like a deer ⁵⁴ whose
 teats are full of milk, running away to feed her fawn, hidden
 in the grass.

⁵⁴ Now Venus feels like the hunted animal; she is a deer, just as Adonis was a rabbit.

And then she heard the dogs coming closer. She was
 startled, like someone who spots a snake ⁵⁵ curled up in
 the grass and shakes and shudders in fear. The dogs'
 barking frightened her, overcoming her senses and
 rendering her motionless.

⁵⁵ While nature was in harmony with Venus and Adonis in the meadow, now nature seems hostile to Venus—trees and branches claw at her, and snakes rise to strike her.

She then realized Adonis wasn't hunting something small; it
 was a strong boar, a rough bear, or a proud lion. She could
 tell because the shouts were coming from one place, as
 were the dogs' scared barks. Knowing they had cornered
 their enemy, all of them fought to see who could kill him
 first.

The dogs' ominous barks rang in her ears and troubled her
 heart. Overcome by doubt and fear, each part of Venus'
 body started to go weak and numb; she couldn't feel
 anything. Her body parts were like cowardly soldiers that
 run away from the battlefield as soon as their captain
 surrenders.

She stood there trembling and out of her mind. But then
 she told herself she was being childish; that it was just her
 imagination; and that her senses were mistaken on account
 of her being afraid. She told her body to stop shaking and to
 not be afraid. And just then she spotted the hunted boar...

...his mouth foaming, blood spilling out of it, mixing red and
 white together. A second, terrified thought coursed through
 her entire body. She ran crazily; she didn't know where. She
 ran one way and then, when she couldn't go any further,
 went back again to charge the boar with murder.

She wanted to go every direction at once. She went down
 one path and then back again; she hurried, and then she
 lagged. She moved like a drunk person's brain, which thinks
 a hundred different thoughts but doesn't think through any
 one of them entirely; or that talks about acting but never
 makes a move.

She found a dog hiding in the bushes and asked the poor
 thing where his master was. He licked his wound, the only
 way a dog knows how to heal a poisoned cut. Then she saw
 another dog scowling sadly. She spoke to him and he
 replied by howling.

When he had stopped making that horrible racket, a black,
 serious dog with a flappy mouth howled up to the sky.
 Another dog, and then another, answered him. They beat
 their tails on the ground and shook their scratched ears,
 bleeding the whole time.

Poor people all over the world are impressed by omens,
 signs, and superstitions. They love to talk about them and
 believe they're significant, as if they can tell the future. In
 the same way, Venus looked at all these sad signs and
 breathed in deeply. Breathing out again, she shouted out,
 cursing Death ⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ In the next few stanzas, Venus personifies Death and addresses him directly. She alternately curses him for killing Adonis; pleads for Adonis' life; and jokes with him that Adonis cannot possibly be dead.

960 'Hard-favour'd tyrant, ugly, meagre, lean,
Hateful divorce of love;—thus chides she Death,—
'Grim-grinning ghost, earth's worm, what dost thou mean
To stifle beauty and to steal his breath,
Who when he lived, his breath and beauty set
Gloss on the rose, smell to the violet?

965 'If he be dead,—O no, it cannot be,
Seeing his beauty, thou shouldst strike at it:—
O yes, it may; thou hast no eyes to see,
But hatefully at random dost thou hit.
Thy mark is feeble age, but thy false dart
970 Mistakes that aim and cleaves an infant's heart.

'Hadst thou but bid beware, then he had spoke,
And, hearing him, thy power had lost his power.
The Destinies will curse thee for this stroke;
They bid thee crop a weed, thou pluck'st a flower:
975 Love's golden arrow at him should have fled,
And not Death's ebon dart, to strike dead.

'Dost thou drink tears, that thou provokest such
weeping?
What may a heavy groan advantage thee?
980 Why hast thou cast into eternal sleeping
Those eyes that taught all other eyes to see?
Now Nature cares not for thy mortal vigour,
Since her best work is ruin'd with thy rigour.'

Here overcome, as one full of despair,
985 She veil'd her eyelids, who, like sluices, stopt
The crystal tide that from her two cheeks fair
In the sweet channel of her bosom dropt;
But through the flood-gates breaks the silver rain,
And with his strong course opens them again.

990 O, how her eyes and tears did lend and borrow!
Her eyes seen in the tears, tears in her eye;
Both crystals, where they view'd each other's sorrow,
Sorrow that friendly sighs sought still to dry;
But like a stormy day, now wind, now rain,
995 Sighs dry her cheeks, tears make them wet again.

Variable passions throng her constant woe,
As striving who should best become her grief;
All entertain'd, each passion labours so,
That every present sorrow seemeth chief,
1000 But none is best: then join they all together,
Like many clouds consulting for foul weather.

By this, far off she hears some huntsman hollo;
A nurse's song ne'er pleased her babe so well:
The dire imagination she did follow
1005 This sound of hope doth labour to expel;
For now reviving joy bids her rejoice,
And flatters her it is Adonis' voice.

Whereat her tears began to turn their tide,
Being prison'd in her eye like pearls in glass;
1010 Yet sometimes falls an orient drop beside,
Which her cheek melts, as scorning it should pass,
To wash the foul face of the sluttish ground,
Who is but drunken when she seemeth drown'd.

O hard-believing love, how strange it seems
1015 Not to believe, and yet too credulous!
Thy weal and woe are both of them extremes;
Despair and hope makes thee ridiculous:
The one doth flatter thee in thoughts unlikely,
In likely thoughts the other kills thee quickly.

She said to Death, ⁵⁷ "you misshapen, ugly, tiny, thin,
hateful opposite of love. You skeletal ghost, you earthworm,
what are doing? Why would you put an end to his beauty?
Why would you stop him from breathing? When he was
alive, his breath and his beauty could make a rose look
prettier and a violet smell better.

"If he is dead—oh, no, it can't be! You couldn't have killed
him, once you knew how beautiful he was! And yet, it can
be, can't it? You have no eyes to see; you hatefully hit ⁵⁸
people at random. You aim for sick, old people, but
sometimes you miss and kill a baby instead.

"If you had only just given him a warning, then he would
have talked back to you and you would have stopped in
your tracks. The Fates will curse you for killing him. They
told you to kill an old person, but you killed a young ⁵⁹
one. He should be falling in love at his age, not falling down
dead!

"Do you feed off of tears? Is that why you're making me cry
so much? What do you want with a heavy groan? Why
would you close his eyes forever, considering his eyes
taught all other eyes how to see? There's nothing left for
Mother Nature to be proud of in this world, now that you've
shot down her best work."

She was overwhelmed by despair at this point. She closed
her eyes; her eyelids worked like a dam, stopping the tide of
her tears from reaching her two, fair cheeks, and from
dripping onto her breasts. But then the tears broke through
the flood-gates, and she was forced to open them again.

Her eyes and her tears were indistinguishable! Her eyes
were filled with tears and tears were in her eyes. Her eyes
and her tears were both like mirrors reflecting their sadness
back at each other—a sadness that no amount of sighs
could exhaust. It was like a stormy day: first wind, then rain.
First tears made her cheeks wet, then sighs dried them
again.

She felt many different kinds of grief at that moment, as if
she weren't sure what to feel or how to express it. ⁶⁰ Each
kind of sadness felt the most pressing when she felt it, but
no single one fully dominated. All her sadnesses joined
together, then, like dark clouds overhead that make for bad
weather.

Then she heard a hunter shouting from far away. She had
never been so happy to hear something in her life. The
sound made her hopeful again, expelling her darkest
imaginings. She was overjoyed now, thinking she'd heard
Adonis' voice.

Her tears stopped falling. They were trapped in her eyes like
pearls suspended in glass. One tear trailed down her left
cheek, where it disappeared on her flushed, red skin—as if
her skin couldn't bear to allow the tears to the pass all the
way down her face to make it wet all over.

Poor Venus, she couldn't believe he was dead, and yet she
completely believed it! Her greatest hope and her greatest
fear were two extremes. Her quick jumps from despair to
hope made her ridiculous—the one thought made her
happy (though it was unlikely he was alive), and the other,
more probable thought nearly killed her.

⁵⁷ This description of death shows that he is the opposite of Venus. And yet, imagery and metaphor throughout the poem collapse the boundaries between the love and death.

⁵⁸ In Renaissance art, Death was usually depicted as a reaper (farmer) with a scythe (long, curved blade). The way Shakespeare describes Death's "aim" and "mark" here, though, recalls Cupid's bow and arrow, again blurring the lines between love and death.

⁵⁹ Adonis is again compared to a flower, here to emphasize his youth and beauty. Venus modifies her "carpe diem" logic to argue against his death, saying he is too young and beautiful to die now.

⁶⁰ Again the theme of ineffability returns—but this time grief, not love, is inexpressible.

1020 Now she unweaves the web that she hath wrought;
Adonis lives, and Death is not to blame;
It was not she that call'd him, all-to naught:
Now she adds honours to his hateful name;
She clepes him king of graves and grave for kings,
1025 Imperious supreme of all mortal things.

'No, no,' quoth she, 'sweet Death, I did but jest;
Yet pardon me I felt a kind of fear
When as I met the boar, that bloody beast,
Which knows no pity, but is still severe;
1030 Then, gentle shadow,—truth I must confess,—
I rail'd on thee, fearing my love's decease.

'Tis not my fault: the boar provoked my tongue;
Be wreak'd on him, invisible commander;
'Tis he, foul creature, that hath done thee wrong;
1035 I did but act, he's author of thy slander:
Grief hath two tongues, and never woman yet
Could rule them both without ten women's wit.'

Thus hoping that Adonis is alive,
Her rash suspect she doth extenuate;
1040 And that his beauty may the better thrive,
With Death she humbly doth insinuate;
Tells him of trophies, statues, tombs, and stories
His victories, his triumphs and his glories.

'O Jove,' quoth she, 'how much a fool was I
1045 To be of such a weak and silly mind
To wail his death who lives and must not die
Till mutual overthrow of mortal kind!
For he being dead, with him is beauty slain,
And, beauty dead, black chaos comes again.

'Fie, fie, fond love, thou art so full of fear
As one with treasure laden, hemm'd thieves;
Trifles, unwitnessed with eye or ear,
Thy coward heart with false bethinking grieves.'
1050 Even at this word she hears a merry horn,
1055 Whereat she leaps that was but late forlorn.

As falcon to the lure, away she flies;
The grass stoops not, she treads on it so light;
And in her haste unfortunately spies
The foul boar's conquest on her fair delight;
1060 Which seen, her eyes, as murder'd with the view,
Like stars ashamed of day, themselves withdrew;

Or, as the snail, whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain,
And there, all smother'd up, in shade doth sit,
1065 Long after fearing to creep forth again;
So, at his bloody view, her eyes are fled
Into the deep dark cabins of her head:

Where they resign their office and their light
To the disposing of her troubled brain;
1070 Who bids them still consort with ugly night,
And never wound the heart with looks again;
Who like a king perplexed in his throne,
By their suggestion gives a deadly groan,

Whereat each tributary subject quakes;
1075 As when the wind, imprison'd in the ground,
Struggling for passage, earth's foundation shakes,
Which with cold terror doth men's minds confound.
This mutiny each part doth so surprise
That from their dark beds once more leap her eyes;

1080 And, being open'd, threw unwilling light
Upon the wide wound that the boar had trench'd
In his soft flank; whose wonted lily white

She convinced herself that she was wrong—that Adonis was alive and that Death was not to blame. She had no reason to call on Death; it was pointless. Then she praised Death's hateful name, calling him the king of graves and the grave for kings, the god who ruled over all mortal things.

"No, no," she said, "dear Death, I was only joking! Forgive me, I was afraid when I saw the boar—that violent, pitiless, aggressive animal. So, sweet ghost, I have to admit that I criticized you because I was afraid my love was dead.

"It's not my fault. The boar made me talk that way. Punish the boar, Death. That disgusting creature is the one that's done you wrong. I only reacted; he's the cause of my criticism. People can't control what they say when they're grieving. No woman in the history of the world could control her tongue when she was in mourning, even if she had the willpower of ten women put together."

Still hoping that Adonis was alive, she continued flattering Death. She begged Death to let the beautiful boy live. She complimented [Death](#) ⁶¹ on his trophies, statues, tombs, and all the stories of his victories, triumphs, and his glories.

⁶¹ In this part of the address to Death, Venus lists objects associated with death (like graves).

"Goodness," she said, "I was such an idiot—and so weak-minded—to mourn the death of someone who was alive and who will never die until the end of mankind! For you see, if he's dead, then that's the end of beauty. And without beauty, the universe will descend back into chaos.

"Shame on my foolish heart. I'm as afraid as a person carrying treasure who's being followed by thieves. The tiniest sight or sound sets my cowardly heart thinking all kinds of things that aren't true." As she said that, she heard a hunting horn. She jumped into the air, even though she was downcast only a moment ago.

She flew away like a falcon following its prey. She ran so quickly that she didn't even trample the grass. As she ran, sadly she saw what the evil boar had done to her beloved boy. When she saw him, her eyes were murdered ⁶² by the sight. She closed her eyes, like stars dimming when day dawns...

⁶² This personification of Venus' eyes as people being murdered doubles the sense of fatality—Venus feels like she's been killed when she sees her lover dead.

...or like a snail ⁶³ that shrinks back into his cave of a shell when you touch his eye stalks—fleeing the pain—and stays there all hidden away in the darkness, even after he's stopped being afraid to creep forward again. Like the snail, when Venus saw Adonis lying there, bloody, her eyes flew back into the dark recesses of her skull.

⁶³ Venus and Adonis have been compared to horses, the sun, and rivers; now Venus and her eyes are compared to a frightened snail, to emphasize her lowly condition in mourning.

There, her eyes refused to see anymore, and refused to relay any images to her brain. ⁶⁴ Her brain told her eyes to stay there in the darkness and never to take in heartbreaking sights ever again. Her heart, like a king sitting, confused, on his throne, groaned when he was mentioned by the brain.

⁶⁴ Venus' eyes, heart, and brain are personified as a court in which the heart is king and the eyes and brain are servants. All the parts of Venus' body are trying to solve the problem of grief by committee, so to speak.

Then every bone in her body shook like an earthquake. It was like when the wind—funneled underground and struggling to get out—shakes the earth above, terrifying and confusing mankind. Her shaking body so surprised her that her eyes opened once again.

And, being open, her eyes could see the wide wound the boar had cut in Adonis' soft thigh. His lily white skin was covered with the purple tears shed by his wound. All the

1085 With purple tears, that his wound wept, was drench'd:
No flower was nigh, no grass, herb, leaf, or weed,
But stole his blood and seem'd with him to bleed.

1090 This solemn sympathy poor Venus noteth;
Over one shoulder doth she hang her head;
Dumbly she passions, frantically she doteth;
She thinks he could not die, he is not dead:
Her voice is stopt, her joints forget to bow;
Her eyes are mad that they have wept til now.

1095 Upon his hurt she looks so steadfastly,
That her sight dazzling makes the wound seem three;
And then she reprehends her mangling eye,
That makes more gashes where no breach should be:
His face seems twain, each several limb is doubled;
For oft the eye mistakes, the brain being troubled.

1100 'My tongue cannot express my grief for one,
And yet,' quoth she, 'behold two Adons dead!
My sighs are blown away, my salt tears gone,
Mine eyes are turn'd to fire, my heart to lead:
Heavy heart's lead, melt at mine eyes' red fire!
So shall I die by drops of hot desire.

1105 'Alas, poor world, what treasure hast thou lost!
What face remains alive that's worth the viewing?
Whose tongue is music now? what canst thou boast
Of things long since, or any thing ensuing?
The flowers are sweet, their colours fresh and trim;
But true-sweet beauty lived and died with him.

1110 'Bonnet nor veil henceforth no creature wear!
Nor sun nor wind will ever strive to kiss you:
Having no fair to lose, you need not fear;
The sun doth scorn you and the wind doth hiss you:
But when Adonis lived, sun and sharp air
1115 Lurk'd like two thieves, to rob him of his fair:

1120 'And therefore would he put his bonnet on,
Under whose brim the gaudy sun would peep;
The wind would blow it off and, being gone,
Play with his locks: then would Adonis weep;
And straight, in pity of his tender years,
They both would strive who first should dry his tears.

1125 'To see his face the lion walk'd along
Behind some hedge, because he would not fear him;
To recreate himself when he hath sung,
The tiger would be tame and gently hear him;
If he had spoke, the wolf would leave his prey
And never fright the silly lamb that day.

1130 'When he beheld his shadow in the brook,
The fishes spread on it their golden gills;
When he was by, the birds such pleasure took,
That some would sing, some other in their bills
Would bring him mulberries and ripe-red cherries;
He fed them with his sight, they him with berries.

1135 'But this foul, grim, and urchin-snouted boar,
Whose downward eye still looketh for a grave,
Ne'er saw the beauteous livery that he wore;
Witness the entertainment that he gave:
If he did see his face, why then I know
He thought to kiss him, and hath kill'd him so.

1140 'Tis true, 'tis true; thus was Adonis slain:
He ran upon the boar with his sharp spear,
Who did not whet his teeth at him again,
But by a kiss thought to persuade him there;

flowers, grass, herbs, leaves, and weeds nearby were
covered in his blood, and seemed to bleed with him.

Venus observed the plants' apparent sympathy. She leaned
her head against her shoulder. She gestured silently and
touched him frantically, thinking he couldn't die—he
couldn't be dead! She couldn't speak. She couldn't move.
She felt she was silly for crying before that moment.

She looked steadily at the spot where he'd been hurt. It
overwhelmed her sight, making her think she could see
three wounds ⁶⁵. Then she corrected her blurry vision,
which was inventing gashes where there were none. She
thought she saw two faces, four arms, and four legs. When
you're upset, your eyes often make mistakes.

"I can't even express my grief for one Adonis, and look!
Here's two dead Adonises," she said. "I can't sigh anymore;
my salty tears are all gone. My eyes have turned into fire
and my heart has turned into lead. I wish I could melt my
hard heart with the fire coming from my eyes! Then I could
kill myself, being consumed by my own desire.

"The world has lost such a treasure! Is there anyone alive
who can compare to him? Anyone with a voice as sweet?
Could anyone ever beat him, in the past or in the days to
come? The flowers may be pretty with their fresh, bright
colors, but since he embodied true beauty, beauty died
with him, too.

"No one needs to wear hats or veils anymore! The sun ⁶⁶
and the wind are gone. Since you can't get sunburned
anymore, you don't have to be afraid. The sun is laughing at
you, and the wind is hissing at you. But when Adonis was
alive, the sun and the air were jealous of him and wanted to
make him less handsome so that he couldn't compete with
them.

"So Adonis would have to wear a hat. The sun would peek
over the brim of the hat, but then the wind would blow it off
and play with Adonis' hair. Then Adonis would cry. At once,
the sun and the air would take pity on the young boy, and
the two of them would compete to comfort him first.

"Lions had to hide in the bushes to see his face, because
Adonis wasn't afraid of them. Tigers would sit tamely and
gently to listen to him entertain himself by singing. When he
spoke, he could convince wolves to leave their prey, and to
even put off scaring sheep for a day.

"When he saw his reflection in a stream, fish would swim
through and try to touch it. When he was nearby, birds
would sing to him or carry in their beaks mulberries and
ripe, red cherries for him. They loved to look at him, so
they'd bring him berries in return.

"But this gross, evil, long-nosed boar with his downward
facing eyes couldn't appreciate Adonis' beauty—he never
saw what he looked like and he never heard his sweet voice.
If he did see his face, then maybe he accidentally killed him
because he was trying to kiss him ⁶⁷.

"Ah, yes—this is how Adonis was killed: he hit the boar with
his sharp spear, and the boar, instead of pursuing him with
his teeth, thought he could kiss Adonis and make him stop

⁶⁵ This is another subversive
image—instead of seeing visions of
her and Adonis' children, she sees
multiplying images of Adonis' death.

⁶⁶ Titan, the sun-god, was jealous of
Adonis' brightness. Because Adonis is
dead, Venus says humans have no
reason to fear sunburn now—Titan
won't lash out at handsome humans
anymore.

⁶⁷ Venus imagines the whole world
is as in love with Adonis as she is,
personifying the ground, the sun, and
even the boar as fellow lovers of
Adonis. In poetry, this is known as the
"pathetic fallacy"—the projection of
one's emotions onto nature.

1145 And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine
Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin.

'Had I been tooth'd like him, I must confess,
With kissing him I should have kill'd him first;
But he is dead, and never did he bless
My youth with his; the more am I accurst.'
1150 With this, she falleth in the place she stood,
And stains her face with his congealed blood.

She looks upon his lips, and they are pale;
She takes him by the hand, and that is cold;
She whispers in his ears a heavy tale,
1155 As if they heard the woeful words she told;
She lifts the coffer-lids that close his eyes,
Where, lo, two lamps, burnt out, in darkness lies;

Two glasses, where herself herself beheld
A thousand times, and now no more reflect;
1160 Their virtue lost, wherein they late excell'd,
And every beauty robb'd of his effect:
'Wonder of time,' quoth she, 'this is my spite,
That, thou being dead, the day should yet be light.

'Since thou art dead, lo, here I prophesy:
1165 Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend:
It shall be waited on with jealousy,
Find sweet beginning, but unsavoury end,
Ne'er settled equally, but high or low,
That all love's pleasure shall not match his woe.

1170 'It shall be fickle, false and full of fraud,
Bud and be blasted in a breathing-while;
The bottom poison, and the top o'erstraw'd
With sweets that shall the truest sight beguile:
The strongest body shall it make most weak,
1175 Strike the wise dumb and teach the fool to speak.

'It shall be sparing and too full of riot,
Teaching decrepit age to tread the measures;
The staring ruffian shall it keep in quiet,
Pluck down the rich, enrich the poor with treasures;
1180 It shall be raging-mad and silly-mild,
Make the young old, the old become a child.

'It shall suspect where is no cause of fear;
It shall not fear where it should most mistrust;
It shall be merciful and too severe,
1185 And most deceiving when it seems most just;
Perverse it shall be where it shows most toward,
Put fear to valour, courage to the coward.

'It shall be cause of war and dire events,
And set dissension 'twixt the son and sire;
1190 Subject and servile to all discontents,
As dry combustious matter is to fire:
Sith in his prime Death doth my love destroy,
They that love best their loves shall not enjoy.'

By this, the boy that by her side lay kill'd
1195 Was melted like a vapour from her sight,
And in his blood that on the ground lay spill'd,
A purple flower sprung up, chequer'd with white,
Resembling well his pale cheeks and the blood
Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.

1200 She bows her head, the new-sprung flower to smell,
Comparing it to her Adonis' breath,
And says, within her bosom it shall dwell,
Since he himself is reft from her by death:
She crops the stalk, and in the breach appears
1205 Green dropping sap, which she compares to tears .

hunting him. Nuzzling into his flank, the sweet pig
accidentally thrust his tusk into Adonis' thigh.

"I have to admit: if I had tusks like the boar, I would have
killed Adonis when I tried to kiss him. But he's dead. I never
got the chance to make love to him, and I regret that." With
that, she fell down where she stood and rubbed her face in
his congealed blood.

She looked at his pale lips. She held his cold hand. She
whispered a sad story in his ear as if he could hear the
words she said. She lifted his eyelids, but his eyes were
burned out, filled with darkness, not light.

She'd seen her own reflection in those eyes a thousand
times, but they didn't reflect anymore. They had lost all the
beauty they once had, and the world was short of beauty
now because of it. "It's strange how it's still daytime," she
said, "and that it's still light outside, even though you're
dead.

"Since you're dead, I prophesy that lovers forever afterward
will have trouble. They'll be jealous of each other. They'll
enjoy the honeymoon phase, and then get tired of each
other and break up. Love and trouble will always be
together; one can't exist without the other. They'll never be
equal, either—the good parts of being in love will never
equal the bad.

"Love will be flighty, double-crossing, and full of deception.
Just when it sprouts and blossoms, the roots will be
poisoned. Just when couples are starting to enjoy love's
sweet fruits, love will be snatched away from them. Love
will make the strongest man weak, make the wise man
dumb, and teach the stupid man to speak.

"Love will happen infrequently, and will cause conflict
when it does arrive. Love will teach old men to act young
again. It will make the boldest scoundrel shut his mouth. It
will make the rich poor and the poor rich. It will be
absolutely crazy and sweet and mild. It will make young
men old, and old men become children again.

"Love will be jealous when there's no reason to be. It will be
comfortable when it should be afraid. It will be both too
forgiving and too harsh, and the most fake when it seems
the most real. It will be hard to get when you want it most.
It will make courageous men cowardly and cowards
courageous.

"Love will cause wars and catastrophes. It will make sons
and fathers fight one another. It will instigate countless
conflicts, like dry kindling starts fires. Since Death killed my
love before his time, lovers until the end of time won't be
allowed to enjoy the best part of their love."

After she said that, the dead boy by her side evaporated
into thin air. And in the place where his blood lay spilled on
the ground, a purple flower with spots of white sprang
up. It resembled his pale cheeks, with their blushing spots
in the middle of his white skin.

She bowed her head to smell the newly-grown flower,
comparing it to her Adonis' breath. She said she would
carry it by her heart always, since death took him away
from her. She cut the stalk. Green sap oozed out of the end,
which she compared to tears.

68 Shakespeare uses deathly
imagery, calling Adonis' eyelids the
lids of coffins, and his eyeballs
"lamps" or candles, now burned out.

69 The "adonis" is a real flower that
looks like what Shakespeare and
classical myth describe: a red flower
with small white dots in the center. All
the imagery of Adonis' white face and
red cheeks, white thigh and red blood,
is echoed in the flower that
memorializes him.

1210 'Poor flower,' quoth she, 'this was thy fathers guise—
Sweet issue of a more sweet-smelling sire—
For every little grief to wet his eyes:
To grow unto himself was his desire,
And so 'tis thine; but know, it is as good
To wither in my breast as in his blood.

1215 'Here was thy father's bed, here in my breast;
Thou art the next of blood, and 'tis thy right:
Lo, in this hollow cradle take thy rest,
My throbbing heart shall rock thee day and night:
There shall not be one minute in an hour
Wherein I will not kiss my sweet love's flower.'

1220 Thus weary of the world, away she hies,
And yokes her silver doves; by whose swift aid
Their mistress mounted through the empty skies
In her light chariot quickly is convey'd;
Holding their course to Paphos, where their queen
Means to immure herself and not be seen.

"Poor flower ⁷⁰," she said, "your father cried like that.
You're the sweet son of an even sweeter-smelling father. He
would cry for every little thing. He wanted to grow up to be
a man, and so do you. But you should know that it's as
good to wither here, next to my heart, as it is to grow here in
his blood.

"Your father laid his head here, on my chest. You're his heir,
so it's your place, now. Look, rest yourself in the hollow
cradle between my breasts. My throbbing heart will rock
you day and night. I'll kiss my sweet love's flower every
minute of every hour."

Weary of the world now, she called her silver doves to take
her away. With their speedy help, she rose into the empty
sky in her light chariot. They set their course for Paphos ⁷¹,
where Venus intended to hide, and never be seen again.

⁷⁰ Venus calls the flower her and Adonis' child—the product of non-consummation with her lover. Rather than having sex and giving birth to children, the pair were separated by death, and produced a flower that immortalized unconsummated love.

⁷¹ Paphos is a city in Cyprus, famous for its shrine and ancient cult devoted to the goddess of love.

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