

VENUS AND ADONIS

INTRODUCTION
The ancient Adonis

Compared with that of Orpheus, the myth of Venus and Adonis might seem an unpromising subject. Its central plot is blandly simple, its details blurred, breaking up into dozens of variant forms; its central male character is passive and colourless; its meaning seems elusive, shading off at the edges into dark regions of cult and ritual and metaphor. And yet this very elusiveness, the sense that the meaning of the myth lies somewhere beyond or beneath the simple events of the story, seems to be what has attracted writers like Shakespeare, Spenser, Shelley, and T.S.Eliot to make it the focus of some of the most ambitious mythological poetry in English.

The core of the story is simple. Adonis is a youth of striking beauty. (That is the one fact of the myth still popularly remembered—we still, if often ironically, call a handsome man ‘an Adonis’.) Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, falls in love with him, and they become lovers. Against her advice, he goes out hunting, and is gored to death by the tusks of a wild boar (or sometimes by a jealous god, Aphrodite’s lover Ares/Mars, or her husband Hephaestus/Vulcan, in the form of a boar). Aphrodite mourns his death, and changes his body into a flower, the lovely but fragile anemone.

A fuller version extends the story to include Adonis’s parentage and birth. He is the child of an incestuous union between a king and his daughter. Different versions give locations for the action—some in Cyprus, some in Assyria or Phoenicia or other parts of the Middle East—and different names for the characters; some of the variants are listed by the mythographer Apollodorus (A5). The most familiar version, Ovid’s (A4), names them as Cinyras, king of Cyprus, and his daughter Myrrha. Myrrha is seized by an incestuous desire for her father (unexplained in Ovid, but said by others to be a punishment from Aphrodite for Myrrha’s neglect of her worship or her parents’ hubristic boasting about her beauty). With the help of her nurse, she smuggles herself in disguise into his bed. When Cinyras discovers the trick, he tries to kill her, but some friendly deity saves the pregnant Myrrha by transforming her into a myrrh tree; her tears become myrrh, the aromatic resin valued by the ancients for its perfume (and familiar to modern readers as one of the gifts brought by the three Wise Men to the infant Jesus—gold, frankincense, and myrrh). Adonis is then born, miraculously, from the trunk of the tree.

In some versions, Aphrodite’s relationship with Adonis begins at his point: enchanted by the beauty of the other gods, seals him in a box and gives him to Persephone. Persephone in the underworld (six months with each, or four months with each and four months at his own free choice).¹ The arrangement is voided, however, when Adonis is killed by the boar. One obscure source (a commentator’s note on) Theocritus suggests that the contest between Aphrodite and Persephone took place at this point, after Adonis’s death and a few late classical sources refer to Adonis’s resurrection; this is not, however, a part of the standard version of the story.

As important as this sketchy and fragmentary story are the rituals associated with the cult of Adonis. Every year in spring or midsummer, in the Greek world and round the eastern

Mediterranean, the death, and sometimes the resurrection, of Adonis were re-enacted. Almost always women took the chief role in the mourning. At Byblos in Syria, where the River Adonis (swollen in spring with red earth washed down from the mountains) was said to run red with the young hero's blood, women wept and lamented to the sound of flutes, but next day celebrated his resurrection and ascent to heaven. In Alexandria the pattern was reversed: the first day of the festival celebrated the sacred marriage of Aphrodite and Adonis, with images of the lovers laid on couches and surrounded by offerings of food and flowers; on the second day the image of Adonis was carried through the streets by mourners and cast into the sea—but with the promise that he would return again next year. At Athens in midsummer women climbed on to the flat roof-tops to mark Adonis's love and death with celebration and grief; Athenian men looked askance at these unofficial female rites, and a character in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* complains of serious government business being interrupted by drunken women howling 'garden of Adonis!' on the roof. As part of the ritual and women prepared 'gardens of Adonis': shallow pots of earth planted with grass and flowers, set on the roof-top to grow and wither rapidly, and finally cast out to sea with the effigy of the dead god. They seemed to symbolise Adonis's sadly rare as powerfully present in the literary tradition as the myth itself, suggesting that the story of Adonis is not something which happens 'once upon a time', but something which is continually being repeated 'as year succeeds year' (Bion, A2).

This was not originally a Greek cult: the legend and many of the ritual came originally from the Middle East. Adonis is a Greek version of the Asian god, worshipped by the Sumerians as Dumuzi and by the Babylonians as Tammuz.² In Mesopotamian myths, Dumuzi/Tammuz was the lover and consort of the great mother goddess, variously known to different peoples as Ishtar or Astarte or Inanna. The sexual union of the goddess and her lover represented and maintained the fertility of the whole world, human, animal, and vegetable. Tammuz's death and Ishtar's grieving descent into the underworld brought famine and barrenness upon the world, averted only when the underworld gods released both the goddess and her lover to return to the upper world. Each summer throughout the Middle East women lamented Tammuz's death and prayed for his return; the prophet Ezekiel indignantly describes the 'abomination' of seeing 'women weeping for Tammuz' in the very porch of God's Temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:13–15). From Mesopotamia versions of the myth migrated to Syria, to Cyprus, and finally to mainland Greece. In the process its plot altered, its names changed (the Greeks took the Semitic title *adon*, 'lord', for the hero's proper name), and its location became blurred (both Ovid and Apollodorus show a certain confusion about where the story takes place). The key question is how far its meaning too may have changed.

The Dumuzi/Tammuz legend is clearly a seasonal myth; like the Greek myth of Persephone, it represents the yearly death and renewal of the crops on which human life depends. English writers and scholars have often interpreted the human life depends. English writers and scholars have often interpreted the Adonis story in the same light, and this reading was put into its classic form in the Adonis story in the same light, and this reading was put into its classic form in the early twentieth century in Sir James Frazer's enormously influential *The Golden Bough* (A25). For Frazer the stories of Tammuz and Adonis and many other mythological figures were manifestations of a single grand,

world-spanning myth of the dying and reviving vegetation god. His reading in turn shaped some of the major twentieth-century versions of the myth.

More recent scholars, however, have argued that Frazer too rashly read the meanings of the Mesopotamian myth into the Greek one. There is little evidence, they suggest, that the Greeks connected Adonis with vegetation, or that they believed in or cared about his resurrection. The Greek myth should be read on a more literal level—it is not about agriculture but about sex. For the French structuralist Marcel Detienne (1977), Adonis represents not fertility but sterility: Aphrodite's fruitless affair with the illegitimate, precocious, doomed Adonis is the opposite of fruitful marriage, as the fast-withering 'gardens of Adonis' are the opposite of proper agriculture. Others (Winkler 1990; Reed 1995) have speculated more positively on what the rituals of Adonis might have meant to the women who took part in them: a celebration of the dominance of Aphrodite over her passive male lover, or an opportunity to express uninhibited sexual joy and grief outside the constraints of patriarchal Greek marriage.

It is impossible to know for certain what meaning or meanings Adonis had for his original worshippers; as Jasper Griffin (1986b:88) has commented, each interpretation of the myth is simply another myth. But the twentieth-century debate about the meaning of the Adonis story does reflect conflicting strains in the literary treatment of the story: on the one hand, an allegorical strain which treats the union of Venus and Adonis primarily as a symbol of natural fertility and renewal, with Adonis's resurrection as the key fact of the story; on the other hand, a tradition which focuses on the human love story, as embodying the joy and pain of sexual love, and ending with the tragic waste and fruitlessness of Adonis's death. Moreover, recent feminist readings bring out a key point about the myth: that Aphrodite/Venus is its dominant figure, whereas Adonis is largely a passive object, less a person than a body, to be desired when alive and mourned over when dead.

Appropriately, the first major classical treatment of Adonis focuses not so much on the myth as on the ritual. Theocritus's fifteenth Idyll (**A1**) describes the festival of Adonis in Alexandria at the court of his patrons, the Hellenistic rulers of Egypt: the images of Aphrodite and Adonis laid out on their marriage bed amid a profusion of splendid tapestries, miniature gardens, purple blankets, perfumes, cakes and puddings, music and song, to celebrate a night of love before the morning when Adonis must be carried out and drowned. Theocritus's sophisticated and witty twist is to portray the festival through the eyes of a pair of Alexandrian housewives. Their grumbling conversation about their mundane problems—the price of shopping, incompetent servants, traffic jams and street crime, above all the deficiencies of their husbands and the frustrations of married life—provides a comically down-to-earth counterpoint to the idealised serenity of the divine union.

Bion's 'Lament for Adonis' (**A2**) takes a very different approach, recreating the original mythic scene—Adonis's death, the grief of Aphrodite, the mourning of her followers and of the whole natural world—with vivid sensuous images and stark pathos. We have the sense of viewing a tragic event as it happens, but also the first enactment of a ritual that will be re-enacted over and over in years to come: 'There is time enough to come for your grief, /time to weep, time to sorrow, as year succeeds year.' Bion's 'Lament', combined with the elegy for Bion himself traditionally attributed to Moschus (**A3**),³ inaugurates the

traditional association between the Adonis myth and the genre of pastoral elegy, which I will discuss later in connection with Shelley's *Adonais* (A21).

The fullest narrative version of the story is Ovid's (A4), already summarised. The Venus and Adonis story is one of the narratives of tragic or forbidden love sung by the bereaved Orpheus, but it is told quickly and simply; Ovid seems more interested in the melodramatic tale of Myrrha's incest and the inset romantic tragedy of Atalanta and Hippomenes. The story itself is told with charm, quiet humour (especially in the image of Venus, in the classical equivalent of a tracksuit, trying to keep up with her athletic toyboy), and gentle pathos at the end. There is no sense of ritual, or of religious or allegorical meaning: Ovid initiates the treatment of the story as a merely human one, unencumbered with symbolic significance.

Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance allegory

The story of Venus and Adonis, unlike that of Orpheus, was not particularly popular in the Middle Ages. Chaucer has a couple of passing references to the love of Venus for 'Adoun', and Lydgate tells the story of 'Adonydes' at tedious length as a warning against the dangerous wild beasts that lurk in the garden of Love. On the whole, though, medieval writers seem to see little potential in the story, either as romance (perhaps Adonis was too passive for a knightly hero) or as Christian allegory.

The Renaissance, on the other hand, enthusiastically embraced the allegorical possibilities of the Adonis myth. Mythographers like Abraham Fraunce, George Sandys (A12), and Alexander Ross (A13) took a typically eclectic approach to the meanings of the story. It could be read as a moral fable, illustrating 'the frail condition and short continuance of beauty' (Sandys), or warning 'them...who hunt too much after pleasure that the Devil is that great boar who lieth in wait to kill them' (Ross). Or it could be read as a physical allegory of natural processes. Adonis may be seen as the sun, warming and fertilising the earth in summer, then retreating into the cold of winter while the earth weeps rain and sheds leaves in mourning. Or he may be wheat, which lies buried in the earth for six months, then rises above the ground, until it is killed again by the boar/winter (Ross). Ross even suggests that the rebirth of Adonis-as-grain may be read as a symbol of 'our resurrection'—an echo of St Paul, who used the image of the sowing of grain and the springing up of wheat, in 1 Corinthians 15, as a parable for the way that the death of 'a natural body' may lead to the resurrection of 'a spiritual body'. Thus, as we saw with Orpheus, the same story may be read as a tale of human folly and sin, a neutral allegory of natural processes, or a profound symbol of Christian mysteries.

This coexistence of very different readings of the same myth is particularly clear in Spenser. Adonis is a key figure in book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, which deals with love and sexuality, but he appears in strikingly different forms. In canto 1 (A6a) the tapestries in the castle of the promiscuous Malecasta gorgeously depict the story of Venus and Adonis—the goddess's sick passion, the 'sleights and sweet allurements' with which she seduces the innocent boy, her desolating grief at his death—in an image of the cruelty and wastefulness of illicit love. In canto 6 (A6b), however, the description of the Garden of Adonis, Spenser takes a very different approach.

In a sense this passage rests on an inspired mistake: Spenser has turned the miniature 'gardens' of earth and herbs, sacrificed by the ancients to the dying god, into an actual place, a paradisaical garden which forms a kind of pagan counterpart to the Garden of Eden.⁴ At the centre of this paradise, the heart of Venus's realm on earth, the resurrected Adonis lies concealed in a secret bower, and there he and Venus enjoy one another in 'eternal bliss'. Moral criticism seems irrelevant here; as in the ancient myths, the sexual union of the great goddess and her lover generates the energies which sustain the Garden, which in turn represents the processes of reproduction and fertility that keep the entire world alive. Subject to mortality and yet never dying, perpetually transformed into new shapes, Adonis is 'the father of all forms'; he seems to be a symbol, not just of corn or vegetation, but of all living matter, all bodies. The Garden—which is ambiguously both an aspect of our own world and a separate realm where things exist before birth and after death—is the place where matter is united with spirit, body with soul, to create the creatures which are sent out into the world to take part in the endless cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation. It is an extraordinary passage, in which Spenser has grasped the significance of the ancient Tammuz myth and transformed it into a piece of complex, ornate, teasingly enigmatic Renaissance allegory.

Milton echoes Spenser in the epilogue to *Comus* (A14a), which describes a paradisaical garden where Adonis lies among hyacinths and roses, tended by 'the Assyrian queen', Astarte/Venus. Here, however, Adonis is still wounded, and Venus sits 'sadly' on the ground beside him, while 'far above' soar her son 'celestial Cupid' and his love Psyche. By implication, Milton sets the merely physical love which Venus and Adonis represent, here and in Spenser, well below the spiritual love represented by Cupid and Psyche ('soul'). Nevertheless, they still have their place in paradise. Milton's attitude is far harsher in *Paradise Lost* (A14b), where Tammuz/Adonis, like his lover Astarte, figures as one of the devil's in Satan's party, and his 'dark idolatries' are said to have 'infected' the Jews. Milton's view of classical myth—as we have seen in his treatment of Orpheus—is exceptionally ambivalent. But such contradictions are not untypical of Renaissance mythography. Mythical figures who, if considered as real people or as objects of worship, must be sternly condemned, can be happily tolerated and even exalted if they are considered as allegories and metaphors.

Shakespeare and the Ovidian tradition

While the mythographers and poets like Spenser and Milton explored the Adonis myth as allegory, other Renaissance writers approached it in a more Ovidian spirit: as a story about real characters, to be told for the pleasure of the story and the qualities of wit, beauty, suspense, pathos and eroticism to be found in it. The most important of these writers was Shakespeare, in his 1,194-line poem *Venus and Adonis* (A7). Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, whose *Hero and Leander* appeared around the same time, jointly created the Elizabethan genre which later scholars have called the 'erotic epyllion': a 'mini-epic' poem, retelling a mythological love story (usually taken from Ovid) with an abundance of sensuous description, learned and witty digression, and highly wrought rhetorical display by both the characters and the narrator.

Shakespeare's crucial departure from the Ovidian story (apparently his original invention) is that Adonis refuses to become Venus's lover. It is easy to forget how bold and subversive

this change is. The core of the ancient myth is that Venus and Adonis were lovers; the interpretation of their sexual union is crucial to all the allegorical readings of the story. The initial effect of Shakespeare's reversal is of a travesty of the myth: a love comedy in which the conventional roles of ardent male wooer and coy mistress are reversed, made more farcical by the fact that the goddess is strong enough to pick up the reluctant youth under her arm, yet cannot cajole or bully him into a sexual response. As it goes on, however, the poem evolves into a more serious debate, Venus arguing for the naturalness of sex and the need for the world to be peopled, Adonis virtuously or priggishly defending chastity and self-restraint. In the end Adonis, preferring hunting to love, is killed by the boar before the union is ever consummated, and Venus prophesies or curses that from henceforth all love shall be similarly unhappy. Despite Shakespeare's avoidance of explicit allegory, *Venus and Adonis* takes on a metaphorical dimension; it is in the end a serious philosophical poem about the nature of love, the conflict between sexuality and chastity, or (to put it in different and more Venus-like terms) between the life-instinct and the deathinstinct. By contrast with Spenser's ebullient celebration of universal fertility, it ends on a note of sadness, failure, and sterility, as the flower that was Adonis withers in Venus's bosom.

The popularity of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is evident not only from the praise of contemporaries but also from parodies in Heywood's *Fair Maid of the Exchange* (A10) and the anonymous comedy *Return from Parnassus*—in each which a hapless male suitor attempts to appropriate scraps of Venus's speeches as chat-up lines. Moreover, it single-handedly altered the literary tradition. Of dozens of poems, songs, and plays which retell or allude to the Adonis story over the following half-century, the great majority take Shakespeare's revisionist version as their starting-point. Writers like Marlowe, Richard Barnfield (A8), Bartholomew Griffin (A9), William Barksted (whose epyllion *Myrrha, the Mother of Adonis* is explicitly a 'prequel' to Shakespeare's), Thomas Heywood, Richard Brathwait, H.C., Shakerley Marmion, and William Bosworth, all present a lovesick Venus courting an Adonis who is careless, scornful, disdainful, a 'boorish lad' (Brathwait)—'Venus and Adonis, sad with pain, /The one of love, the other of disdain' (Marmion).

A few writers stick to the traditional story. William Browne (A11) and Henry Lawes, in their songs for Venus lamenting over Adonis's body, give no suggestion that her love was unrequited. And Robert Greene, in a pair of poems attached to his novella *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, presents an Adonis who is far from reluctant to accept Venus's attentions: in the first, a young prince adopts the persona of Adonis to defend his licentiousness ('I am but young and may be wanton yet'), while in the second, his aged counsellor warns him against Adonis's fate ('A lecher's fault was not excused by youth'). Such a heavily moralistic approach to the story, however, is exceptional. Despite the serious debate about sexuality and chastity that gradually emerges in Shakespeare's epyllion, on the whole the writers in the Ovidian/Shakespearean tradition are less concerned with moralising over Venus and Adonis than with exploiting the beauty, sensuality, and pathos of their story.

'Soft Adonis': the eighteenth century

The Venus and Adonis story remained popular throughout the Restoration and eighteenth century. The classical sources of the story, Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, and of course Ovid, were repeatedly translated, adapted, and imitated. The story was also repeatedly

given musical treatment: John Blow's opera (1684), Colley Cibber's masque (1715), Daniel Bellamy's cantata (1722), John Hughes's cantata (to music by Handel, 1735), Samuel Derrick's cantata (A18) and song (1755). Nevertheless, the period failed to produce any major original treatment of the theme to stand comparison with Spenser's or Shakespeare's.

Most eighteenth-century versions follow the Ovidian/Shakespearean tradition, treating the myth as a human story of joyous or unhappy love. Sometimes, as in Shakespeare, Venus and Adonis take on the status of archetypal lovers, models of sexual bliss: so Derrick's cantata contrasts their happiness with the discomfiture of the jealous and possessive Mars, and in Richard Savage's 'Valentine's Day' (A17) a startlingly graphic description of the mythic lovers' pleasure serves as an implied reproach to 'Chloe' who has denied the poet such joys.⁵ On a more trivial level, Venus and Adonis, as archetypes of female and male beauty, can be turned to the purposes of courtly flattery: so Aphra Behn, in 1685, describes James II as a compound of Mars and Adonis ('The goddess here might all her wish enjoy—/ The rough stern hero in the charming boy!'), while Samuel Whyte in 1722, even more improbably, compares the marriage of George III and Queen Charlotte to that of Adonis and Venus.

In some Restoration treatments of Adonis a new note is heard, of satirical contempt. This seems to reflect a new, macho assumption, foreign to the Renaissance, that excessive beauty in a man is unmanly, and that to be admired by women is contemptible. Hugh Crompton's 'Masque of Adonis' (1657) gently mocks the frenzied impatience of a female audience for the appearance of 'Adonis our moan'; Thomas Brown's 'The Ladies' Lamentation for their Adonis' (c. 1700?) more nastily celebrates the political murder of an actor ('the Player Adonis'), whose popularity among women, Brown implies, is just one more reason for satisfaction at his death. Gradually in the eighteenth century 'Adonis' takes on connotations of effeminacy; Pope, for instance, consistently uses the name for an effeminate courtier, especially his arch-enemy, the homosexual Lord Harvey.⁶ This conception can be seen colliding with the Shakespearean one when William Mason describes a youth as being handsome as Adonis, 'Yet not like that rough woman-hater; /No, he was half a *petit-maitre*'—that is, a dandy or fop.

In 1749 the poet and critic Joseph Warton, welcoming a new translation of Pindar's *Odes*, wrote:

Away, enervate bards, away,
Who spin the silken courtly lay
As wreaths for some vain Louis' head,
Or mourn some soft Adonis dead:
No more your polished lyrics boast.
In English Pindar's strength o'erwhelmed and lost.

This is what the Adonis theme had come down to in the mid-eighteenth century: damned by association with effeminacy and flattery, it was now a byword for merely trivial, insubstantial court poetry. From this low point it was the achievement of the Romantics, especially Shelley, to restore the myth to something of its former stature.

Romantic revival: Shelley and the pastoral elegy

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a new interest in myth caused both scholars and writers to look seriously once again at the meanings of the Venus and Adonis story. Once again the allegorical tradition rose to the fore: Adonis was now seen once again as the dying and revived god, and his myth as a symbol of resurrection.

Perhaps the first work to take this approach was *The Botanic Garden* (A19), Erasmus Darwin's extraordinary poetic exposition of geology, biology, and botany. It is no doubt misleading to include Darwin in a discussion of the Romantics, but he is a hard figure to classify: his style and didactic form are thoroughly Augustan, his scientific interests look forward to the Victorian era and the researches of his grandson Charles Darwin, while his faith in myth as a vehicle for scientific truth harks back to Bacon and the Renaissance mythographers. Darwin's treatment of Adonis is particularly close to Spenser's in the Gardens of Adonis episode. Adonis is the embodiment of living matter; his descent to the underworld and his resurrection symbolise the endless cycle by which dead and decaying animal and vegetable matter is reabsorbed into the soil to fertilise new life.

If Darwin belongs to the allegorical tradition of Spenser, John Keats's *Endymion* (A20) is an epyllion in the tradition of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*—though with hints of a cloudy underlying allegory. There is little trace of allegory, however, in the concrete physicality of Keats's Adonis or the sensuous evocation of the smells, tastes, textures, colours and sounds of his bower; and little sense of mythic grandeur in the comically unimpressed account of the love affair given by one of Venus's cupids ('I was half glad... When the boar tusked him'). Nevertheless, Keats's version of the story, by which Adonis after his death is permitted to spend six months in enchanted sleep and six months in the company of Venus, does once again foreground the ideas of death and resurrection.

The greatest Romantic treatment of the myth is Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Adonais* (A21), an elegy for the death of Keats. Shelley's use of the Adonis story was no doubt partly suggested by Keats's own use of it in *Endymion*. At the same time, he was explicitly imitating two classical works, Bion's lament for Adonis (A2) and Moschus's lament for Bion (A3), both of which he had translated; and in doing so, he was tapping into an ancient and complex literary tradition which links the Adonis legend with the genre of pastoral elegy for a dead poet.

Bion and Moschus were both writing in the pastoral genre created by their predecessor Theocritus, about an idealised rural world in which shepherds and goatherds spend their time piping and singing about their loves, jealousies, and griefs. Pastoral lends itself to funeral elegy, partly because the genre's frank artificiality helps to distance and formalise grief; and the implicit metaphor of shepherd-as-poet makes it particularly appropriate to an elegy for a poet. So Moschus portrays Bion as a shepherd piping to his flock; he shows the whole natural world as mourning and indeed dying in sympathy with the poet's death; he invokes the deaths of earlier great poets; he questions divine justice...all elements that became conventions of the genre. Moschus alludes only briefly to Adonis and the grief of Aphrodite at his death; nevertheless, the connections of the poem to Bion's lament for Adonis, and the association of Adonis with ritualised mourning and with the themes of death and resurrection, meant that the Adonis myth became closely entwined with the tradition of pastoral elegy.

The most famous of English elegies, Milton's *Lycidas*, never explicitly refers to Adonis; nevertheless, some critics have argued that the myth underlies its images of the cycle of the seasons and the death and revival of vegetation, and its contrast between burial in the soil and the bleak decay of Lycidas's corpse as it tosses (like Adonis) on the sea. Milton both uses and questions the conventions of the genre, switching between pagan and Christian perspectives; his final dramatic shift in tone—'Weep no more, sad shepherds, weep no more, /For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead'—leads to both a Christian vision of Lycidas's soul in heaven and a pagan vision of him as 'the genius [guardian spirit] of the shore'. Milton's brilliant handling of the genre, however, was not matched by its increasingly routine use through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to honour every VIP's death. Two Restoration examples, John Oldham's elegy for Rochester as 'Bion' (A15) and Thomas Andrews's elegy for Oldham as 'Adonis' (A16), suggest both the routineness and the potential incongruity of the convention.

Shelley, however, like Milton, rethinks and reinvigorates the conventions of the genre and of the myth. He establishes his departure from the original Adonis myth by two bold changes of name: the hero is not Adonis but 'Adonais' (suggesting the Hebrew *Adonai*, Lord God); and the chief mourner is not Venus, Adonis's lover, but Urania, Adonais's mother. In early drafts the mourner was identified allegorically as 'great Poesy', but 'Urania' is a more resonant name, fusing the figure of Aphrodite Urania (the goddess of heavenly rather than earthly love) with that of Urania the muse, especially the 'heavenly muse' invoked by Milton in *Paradise Lost* (see O20d). Shelley echoes elements in both Bion and Moschus, but pervasively turns the physical details of the ancient poems into allegories of thought and feeling: the poison which killed Bion becomes a symbol of the hostile criticism which destroyed Keats; the attendants who tend the body are not Loves but Thoughts, personifications of Keats's poetic creations; Urania wounds her feet, not on brambles but (almost grotesquely) on hard human hearts and tongues.

At the same time, Shelley goes beyond the consolations offered by the myth and the ancient poems. It is no consolation to Shelley that Adonais's grave once again produces flowers in the spring (stanzas 18–20): Adonais is not Adonis, the dying corn god, but a human being and a poet, and what matters is not the perpetual renewal of his physical body (as in Spenser or Erasmus Darwin) but the apparent annihilation of his mind and soul. The turning-point in the poem is Shelley's recognition (in stanzas 42–43) that Adonais/Keats is still alive in nature, not merely as recycled matter, but as a spiritual force, part of the universal mind and soul that animates nature and pushes it towards perfection. From that point the poem sweeps on to its visionary conclusion, in which Shelley seems to call for an abandonment of the material world for an ideal otherworld of pure thought and pure being. This is very far from the Adonis myth, which is deeply rooted in the material world; the conclusion of *Adonais* in effect repudiates and leaves behind the myth which was its starting-point.

'The grief of gods': Victorian and Edwardian Adonises

After Shelley's *Adonais*, the remainder of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century produce few memorable reimaginings of the Venus and Adonis story. There are many passing and decorative allusions, especially in connexion with flowers;

we are often reminded of Adonis's blood on the petals of the rose, Wordsworth's 'Love Lies Bleeding' associates Adonis with the drooping petals of that flower, and De Tabley in 'Lines to a Ladybird' creates a whimsical myth of origin for the insects as drops of blood from Venus' wounded heel.

More extended Victorian retellings stress the story's sadness, lingering over Adonis's death and Venus's grief. Unlike Renaissance and eighteenth-century versions which tend to treat the characters as merely human, Victorian versions restore them to the grandeur of divinity, finding the irony and pathos of the story in the image of the all-powerful goddess brought down by the pains of mortal love. Venus/Aphrodite often becomes the focus or speaker of the poem: so Robert Bulwer-Lytton (A22) has her refusing to despair even though the world is locked in icy winter; R.W.Buchanan has her riding the sun's chariot, searching the earth for signs of Adonis's resurrection. Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper (writing as 'Michael Field') show the proud goddess reduced to mere womanhood, 'torn/By mortal pangs, to inmost godhead slain', as she confronts 'All those immortal limbs can learn of death'; very similarly, Rupert Brooke in 1910 shows Venus's 'one eternal instant' of joy shattered by Adonis's death, as 'The immortal limbs flashed to the human lover, /And the immortal eyes to look on death'.

In some late nineteenth-century versions we sense, behind the lament for Adonis, the pathos of the fading away of the classical gods and their myths in an unsympathetic modern world. In De Tabley's 'Lament for Adonis' (A23), Adonis does not rise from the dead, and indifferent nature fails to answer the traditional call to lament for him:

Nature is greater than the grief of gods,
And Pan prevails, while dynasties in heaven
Rule out their little eons and resign
The thunder and the throne to younger hands.

A similar melancholy and world-weariness pervades Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's poem (A24), in which Adonis dies because 'the gods did love [him]', and so took him from the world before the perfection of his youth could be marred by age. 'The Gardens of Adonis' for John Payne (1902) are a place of dreamy peace and silence where wounded love can be laid to sleep—a place far removed from the bustling fertility of Spenser's gardens. By the end of the nineteenth century the Adonis legend has become an affair of sweetly sad nostalgia. In the early twentieth century, however, the violent and earthy aspects of the legend are brought back into startling focus.

Frazer and the dying god in the twentieth century

This latest resurrection of Adonis was largely the work of the classical scholar and anthropologist Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, published in a series of volumes over twenty-five years from 1890 to 1915 (A25). Central to Frazer's encyclopaedic and sprawling study are the linked figures of the 'dying god', whose death and resurrection embodies and maintains the cycle of life, and the sacred and sacrificial king, who represents the god and whose life is sacrificed (literally or symbolically) to maintain the prosperity of his people. The volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*

(1906) link the three deities as lovers of the great goddess and embodiments of the decay and regrowth of plants and crops; later volumes take in other dying and resurrected deities such as Demeter and Persephone, Dionysus, Odin, Balder, and Christ. The rationalist Frazer implicitly challenges Christianity by suggesting that Christ's resurrection is just another example of a widespread mythic pattern. The literary appeal of Frazer's writing, perhaps, comes from his combination of scientific detachment and witty scepticism about the follies of 'magic and religion' with a poetic appreciation of the beauty of the ancient myths and rituals. Ironically, as we have seen, modern scholars are sceptical of Frazer's own methods and conclusions, and regard *The Golden Bough* as a work more of literature than of science. But its literary impact is undeniable: its account of the mythological vision of the world inspired many of the major 'modernist' writers of the earlier twentieth century, including Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, and Pound (see Vickery 1973).

T.S.Eliot drew both upon Frazer ('Anyone who is acquainted with these works,' he notes, 'will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies') and upon Jessie L. Weston's study of the Holy Grail legends, *From Ritual to Romance*, in creating the landscape of *The Waste Land* (A27): an arid, sterile wilderness ruled by a sick and impotent king, imaging the spiritual, intellectual, political and sexual wasteland of the western world after the First World War. Despite repeated 'references to vegetation ceremonies' there is little sign of rebirth in the poem's opening section, 'The Burial of the Dead': seeds huddle underground fearing the ordeal of birth, the clairvoyant Madame Sosostriis cannot 'find/The Hanged Man' (the dying god/Christ) in her tarot pack, and the idea of resurrection arouses horror rather than hope: 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, /Has it begun to sprout?' Later in the poem there are hints of possible regeneration—especially in the images of 'death by water', which echo the floating of the figure of Adonis out to sea—but it ends with no clear sign of change. Though Eliot never names Adonis, we may read this as a world in which the dying god does not rise from the dead, in which (in the absence of the goddess and her lover) sexuality has become barren, bored, and sordid, and human beings are locked into a perpetual living death. Ezra Pound, Eliot's friend and editor of *The Waste Land*, makes a more positive use of the figure of Adonis in his *Cantos*. In this immense, shapeless, almost impenetrable work, written intermittently between 1917 and 1970, and mainly concerned with diagnosing the political and economic corruptions of modern society, the rituals of Adonis seem to stand for an older way of life more in harmony with nature—in Canto 47, for instance, where 'the sea is streaked red with Adonis' as lighted lamps float seaward, and 'Wheat shoots rise new by the altar, /flower from the swift seed.'

Archibald McLeish's 'The Pot of Earth' (A28) is more equivocal about the 'natural' values embodied in the Adonis story. The poem, which takes its title and epigraph from Frazer's discussion of the 'Gardens of Adonis' and repeatedly invokes images of the rituals of the dying god, falls into three sections describing a young woman's childhood and puberty ('The Sowing of the Dead Corn'), marriage and pregnancy ('The Shallow Grass'), childbirth and death ('The Carrion Corn'). The poem creates a sense of an individual human being caught up in the ancient, inescapable cycle of 'birth, copulation, and death', but also of her frightened, helpless rebellion against that cycle: 'why, then, must I hurry? /There are things I have to do/More than just to live and die/More than just to die of living.' As Shelley lamented in *Adonais*, nature, in its cycle of endless selfperpetuation, seems indifferent to

the human mind and its aspirations. At the end of the poem an Eliotesque voice expounds the meaning of the myth:

Listen, I will interpret to you....
 I will show you the body of the dead god bringing forth
 The corn. I will show you the reaped ear
 Sprouting.
 Are you contented? Are you answered?

The question seems very much an open one.

H.D. and Yeats also, in rather different ways, use the myth to symbolise aspects of human experience. H.D. (A26), addressing Adonis, declares that 'Each of us like you/ has died once': we have all undergone the experience of emotional death and rebirth, symbolised in the dead autumn leaf which yet shines more gloriously than beaten gold, and so all participate in Adonis's godhead. For Yeats, in 'A Woman Young and Old' (A29), the recognition is more painful. His female speaker, again in an autumnal setting 'At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood', is angrily grieving over her loss of youth and beauty when she encounters the procession of the dying god Adonis, and shockingly recognises him as her own lost lover—'no fabulous symbol... But my heart's victim and its torturer'. As in Shakespeare, the Venus-Adonis relationship becomes a perennial symbol of the pain and tragedy of love.

The modernist fascination with the dying god was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s. In the later twentieth century versions of the Adonis myth have been rarer, and with little sense of shared concerns or dialogue between them. It is hard to see any pattern in the diversity of (for instance) John Heath-Stubbs's pastoral elegy 'Wounded Tammuz' (1942); Kenneth Rexroth's contrasted visions of 'Adonis in Winter' and 'Adonis in Summer' (1944; A30); Daryl Hine's love poem 'The Wound' (1957); and Constantine Trypanis's surreal 'Elegies of a Glass Adonis' (1972). W.H.Auden and Chester Kallman's opera *The Bassarids* (1963) includes a comic intermezzo, 'The Judgement of Calliope', which dramatises that rare version of the legend in which the Muse Calliope arbitrates the rival claims of Aphrodite and Persephone to Adonis; and Carol Orlock's novel *The Goddess Letters* includes Persephone's own account of the love affair. Ted Hughes's *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, a work poised between criticism and mythmaking, argues that the Venus and Adonis myth is the key to Shakespeare's entire artistic vision. These scattered and diverse texts suggest that the later twentieth century is another fallow period for the Adonis myth; but its history leaves little doubt that, at some point, it will make yet another seasonal return.

Notes

- 1 In another version, recorded by the Roman mythographer Hyginus (*De astronomia*, 7.2. 3), Zeus diplomatically referred the dispute to the Muse Calliope, and her compromise judgement so infuriated Aphrodite that she stirred up the Bacchantes to kill Calliope's son Orpheus. This variant did not become an accepted part of either story, but it demonstrates the web of unexpected connexions that can always sprout between myths.
- 2 There are a number of variant spellings: Tamuz, Thammuz, Thamus...
- 3 As noted in the headnote to the poem, the attribution is probably wrong, but (since the author is otherwise nameless) it is a convenient fiction.
- 4 Other Renaissance writers, perhaps following Spenser, made the same assumption: not only Milton (discussed below), but also Giles Fletcher ('Adonis' garden was to this but vain'), and Ben Jonson (the courtier Fastidious Brisk in *Every Man Out of His Humour* boasts that 'the Hesperides, the Insulae Fortunatae, Adonis' gardens' were all merely 'imperfect figures' of the perfection of Queen Elizabeth's court). Shakespeare is closer to the classical image when in *1 Henry VI* the French Dauphin tells Joan of Arc that her 'promises are like Adonis' gardens, / That one day bloomed and fruitful were the next' (1. 8. 6-7)—the ironic implication that they will wither equally fast is obvious.
- 5 The erotic connotations of 'Adonis' in the eighteenth century are suggested by a potent drink known as 'Spirit of Adonis'—or, more popularly, 'Strip-me-naked' or 'Lay-medown-softly' (Tucker 1967:55).
- 6 I cannot resist quoting the couplet in which Pope gleefully imagines how difficult courtly gambling would be in a barter economy: ' [Shall] soft Adonis, so perfumed and fine, / Drive to St James's a whole herd of swine?' ('Epistle to Bathurst', lines 61-2).

TEXTS

A1 Theocritus, *Idyll 15: The Festival of Adonis*, third century BC. Trans. Francis Fawkes, 1767^o

Theocritus, Hellenistic Greek poet of the third century BC, was born in Sicily but spent much of his career on the island of Cos and in Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, where he worked at the court of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus. His major works are the *Idylls* (the name originally meant something like ‘short pieces’ or ‘sketches’). Theocritus is most famous in European literature as the creator of the pastoral genre, and many of the idylls are set in a pastoral world of shepherds and goatherds; but others, like this one, have an urban setting. In *Idyll 15* two suburban housewives, Gorgo and Praxinoe, visit the royal palace of Alexandria to take part in the festival of Adonis. The eighteenth-century translation by Francis Fawkes, 1720–77, catches some of the colloquial ease of the dialogue.

GORGO: Pray, is Praxinoe^o at home?

EUNOE:^o Dear Gorgo, yes—how late you come!

PRAXINOE: Well! is it you? Maid, bring a chair
And cushion.

GORGO: Thank you.

PRAXINOE: Pray sit there.

5 GORGO: Lord bless me! what a bustling throng!
I scarce could get alive along.

In chariots such a heap of folks!
And men in arms, and men in cloaks—

Besides I live so distant hence

10 The journey really is immense.

PRAXINOE: My husband—heaven his senses mend!—

Here will inhabit the world’s end,

This horrid house, or rather den,

More fit for savages than men.

15 This scheme with envious aim he labours,

Only to separate good neighbours—

My plague eternal!

GORGO: Softly, pray,

The child attends to all you say;

Name not your husband when he’s by—

20 Observe how earnest is his eye!

PRAXINOE: Sweet Zopy!^o there’s a bonny lad,

^o ‘*Idyllium XIV: The Syracusan Gossips*’, from *The Idylliums of Theocritus*, trans. Francis Fawkes, London, 1767, pp. 132–47.

^o **Praxinoe**: four syllables: Prax-IN-oh-ee.

^o **Eunoe**: Praxinoe’s maid (modern editors give this line to Praxinoe herself).

^o **Zopy**: a pet name for the child, Zopyrion.

Cheer up! I did not mean your dad.

GORGO: 'Tis a good dad.—I'll take an oath,
The urchin understands us both.

25 PRAXINOE: (Let's talk as if some time ago,
And then we shall be safe, you know.)
This person happened once to stop
To purchase nitre at a shop,
And what d'ye think? the silly creature
30 Bought salt, and took it for saltpetre.

GORGO: My husband's such another honey,
And thus, as idly, spends his money;
Five fleeces for seven drachms he bought,
Coarse as dog's hair, not worth a groat.^o
35 But take your cloak, and garment graced
With clasps, that lightly binds your waist.
Adonis' festival invites,
And Ptolemy's gay court delights:
Besides, our matchless queen,^o they say,
40 Exhibits some grand sight today.

PRAXINOE: No wonder—everybody knows
Great folks can always make fine shows.
But tell me what you went to see,
And what you heard—'tis new to me.

45 GORGO: The feast now calls us hence away,
And we shall oft keep holiday.

PRAXINOE: Maid! water quickly—set it down—
Lord! how indelicate you're grown!
Disperse these cats that love their ease—
50 But first the water, if you please—
Quick! how she creeps; pour, hussy, pour;
You've spoiled my gown—so, so—no more.
Well, now I'm washed—ye Gods be blest!—
Here—bring the key of my large chest.

55 GORGO: This robe becomes you mighty well;
What might it cost you, can you tell?

PRAXINOE: Three pounds, or more; I'd not have done it,
But that I'd set my heart upon it.

GORGO: 'Tis wonderous cheap.

PRAXINOE: You think so?—Maid,

^o **drachms**: a Greek silver coin; **groat**: an old English coin worth four pennies.

^o **our matchless queen**: Arsinoe, wife and sister of King Ptolemy II Philadelphia (the Ptolemies, originally Greek, adopted the Egyptian royal custom of brother-sister marriages).

60 Fetch my umbrella and my shade.
 So, put it on.—Fie, Zopy, fie!
 Stay within doors, and don't you cry.
 The horse will kick you in the dirt—
 Roar as you please, you shan't get hurt.
 65 Pray, maid, divert him—come, 'tis late:
 Call in the dog, and shut the gate.

[In the street]

Lord! here's a bustle and a throng—
 How shall we ever get along!
 Such numbers cover all the way,
 70 Like emmets^o on a summer's day.

O Ptolemy, thy fame exceeds
 Thy godlike sire's in noble deeds!
 No robber now with Pharian^o wiles
 The stranger of his purse beguiles;
 75 No ruffians now infest the street,
 And stab the passengers^o they meet.

What shall we do? Lo, here advance
 The king's war-horses—how they prance!
 Don't tread upon me, honest friend—
 80 Lord, how that mad horse rears an end!
 He'll throw his rider down, I fear—
 I'm glad I left the child, my dear.

GORG0: Don't be afraid; the danger's o'er;
 The horses, see! are gone before.

85 PRAXIN0E: I'm better now, but always quake
 Whene'er I see a horse or snake;
 They rear, and look so fierce and wild—
 I own, I've loathed them from a child.
 Walk quicker—what a crowd is this!

90 GORG0: Pray, come you from the palace?

OLD WOMAN: Yes.

GORG0: Can we get in, d'ye think?

OLD WOMAN: Make trial—

The steady never take denial;
 The steady Greeks old Ilium^o won:
 By trial, all things may be done.

^o **emmets:** ants.

^o **Pharian:** Egyptian (Praxinoe, a Greek settler, looks down on the native Egyptians).

^o **passengers:** passers-by.

^o **Ilium:** Troy.

- 95 GORGO: Gone, like a riddle, in the dark.
 These crones, if we their tales remark,^o
 Know better far than I or you know
 How Jupiter was joined to Juno.^o
 Lo! at the gate, what crowds are there!
- 100 PRAXINOE: Immense, indeed! Your hand, my dear:
 And let the maids join hands, and close us,
 Lest in the bustle they should lose us.
 Let's crowd together through the door—
 Heavens bless me! how my gown is tore!
- 105 By Jove, but this is past a joke—
 Pray, good sir, don't you rend my cloak.
 MAN: I can't avoid it; I'm so pressed.
 PRAXINOE: Like pigs they justle, I protest.^o
 MAN: Cheer up, for now we're safe and sound.
- 110 PRAXINOE: May you in happiness abound,
 For you have served us all you can.—
 Gorgo!—a mighty civil man—
 See how the folks poor Eunoe justle!
 Push through the crowd, girl!—bustle, bustle—
- 115 Now we're all in, as Dromo said,
 When he had got his bride in bed.^o
 GORGO: Lo! what rich hangings grace the rooms—
 Sure they were wove in heavenly looms.
 PRAXINOE: Gracious! how delicately fine
- 120 The work! how noble the design!
 How true, how happy is the draught!^o
 The figures seem informed with thought—
 No artists sure the story wove;
 They're real men—they live, they move.
- 125 From these amazing works we find,
 How great, how wise the human mind.
 Lo! stretched upon a silver bed,
 (Scarce has the down his cheeks o'erspread)
 Adonis lies—O, charming show!—

^o **remark:** take notice of.

^o **Know better... to Juno:** i.e. they behave as if they knew everything, even the bedroom secrets of the gods.

^o **protest:** declare.

^o **Now... in bed:** in the original, 'as the bridegroom said when he shut the door'; **Dromo** is Fawkes's addition, and unexplained.

^o **How true... draught:** How accurate and natural is the drawing!

- 130 Loved by the sable Powers below.
 STRANGER: Hist!^o your Sicilian prate forbear.
 Your mouths extend from ear to ear,
 Like turtles^o that for ever moan;
 You stun us with your rustic tone.^o
- 135 GORGO: Sure, we may speak! What fellow's this?
 And do you take it, sir, amiss?
 Go, keep Egyptian slaves in awe;
 Think not to give Sicilians law.
 Besides, we're of Corinthian mould,
 As was Bellerophon of old:
 140 Our language is entirely Greek—
 The Dorians may the Doric speak.
- PRAXINOE: O sweet Proserpina, sure none
 Presumes to give us law but one!
 145 To us there is no fear you should
 Do harm, who cannot do us good.
- GORGO: Hark! the Greek girl's about to raise
 Her voice in fair Adonis' praise;
 She's a sweet pipe for funeral airs:
 150 She's just beginning, she prepares:
 She'll Sperchis^o and the world excel,
 That by her prelude you may tell.

THE GREEK GIRL SINGS

- O chief of Golgos, and the Idalian grove,
 And breezy Eryx,^o beauteous queen of Love!
 155 Once more the soft-foot hours, approaching slow,
 Restore Adonis from the realms below;
 Welcome to man they come with silent pace,
 Diffusing benisons^o to human race.
 O Venus, daughter of Dione fair,

^o **Hist!:** Shh!

^o **turtles:** i.e. turtle-doves.

^o **rustic tone:** the Stranger objects to the women's **Doric** accent, which he compares to the monotonous cooing of doves. The **Doric** or **Dorian** dialect was originally spoken in the Peloponnese, the southern part of Greece, but spread by colonisation to other parts of the Mediterranean; Syracuse in Sicily—the birthplace of Gorgo and Praxinoe, and of Theocritus—was settled by colonists from the Greek city of **Corinth** (home of the hero **Bellerophon**). Most of Theocritus's poetry is written in Dorian dialect, which came to be regarded as the appropriate language for pastoral; to other Greeks it had a 'rustic tone', a suggestion of hicks from the back country.

^o **Sperchis:** presumably a rival singer.

^o **Golgos** and **Idalium** in Cyprus, and **Eryx** in Sicily, are places sacred to Aphrodite.

^o **benisons:** blessings.

160 You gave to Berenice's^o lot to share
 Immortal joys in heavenly regions blest,
 And with divine ambrosia filled her breast.
 And now in due return, O heavenly born!
 Whose honoured name a thousand fanes^o adorn,
 165 Arsinoe pays the pompous^o rites divine,
 Rival of Helen, at Adonis' shrine.
 All fruits she offers that ripe autumn yields,
 The produce of the gardens and the fields;
 All herbs and plants which silver baskets hold;
 170 And Syrian unguents flow from shells of gold.
 With finest meal sweet paste the women make,
 Oil, flowers and honey mingling in the cake;
 Earth and the air afford a large supply
 Of animals that creep, and birds that fly.
 175 Green bowers are built with dill sweet-smelling crowned,
 And little Cupids hover all around,
 And, as young nightingales their wings essay,
 Skip here and there, and hop from spray to spray.
 What heaps of golden vessels glittering bright!
 180 What stores of ebon^o black and ivory white!
 In ivory carved large eagles seem to move,
 And through the clouds bear Ganymede to Jove.
 Lo! purple tapestry arranged on high
 Charms the spectators with the Tyrian dye;
 185 The Samian and Milesian swains,^o who keep
 Large flocks, acknowledge 'tis more soft than sleep:
 Of this Adonis claims a downy bed,
 And lo! another for fair Venus spread!
 Her bridegroom scarce attains to nineteen years,
 190 Rosy his lips, and no rough beard appears.
 Let raptured Venus now enjoy her mate,
 While we, descending to the city gate,
 Arrayed in decent robes that sweep the ground,
 With naked bosoms, and with hair unbound,
 195 Bring forth Adonis, slain in youthful years,
 Ere Phoebus drinks the morning's early tears.
 And while to yonder flood^o we march along,
 With tuneful voices raise the funeral song.

^o **Berenice:** mother of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe, deified after her death in 270.

^o **fanés:** temples.

^o **pompous:** magnificent (not a derogatory word).

^o **ebon:** ebony.

^o **swains:** shepherds; wool from Samos and Miletos was famous for its quality.

^o **flood:** sea.

Adonis, you alone of demigods,
 200 Now visit earth, and now hell's dire abodes:
 Not famed Atrides^o could this favour boast,
 Nor furious Ajax, though himself an host;
 Nor Hector, long his mother's grace and joy
 Of twenty sons, not Pyrrhus safe from Troy,
 205 Not brave Patroclus of immortal fame,
 Nor the fierce Lapithæ, a deathless name;
 Nor sons of Pelops, nor Deucalion's race,
 Nor stout Pelasgians, Argos' honoured grace.

As now, divine Adonis, you appear
 210 Kind to our prayers, O bless the future year!
 As now propitious to our vows you prove,
 Return with meek benevolence and love.

GORGO: O, famed for knowledge in mysterious things!
 How sweet, Praxinoe, the damsel sings!
 215 Time calls me home to keep my husband kind;
 He's prone to anger if he has not dined.
 Farewell, Adonis, loved and honoured boy;
 O come, propitious, and augment our joy.

**A2 Bion, 'Lament for Adonis', c. 100 BC. Trans.
 Anthony Holden, 1974^o**

Bion was a lyrical and pastoral poet around the beginning of the first century BC; little is known about his life except that he was born near Smyrna in Asia Minor, worked in Sicily, and (according to the 'Lament for Bion') died by poisoning.

I weep for Adonis, cry, 'Fair Adonis is dead';
 'Fair Adonis is dead,' the Loves echo my grief.
 Sleep no more, Cypris,^o shrouded in purple,
 awake to this grief, and put on mourning,
 5 beat your breast and tell all mankind:
 'Fair Adonis is dead.'

I weep for Adonis; the Loves echo my grief.

Fair Adonis lies high in the hills, his thigh
 holed by a tusk, white into white.

^o **Atrides:** i.e. Agamemnon—the start of a rather ill-assorted list of heroes which Kenneth Dover calls a 'clumsy rampage through mythology'.

^o from *Greek Pastoral Poetry*, trans. Anthony Holden, Penguin, 1973, pp. 167–70. Copyright © Anthony Holden, 1974. Reproduced by permission of the author c/o Rogers, Coleridge & White Ltd, 20 Powis Mews, London W11 1JN.

^o **Cypris:** a name for Aphrodite, as goddess of Cyprus.

Sing, Sicilian Muses, raise your song of grief.

But justice comes to all. For me, this song
 shall be my mournful elegy upon your death.
 140 Had I been able to descend to Tartarus,
 as Orpheus did, Odysseus, and once Alcides,^o
 then perhaps I would have come
 to Hades' throne, and, if you sing for him,
 listened to you, and to what it is you sing.
 145 Let it be some song of Sicily,
 for Persephone, some sweet country song,
 for she too is Sicilian, she once played
 on Etna's shores; she knows Dorian music;
 your singing would not go unrewarded.
 150 As once she granted Orpheus, for the rhythms
 of his harp, the return of his Eurydice,
 so shall she return you, Bion, to the hills.
 Could my pipe ever match the magic of his harp,
 I would myself have sung for you to Hades.

**A4 Ovid, from the *Metamorphoses*, c. AD 10. Trans.
 A.D.Melville, 1986^o**

The story of Adonis is one of the tales which Orpheus sings 'Of boys beloved of gods and girls bewitched/By lawless fires who paid the price of lust', in book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid tells the story of Venus and Adonis itself quite briefly. It is preceded by a much longer version of the story of Adonis's mother, Myrrha, and has inset into it a long version of the tale of Atalanta and Hippomenes, which Venus tells to Adonis. Our passage begins as King Cinyras discovers that the girl who has been sharing his bed is his daughter Myrrha.

Dumb in agony, he drew
 890 His flashing sword that hung there. Myrrha fled.
 The darkness and the night's blind benison^o
 Saved her from death. Across the countryside
 She wandered till she left the palm-fringed lands
 Of Araby and rich Panchaia's fields.^o

^o **Alcides:** i.e. Hercules.

^o from *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D.Melville, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 10. 474–739 (pp. 240–2, 247–8). Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

^o **benison:** blessing.

^o **Panchaia:** a legendary eastern land rich in spices.

395 Nine times the crescent of the moon returned
 And still she roamed, and then she found at last
 Rest for her weariness on Saba's soil.^o
 She scarce could bear the burden of her womb.
 And then, not knowing what to wish, afraid
 000 Of death and tired of life, she framed these words
 Of prayer: If Powers of heaven are open to
 The cries of penitents, I've well deserved—
 I'll not refuse—the pain of punishment,
 But lest I outrage, if I'm left alive,
 005 The living, or, if I shall die, the dead,
 Expel me from both realms; some nature give
 That's different; let me neither die nor live![?]
 Some Power is open to a penitent;
 For sure her final prayer found gods to hear.
 010 For, as she spoke, around her legs the earth
 Crept up; roots thrusting from her toes
 Spread sideways, firm foundations of a trunk;
 Her bones gained strength; though marrow still remained,
 Blood became sap, her fingers twigs, her arms
 015 Branches, her skin was hardened into bark.
 And now the growing tree had tightly swathed
 Her swelling womb, had overlapped her breast,
 Ready to wrap her neck. She would not wait,
 But sinking down to meet the climbing wood,
 020 Buried her face and forehead in the bark.
 Though with her body she had forfeited
 Her former feelings, still she weeps and down
 The tree the warm drops ooze. Those tears in truth
 Have honour; from the trunk the weeping myrrh
 025 Keeps on men's lips for aye^o the name of her.

 The child conceived in sin had grown inside
 The wood and now was searching for some way
 To leave its mother and thrust forth. The trunk
 Swelled in the middle with its burdened womb.
 030 The load was straining, but the pains of birth
 Could find no words, nor voice in travail call
 Lucina.^o Yet the tree, in labour, stooped

^o **Saba's soil:** Arabia. (It seems a little odd that Myrrha could 'wander' on foot from Cyprus to Arabia, but Ovid is blending two traditions, one of which places the story in Cyprus, the other in Assyria.).

^o **for aye:** for ever.

^o **Lucina:** Roman goddess of childbirth.

With groan on groan and wet with falling tears.
 Then, pitying, Lucina stood beside
 935 The branches in their pain and laid her hands
 Upon them and pronounced the words of birth.
 The tree split open and the sundered bark
 Yielded its living load; a baby boy
 Squalled, and the Naiads laid him on soft grass
 940 And bathed him in his mother's flowing tears.
 Envy herself would praise his looks; for like
 The little naked Loves that pictures show
 He lay there, give or take the slender bow.

 Time glides in secret and his wings deceive;
 945 Nothing is swifter than the years. That son,
 Child of his sister and his grandfather,
 So lately bark-enswathed, so lately born,
 Then a most lovely infant, then a youth,
 And now a man more lovely than the boy,
 950 Was Venus' darling (Venus'!) and avenged
 His mother's passion.^o Once, when Venus' son^o
 Was kissing her, his quiver dangling down,
 A jutting arrow, unbeknown, had grazed
 Her breast. She pushed the boy away.
 955 In fact the wound was deeper than it seemed,
 Though unperceived at first. Enraptured by
 The beauty of a man, she cared no more
 For her Cythera's shores nor sought again
 Her sea-girt Paphos nor her Cnidos, famed
 960 For fish, nor her ore-laden Amathus.^o
 She shunned heaven too: to heaven she preferred
 Adonis. Him she clung to, he was her
 Constant companion. She who always used
 To idle in the shade and take such pains
 965 To enhance her beauty, roamed across the hills,
 Through woods and brambly boulders, with her dress
 Knee-high like Dian's, urging on the hounds,
 Chasing the quarry when the quarry's safe—
 970 But keeping well away from brigand wolves
 And battling boars and bears well-armed with claws
 Does and low-leaping hares and antlered deer—

^o **avenged his mother's passion:** a hint of the idea, explicit in Apollodorus, that Myrrha's incestuous passion was caused by 'the wrath of Aphrodite'.

^o **Venus' son:** i.e. Cupid.

^o **Cythera's shores... Amathus:** places sacred to Venus: **Cythera** is an island near Sparta, **Cnidos** a city on the coast of Asia Minor, **Paphos** and **Amathus** in Cyprus.

And lions soaked in slaughter of the herds.
 She warned Adonis too, if warnings could
 Have been of any use, to fear those beasts.
 075 'Be brave when backs are turned, but when they're bold,
 Boldness is dangerous. Never be rash,
 My darling, to my risk; never provoke
 Quarry that nature's armed, lest your renown
 Should cost me dear. Not youth, not beauty, nor
 080 Charms that move Venus' heart can ever move
 Lions or bristly boars or eyes or minds
 Of savage beasts. In his curved tusks a boar
 Wields lightning; tawny lions launch their charge
 In giant anger. Creatures of that kind
 085 I hate.' And when Adonis asked her why,
 'I'll tell', she said, 'a tale to astonish you
 Of ancient guilt and magic long ago.
 But my unwonted toil has made me tired
 And, look, a poplar, happily at hand,
 090 Drops shade for our delight, and greensward gives
 A couch. Here I would wish to rest with you'
 (She rested) 'on the ground', and on the grass
 And him she lay, her head upon his breast,
 And mingling kisses with her words began...

Venus proceeds to tell the story of Atalanta, Hippomenes, and the golden apples. Atalanta was a brilliant athlete and runner who, having been warned by an oracle that if she married she would 'lose herself', declared that she would marry only the man who could defeat her in a foot race—the loser to be executed. Hippomenes, coming to take his chance in the contest, prayed to Venus, who gave him three golden apples. During the race he threw down each of the apples in turn; Atalanta could not resist swerving to pick them up, and so was beaten, not entirely to her disappointment. But Venus was offended when the triumphant Hippomenes forgot to offer thanks for her help. As the couple departed, she cursed them with a sudden attack of irresistible desire, which drove them to make love, sacrilegiously, in an ancient shrine of the mother-goddess Cybele. Cybele in turn prepares *her* revenge, and Atalanta's oracle is fulfilled...

'... The holy statues
 Turned their shocked eyes away and Cybele,
 The tower-crowned^o Mother, pondered should she plunge
 870 The guilty pair beneath the waves of Styx.
 Such punishment seemed light. Therefore their necks,
 So smooth before, she clothed with tawny manes,

^o **tower-crowned:** Cybele was depicted wearing a turreted crown and riding in a chariot drawn by lions.

Their fingers curved to claws; their arms were changed
 To legs; their chests swelled with new weight; with tails
 875 They swept the sandy ground; and in their eyes
 Cruel anger blazed and growls they gave for speech.
 Their marriage-bed is now a woodland lair,
 And feared by men, but by the goddess tamed,
 They champ—two lions—the bits of Cybele.
 880 And you, my darling, for my sake beware
 Of lions and of every savage beast
 That shows not heels but teeth; avoid them all
 Lest by your daring ruin on us fall.
 Her warning given, Venus made her way,
 885 Drawn by her silver swans across the sky;
 But his bold heart rebuffed her warning words.
 It chanced his hounds, hot on a well-marked scent,
 Put up^o a boar, lying hidden in the woods,
 And as it broke away Adonis speared it—
 890 A slanting hit—and quick with its curved snout
 The savage beast dislodged the bloody point,
 And charged Adonis as he ran in fear
 For safety, and sank its tusks deep in his groin
 And stretched him dying on the yellow sand.
 895 Venus was riding in her dainty chariot,
 Winged by her swans, across the middle air
 Making for Cyprus, when she heard afar
 Adonis' dying groans, and thither turned
 Her snowy birds and, when from heaven on high
 900 She saw him lifeless, writhing in his blood,
 She rent her garments, tore her lovely hair,
 And bitterly beat her breast, and springing down
 Reproached the Fates: 'Even so, not everything
 Shall own your sway. Memorials of my sorrow,
 905 Adonis, shall endure; each passing year
 Your death repeated in the hearts of men
 Shall re-enact my grief and my lament.
 But now your blood shall change into a flower:
 Persephone of old was given grace
 910 To change a woman's form to fragrant mint;^o
 And shall I then be grudged the right to change
 My prince?' And with these words she sprinkled nectar,

^o **Put up:** roused from hiding.

^o **Persephone...mint:** her name was Menthe ('mint'); according to another account, she was Pluto's mistress, and Persephone jealously trampled her underfoot before changing her into the herb.

Sweet-scented, on his blood, which at the touch
 Swelled up, as on a pond when showers fall
 915 Clear bubbles form; and ere an hour had passed
 A blood-red flower arose, like the rich bloom
 Of pomegranates which in a stubborn rind
 Conceal their seeds; yet is its beauty brief,
 So lightly cling its petals, fall so soon,
 920 When the winds blow that give the flower its name.^o

**A5 Apollodorus, from *The Library of Greek Mythology*,
 first or second century AD. Trans. Robin Hard, 1997^o**

The *Library* is a comprehensive brief handbook of Greek mythology. Traditionally ascribed to Apollodorus of Athens, a great literary scholar of the second century BC, it is now believed by scholars to be written much later, probably in the first or second century AD; however, the traditional name has stuck. ‘Apollodorus’ here briefly summarises the various forms of the Adonis story.

Arriving in Cyprus with some followers, Cinyras founded Paphos, where he married Metharme, daughter of Pygmalion, king of Cyprus, and became the father of Oxyporos and Adonis... Through the anger of Artemis, Adonis died in a hunt while he was still a young boy, from a wound inflicted by a boar. According to Hesiod, however, he was a son [not of Cinyras but] of Phoenix and Alpheisiboia, while according to Panyras, he was a son of Theias, king of Assyria, who had a daughter called Smyrna. And this Smyrna, through the wrath of Aphrodite (whom she had failed to honour), conceived a passion for her father, and enlisting the aid of her nurse, shared her father’s bed for twelve nights before he realized who she was. But when he found out, he drew his sword and chased after her. As he caught up with her, she prayed to the gods to be made invisible; and the gods, taking pity on her, turned her into a tree of the kind known as a *smyrna* [or myrrh tree]. Ten weeks later the tree burst open and Adonis, as he is called, was brought to birth. Struck by his beauty, Aphrodite, in secret from the gods, hid him in a chest while he was still a little child, and entrusted him to Persephone. But when Persephone caught sight of him, she refused to give him back. The matter was submitted to the judgement of Zeus; and dividing the year into three parts, he decreed that Adonis should spend a third of the year by himself, a third with Persephone, and the remaining third with Aphrodite (but Adonis assigned his own share also to Aphrodite). Later, however, while he was out hunting, Adonis was wounded by a boar and died.

^o **its name:** anemone (from Greek *anemos*, wind).

^o from *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Robin Hard, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 131–2 (3. 14. 4). Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

After long troubles and unmeet upbrays^o
 With which his mother Venus her reviled,
 And eke himself her cruelly exiled;
 But now in steadfast love and happy state
 She with him lives, and hath him borne a child,
 Pleasure, that doth both gods and men aggrate,^o
 Pleasure, the daughter of Cupid and Psyche late.^o

- 51 Hither great Venus brought this infant fair,
 The younger daughter of Chrysogoné,
 And unto Psyche with great trust and care
 Committed her, yfosterèd^o to be
 And trained up in true feminity;^o
 Who^o no less carefully her tenderèd^o
 Than her own daughter Pleasure, to whom she
 Made her companion, and her lessonèd^o
 In all the lore of love and goodly womanhead.^o

**A7 William Shakespeare, from *Venus and Adonis*,
1593^o**

Venus and Adonis was Shakespeare's first long narrative poem, and was enormously popular. Its variations on the traditional legend, and its influence on subsequent versions of the story, are discussed in the introduction. The extracts below comprise a little less than half of the poem, focusing on the lovers' initial encounter (stanzas 1–16, 39–40), their central arguments (68–71, 98–137), and Venus's final lament (170–99).

1

Even as the sun with purple-coloured face
 Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,

- ^o **unmeet upbrays:** undeserved reproaches.
- ^o **aggrate:** please.
- ^o **And his true love... Psyche late:** see ch. 3, 'Tales of love', p. 40, for the story of Cupid and Psyche.
- ^o **yfosterèd:** fostered.
- ^o **feminity:** womanliness.
- ^o **Who:** referring to Psyche.
- ^o **tenderèd:** looked after.
- ^o **lessonèd:** educated.
- ^o **womanhead:** womanhood.
- ^o from *Venus and Adonis*, London, 1593. (I have made the following emendations: 172.5, 'are' to 'as'; 176.4, 'had' to 'was'.)

Rose-cheeked Adonis hied him to the chase;^o
 Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.
 Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him^o
 And like a bold-faced suitor 'gins^o to woo him.

2

'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^o
 Saith that the world hath ending with thy life.

3

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

4

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

5

With this she seizeth on his sweating palm,
 The precedent of pith and livelihood,^o
 And, trembling in her passion, calls it balm,
 Earth's sovereign^o salve to do a goddess good.

- **hied him to the chase:** hurried to go hunting.
- **makes amain unto him:** heads at full speed towards him.
- **with herself at strife:** trying to surpass herself.
- **saddle-bow:** the arched front part of the saddle; the rein was tied to it to stop the horse straying.
- **meed:** reward.
- **honey:** sweet.
- **an hour but short:** only a short hour.
- **wasted:** spent.
- **precedent of pith and livelihood:** outward sign of his strength and vitality.
- **sovereign:** most potent.

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

6

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

7

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

8

So soon was she along^o 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,^o but soon she stops his lips,
 And kissing speaks, with lustful language broken,
 'If thou wilt chide, thy lips shall never open.'

9

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

- ^o **enraged:** driven wild (with desire rather than anger).
- ^o **courser:** a large, powerful horse, or (specifically) a stallion.
- ^o **unapt to toy:** disinclined for (sexual) play.
- ^o **stallèd:** tied.
- ^o **prove:** attempt.
- ^o **lust:** (i) will, desire, (ii) sexual appetite; i.e. she can control him physically but can't arouse him sexually or get him to do what she wants.
- ^o **along:** lying alongside.
- ^o **chide:** complain.
- ^o **miss:** misbehaviour.

10

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

11

Forced to content° but never to obey,
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 dewed with such distilling° showers.

12

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

13

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

- ° **Tires:** tears away
- ° **content:** put up with it.
- ° **So:** so long as.
- ° **distilling:** softly falling.
- ° **Look how:** just as.
- ° **awed:** frightened.
- ° **rank:** swollen.
- ° **Perforce:** necessarily.
- ° **Still:** all the time, continually.
- ° **lours:** frowns.
- ° **'Twixt:** between.
- ° **Her best... delight:** i.e. she loves him even better than best (an absurd hyperbole).

14

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

15

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

16

Never did passenger^o 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?...'

* * *

39

'Fondling,'^o she saith, 'since I have hemmed thee here
 Within the circuit of this ivory pale,^o
 I'll be a park and thou shalt be my deer.^o
 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.

40

'Within this limit is relief enough,
 Sweet bottom-grass^o and high delightful plain,

- ° **remove:** withdraw
- ° **divedapper:** dabchick (a small water-bird).
- ° **winks:** closes his eyes.
- ° **passenger:** traveller.
- ° **Fondling:** foolish boy.
- ° **this ivory pale:** i.e. her white arms, imaged as the **pale** or fence round a deer park. In the following lines Venus's body is metaphorically depicted as the park.
- ° **deer:** punning on 'dear'—one of Shakespeare's favourite puns.
- ° **bottom-grass:** low-lying grassland.

Round rising hillocks, brakes^o 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,^o though a thousand bark.’

Despite all Venus’s arguments, pleas, and physical force, Adonis prepares to ride away. But a mare appears out of the forest, and Adonis’s stallion enthusiastically breaks his tether and runs away after her; Adonis is left cursing, while Venus advises him that *that* is how a male should respond to a sexual invitation:

68

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

69

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

70

Who wears a garment shapeless and unfinished?
 Who plucks the bud before one leaf put forth?
 If springing^o things be any jot diminished
 They wither in their prime, prove nothing worth.
 The colt that’s backed^o and burdened being young,
 Loseth his pride and never waxeth^o strong.

- ^o **brakes:** clumps of trees.
- ^o **rouse thee:** hunt you out from cover.
- ^o **on presented joy:** of the opportunities of joy that you are given.
- ^o **proceedings:** actions.
- ^o **made perfect:** learnt.
- ^o **My love...disgrace it:** My only feeling about love is a wish to expose it as disgraceful.
- ^o **springing:** just beginning to grow.
- ^o **backed:** ridden.
- ^o **waxeth:** grows.

71

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

Finally—after Venus has been driven to faint, or pretend to—Adonis reluctantly allows her a kiss, which she takes with alarming enthusiasm ('having felt the sweetness of the spoil, /With blindfold fury she begins to forage'). At last the exhausted Adonis gets free and prepares to depart.

98

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

99

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

100

Now is she in the very lists^o of love,
 Her champion mounted for the hot encounter.
 All is imaginary she doth prove;^o

- **bootless:** pointless.
- **alarms:** assaults.
- **make no battery:** fail to batter down the defences.
- **watch:** stay awake.
- **whereat:** at which.
- **lawn:** a very fine white cloth.
- **Usurps:** takes over.
- **lists:** the arena for a tournament, where knights on horseback fight with lances.
- **All is imaginary she doth prove:** everything she experiences is imaginary—i.e. her fantasies will not be translated into reality.

He will not manage her,^o although he mount her,
 That worse than Tantalus' is her annoy,^o
 To clip Elysium^o and to lack her joy.

101

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

102

But all in vain, good queen—it will not be.
 She hath assayed as much as may be proved.^o
 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.'

103

'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,
 Whose tushes^o never-sheathed he whetteth^o still,
 Like to a mortal^o butcher bent^o to kill.

104

'On his bow-back^o he hath a battle^o set
 Of bristly pikes that ever threat his foes.

- ^o **manage her:** put her through her paces (a term from horsemanship).
- ^o **That...her annoy:** so that her suffering is worse than that of Tantalus (the sinner in the Underworld who was tormented by food and water just out of his reach).
- ^o **clip:** embrace; **Elysium** is the classical equivalent of heaven, the place of the blessed dead.
- ^o **Even so poor birds...:** a reference to a story of the Greek painter Zeuxis, that he painted a bunch of grapes so realistic that birds came to peck at it.
- ^o **surfeit by the eye, and pine the maw:** are overfed as far as the eyes are concerned, but starve as far as the stomach is.
- ^o **helpless:** useless.
- ^o **assayed as much as may be proved:** tried as much as she can.
- ^o **tushes:** tusks.
- ^o **whetteth:** sharpens.
- ^o **mortal:** deadly.
- ^o **bent:** determined.
- ^o **bow-back:** humped back.
- ^o **battle:** battle-line.

His eyes like glow-worms shine; when he doth fret^o
 His snout digs sepulchres where'er he goes.
 Being moved,^o he strikes whate'er is in his way,
 And whom he strikes his crooked tushes slay.

105

'His brawny sides with hairy bristles armed
 Are better proof^o than thy spear's point can enter.
 His short thick neck cannot be easily harmed.
 Being ireful, on the lion he will venture.
 The thorny brambles and embracing bushes,
 As fearful of him, part, through whom he rushes.

106

'Alas, he naught esteems^o that face of thine,
 To which love's eyes pays tributary gazes,
 Nor thy soft hands, sweet lips, and crystal eyne,^o
 Whose full perfection all the world amazes,
 But having thee at vantage^o (wondrous dread!)
 Would root^o these beauties as he roots the mead.^o

107

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

108

'Didst thou not mark my face—was it not white?
 Sawest thou not signs of fear lurk in mine eye?
 Grew I not faint, and fell I not downright?^o
 Within my bosom, whereon thou dost lie,

- ^o **fret:** rage.
- ^o **moved:** angered.
- ^o **proof:** armoured.
- ^o **naught esteems:** cares nothing for.
- ^o **eyne:** eyes.
- ^o **at vantage:** at his mercy.
- ^o **root:** tear up.
- ^o **mead:** meadow.
- ^o **cabin:** den.
- ^o **counsel of:** advice from.
- ^o **downright:** (i) immediately, (ii) straight down.

My boding^o heart pants, beats, and takes no rest,
But like an earthquake shakes thee on my breast.

109

‘For where love reigns, disturbing jealousy^o
Doth call himself affection’s sentinel,
Gives false alarms, suggesteth mutiny,^o
And in a peaceful hour doth cry, “Kill, kill!”,
Distempering^o gentle love in his desire,
As air and water do abate the fire.

110

‘This sour informer, this bate-breeding^o spy,
This canker^o that eats up love’s tender spring,^o
This carry-tale,^o dissentious jealousy,
That sometime true news, sometime false doth bring,
Knocks at my heart and whispers in mine ear
That if I love thee, I thy death should fear;

111

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

112

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

- ^o **boding:** foreboding.
- ^o **jealousy:** fear, anxiety (not ‘jealousy’ in the modern sense).
- ^o **suggesteth mutiny:** incites riots.
- ^o **Distempering:** disturbing.
- ^o **bate-breeding:** troublemaking.
- ^o **canker:** canker-worm (an insect which devours plants from within).
- ^o **tender spring:** young growth.
- ^o **carry-tale:** tale-bearer, gossipmonger.

113

‘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.
 Pursue these fearful creatures o’er the downs,
 And on thy well-breathed horse keep with thy hounds.

114

‘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
 He cranks and crosses° with a thousand doubles;°
 The many musits° through the which he goes
 Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.

115

‘Sometime he runs among a flock of sheep
 To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell;
 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.°

116

‘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.

- ° **Uncouple at:** unleash the dogs to hunt.
- ° **purblind:** weak-sighted.
- ° **cranks and crosses:** twists and turns.
- ° **doubles:** doublings-back.
- ° **musits:** gaps in hedges.
- ° **earth-delving conies keep:** burrowing rabbits live.
- ° **sorteth:** mingles.
- ° **shifts:** tricks.
- ° **wit waits on fear:** intelligence accompanies, i.e. is stimulated by, fear.
- ° **cold fault:** lost scent.

117

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

118

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

119

'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
Unlike myself^o thou hear'st me moralise,
Applying this to that and so to so,
For love can comment upon every woe.

120

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

121

'But if thou fall, O then imagine this:
The earth, in love with thee, thy footing trips,
And all is but to rob thee of a kiss.

- **Wat:** a traditional nickname for a hare.
- **Anon:** soon.
- **alarums:** calls to battle.
- **sore:** gravely.
- **passing-bell:** the bell tolled to mark someone's death, one ring for each year of their life.
- **indenting with:** zigzagging across.
- **stay:** pause.
- **leave:** stop (talking).
- **expected of:** expected by.

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.°

122

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

123

‘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,°
 Making it subject to the tyranny
 Of mad mischances and much misery;

124

‘As° burning fevers, agues pale and faint,
 Life-poisoning pestilence, and frenzies wood,°
 The marrow-eating sickness whose attainment°
 Disorder breeds by heating of the blood;
 Surfeits, impostumes,° grief, and damned despair
 Swear Nature’s death for framing thee so fair.

- **Rich preys make true men thieves:** even honest men can be tempted to steal something sufficiently desirable.
- **so do thy lips...die forsworn:** The moon is covered with clouds (Venus suggests) because Diana, the moon goddess, is unhappy at being tempted by the sight of Adonis to break her vows of chastity.
- **perceive the reason:** in the stanzas that follow Venus develops a kind of myth to explain the fallen nature of the world. Nature, in a kind of Promethean rebellion, stole ‘divine moulds’ from heaven to make Adonis as an incarnation of beauty. Diana (or Cynthia), angered at this competition, has bribed the Fates to frustrate Nature by filling the world with evils that deform and destroy beauty.
- **forging:** counterfeiting.
- **she:** i.e. Nature.
- **in high heaven’s despite:** against heaven’s will.
- **cross:** frustrate.
- **curious:** elaborate.
- **defeature:** disfigurement.
- **As:** such as.
- **wood:** mad.
- **attaint:** infection.
- **imposthumes:** abscesses.

125

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

126

'Therefore, despite of^o fruitless chastity,
Love-lacking vestals^o 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.^o

127

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

128

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

- ^o **And not the least... beauty under:** Even the least of these can destroy beauty in a moment.
- ^o **favour, savour, hue:** charm, perfume, complexion.
- ^o **despite of:** in defiance of.
- ^o **vestals:** virgin priestesses.
- ^o **The lamp... his light:** i.e. as the lamp uses up its oil to create light, Adonis should use up his sexual potency to create new life.
- ^o **posterity:** offspring.
- ^o **Sith:** since.
- ^o **made away:** murdered.
- ^o **mischief:** harm.
- ^o **home-bred strife:** civil war.
- ^o **sire:** father.
- ^o **reaves:** deprives.
- ^o **frets:** eats away.
- ^o **put to use:** invested at interest.

129

‘Nay then,’ quoth Adon, ‘you will fall again
 Into your idle over-handled theme.
 The kiss I gave you is bestowed in vain,
 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.

130

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

131

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

132

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

133

Call it not love, for love to heaven is fled
 Since sweating lust on earth usurped his name,
 Under whose simple semblance^o he hath fed
 Upon fresh beauty, blotting it with blame;

- ^o **moving:** persuasive.
- ^o **closure:** enclosure.
- ^o **barred:** deprived.
- ^o **urged:** argued.
- ^o **reprove:** disprove.
- ^o **device:** conduct.
- ^o **bawd:** female pimp, or madam of a brothel—i.e. Venus’s reason is pimping for her lust.
- ^o **simple semblance:** innocent appearance.

Which the hot tyrant stains, and soon bereaves,^o
As caterpillars do the tender leaves.

134

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

135

‘More I could tell, but more I dare not say;
The text is old, the orator too green.
Therefore in sadness now I will away.
My face is full of shame, my heart of teen.^o
Mine ears that to your wanton talk attended^o
Do burn themselves for having so offended.’

136

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

137

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^o night
Fold in the object that did feed her sight.

^o **teen:** irritation.

^o **attended:** listened.

^o **laund:** clearing.

^o **apace:** at speed.

^o **Look how:** just as.

^o **pitchy:** pitch-black.

^o **Which the hot tyrant...bereaves:** i.e. the ‘tyrant’ lust first stains the innocence of beauty with corruption, and then strips it (beauty) away.

After a sleepless night, Venus sets out to find Adonis. Hearing the sounds of the hunt in disarray and meeting the wounded hounds, she searches on, in alternating waves of hope and despair, until she comes upon his dead body.

178

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

179

‘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 turned 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.

180

‘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 anything ensuing?^o
 The flowers are sweet, their colours fresh and trim,
 But true sweet beauty lived and died with him.

181

‘Bonnet nor veil henceforth no creature wear;
 Nor sun nor wind will ever strive to kiss you.
 Having no fair^o 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
 Lurked like two thieves to rob him of his fair;

182

‘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,

- ° **dazzling:** becoming blurred.
- ° **reprehends:** rebukes.
- ° **several:** separate.
- ° **ensuing:** to come.
- ° **fair:** beauty.

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.

183

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

184

'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.

185

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

186

'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^o
 But by a kiss thought to persuade him there,
 And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine
 Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin.^o

- ^o **fear:** frighten.
- ^o **To recreate himself when he hath sung:** when he sang to amuse himself.
- ^o **silly:** innocent.
- ^o **urchin-snouted:** with a snout like a hedgehog (an animal the Elizabethans regarded as sinister).
- ^o **livery:** costume (i.e. Adonis's outward beauty).
- ^o **thought:** meant.
- ^o **again:** in return.
- ^o **But by a kiss... groin:** this idea is borrowed from a late classical poem about Venus' interview with the repentant boar, included among Theocritus's poems and popular in the Renaissance.

187

‘Had I been toothed like him,^o I must confess
 With kissing him I should have killed him first.
 But he is dead, and never did he bless
 My youth with his—the more am I accursed.’
 With this she falleth in the place she stood
 And stains her face with his congealed blood.

188

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^o tale,
 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;

189

Two glasses,^o where herself herself beheld
 A thousand times, and now no more reflect,
 Their virtue^o lost wherein they late^o excelled,
 And every beauty robbed of his effect.
 ‘Wonder of time,’ quoth she, ‘this is my spite,^o
 That, thou being dead, the day should yet be light.

190

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

- **Had I been toothed like him:** if I had had teeth like the boar.
- **heavy:** sad.
- **glasses:** mirrors.
- **virtue:** power.
- **late:** not long ago.
- **my spite:** what angers me.
- **waited on with:** accompanied by.
- **Ne’er settled equally, but high or low:** lovers will never be equal in social status or in the strength of their love.

191

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

192

'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.
It shall be raging-mad and silly-mild,
Make the young old, the old become a child.

193

'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,
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.

194

'It shall be cause of war and dire events,
And set dissension 'twixt the son and sire;
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.'

195

By this, the boy that by her side lay killed
Was melted like a vapour from her sight,

- ° **Bud and be blasted in a breathing while:** spring up and wither away in the space of a breath.
- ° **o'erstrawed:** strewed over.
- ° **The bottom poison...beguile:** i.e. love is like an animal trap, with sweet food scattered on top to tempt the victim to fall into the poison below.
- ° **sparing:** niggardly.
- ° **riot:** debauchery.
- ° **tread the measures:** dance.
- ° **staring:** bold-faced.
- ° **toward:** willing.
- ° **combustious:** combustible.

And in his blood that on the ground lay spilled
 A purple flower sprung up, chequered with white,
 Resembling well his pale cheeks, and the blood
 Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.

196

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^o from her by death.
 She crops the stalk, and in the breach^o appears
 Green-dropping sap, which she compares to tears.

197

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

198

'Here was thy father's bed, here in my breast.
 Thou art the next of blood,^o 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.'

199

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

- **reft:** taken away.
- **breach:** break.
- **guise:** habit.
- **issue:** child.
- **To grow unto himself was his desire:** He desired to grow only for his own sake, to be entirely self-sufficient.
- **next of blood:** next of kin—but the phrase is especially appropriate since the flower literally comes from Adonis's blood.
- **hies:** hurries.
- **immure herself:** shut herself up.

And shines and charms with renovated^o bloom.
 While wondering Loves the bursting grave surround,
 And edge with meeting wings the yawning ground,
 595 Stretch their fair necks, and leaning o'er the brink
 View the pale regions of the dead, and shrink,
 Long with broad eyes ecstatic Beauty stands,
 Heaves her white bosom, spreads her waxen hands;
 Then with loud shriek the panting youth alarms,
 600 "My life! my love!" and springs into his arms.'

 The Goddess ceased. The delegated^o throng
 O'er the wide plains delighted rush along;
 In dusky squadrons and in shining groups
 Hosts follow hosts, and troops succeed to troops;
 605 Scarce bears the bending grass the moving freight,
 And nodding florets^o bow beneath their weight.
 So, when light clouds on airy pinions sail,
 Flit the soft shadows o'er the waving vale;
 Shade follows shade, as laughing zephyrs drive,
 610 And all the chequered landscape seems alive.

A20 John Keats, from *Endymion*, 1818^o

John Keats, 1795–1821, English Romantic poet; of working-class London background, and trained as an apothecary-surgeon, he produced a substantial body of work (including several great odes and the unfinished classical epics *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*) before his death of tuberculosis in Rome at the age of twenty-five. *Endymion* is a lush allegorical romance in four books, inspired by the legend of the moon goddess's love for the shepherd Endymion. Keats's first long poem, it was harshly attacked by the critics (one of whom described it as displaying 'calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy'), and he himself called it 'a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished'. In this passage from book 2, *Endymion*, in quest of his goddess, comes on the cave where Adonis lies in enchanted sleep, hears his story, and witnesses his reunion with Venus.

After a thousand mazes overgone,^o
 At last, with sudden step, he came upon
 A chamber, myrtle walled, embowered^o high,

^o **renovated:** renewed.

^o **delegated:** having received their instructions.

^o **florets:** little flowers.

^o from John Keats, *Endymion: A Poetic Romance*, London, 1818, pp. 71–80.

^o **overgone:** passed through.

^o **embowered:** enclosed as a bower.

390 Full of light, incense, tender minstrelsy,^o
 And more of beautiful and strange beside:
 For on a silken couch of rosy pride,
 In midst of all, there lay a sleeping youth
 Of fondest beauty; fonder, in fair sooth,^o
 395 Than sighs could fathom, or contentment reach:
 And coverlids^o gold-tinted like the peach,
 Or ripe October's faded marigolds,
 Fell sleek about him in a thousand folds—
 Not hiding up an Apollonian curve
 400 Of neck and shoulder, nor the tenting swerve^o
 Of knee from knee, nor ankles pointing light;
 But rather, giving them to the filled sight
 Officiously^o Sideway his face reposed
 On one white arm, and tenderly unclosed,
 405 By tenderest pressure, a faint damask^o mouth
 To slumbery pout; just as the morning south
 Disparts^o a dew-lipped rose. Above his head,
 Four lily stalks did their white honours wed
 To make a coronal; and round him grew
 410 All tendrils green, of every bloom and hue,
 Together intertwined and trammelled^o fresh:
 The vine of glossy sprout; the ivy mesh,
 Shading its Ethiop^o berries; and woodbine,
 Of velvet leaves and bugle-blooms divine;
 415 Convolvulus in streakèd vases flush;
 The creeper, mellowing for an autumn blush;
 And virgin's bower,^o trailing airily;
 With others of the sisterhood. Hard by,
 Stood serene Cupids watching silently.

^o **minstrelsy:** music.

^o **in fair sooth:** in truth.

^o **coverlids:** coverlets, quilts.

^o **tenting swerve:** obscure; perhaps one knee is bent over the other to cover it like a tent.

^o **Officiously:** obligingly.

^o **damask:** like a damask rose, with 'velvety-crimson' petals.

^o **Disparts:** opens up.

^o **trammelled:** tied up.

^o **Ethiop:** i.e. dark-skinned.

^o **virgin's bower:** clematis.

420 One, kneeling to a lyre, touched the strings,
 Muffling to death the pathos with his wings;
 And, ever and anon,^o uprose to look
 At the youth's slumber; while another took
 A willow-bough, distilling odorous dew,
 425 And shook it on his hair; another flew
 In through the woven roof, and fluttering-wise
 Rained violets upon his sleeping eyes.

At these enchantments, and yet many more,
 The breathless Latmian^o wondered o'er and o'er;
 430 Until, impatient in embarrassment,
 He forthright passed,^o and lightly treading went
 To that same feathered lyrist, who straightway,
 Smiling, thus whispered: 'Though from upper day
 Thou art a wanderer, and thy presence here
 435 Might seem unholy, be of happy cheer!
 For 'tis the nicest touch of human honour
 When some ethereal and high-favouring donor
 Presents immortal bowers to mortal sense;
 As now 'tis done to thee, Endymion. Hence
 440 Was I in no wise startled. So recline
 Upon these living flowers. Here is wine,
 Alive with sparkles—never, I aver,
 Since Ariadne was a vintager,^o
 So cool a purple: taste these juicy pears,
 445 Sent me by sad Vertumnus, when his fears
 Were high about Pomona: here is cream,
 Deepening to richness from a snowy gleam;
 Sweeter than that nurse Amalthea skimmed
 For the boy Jupiter: and here, undimmed
 450 By any touch, a bunch of blooming plums
 Ready to melt between an infant's gums:
 And here is manna picked from Syrian trees,
 In starlight, by the three Hesperides.
 Feast on, and meanwhile I will let thee know

^o **ever and anon:** repeatedly.

^o **Latmian:** i.e. Endymion, whose home was on Mount Latmos.

^o **forthright passed:** came straight forward.

^o **Ariadne was a vintager:** Ariadne became the wife of Bacchus, and hence is imagined as working as a **vintager** (grape-picker) in his vineyard. Other mythological allusions follow: to **Vertumnus's** courtship of the fruit goddess **Pomona** (*Met.*, 14); to **Amalthea**, Jupiter's Cretan nurse; to the **Hesperides**, the nymphs guarding the golden apples of immortality in their far-western garden.

455 Of all these things around us.' He did so,
 Still brooding o'er the cadence of his lyre,
 And thus: 'I need not any hearing tire
 By telling how the sea-born goddess pined
 For a mortal youth, and how she strove to bind
 460 Him all in all unto her doting self.
 Who would not be so prisoned? but, fond elf,^o
 He was content to let her amorous plea
 Faint through his careless arms; content to see
 An unseized heaven dying at his feet;
 465 Content, O fool! to make a cold retreat,
 When on the pleasant grass such love, lovelorn,
 Lay sorrowing; when every tear was born
 Of diverse passion; when her lips and eyes
 Were closed in sullen moisture, and quick sighs
 470 Came vexed and pettish through her nostrils small.
 Hush! no exclaim—yet, justly mightst thou call
 Curses upon his head.—I was half glad,
 But my poor mistress went distract and mad,
 When the boar tusked him: so away she flew
 475 To Jove's high throne, and by her plainings^o drew
 Immortal tear-drops down the thunderer's beard;
 Whereon, it was decreed he should be reared
 Each summer time to life. Lo! this is he,
 That same Adonis, safe in the privacy
 480 Of this still region all his winter-sleep.
 Aye, sleep; for when our love-sick queen did weep
 Over his waned corpse,^o the tremulous shower
 Healed up the wound, and, with a balmy power,
 Medicined death to a lengthened drowsiness:
 485 The which she fills with visions, and doth dress
 In all this quiet luxury; and hath set
 Us young immortals, without any let,^o
 To watch his slumber through. 'Tis well nigh passed,
 Even to a moment's filling up, and fast
 490 She scuds with summer breezes, to pant through
 The first long kiss, warm firstling,^o to renew

- ° **fond elf:** foolish creature.
- ° **plainings:** complaints, lamentations.
- ° **wanèd:** shrunken.
- ° **let:** hindrance.
- ° **firstling:** first offspring.

Embowered sports in Cytherea's isle.
Look! how those wingèd listeners all this while
Stand anxious: see! behold!'—This clamant^o word
195 Broke through the careful silence; for they heard
A rustling noise of leaves, and out there fluttered
Pigeons and doves: Adonis something muttered
The while one hand, that erst^o upon his thigh
Lay dormant, moved convulsed and gradually
500 Up to his forehead. Then there was a hum
Of sudden voices, echoing, 'Come! come!
Arise! awake! Clear summer has forth walked
Unto the clover-sward, and she has talked
Full soothingly to every nested finch.
505 Rise, Cupids! or we'll give the blue-bell pinch^o
To your dimpled arms! Once more sweet life begin!'
At this, from every side they hurried in,
Rubbing their sleepy eyes with lazy wrists,
And doubling over head their little fists
510 In backward yawns. But all were soon alive:
For as delicious wine doth, sparkling, dive
In nectared clouds and curls through water fair,
So from the arbour roof down swelled an air
Odorous and enlivening; making all
515 To laugh, and play, and sing, and loudly call
For their sweet queen: when lo! the wreathèd green
Disparted, and far upward could be seen
Blue heaven, and a silver car,^o air-borne,
Whose silent wheels, fresh wet from clouds of morn,
520 Spun off a drizzling dew—which falling chill
On soft Adonis shoulders, made him still^o
Nestle and turn uneasily about.
Soon were the white doves plain, with necks stretched out,
And silken traces^o lightened in descent;
525 And soon, returning from love's banishment,
Queen Venus leaning downward open armed;
Her shadow fell upon his breast, and charmed
A tumult to his heart and a new life
Into his eyes. Ah, miserable strife,

^o **clamant:** cried-out.

^o **erst:** formerly.

^o **give the blue-bell pinch:** i.e. make them blue as bluebells with bruises.

^o **car:** chariot.

^o **still:** continually

^o **traces:** reins.

530 But for her comforting! unhappy sight,
 But meeting her blue orbs! Who, who can write
 Of these first minutes? The unchariest^o muse
 To embracements warm as theirs makes coy excuse.^o
 O it has ruffled every spirit there,
 535 Saving love's self,^o who stands superb to share
 The general gladness: awfully he stands;
 A sovereign quell^o is in his waving hands;
 No sight can bear the lightning of his bow;
 His quiver is mysterious, none can know
 540 What themselves think of it; from forth his eyes
 There darts strange light of varied hues and dyes;
 A scowl is sometimes on his brow, but who^o
 Look full upon it feel anon the blue
 Of his fair eyes run liquid through their souls.
 545 Endymion feels it, and no more controls
 The burning prayer within him; so, bent low,
 He had begun a plaining of his woe.
 But Venus, bending forward, said: 'My child,
 Favour this gentle youth; his days are wild
 550 With love—he—but alas! too well I see
 Thou know'st the deepness of his misery.
 Ah, smile not so, my son: I tell thee true
 That when through heavy hours I used to rue
 The endless sleep of this new-born Adon,
 555 This stranger ay^o I pitied. For upon
 A dreary morning once I fled away
 Into the breezy clouds, to weep and pray
 For this my love: for vexing Mars had teased
 Me even to tears: thence, when a little eased,
 560 Down-looking, vacant, through a hazy wood,
 I saw this youth as he despairing stood:
 Those same dark curls blown vagrant in the wind;
 Those same full-fringed lids a constant blind
 Over his sullen eyes: I saw him throw

^o **unchariest:** least cautious, frankest.

^o **makes coy excuse:** i.e. modestly refuses to describe them.

^o **love's self:** i.e. Eros/Cupid—clearly a different and more formidable figure than the 'feathered lyrist' and the other 'Cupids' who tend Adonis.

^o **sovereign quell:** supreme power to subdue.

^o **who:** those who.

^o **ay:** always.

665 Himself on withered leaves, even as though
 Death had come sudden; for no jot he moved,
 Yet muttered wildly. I could hear he loved
 Some fair immortal, and that his embrace
 Had zoned^o her through the night. There is no trace
 670 Of this in heaven: I have marked each cheek,
 And find it is the vainest thing to seek;
 And that of all things 'tis kept secretest.
 Endymion! one day thou wilt be blest:
 So still obey the guiding hand that fends^o
 675 Thee safely through these wonders for sweet ends.
 'Tis a concealment needful in extreme;
 And if I guessed not so, the sunny beam
 Thou shouldst mount up to with me. Now adieu!
 Here must we leave thee.'—At these words up flew
 680 The impatient doves, up rose the floating car,
 Up went the hum celestial. High afar
 The Latmian saw them minish^o into naught;
 And, when all were clear vanished, still he caught
 A vivid lightning from that dreadful bow.
 685 When all was darkened, with Etnean thro^o
 The earth closed—gave a solitary moan—
 And left him once again in twilight lone.

A21 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, 1821^o

On Shelley, see headnote to O33. *Adonais* is his lament for the death of Keats, which he believed (wrongly) to have been caused by hostile criticism, especially an anonymous review in the *Quarterly Review*. Shelley, who had already made fragmentary translations of Bion and Moschus, drew on the 'lament for Adonis' tradition in his elegy. The boar's tusk becomes a 'shaft which flies/In darkness', and is blended with the poison which Moschus claimed Bion drank as symbols of the murderous effects of malicious criticism.

zoned: surrounded.

fends: protects.

minish: diminish.

Etnean thro^o: a quake like Mount Etna (a Sicilian volcano) erupting.
 from *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats*, Pisa, 1821.

5 cracked and bent
 and tortured and unbent
 in the winter frost,
 then burnt into gold points,
 lighted afresh,
 10 crisp amber, scales of gold-leaf,
 gold turned and re-welded in the sun-heat;
 each of us like you
 has died once,
 each of us has crossed an old wood-path
 15 and found the winter leaves
 so golden in the sun-fire
 that even the live wood-flowers
 were dark.

2

20 Not the gold on the temple-front
 where you stand,
 is as gold as this,
 not the gold that fastens your sandal,
 nor the gold reft
 through your chiselled locks
 25 is as gold as this last year's leaf,
 not all the gold hammered and wrought
 and beaten
 on your lover's face,
 brow and bare breast
 30 is as golden as this:
 each of us like you
 has died once,
 each of us like you
 stands apart, like you
 35 fit to be worshipped.

A27 T.S.Eliot, from *The Waste Land*, 1922^o

Thomas Stearns Eliot, 1888–1965, poet, playwright, and critic, American-born but settled in England from 1914. His early poetry, witty, unorthodox, disjointed, and teasingly allusive, brought a new tone of voice into twentieth-century poetry and established him as a leader of the modernist movement. He later became increasingly conservative, describing himself as ‘classical in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion’; immensely influential as a critic and editor, he consistently

^o from T.S.Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, London, 1963, pp. 63–5, 80. Reprinted by permission of Faber & Faber Ltd and The Estate of T.S.Eliot.

argued for the importance of literary tradition. *The Waste Land*, as Eliot's note implies, draws on Frazer's concept of the dying fertility god in its allegorical picture of the spiritual barrenness of modern life.

I: THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

April° is the cruellest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.
 5 Winter kept us warm, covering
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
 A little life with dried tubers.
 Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
 With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
 10 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.°
 Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.°
 And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
 My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
 15 And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
 Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
 In the mountains, there you feel free.
 I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.
 What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
 20 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,°
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,°
 And the dead stone no sound of water. Only

- ° **April:** the beginning of spring, and also the time of Easter, the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.
- ° **Summer surprised us...for an hour:** Stark poetic images merge anticlimactically into a tourist's notes on Munich (the **Hofgarten** is a park in Munich, the **Starnbergersee** a nearby lake). Eliot visited Munich in 1911, and the following lines draw on the reminiscences of an old Bavarian aristocrat, Countess Marie Larisch, whom he met there.
- ° **Bin gar...deutsch:** 'I'm not Russian at all, I come from Lithuania, pure German' (quoted from Countess Larisch).
- ° **Son of man:** Eliot notes that this is God's address to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1), whom he orders to warn the Jews that 'your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken... In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste...' (6:4-6).
- ° **the cricket no relief:** Eliot cites Ecclesiastes: '...and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home... Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was... Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity' (12:5-8).

25 There is shadow under this red rock,
 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
 And I will show you something different from either
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
 30 I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

*Frisch weht der Wind
 Der Heimat zu
 Mein Irisch Kind,
 Wo weilest du? °*

35 'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
 They called me the hyacinth girl.'
 —Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
 40 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer. °

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless
 45 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
 With a wicked pack of cards. ° Here, said she,
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
 (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
 Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
 50 The lady of situations.
 Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
 And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
 Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
 Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find

° **Frisch weht...du?:** a sailor's song from Wagner's opera of tragic love, *Tristan and Isolde*: Fresh blows the wind to the homeland—my Irish child, where are you waiting?'

° **Oed' und leer das Meer:** from *Tristan and Isolde* again: the dying Tristan is waiting for Isolde's ship, but the lookout reports 'Waste and empty the sea'.

° **wicked pack of cards:** i.e. Tarot cards. Eliot notes that he was not familiar 'with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack', and mingles real with invented cards, planting images which recur throughout the poem. He notes: 'The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V.' The hooded figure is of course the resurrected Christ (Luke 24), whom Eliot thus associates with Frazer's dying god; in the world of *The Waste Land*, such a saviour figure is not to be found. Eliot adds that 'The Man with Three Staves... I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself

- 55 The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.
- 60 Unreal City,^o
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.^o
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,^o
65 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth^o kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!
70 You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!^o
That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
75 Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!^o
You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable—mon frère!^o

From Eliot's notes on *The Waste Land*

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*

- o **Unreal City:** London, and more precisely the City of London, its central business district.
- o **I had not...so many:** Eliot notes that this is a quotation from Dante's *Inferno* (3. 55–7), describing the souls of those who were neither good nor evil; the office workers, similarly, are a kind of living dead, morally vacant.
- o **Sighs...exhaled:** another reference to Dante (*Inferno*, 4. 25–7), describing the souls in Limbo.
- o **Saint Mary Woolnoth:** a church in the City of London; the 'dead sound' of its bell is 'A phenomenon which I have often noticed' (Eliot).
- o **Mylae:** a naval battle in the First Punic War between Rome and Carthage, anachronistically linked with the modern name **Stetson**.
- o **Oh keep...dig it up again:** adapted from a funeral dirge in John Webster's play *The White Devil* (4.4); the original has 'wolf (not **Dog**) and 'foe' (not **friend**).
- o **hypocrite...frère:** from the French poet Charles Baudelaire's preface to his *Fleurs du Mal* ('Flowers of Evil'): 'hypocritical reader, my likeness, my brother!'

Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies.

**A28 Archibald MacLeish, from
'The Pot of Earth', 1925°**

Archibald MacLeish, 1892–1982, American poet and dramatist, later a prominent public figure as Librarian of Congress and assistant secretary of state in the Roosevelt administration. 'The Pot of Earth' was written in Paris in the 1920s when MacLeish was much influenced by Eliot and Pound. It sets a contemporary story, that of a woman's growth to adulthood, marriage, and death in childbirth, against the ancient myth of Adonis; like Eliot, MacLeish jarringly juxtaposes the ancient and the modern, but he suggests continuity rather than contrast. The poem is in three parts; included here are excerpts from Parts One and Two and the whole of Part Three.

Part One, 'The Sowing of the Dead Corn', begins with a quotation from *The Golden Bough* about 'gardens of Adonis', and an evocation of the funeral rites for Adonis:

Silently on the sliding Nile
The rudderless, the unoared barge
Diminishing and for a while
Followed, a fleck upon the large
Silver, then faint, then vanished, passed
Adonis who had once more died
Down a slow water with the last
Withdrawing of a fallen tide.

It shows the growth of a young girl from childhood to adolescence. Images of spring (rising waters, swelling chestnut buds, rivers running blood-red with flowers) are associated with her sexual maturing, and her mingled excitement and fear of it. Part One climaxes with her first sexual experience, amid images of spring, the Christian Easter, and the resurrection of Adonis:

Easter Sunday they went to Hooker's Grove,
Seven of them in one automobile
Laughing and singing.

Sea water flows

Over the meadows at the full moon,
The sea runs in the ditches, the salt stone
Drowns in the sea.

° from *Collected Poems 1917–1982*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985, pp. 59–77.