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SHAKESPEARE'S LOVERS

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Where do we get our idea of romantic love? For the last hundred years, the answer has probably been: from Hollywood, from romantic fiction and women's magazines, and from popular music. Where action movies are about heroes – the modern equivalents of those figures such as Hector and Achilles, Aeneas and Alexander the Great, whom I spoke about in my last lecture – RomComs and tearjerkers are about lovers. *Casablanca* and *Brief Encounter*, *Love Story* and *Love Actually*. Then there has been the huge industry aimed predominantly at a female audience, exemplified in fiction by Harlequin and Mills and Boon romances and in magazine publishing by *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* in the English-speaking world, and, say, the hugely influential *Twen* in Germany in the 1960s. And then of course there are the songs that have provided the soundtrack of the love lives of most people since the invention of radio and the gramophone record: "What is this thing called love?", "Have I told you lately that I love you?", "You're the one that I want", "She loves you yeah yeah yeah."

Where did Shakespeare's original audiences get their idea of romantic love? Just as the novels, movies, pop songs and magazine pieces have shaped the idea in the last hundred years, so Shakespeare and his fellow poets and creative artists (along with the authors of conduct books, the equivalent of magazine columnists) did so in their time. Ophelia's love-madness is expressed through her singing of ballads – Elizabethan pop songs – such as "How should I your true love know?" and "For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy". Thomas Morley's setting of "It was a lover and his lass" from *As You Like It* was what we would now call a "hit". The literate, meanwhile, purchased love poems. In a pair of plays called *The Return from Parnassus*, performed by Cambridge students, a lovesick character called Gullio starts quoting in what he calls "Mr Shakespeare's vein". Another character, Ingenioso, accuses him of "monstrous theft" from *Romeo and Juliet* and says, "We shall have nothing but pure Shakespeare and shreds of poetry that he hath gathered at the theatres". "I'll worship sweet Mr Shakespeare," says Gullio, "and to honour him will lay his *Venus and Adonis* under my pillow." The language of love is learned from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Venus and Adonis*, which, to judge by number of reprints and frequency of allusions, was the bestselling volume of single-authored poetry of the Elizabethan age. I say single-authored because an even more popular volume was the anthology called *Songs and Sonnets* that gathered together the love-poetry of Thomas Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey and others – modern scholars name it for its publisher as *Tottel's Miscellany*. That book is the *vade mecum* of one of Shakespeare's less imaginative lovers, Abraham Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: "I had rather than forty shillings I had my Book of Songs and Sonnets here." Books of sonnets were handbooks for wooers and the theatre was a school of love.

Romantic love is everywhere in the literature of the 1590s, from Giles Fletcher, teasing the reader in the preface to his 1593 sonnet sequence *Licia* by refusing to say whether the sonneteer really is "in love" or whether he is playing an elaborate game (an interesting context for Shakespeare's sonnets); to Robert Greene in the *Groatsworth of Wit*, famous for its attack on Shakespeare, describing a character Lucanio "being so far in love as he persuaded himself without her grant he could not live"; to Dr Reynolds of Queen's College, Oxford, warning in his *Overthrow of Stage Plays* that, since love enters by the eyes (witness the Old Testament example of "Potiphar's wife, who cast her eyes on Joseph, and fell in love with him"), then the very act of witnessing boys dressed as girls in the theatre ran the risk of inflaming perverted desire. Above all, romantic love pervades the theatrical repertoire. Thus, a simple-minded cobbler called Strumbo, in love with a wench called Dorothy, in the comic sub-plot of *The Tragedy of Locrine*, published in 1595 with an attribution to one W. S. on the title page: "the little

god, nay the desperate god Culprit [his malapropism for Cupid], with one of his vengible bird-bolts, hath shot me unto the heel … I burn, I burn, and I burn, ah, in love, in love, and in love." And Shakespeare's Rosalind, a few years later in *As You Like It*: "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little cos, that thou dist know how many fathoms deep I am in love!"

A phrase such as "I am in love with you" has in some sense to be learned. When we say it, we are imitating the archetypal lovers from page and screen who have said it before us. For Shakespeare's audience, it was readily learnt from the stage. If one searches online databases of sixteenth-century texts for the phrase "I am in love", the (surprisingly few) results are clustered among the comedies of the 1590s, such as John Lyly' *Gallathea*, Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Anthony Munday's *Fedele and Fortunio; or, The Deceits in Love*; Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *As You Like It* – along with *Romeo and Juliet*, the play that takes the conventions of romantic comedy (union of young lovers against the opposition of their parents) and turns it to tragedy.

One of the reasons why Puritans didn't like the theatre was the fear that housewives would start getting romantic ideas from the plays that they went to see, such as *Arden of Faversham*, in which a genteel married woman has a passionate affair with a man from the servant class (and in which Shakespeare may have had a hand). One Henry Crosse fumed in *Vertue's Commonwealth* (1603) that the players were getting rich and buying land on the proceeds of "adulterous Playes". The stage was a new public arena for the open exploration of love, sex and marriage. Master Arden of Faversham says to his wife early in their play,

> Sweet love, thou knowst that we two, Ovid-like,
> Have often chid the morning when it 'gan to peep,
> And often wished that dark night's purblind steeds
> Would pull her by the purple mantle back
> And cast her in the ocean to her love.
> But this night, sweet Alice, thou hast killed my heart:
> I heard thee call on Mosby in thy sleep.

"Ovid-like" because Ovid was known as "Cupid's poet" and, more particularly, because in one of his most famous poems he pleads to Aurora, goddess of dawn, to hold back her horses so that he could spend more time in bed with his girlfriend – "O lente lente currite noctis equi", run slowly, slowly, O horses of the night. Shakespeare's Juliet will beautifully reverse the image, urging the fiery-footed steeds of the sun to race towards the west and usher in "love-performing night". But for Arden the marital bed has become a place of heartbreak: he has heard his wife moaning the name of another man, the lower-class Mosby, as she dreams. A tragedy of adultery, jealousy, murder and revenge is about to unfold. Having instigated the murder of Arden, Alice and her lover are duly punished with death. Their demise ensures that the story conforms to public morality: as the title-page has it, this is a play "Wherein is showed the great malice and dissimulation of a wicked woman, the insatiable desire of filthy lust and the shameful end of all murderers". But what an audience remembers is not the rough justice of the ending up Alice's boldness and strength of character – "Love is a god and marriage is but words," she says, "And therefore Mosby's title is the best." Not what a woman was supposed to say in a vigorously Protestant culture that took seriously St Paul's injunction that the only proper place for sex is within marriage.

For Puritans in Shakespeare's time, erotic desire was something to be repressed. Hence the delicious comedy of the Puritanical Malvolio setting himself up as a lover and the dark irony of the Puritanical Angelo in *Measure for Measure* – Shakespeare's sexual harassment play – giving in to the flame of his sensual desire for Isabella, the young girl who has chosen the chastity of the cloister. For physicians in Shakespeare's time, erotic desire was unhealthy in a more literal sense: it was regarded as a form of sickness, of mental aberration.

In a *Treatise of Melancholy*, published in 1586, Richard Bright noted that "love, which upholdeth the propagation of kinde, and is the onely glue to couple the joynts of this great frame of the world together" induces a state where "reason is often times failed of the passion, and (carried captive) submitteth where it should have preeminence and rule". Love is not rational. It is easy to see how an overlaying of this empirical observation upon the story of Eve leads to misogyny: woman as sexual temptress leads to the overthrown of reason. Some of the foundational myths of classical antiquity were usually read in a similar way: the female enchantress Circe ensnares Odysseus and his crew, while the sexual allure of Dido diverts Aeneas from his heroic destiny.

Five years after Shakespeare's death, Robert Burton published the first edition of his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Its "Third Partition" is called "Love Melancholy". There Burton writes of how love tyrannizes over men: it is "a disease, Frensie, Madnesse, Hell". He contrasts the "honest love", which we would call affection, on which he argues that marriage should be based, to what he calls "heroical love", which he considers to be a form of melancholy. Heroical love "is a wandring extravagant, a domineering, a boundlesse, an irrefregable passion: sometimes this burning lust rageth after marriage, and then it is properly called *Jelousie,* sometimes before, and then it causeth this *Heroicall* melancholy … sometimes it produceth rapes, incests, murders, etc. is confined within no termes, of yeares, sexe or whatsoever else." Crazed jealousy, rape, incest, murder: one immediately sees how this raging form of desire is a rich source of raw material for tragedy – the jealousy of Othello, Posthumus and Leontes; the rape of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* and Angelo's near-rape of Isabella in *Measure for Measure*; the by-some-accounts (Hamlet's, certainly) incestuous passion of Claudius and Gertrude; the murder in *Arden of Faversham*.

Burton quotes the medieval Arabic scholar Avicenna, who defined the state of being in love as "*a disease or melancholy vexation or anguish of mind, in which a man continually meditates of the beauty, gesture, manners of his mistris, and troubles himselfe about it*". He quotes Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, calling it "a furious disease of the mind", and Ficino, the Renaissance commentator on Plato, calling it "a species of madness". Most physicians, Burton reports, regard it as a species of melancholy. He goes on to list the symptoms: paleness, leanness, hollow eyes, loss of appetite, insomnia, groans, tears, the kind of distracted symptoms that lead Polonius to believe that Hamlet has been driven mad by his love for Ophelia:

> his doublet all unbraced,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
> Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle;
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other …
> He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
> And with his head over his shoulder turned
> He seemed to find his way without his eyes.

The term "heroical love" initially seems a puzzling epithet for this condition. Hamlet's appearance in Ophelia's closet could hardly be less heroic. Indeed, in the case of Aeneas, and many another warrior-hero, a love affair is the principal impediment to heroic action. Burton tries to offer an explanation of the term by suggesting that this kind of love is particularly associated with knights and noblemen, an argument of a piece with the idea that romance somehow came into being in the twelfth century with the code of chivalry and courtly love. But a medical treatise published on the cusp of Shakespeare's career offers a different explanation. In *The Breviarie of Health* (1587), there is a short chapter that "doth shew of an infirmitie named Hereos". "*Hereos* is the greke word", the author explains, "In latin it is named *Amor*. In English it is named love sicke." The cause of this infirmity is "amours which is a fervent love, for to have carnal copulacion with the party that is loved, and [if] it cannot be obtayned, some be so folish that they be ravished of their witte". The proposed remedy – quite a sensible one, in my view – is "muse not, but use mirth and mery company", which is to say, take your mind off it.

Not heroes, then, but *hereos*. Shakespeare would have come across the term when he read Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, the source for *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, his final play, co-authored with John Fletcher. Chaucer tells us that Arcite suffers from "the loveres Maladye / Of Hereos", which is engendered of melancholy and leads to those symptoms of sleeplessness, loss of appetite and so forth. In Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer, probably the one that Shakespeare used, there is a helpful footnote explaining that the term is synonymous with *Eros* or Cupid. In his 1602 edition, Speght actually emended *Hereos* to *Eros*. There is a fascinating history, which I can't fully go into here, of the transmission of the term *hereos* from ancient Greece to medieval and Renaissance Europe via Arab commentators such as Avicenna, Constantinus Africanus, and the *Hayât al-Hayawân* of Ad-Damîrîs. The latter describes how "the imagination of the ardent lover is never free from the object of his ardent love, and consideration and remembrance of the object of love are never absent from his thoughts and mind; the mind is diverted from the promptings of sensual energies, and the lover is prevented from eating and drinking … and also from thinking, remembering, imagining and sleeping." This passage is especially valuable in reminding us that *hereos* is a disease of the imagination: the lover's mind is filled with the *image* of the beloved. In many respects, the extreme lover of this kind is in love with an idealized image, not a reality: Elizabethan literary representations of the malady of *hereos* are almost always informed by the Petrarchan tradition of suggesting that the beloved is perfect in beauty, unattainable, set upon a pedestal – the kind of love-worship that Shakespeare so memorably parodies in his sonnet "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun."

Hereos, then, is an aberrant mental condition provoked by the mischievous little god that the Greeks called *Eros* and the Romans Cupid. His blindness is symbolic of the arbitrariness whereby there is no predictability or reason in the act of falling in love. His arrow is symbolic of the pain that comes with desire, the sense that love is a wound which makes us feel incomplete until we possess the beloved. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the agent of *eros* is the mischievous vernacular spirit Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, and Cupid's dart is displaced into the juice of the plant named love-in-idleness. As Oberon explains to Puck,

> Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.
>
> It fell upon a little western flower,
>
> Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound.
>
> And maidens call it "love-in-idleness."
>
> Fetch me that flower. The herb I showed thee once.
>
> The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
>
> Will make or man or woman madly dote.

We no longer imagine falling in love as a transformation precipitated by an external agency – Cupid's dart or the juice of love-in-idleness – but the underlying model of the psychology of the process is not so very different from our own. It is just the language that is different: the Elizabethans' mythological narrative of desire has been replaced by our neurochemical one, which goes roughly as follows. We are programmed with a biological imperative to reproduce. The hypothalamus therefore stimulates the sex hormones testosterone and oestrogen. But reproduce with whom? This is where the laws of chemical attraction come into play: the dopamine rush, the release of a related hormone, norepinephrine, which makes us giddy, energetic, euphoric, obsessive, wide-eyed, even unable to eat or sleep. Sooner or later, probably sooner, some pharmacologist will distil the essence of testosterone, dopamine and norepinephrine into a drug that will have precisely the same effect as Puck's love-in-idleness and we will say, as we so often do, that Shakespeare got there four hundred years before us.

However, the sexual arousal that comes with these hormones has a downside: they appear to shut down those parts of the prefrontal cortex that regulate critical thinking, self-awareness, and rational behavior. It is presumably out of an instinctive understanding of this, along with the experiential knowledge that being madly in love is usually a state that lasts for a maximum of about eighteen months, that most cultures for most of human history have taken the view that "romantic love" is not a good basis for marriage and parenthood.

The idea of erotic love as a kind of madness is everywhere in Shakespeare, nowhere more variously and sustainedly than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Theseus famously says: "The lunatic, the lover and the poet / Are of imagination all compact". The lover is as "frantic" – a word that means deranged – as the madman. Lovers have "seething brains" and "shaping phantasies." Their way of seeing is the opposite of "cool reason." Erotic love is a trick of "strong imagination." And it is especially associated with "poets." The word poet, from Greek *poiesis*, making, could refer to any act of imagination. This takes us back to the idea that creative types – poets and songwriters, romance writers and moviemakers – are the inventors of romantic love. And that idea has a history going all the way back to Plato. As a philosopher, an apostle of "cool reason", he was very sceptical about both poets and lovers: he regarded poetry and love as forms of madness, in which the rational mind was struck by a mania-inducing force from without. In poetry, you call it the Muse; in love, you call it *Eros* or Cupid. But Plato also recognized that we are all susceptible to the power of *Eros* and in his *Symposium* he put the case that the desire that is consummated in sex might be a rung on the ladder to love divine. As part of that argument, we find the suggestion that the love of a man for a beautiful boy might be a purer thing than a man's desire for a woman, because the endpoint of the latter is mere bodily conception, whereas the former has a spiritual quality. That distinction would appear to be one of the keys to Shakespeare's love sonnets, with their differentiation between "the marriage of true minds" which is the aspiration of those addressed to the "lovely boy" and the self-disgust that marks many of those addressed to the "dark lady" ("The expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action").

But now let's go back to the beginning of his career and ask where he got his ideas for the dramatization of romantic love. Consider his first three comedies. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* sets up an opposition to which Shakespeare will return again (most notably in his sonnets and in his final play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*): the conflict between the bond of male friendship and the force of erotic desire. Cicero's essay on friendship, *De Amicitia*, was hugely influential in the sixteenth century, underlying scores of conduct books and literary works, including John Lyly's *Euphues*, the most popular English novel of the age. Another book that was hugely influential throughout western Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century was a Spanish pastoral romance called *Diana Enamorada*. Shepherds in love, disguises that cross the boundaries of rank, strong cross-dressed heroines, the administration of a magic potion that makes its victims either forget they are in love or fall in love with someone new: all these elements, so familiar to us from Shakespeare, are found in the *Diana*. The particular detail that caught his eye when he was preparing the script of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was a plot line in which one of the heroines, Felismena, disguises herself as a page and enters the service of her lover, who has been sent away by his father to gain an education in the world. She overhears him wooing another woman. Shakespeare makes this second woman into the beloved of the main character's best friend, enabling him to set up the battle between love and friendship.

There is a schematic quality to this early comedy, as witnessed by Shakespeare's choice of names. One of the gentlemen of Verona is called Valentine: that is enough to make him into an archetypal lover. His beloved is called Silvia, from the Latin for the spirit of the woods and in Italian Renaissance drama a favoured name for a beautiful young woman in a love plot – besides being the name for the female lover in many plays in the *commedia dell' arte* tradition, Silvia is the heroine of Torquato Tasso's highly influential pastoral play *Aminta*. The unfaithful lover, meanwhile, the cad who makes a play for his best friend's girlfriend, is called Proteus, the name in Greek myth of the son of the Ocean who could change himself into many shapes. Hence the Latin adjective *proteus*, defined in a sixteenth-century Latin dictionary as "unstable and inconstant of word and deed". Early in *The Two Gentlemen*, Proteus' beloved speaks of him as an archetype of constancy, hammering the point home with reiterative rhetoric:

> His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles,
>
> His love sincere, his thoughts immaculate,
>
> His tears pure messengers sent from his heart,
>
> His heart as far from fraud as heaven from earth.
>
> But his name is a sign that he is the opposite of all these things.

His original girlfriend, who speaks these lines and who then disguises herself as a boy to go in pursuit of her, is called Julia. This is not so obviously a symbolic name as Proteus and Valentine, or even Silvia, but it may have had a particular association for Shakespeare and those members of his audience who knew anything about classical history and poetry: the most famous bearer of the name was Julia, the only daughter of the emperor Augustus, a figure indelibly associated with love. It was widely believed in Shakespeare's time that the poet Ovid was banished from Rome to Tomis on the Black Sea for two reasons: writing the scandalous *Ars Amatoria*, the art of love, and having an affair with the Emperor's daughter. Eliding the alleged Julia liaison with the idea of Ovid as Cupid's poet, commentators read his love poetry biographically, supposing that the "Corinna" to whom Ovid addressed many of his *Amores* was a codename for Julia. And Julia is indeed Ovid's lover in *Poetaster*, Ben Jonson's play about the Augustan poets – rather cheekily, he stages the parting scene in which Ovid says goodbye to Julia before going into exile as a rewrite of the equivalent scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Evidence that Ovid was on Shakespeare's mind as he wrote the character of Julia comes from the most poignant moment in the play, which is also the most theatrically sophisticated. Julia is describing herself to Silvia, but in the part of the boy Sebastian, in which she is pretending that he/she was once Julia's servant. Silvia asks how tall Julia is. "About my stature", replies "Sebastian", and as proof "he" offers a memory of how during a Whitsun pageant he played "the woman's part", wearing Julia's gown, which was a perfect fit. She then goes on, unnecessarily for the proof of height but necessarily for the revelation of her interior anguish, to describe the part she played. It is a "lamentable" one:

> Madam, 'twas Ariadne, passioning
>
> For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight,
>
> Which I so lively acted with my tears
>
> That my poor mistress, movèd therewithal,
>
> Wept bitterly; and would I might be dead
>
> If I in thought felt not her very sorrow.

This is one of Shakespeare's earliest descriptions of the art of tragic acting – the player performs tearful emotion in such a lifelike ("lively") fashion (with such *enargeia*, a classical rhetorician would say) that the audience is moved to tears. It is the process demonstrated by the Player's speech to Hamlet, which I talked about in my last lecture. At the same time, the speech is one of Shakespeare's earliest examples of the art of 'metadrama", theatrical self-consciousness: a boy actor (an apprentice in the acting company) is playing the part of a female character (Julia) playing the part of a boy character (Sebastian) fictionally remembering himself playing the part of a female character (Ariadne) in front of an audience that includes a female character (Julia), who is imagined to be moved to tears, the purpose being to move another female character (Silvia, who is of course played by another boy actor) to tears, which she duly is: "Alas, poor lady, desolate and left! / I weep myself to think upon thy words." Julia/Sebastian pulls off the trick of making the "poor lady, desolate and left" into both herself and her precedent from classical mythology, Ariadne, deserted on Naxos by Theseus after he has rewarded her for assisting him into the Minotaur's labyrinth by seducing her and then deserting her.

Shakespeare learned her story from Ovid's *Heroides*, a series of narrative poems written in the voices of lamenting heroines who have been dumped by their lovers. I would suggest, indeed, that the *Heroides* was one of his key sources for his art of animating "the woman's part", giving subjectivity to the female voice, albeit as victim, yet as victim who is given the opportunity to state her case at length in the court of audience opinion. The Petrarchan tradition of love poetry, by contrast, makes the woman into an object: beautiful but frosty, beloved but distant, anatomized part by lovely part but silent and unyielding. Her chastity is her attraction (think Angelo in *Measure for Measure*). The man likes a bit of resistance: the thrill of the chase, the sense that the prize is

worth winning and not just an easy score. The challenge is to win the woman with words. But what happens if the verbal seduction fails? Proteus to Silvia in the woods:

> Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving words
> Can no way change you to a milder form,
> I'll woo you like a soldier, at arms' end,
> And love you 'gainst the nature of love,—force ye.

Silvia: "O heaven!" Proteus: "I'll force thee yield to my desire." From seduction to rape. The Theseus who abandons Ariadne has form. Remember Oberon's words to Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "Didst not thou", he says, lead Theseus:

> through the glimmering night
> From Perigenia whom he ravished?
> And make him with fair Aegles break his faith,
> With Ariadne and Antiope?

Theseus: the serial seducer, rapist, abandoner of his conquests.

His example suggests that the youthful Shakespeare had a somewhat low opinion of men in the matter of love. Consider some of his other early works. *The Taming of the Shrew* offers two versions of courtship, with respect to the two sisters. In the Bianca plot, there is consensual seduction, achieved through role-play: Lucentio, disguised as a tutor, gives Bianca a Latin lesson in which they flirtatiously exchange lines from Ovid. But in the shrew plot, Kate is subdued through aggressive mind games and deprivation. The "induction" at the beginning frames the play as a practical joke played by a Lord on a drunken tinker, Christopher Sly, who is offered a fantasy of sexual fulfillment: he is taken to a bedroom hung with "wanton pictures" and presented with a boy dressed as a girl, only to have his pleasure withdrawn at the last minute. It was indeed a custom in aristocratic households to adorn the walls of the bedchamber with a chimney-piece or tapestries or paintings of erotic scenes, in order to set the juices flowing. Troublingly, though, the usual subject matter, as here, is coercive desire: among the pictures described to Sly are Jupiter's rape of Io and Apollo chasing Daphne through the woods, causing her legs to bleed as they are scratched with briars.

Then there is Shakespeare's earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, at the centre of which is a brutal rape, followed by mutilation of the woman's body, modeled explicitly upon the rape of Philomel in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. And even *The Comedy of Errors*, the lightest of his early plays, has a darker dimension to its origins: though it is primarily based on the Roman dramatist Plautus' farcical comedy of the confusion twins, *The Menaechmus Brothers*, it incorporates a plot line from a different Plautus play, *Amphytrion*, in which a husband returns to his house only to discover that his wife has been in bed with someone else. That someone else turns out to have been Jupiter, disguised as Amphytrion himself: what better way to seduce a loyal wife than to take the form of her husband?

The gods in the classical pantheon were symbols of particular qualities. Jupiter of earthly power, Apollo of the creative arts, Mars of military strength. They are images of hyper-masculinity. And with their power comes their belief that they can have sex with any woman they want. If words fail them in their desire, they simply metamorphose themselves and get their way by force. As Florizel puts it in *The Winter's Tale*, when trying to reassure Perdita that he will not try to have sex with her before they marry:

> The gods themselves
> Humbling their deities to love, have taken
> The shapes of beasts upon them: Jupiter

Became a bull, and bellowed; the green Neptune
A ram, and bleated; and the fire-robed god,
Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain,
As I seem now. Their transformations
Were never for a piece of beauty rarer,
Nor in a way so chaste, since my desires
Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts
Burn hotter than my faith.

The gods take the girls of their choice by assuming such forms as the bull and the ram, symbols of sexual potency. Florizel acknowledges the heat of his lust, but maintains that he will control it within the bounds of propriety and fidelity. It should be now be abundantly clear that Shakespeare's first port of call in his anatomy of desire is the Roman poet Ovid. We have seen that his early comedies and the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, despite their diverse sources and styles, all converge on Ovid when they address the matter of *eros*. The popularity of Ovid and Ovidianism was one of the main reasons for the efflorescence of the poetry and drama of desire in the early 1590s. The court comedies of John Lyly are dramatizations of Ovidian or quasi-Ovidian myths; the prose romances of Robert Greene are steeped in allusions to the transformations of the Ovidian gods; one of the most widely practised forms of poetry was the Ovidian or neo-Ovidian narrative poem, of which the most famous examples were Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and the poem that Shakespeare wrote during 1593, when the theatres were closed because of plague, *Venus and Adonis*, which was developed from a story in the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses* that was also an inspiration to artists such as Titian.

Venus and Adonis was Shakespeare's attempt to establish his classical literary credentials, perhaps as a riposte to Greene's jibe dismissing him as an ill-educated "upstart crow". But it was also his distinctive anatomy of desire, and what is striking about it is the manner in which the male is put in the position of passivity. The language of seduction is given to the woman. In the sonnet tradition, the idealized female is almost always silent. In this poem, the woman speaks 531 lines and the man just 89. Venus actually speaks 45% of the poem, a higher proportion of her work than any other character in Shakespeare (Hamlet, the character who most dominates a play, has 37% of the lines). In the sonnet tradition, the enamoured poet blazons the woman's body parts. Shakespeare's Venus unashamedly blazons herself:

I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:
Graze on my lips; and if those hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.
Within this limit is relief enough,
Sweet bottom-grass and high delightful plain,

Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough,
To shelter thee from tempest and from rain.

Adonis barely speaks in until well into the poem, and for the most part when he does he is largely monosyllabic, mumbling protestations such as "no" and "let me go". At various points, he is silenced by Venus' kisses. What happens to him is what happens to the women who are forced into submission in Ovid's many tales of seduction, abduction and rape by male gods: when he finally gets his say in a discourse contrasting the selfishness of lust with the selflessness of true love, he is cut short by Venus jumping on him, which leads him

to run away and be gored to death by a boar.

The point, though, is that Venus is not any woman: she is the very embodiment of love. Cupid is her child, born of her seduction of Mars, the god of war. In this poem it is desire itself that speaks. To resist *eros*, as Adonis does, means death. Shakespeare, following Ovid, seems to be suggesting that humans have little choice but to submit to the power of love. One sees why poetry in general and Ovid in particular were regarded by Puritans as highly dangerous. In 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London ordered the banning and burning of a number of books, among them not only a variety of "snarling satires" but also *The Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image*, a poem about a man having sex with a statue, Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores*, a collection of extremely filthy epigrams by Sir John Davies, and a witty misogynistic work called *The XV Joys of Marriage* (the title is ironic, in that the argument is essentially that a bachelor may experience the joys of sex whereas a married man is imprisoned in a kind of hell). *Venus and Adonis* escaped the cull, perhaps because it avoided the toxic mix of satire and eroticism, perhaps because it was regarded as essentially playful, perhaps because of the patronage behind Shakespeare, or, most probably, simply because it was already in wide circulation, so could not have been withdrawn.

Venus reacts to the moment of Adonis' death by imagining herself in the place of the boar and making it into an aggressive act of lovemaking: if the boar had seen Adonis' lovely face, she argues, he would have tried to kiss him. The killing was the accidental consequence of a kiss: "And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine / Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin." The double entendre in the image of sheathing a hard tusk in soft nether regions hardly needs further elaboration, though Venus provides some, just in case we have missed the point: "Had I been toothed like him, I must confess, / With kissing him I should have killed him first." This moment, the poem proposes, is the origin not merely of the association of sex with death (in Elizabethan poetry "dying" is a frequent metaphor for orgasm, or vice-versa), but also of the idea of love as a sickness, a disease: Venus launches into a curse, prophesying that because Adonis is dead, love with always be associated with sorrow and jealousy, with "sweet beginning" and "unsavoury end", that "all love's pleasure shall not match his woe", that "It shall be fickle, false and full of fraud," striking "the wise dumb" and teaching "the fool to speak"; "It shall be raging-mad and silly-mild, / Make the young old, the old become a child"; "It shall be cause of war and dire events" (think Helen of Troy) "And set dissension 'twixt the son and sire" (or daughter and sire, one might add – think Juliet). Because death has destroyed Adonis in his prime, "They that love best their loves shall not enjoy". The tone of *Venus and Adonis*, like the style of Ovid, has been light, thanks to the dazzlingly ingenious word-play, but the matter, like that of Ovid, is dark. Venus lays out a programme for the tragedy of love – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida, Antony and Cleopatra* – even though the main substance of the poem has been a gender-inverted parody of the tropes of the courtship comedy and the seduction sonnet.

Adonis is transformed into an anemone in order to suggest the transience of beauty. It is as short-lived as a flower in season, this beauty we most desire, this prime of youth with an aura of androgyny that can make the lover speak, as Shakespeare does in his twentieth sonnet, of the "master-mistress" of his passion. When Shakespeare brings Adonis-like figures off the page of his poetry onto the stage of his theatre, it is in the form of lovely boys dressed as girls, temporarily re-dressed as boys – Portia as Balthasar, Rosalind as Ganymede, Viola as Cesario – and there is a poignancy, especially in *Twelfth Night*, that their androgynous beauty will perforce fade and die as they become wives and then mothers.

When *Venus and Adonis* was published in 1593, Shakespeare did not know when the theatres would reopen and give him the opportunity to create those characters. Having gained the agreement of a real-life lovely boy, the Earl of Southampton, to be his patron, he set about writing a second poem, which he described in the dedication to the first as "some graver labour". This notion of a progression from lighter to more serious matter was based on the so-called *cursus Virgilius*, the model of the Virgilian poetic career that began with pastoral (the *Eclogues* or *Bucolicks*), proceeded to *labor* (the *Georgics*, poems about the work of farming), and climaxed in epic (the *Aeneid*, poetry of a nation). But in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare had loudly trumpeted his allegiance to Ovid rather than Virgil, not only by basing his poem on a story in the *Metamorphoses* but also by plastering a quotation from the *Amores* as epigraph on the title-page. His own "graver labour" meant, accordingly, going to a heavier poem by Ovid, the *Fasti*, an incomplete six-book poem narrating the etiology of the Roman calendar. This involved the additional labour of reading in Latin, since, in contrast to the *Metamorphoses*, for which he had Arthur Golding's English version, there was no translation.

If he did manage to plough through the entire text in search of stories about the graver labours of love, he would have found an embarrassment of riches. February, for example, offered him the festival of the Lupercalia (a calendrical moment to which he would revert in *Julius Caesar*): Ovid claims that the custom of young men running naked through the streets of Rome on that day had its origin in the humiliation of Faunus as a result of his attempt to rape Omphale, who was really the mighty Hercules cross-dressed as a girl. In March, under the influence of Mars, there was the rape of Silvia, the rape of the Sabine women and a lament of Ariadne; in April, Venus herself puts in an appearance and upbraids Ovid for abandoning erotic elegy in favour of history; this month also includes the longest narrative in the poem, the rape of Persephone (otherwise known as Proserpina) and the anguish of her mother Ceres, a story which would haunt *The Winter's Tale* many years later in Shakespeare's career. But you get the idea: whereas Virgil argued, as we saw last week, that the foundation of Roman-ness was the heroic deeds of Aeneas, which included his renunciation of *eros* in the form of Dido, Ovid seems to be suggesting that Rome was built upon the act of rape. And no legend of rape was more influential than the story of Tarquin and Lucrece, the closing section of February.

Now, I am actually going to talk about *The Rape of Lucrece* in my next lecture, which is about the classical shaping of Shakespeare's politics, since the reason for the story's influence was that Tarquin's heinous crime in raping the virtuous Lucrece, causing her to commit suicide, is that her relatives use it as the opportunity to drive out the Tarquins, who were the Roman kings, and to establish a republic. The rape of a woman is, it seems, the price for the establishment of a new political order in which the people – well, the men – have an electoral voice. But in the context of this lecture on Shakespeare and *eros*, the point that needs to be made about *The Rape of Lucrece* is that it offers an astonishingly powerful account of the animal force of raging male desire. Furious at Lucrece's steadfast refusal to submit to his advances, Tarquin sets his foot on the light, muffles her cries by wrapping the bed linen around her face, and stains her bed with his "prone lust". Rape is the extreme consequence of desire as disease that overcomes reason and restraint. Or one of the extreme consequences, the other being the "infirmity called *hereos*", the melancholy that comes from unrequited desire or the jealousy that turns a man to madness when he is tormented by the mental image of his beloved in bed with another man (Troilus seeing Cressida with Diomed, Othello thinking of Cassio lying on Desdemona, Posthumus imagining Iachimo mounting chaste Imogen "like a full-acorned boar", Leontes watching Hermione and Polixenes "paddling palms" and convincing himself that the child full in her womb is not his own).

It was probably Shakespeare's immersion in Ovid during the closure of the theatres in 1593-94 that led him to the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe, lovers from rival households, in book four of the *Metamorphoses*, which he treated comically in the play-within-the-play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and which was the *exemplum* for the Romeo and Juliet story that he read in a rather labored Elizabethan poem by one Arthur Brooke. Brooke treats it as an admonitory tale: *eros* is a dangerous aberration; girls should marry the person their parents think is suitable. Shakespeare, by contrast, immortalizes the star-crossed lovers. He acknowledges the dangers of passion ("These violent delights have violent ends"), but he also celebrates the young girl who embraces her desire, refusing to be inhibited or to bow to her father's will. The Romeo who is superficially in love with Rosaline in the first act suffers from the symptoms of the infirmity named *hereos*, but the love of Juliet and her Romeo is both fully sexual and intensely spiritual, insofar as it lifts them to another plane:

> Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-browed night,
> Give me my Romeo. And when I shall die,
> Take him and cut him out in little stars,
> And he will make the face of heaven so fine
> That all the world will be in love with night
> And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Monarchs are traditionally worshipped as the sun; Juliet proposes instead that all the world should be in love

with the idea of star-crossed love. There is a famous moment in the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid* when Jupiter prophesies that Caesar – Virgil may mean Julius, he may mean Augustus, or he may mean both – will undergo an apotheosis, be raised to the heavens as a star, shining over a Roman empire that will rule the earth and endure for ever. Ovid alludes to this when the character of Pythagoras in the final book of the *Metamorphoses* prophesies that Venus will take the spirit of the emperor Augustus and turn it into a star. His fame will outshine that of Agamemnon, Achilles and Aeneas. As Jove rules the heavens, Augustus will rule the triple-cornered earth. But there has been an element of irony here: the thrust of Pythagoras' discourse in book fifteen, and the whole direction of the *Metamorphoses*, has been towards change, not endurance. The only constancy is change. This is the very opposite of Virgil's idea of an Augustan Rome that is "an empire without end" and without bound ("nec metas rerum nec tempora … imperium sine fine"). Ovid knows that all dynasties and dominions are transient – that was the lesson of the fall of Troy and the expulsion of the Tarquins. In his world, stellar transformation is the fate not of emperors but of victims of love such as Callisto, who is doubly transformed, from nymph to bear to constellation. Besides, and even more cheekily, the divinity who raises Augustus to the stars is not Mars the god of might but Venus the goddess of desire. In Ovid, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is love, not power, that brings eternal fame.

That is the story which Shakespeare tells again in his greatest love play, *Antony and Cleopatra*. At the climax, Cleopatra dreams of an "emperor Antony", bestriding the earth, raised god-like in the heavens: this is wonderfully subversive, since the whole thrust of the play as political drama has been to tell the story of the rise of Antony's rival Octavius from one of a triumvirate into his new role as Augustus, the first Roman emperor. Shakespeare is continuing Ovid's work of undoing Virgil. The language of boundlessness and eternity which Virgil had ascribed to the Roman *imperium* is given by Shakespeare to the passion inspired by Cleopatra: "eternity was in our lips and eyes"; "I'll set a bourn [boundary] how far to be beloved. / Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth." Cleopatra is Venus, subduing Antony's Mars. And she is Dido to his Aeneas, but whereas Virgil tells of how Dido must be renounced in the name of empire, Shakespeare brings the forces of imagination and poetry together to reunite the lovers in death: "I come, my queen," says Antony: "Stay for me":

> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
>
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
>
> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
>
> And all the haunt be ours.

This is at the moment when Antony is readying himself for death, following defeat in battle. But the soaring verse of his final speeches, and still more in Cleopatra's that follow, transcends defeat and apotheosizes the lovers instead of the emperor, who is left upon the dungy earth as a diminished Augustus.

In his close reading of Plutarch's life of Mark Antony, the source for the play, Shakespeare happened upon a little detail that must have greatly tickled his fancy. Antony's last follower, who unarms him and who bears the Roman sword that he will turn upon himself, has a very resonant name. A moment ago, I quoted Antony's words addressed to his absent beloved, imagining their reunion in Elysium, the field of the famous dead. I omitted the interjections in which he calls for his (un)armourer. The call is also an invocation of the child of Venus, goddess of love. Let me end by quoting the lines again, in full:

> Eros! – I come, my queen. – Eros! – Stay for me:
>
> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
>
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
>
> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
>
> And all the haunt be ours. – Come, Eros, Eros!