SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE MYTHOLOGY IN VENUS AND ADONIS, A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM AND ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

by

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B.A. Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., 1968

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department

of

English

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

March, 1975

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ABSTRACT

In all three works which I will consider, Venus and Adonis, A Midsummer-Night's Dream and Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare's theme of love is informed, in varying degrees, by the figures of classical mythology. The gods and goddesses of pagan myth underwent many transformations from their original antique forms to their revival in Renaissance literature and art. A major portion of this study is concerned with establishing Shakespeare's mythological figures in a Renaissance context.

I have attempted to trace the development of Shakespeare's use of love mythology from its earliest forms in Venus and Adonis and A Midsummer-Night's Dream to its fullest expression in Antony and Cleopatra. Venus and Adonis shows us, within a mythological framework, the fall of the world. A Midsummer-Night's Dream reverses the process, rebuilding through divine influence a mythic paradise. Antony and Cleopatra transcends the relative simplicity of the two earlier works. The negative aspects of love in Venus and Adonis and the positive aspects portrayed in A Midsummer-Night's Dream are placed in the

context of a world no longer sheltered by gods and goddesses. In Antony and Cleopatra the world neither falls nor rises; it stays locked in a stasis under the dominance of Fortune's wheel. The divine content of mythology is present only on the edges of this world, where it struggles, unsuccessfully, to achieve recognition.

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INTRODUCTION.

The Renaissance, as its name implies, was a time of extraordinary reawakening. After centuries of semi-neglect the achievements of the Greek and Roman civilizations were restored to a position of central importance and the influx of rediscovered classical thought stimulated the great artistic flowering for which this period is so renowned.[1] Classical literature, in particular, captured and inspired the imagination of the Renaissance world and since much of it was found expressed through mythology, Renaissance artists celebrated a renewed interest in the classical portrayal of the pagan gods and goddesses. Moreover, the new humanism of the period provided a fresh interpretation of mythological figures. Not only were classical myths freed from the Christianizing influence which had dominated them during the Middle Ages, for instance, Golding's departure from the moralized tradition in his Elizabethan translation of Ovid's Metamorphoses, but they were further informed by a renewed interest in philosophy, primarily the tradition of Neoplatonism.[2]

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[1]Paul O. Kristeller, Renaissance Thought (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 7.

[2]Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism (1940), trans. Barbara F. Sessions, Bollingen Series XXXVIII (Princeton, N.J., Princeton Univ. Pr., 1953, 1972), pp. 96ff.

Thus figures taken from classical mythology, infused with philosophical meaning and reinterpreted in the light of the new humanism, appear in the works of Botticelli and Michelangelo.

The Renaissance fascination with pagan mythology also appears in Shakespeare's work. His use of classical iconography in several of the sonnets and many of the plays and his familiarity with at least the basic premises of the surrounding philosophical tradition,[3] show that he participated in the general movement toward mythological expression in the arts. Richard Cody and David P. Young have attempted in their individual works to place Shakespeare in this tradition,[4] while Erwin Panofsky, Jean Seznec and Edgar Wind make reference to Shakespeare when discussing the Renaissance revival in the plastic arts,[5] but on the whole this is an area of Shakespeare criticism which is only now beginning to receive scholarly attention. I have therefore chosen to examine certain aspects of Shakespeare's myth structure. Since

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[3]On Shakespeare and Neoplatonism, see John Vyvyan, Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970); Walter C. Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Louisiana State Univ. Pr., 1937, 1959).

[4]Richard Cody, The Landscape of the Mind (London: Clarendon Pr., 1969); David P. Young, Something of Great Constancy (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1966).

[5]Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1939, 1967).

Shakespeare's use of Renaissance mythology is a topic too large for the confines of this paper and too expansive for the limits of my knowledge, I will concentrate on the mythological aspects of love in three works which have this theme in common: the narrative poem Venus and Adonis and the plays A Midsummer-Night's Dream and Antony and Cleopatra. In each instance the love theme is explored through mythological backgrounds which demonstrate Shakespeare's indebtedness to the revival of pagan mysteries in the Renaissance.

I shall open with a study of Venus and Adonis because it is clearly the best example of an Ovidian mythology interpreted and to some extent transformed by the new Renaissance humanism. The universal treatment accorded to love in this early mythological poem points toward Shakespeare's lifelong exploration of the power of Eros in the world, a theme which is further explored in A Midsummer-Night's Dream where, amidst fairies and lovers, the descent of the winged god into the play's world and its consequent metamorphosis, is charted. Finally, in Antony and Cleopatra, which shares a pagan setting with the earlier works and their concern with the universality of love, Shakespeare departs from the recognizable figures of classical mythology and instills all mythological potency into the dramatic characterization, through

suggestive powers of imagery. Cleopatra is compared to Venus and Isis, while Antony carries aspects of Hercules and Mars, however the line between the mortal and the immortal is never clearly drawn, allowing an undefined flow to occur between divine and temporal worlds. Thus we shall be studying Shakespeare's use of mythology to portray the theme of love, from its simplest poetic origins to its most complex dramatic expression.

The wealth of material which the humanist movement revived during the Renaissance gave life to the artistic imagination of the period by providing new metaphors for the poetic expression of the world. Whereas the Middle Ages had accepted a typological reading of myth, as a means of reinforcing closed systems of dogmatic belief, the Renaissance found in the store of classical mythology an opportunity to unfold non-Christian mysteries of divinity in the world. Shakespeare, in particular, took advantage of the image power in the new mythology.

A source of power for both poetry and mythology is the accuracy with which they disclose truth in the world and the medium through which they make this disclosure is image, for image conveys mysteries which elude common language:

> The word-bound concept is always inadequate to the torrent of life. Hence it is only the image-making or figurative word that can invest things with expression. . . . But whereas the language of ordinary life — in itself a working and workmanlike instrument — is continually wearing down the image-content of words and acquiring a superficial existence of its own (logical only in appearance), poetry continues to cultivate the figurative, i.e. image-bearing, qualities of language, with deliberate intent. What poetic language does with images is to play with them so that every image contains the answer to an enigma. [6]

In the inspired poet we witness the authenticity of the insights which his images unfold, an authenticity which mirrors that of mythology, for both "soar to heights of insight beyond the reach of reason."[7] The common centre of poetry and myth, as Cassirer defines it, is that both spring from "metaphorical thinking."[8] Since they have this mode of perception in common, it is natural that the poet not only uses metaphor as a means of expression, but also looks to myth for the source of his images. When the poet takes his metaphors from mythology he brings the world, in its largest sense — the movement of heaven, earth and hell — into his poem. Indeed, if the poet wishes to expand his work beyond

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[6] J. Huizinga, Homo Ludens (Boston: Beacon Pr., 1950), pp. 133-4.

[7] ibid., p. 129.

[8] Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth (New York: Harper & Bros., 1946), p. 84: "And this common centre really seems to be demonstrable; for, no matter how widely the contents of myth and language may differ, yet the same form of mental conception is operative in both. It is the form which one may denote as metaphorical thinking."

the limits of the personal, he must draw his images from mythology, since they are both accurate and the only way he can show an expanded world vision. It is through myth that our cosmology is revealed to us and the revival of classical mythology gave Shakespeare the opportunity to express a Renaissance cosmology composed of heavenly spheres, through the figures of gods and goddesses.

We know that Shakespeare drew his knowledge of classical myth primarily from his reading of Ovid, Virgil and Plutarch.[9] But though he became familiar with mythological figures through classical literature, the context in which they were viewed was entirely Renaissance. The humanist's devotion to the work of ancient authors included not only the literature but also the philosophy, and the rediscovery of classical image went hand in hand with the revival, in Italy, of Platonism. For the quattrocento painters, mythology was wedded to this revived philosophy. Differing from both the ancients and the mediaeval Christians, they presented the gods (Venus, Diana, Mars, etc.) as they appeared within the intricate cosmology of Neoplatonism. Thus when the goddess of Love was portrayed on a Renaissance canvas, she reflected

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[9] Seznec makes note of other possible sources: "It has been conjectured that he made use of Textor's Officina. With more precision, his indebtedness to the emblematists Alciati, Symeoni, Sambec and Whitney has been postulated, not only 'for devices' and allegories, but also for a large number of mythological allusions scattered throughout his work. Finally, there are certain indications pointing to Shakespeare's having known the Imagini of Cartari." Jean Seznec, op. cit., p. 315.

Aphrodite Urania or Aphrodite Pandemos, originally mentioned by Plato in the Symposium.[10]

Whether Shakespeare had detailed knowledge of Neoplatonism, in particular the writings of the Florentine Academy, is an open question. What is known is that Platonism was cultivated by Elizabethan intellectual circles, notably by Sir Philip Sidney, and that its popularity made its major tenets common knowledge: "Everybody, including Shakespeare, knew about 'the prophetic soul of the wide world, dreaming on things to come'; and everybody was acquainted with the hierarchy of Neoplatonic daemons — as distinguished from the fallen angels of Christian theology."[11] Given that the basic cosmology of Platonism was widely known, it is not a large assumption to say that its Love theories enjoyed a similar popularity, for it was Love (Eros) that activated the Neoplatonic hierarchy: "Each of these (Neoplatonic) worlds is formless, at first; but it gradually takes shape through the activity of divine Love. . . . Love is therefore the ultimate bond of the cosmos — nodus perpetuus et copula mundi."[12] As for Shakespeare's direct sources, Spenser's A Hymne in Honour of

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[10]As Seznec, Wind and Panofsky point out.

[11]Walter C. Curry, op. cit., p. 157.

[12]John Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 36.

Beautie, has been mentioned,[13] and it has been suggested that the Platonic tinge of Love's Labour's Lost may owe a debt to Giordano Bruno's visit to England in 1582.[14]

Since this paper is not primarily concerned with the influence of Neoplatonism on Shakespeare, but rather looks at the Neoplatonic tradition as one means by which mythology entered Shakespeare's world, and since the topic under consideration will be Shakespeare's Love concepts, I will limit my discussion of Neoplatonic mythology to the metaphors which express the 'Love' theories. It should also be kept in mind, particularly when it seems that the balance of discussion weighs heavily on the side of philosophy at the expense of myth, that Shakespeare's concerns were artistic rather than philosophical. Looked at from this point of view, Neoplatonism provided him with a world of images contained in a tradition of ideas.

Love, in the Neoplatonic tradition, was defined as the desire for beauty. The ultimate beauty to be sought and longed for was the original Platonic One, metamorphosed by Ficino and other Christian Neoplatonists into God:

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[13] ibid., p. 12.

[14] Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1964), pp. 356-7.

> This divine quality of beauty stirs desire for itself in all things; and that is love. The world that was originally drawn out of God is thus drawn back to God; there is a continual attraction between them — from God to the world and from the world to God — moving as it were in a circle. This circle may be said to display three qualities: beginning in God, it is beauty; passing into the world, it is love; and returning to unite the creation with the Creator, it is pure delight. . . . God is the beauty that all things desire; by this their longing was kindled, and in the possession of it they will be content. Here the ardour of all lovers comes to rest, not because it is spent, but because it is fulfilled. [15]

This divine circle was further understood to have three actions: emanatio, the outpouring from God; raptio, the rapture which accompanies the recognition of divine presence in the world and consequently produces conversion; and remeatio, the final ascendence and return to Godhead.[16] Moreover, the image used to express this circular movement was of Venus and her son Eros:

> If we further consider that all communion between mortals and gods was established, according to Plato, through the mediation of Love, it becomes clear why in Ficino's and Pico's system the entire Greek pantheon began to revolve around Venus and Amor. . . . Although Venus remained one deity among others, and as such the bestower only of particular gifts, she defined, as it were, the universal system of exchange by which divine gifts are graciously circulated. [17]

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[15] Ficino, Commentary on the Symposium, as quoted in Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 39.

[16] John Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 40; Edgar Wind, op. cit., p. 38.

[17] Edgar Wind, op. cit., p. 38.

As has been noted, this "system of exchange," which Venus and Amor defined, had three movements: emanatio, raptio and remeatio. A more detailed look at each of these stages may help us to understand how they are represented by aspects of the Venus/Eros image, what these gods may have meant to Shakespeare and, on a larger plane, what theories of Love were popular throughout the Renaissance world. Moreover, I have chosen to look at each of the movements separately, because while Aphrodite and Eros play a major role in all three, their aspects change according to the purpose of the movement. For example, the Aphrodite who inspires remeatio, or the upward return, differs from the Aphrodite who is present in the emanatio, or downward flow. A similar distinction exists between the Eros of the remeatio and its counterpart in the raptio. It is thus necessary to look at all the faces of the goddess and her son before we can understand what they might have symbolized for Shakespeare.

I. REMEATIO the way up:

Love is a spirit all compact of fire,
Not gross to sink, but light and will aspire.

(Venus and Adonis 149-50)

Tit. And I do love thee. . . .
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.

(A Midsummer-Night's Dream,
III, i, 147, 151-2)

Cleo. . . . Husband I come: . . .
I am fire, and air; my other elements
I give to baser life.

(Antony and Cleopatra,
V, ii, 286, 288-9)

The history of the upward movement of Love (remeatio) and its images (Aphrodite Urania and Eros) begins, of course, with Plato's Symposium. Towards the beginning of the dialogue, Pausanias distinguishes between two aspects of Venus, her heavenly side, Aphrodite Urania, and her earthly or sensual side, Aphrodite Pandemos. The heavenly Venus, called daughter of Uranus, inspires a Love in which "there is nothing of wantonness."[18] While Pausanias equates this with a Love of

[18] Plato, Symposium, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in The Dialogues of Plato, Vol. II (London: Sphere Books, 1970), p. 195.

young boys rather than women, he also states that this is love of the "intellect" and the "good": "For they love not boys but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed."[19] It is, however, Socrates, or rather Diotima, who articulates how love, in this case Eros, inspires one to climb higher to absolute beauty:

> He who, ascending from these earthly things under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount unwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair bodily forms, and from fair bodily forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair sciences, until from fair sciences he arrives at the science of which I have spoken, the science which has no other object than absolute beauty, and at last knows that which is beautiful by itself alone. This, . . . is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty alone. 20

The commentators on Plato's love theories were also influenced by the works of other philosophers, notably Plotinus. A brief look at Plotinus' writing on the subject of love is therefore necessary, since his ideas helped to shape Renaissance Neoplatonism.

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[19] ibid., p. 195.

[20] ibid., p. 225.

Plotinus' system consisted of a cosmology of descending orders from the One, to the Universal Mind, the World Soul and the lower sensible or material plane of Being. In this picture Love is a God and a Celestial Spirit, and in discussing Love as a God,Plotinus refers back to the passage in the Symposium where we are told that Eros is the child of Aphrodite. Since Aphrodite Urania is herself the daughter of Kronos/Saturn (in Plotinus' system, the Universal Mind), it follows that Aphrodite is the World Soul, offspring of heavenly Mind. This Soul, according to Plotinus, is "unmingled as the immediate emanation of the unmingled, remaining ever above, as neither desirous nor capable of descending to this sphere."[21] But Aphrodite fixes her gaze upon the Father who conceived her (Kronos) and the Soul's adoration of the Universal Mind produces a Love, named Eros, the son of Aphrodite:

> This Act of the Soul has produced an Hypostasis, a Real-Being; and the mother and this Hypostasis — her offspring, noble Love — gaze together upon Divine Mind. Love, thus, is ever intent upon that other loveliness, and exists to be the medium between desire and the object of desire. 22

Plotinus is less harsh than Pausanias in Plato's Symposium, when he speaks not of the heavenly but of the

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[21]Plotinus, The Enneads, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), III.v, "Love," p. 193.

[22]ibid., p. 193.

baser, earthly Aphrodite. She, too, is a Soul, but unlike her divine sister she is neither pure nor absolute. She is the Soul of this universe (Anima Mundi) and as such her concerns are in the lower world:

> This Aphrodite, the secondary Soul, is of this Universe — not Soul unmingled alone, not Soul the Absolute — giving birth, therefore, to the Love concerned with the universal life; no, this is the Love presiding over marriages; but it, also, has its touch of the upward desire; and, in the degree of that striving, it stirs and leads upwards the souls of the young and every soul with which it is incorporated in so far as there is a natural tendency to remembrance of the divine. [23]

Since this secondary Aphrodite is touched by matter, she cannot be absolutely pure and is thus called a Celestial Spirit, while her heavenly counterpart is allowed the name of God: "It is our teaching and conviction that the Gods are immune to all passion, while we attribute experience and emotion to the Celestials which, though eternal Beings and directly next to the Gods, are already a step towards ourselves and stand between the divine and the human."[24] The Eros who accompanies the Celestial Aphrodite is born of Penia (Poverty) and Poros (Plenty). The love is called son of Penia because, not containing within itself the means of satiating its own desire, it must always strive for union with the divine: "It cannot be satisfied because a thing of

[23] ibid., p. 194.

[24] ibid., p. 196.

mixture never can be so: true satisfaction is only for what has its plenitude in its own being; where craving is due to an inborn deficiency, there may be satisfaction at some given moment but it does not last."[25] The echo of this doctrine can be heard as late as Ficino: "As Ficino was never tired of repeating, the trouble about the pleasures of the senses is not that they are pleasures, but that they do not last. It is their transitory, not their enjoyable nature which needs to be amended."[26] But this Eros is also born of Poros or Plenty, who is defined as: "the lavishness, the abundance of beauty."[27] The concept of plenitude will be dealt with in greater detail when we look at the emanatio or downward movement of love. Plotinus places more emphasis on the aspiring nature of this Eros than on Love's abundant plenitude: "This Love is, at once, in some degree a thing of Matter and at the same time a Celestial sprung of the Soul's unsatisfied longing for The Good."[28]

The major tenets of Plotinian Love are these: (1) that the Eros which Aphrodite Urania inspires leads one to a perception of absolute beauty, and (2) that when Love (Eros) is tied to matter through the earthly Aphrodite it creates an

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[25] ibid., p. 198.

[26] Wind, op. cit., p. 55.

[27] Plotinus, op. cit., p. 200.

[28] Plotinus, op. cit., p. 201.

insatiable longing. These two forms of Eros, however, have one important similarity. They are both continually aspiring in an upward direction.

Plato's ideas on Love reappeared with renewed popularity in Renaissance Italy, where they received attention in the many Trattati d'amore written during this period. These "Love treatises" were inspired by Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium.[29] Notable among these were the Dialoghi d'amore of Leone Ebreo and Castiglione's Book of the Courtier, the latter easily accessible to Shakespeare in Hoby's translation. All three works comment on the nature of aspiring Love, the remeatio, the Love that returns to God.

It was Ficino's lifelong desire to reconcile Platonic doctrine with Christianity. In an effort to do this, he transformed the Plotinian cosmology of the One, the Universal Mind, the World Soul and the sensible or material world, into God, the Angelic Mind, the World Soul and the Body of the World.[30] Eros is seen as the force that binds all these levels together and it is through Eros that one makes the ascent implied in the phrase remeatio:

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[29] For a detailed discussion of the Trattati d'amore in the Renaissance, see "Love Treatises," in John C. Nelson, The Renaissance Theory of Love (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1955), pp. 67ff.

[30] Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 36.

> As we noticed, the grace or attractive power of the ideal world, as it first appears in the Angelic Mind, is beauty. This beauty, of course, originates in God; and it is by God's absolute beauty that love is said to be stirred in the very beginning. Once again, the process is repeated as we descend the universal scale; so that in every world love is awakened by the beauty of the world above. Considered in this way, love becomes an ascent, a longing for the ideal order and the pure Spirit from which it came. [31]

Ficino, following Plato and Plotinus, also comments on the dual-natured Venus, bequeathing her to Renaissance mythology:

> The first Venus, who is the Angelic Mind, is born of Heaven: she is said to have no mother, because mother signifies matter to the natural philosophers, and the Angelic Mind has no trace of materiality. The second Venus, who is in the Soul of the World, is called the daughter of Jupiter and Dione. What is meant by Jupiter is the power in the World Soul that moves the visible heavens, and generates all lower forms; and because this is infused into matter, and appears to unite with it, the second Venus is said to have a mother. To sum it up, there are two aspects of Venus: the intelligence in the Angelic Mind, and the generating power of the World Soul. They are both accompanied by love. By innate love, the first is impelled to contemplate the beauty of God, and the second, to re-create this beauty in material forms; the one, having embraced the divine splendour, sheds it on the other, who imparts scintillations of its glory to the Body of the World. [32]

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[31] Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 39.

[32] Ficino, Commentary on Plato's Symposium, quoted in Vyvyan, op. cit., pp. 47-8.

The Platonic ladder of ascent is followed so closely in the Dialoghi d'amore of Leone Ebreo that it would be redundant to present the text here.[33] On the other hand, since Shakespeare was familiar with Castiglione's Book of the Courtier, it may be worth our while to examine, briefly, his ideas on the remeatio aspect of love, before continuing on to a discussion of the emanatio or downward motion of love.

While Castiglione does not name the Soul "Aphrodite," or her Love, born when the Soul perceives Beauty, "Eros," his debt to Plato and Ficino is obvious. The Courtier, according to Pietro Bembo, begins by loving the beauty which is "seen in the human body and especially the face,"[34] This sensual love is described as the lowest rung on the ladder and forgiveable in youth; but it is utterly condemned in maturity and is to be left behind as soon as possible. The lover then progresses to a stage where he uses the senses of sight and hearing to perceive the beauty of his beloved. Nor is he deceived in thinking that the beauty is real, but rather he sees in the beauty of the body a reflection of divinity. This type of love incites both lover and beloved to virtuous behaviour, so that "The desires of

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[33]Nelson, op. cit., p. 93.

[34]Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. George Bull, (Penguin Books, 1967), p. 325.

both will be perfectly happy."[35] As he proceeds up the ladder, the Courtier will abandon even this form of rational love, since it is still based upon a perception of physical beauty, and he chooses instead to adore universal beauty.[36] From universal beauty he will ascend to a contemplation of the angelic beauty, "and so, consumed in this most joyous flame, it ascends to the noblest part which is the intellect."[37] Finally, the particular expands to become the universal intellect and the soul, gazing upon this, achieves the final remeatio with God, which Bembo defines as "the supreme happiness the senses cannot comprehend."[38]

II. EMANATIO the way down:

The Ficinian definition of emanation is "overflowing,"[39] or in other words the love which flows from the divine world into the material one. When describing the

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[35] ibid., p. 340.

[36] ibid., p. 339.

[37] ibid., p. 340.

[38] ibid., p. 340.

[39] Wind, op. cit., p. 37.

interrelation of his trilevelled cosmology, Ficino uses the metaphor of a mirror:

> And so it is that the same divine countenance shines, as it were, from three mirrors — the Angelic Mind, the Soul of the World, and the Body of the World. In the first, being nearest to God, it is brilliant; in the second it is not so clear; and in the third, which is far removed, it is obscure. 40

However, as Vyvyan points out, "the metaphor of the mirror is not pressed, for something more purposeful than reflection is assumed to be taking place. Creation — or emanation — . . . ."[41] If we note that the shining countenance of God is obscured by the time it filters through to the Body of the World, it becomes clear why the aspiring motion of love plays so important a part in the Neoplatonic scheme. The spirit and soul of man, corresponding to the Absolute Soul and Spirit of the Platonic hierarchy, cannot receive the bounty of God's emanation in a purer state than it is manifest once it has entered into the world of matter. For many Neoplatonists, the material form of God was so far away from the source as to be totally negative:

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[40]Ficino, quoted by Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 41.

[41]Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 41.

> In sum, then, the Intellectual-Principle gives forth itself to the Soul of the All which flows immediately upon it; this again gives forth from itself to its next, illuminated and imprinted by it; and that secondary Soul (Aphrodite Pandemos) at once begins to create, as under order, unhindered in some of its creations, striving in others against the repugnance of Matter.
>
> It has a creative power, derived; it is stored with Reason-Principles not the very originals: therefore it creates, but not in full accordance with the Principles from which it has been endowed: something enters from itself; and, plainly, this is inferior. The issue then is something living, yes; but imperfect, hindering in its own life, something very poor and reluctant and crude, formed in a Matter that is the fallen sediment of the Higher Order, bitter and embittering. This is the Soul's contribution to the All. [42]

The creation of something "very poor and reluctant and crude" is the role assigned by Plotinus to the earthly Aphrodite. Ficino holds a milder view. Though his second Aphrodite is still the guardian of Matter, she is allowed her share of the love which flows from God:

> Our mind corresponds to the first Venus; and because of the divine provenance of beauty, the mind is moved to a reverential love when the beauty of the human body is presented to the eyes; while the power of generation in us, which is the second Venus, is stimulated to create a similar form. Love acts in both — in the one, as a desire to contemplate, and in the other to propagate the beautiful. In reality, each love is that of the divine image, and each is pure. [43]

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[42] Plotinus, op. cit., II.i, p. 104.

[43] Ficino, quoted by Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 48.

Though he continues to say that the second Venus must never overpower the importance of the first,[44] Ficino stands out in bestowing such lavish praise on the goddess of sensual love. The majority of the Renaissance Trattati d'amore admit that generation is necessary, but they hasten to disqualify the sexual act as an expression of love or, as does Castiglione, they describe it as a desperate condition of youth, to be passed through as quickly as possible.

All these writers are, however, intent on describing the joys to be found in the act of the remeatio and one is constantly advised to raise oneself to heights which intercept the divine emanatio before it enters the "chains" of matter. The earthly Aphrodite is always overshadowed by her heavenly sister and is seldom discussed in her own right. God's light becomes the virtues that enter the world of things, passing through the World Soul as seeds of virtues that are the rationes seminales, which Ficino understands as "unconscious creative forces in nature."[45] It is thus the Aphrodite of the earth (the Anima Mundi) who is responsible for planting the seeds of God's divine

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[44]Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 48.

[45]Walter C. Curry, op. cit., p. 40.

principles into Matter and, more important, it is she who inspires love which in human beings results in their propagation:

> While the celestial Venus is a pure intelligentia, the other Venus is a vis generandi which, like Lucretius' Venus Genetrix, gives life and shape to the things in nature and thereby makes the intelligible beauty accessible to our perception and imagination.
>
> Either Venus is accompanied by a congenial Eros or Amor who is rightly considered to be her son because each form of beauty begets a corresponding form of love. The celestial love or amor divinus possesses itself of the highest faculty in man, i.e. the Mind or intellect, and impels it to contemplate the intelligible splendour of the divine beauty. The son of the other Venus, the amor vulgaris, takes hold of the intermediary faculties in man, i.e., imagination and sensual perception, and impels him to procreate a likeness of divine beauty in the physical world. [46]

The ambivalence with which this natural Venus is treated, on the one hand with outright condemnation, on the other with enlightened tolerance, reflects a basic confusion in the Renaissance Weltanschauung. This confusion is carried over into Renaissance images of her. While Titian's "Venus of Urbino" appeared so joyously sensual as to suggest that "an undisguised hedonism had at last dispelled the Platonic metaphors,"[47] the goddess could also appear, as she does in an engraving after Baccio Bandin-

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[46] Panofsky, op. cit., Chap. V, "The Neoplatonic Movement in Florence and North Italy (Bandinelli and Titian)," pp. 142-3.

[47] Wind, op. cit., p. 141.

elli's, as "troublesome human Lust."[48] The question of whether the goddess of sensual love was to be celebrated or reviled was debated throughout the Renaissance. The force which brought such a debate into being lay buried within a major contradiction in the Renaissance world view.

Basically the God who sat on high and to whom one continually aspired was in direct conflict with the God whose downward movement ended in the generation of the world: "The One was an apotheosis of unity, self-sufficiency, and quietude, the other of diversity, self-transcendence, and fecundity. . . . The one God was the goal of the 'way up,' of that ascending process by which the finite soul, turning from all created things, took its way back to the immutable Perfection in which alone it could find rest. The other God was the source and the informing energy of that descending process by which being flows through all the levels of possibility down to the very lowest."[49] The Renaissance attempted time and again to bring these two conceptions of the Good or God together. Sometimes, as in Ficino, a divine circle was made to hold both notions of God; but even in his

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[48]Panofsky, op cit., p. 149.

[49]Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1933), pp. 82-3.

system the God of remeatio dominates over the God of emanatio, as does the heavenly Venus over her earthly counterpart. Moreover, the opposition between these two conceptions of God was not simply a metaphysical matter, but also a practical problem, with consequences in a world view:

> There was no way in which the flight from the Many to the One, the quest of a perfection defined wholly in terms of contrast with the created world, could be effectually harmonized with the imitation of a Goodness that delights in diversity and manifests itself in the emanation of the Many out of the One. The one program demanded a withdrawal from all "attachment to creatures" and culminated in the ecstatic contemplation of the indivisible Divine Essence; the other, if it had been formulated, would have summoned men to participate, in some finite measure, in the creative passion of God, to collaborate consciously in the processes by which the diversity of things, the fulness of the universe, is achieved. 50

The theory of plenitude could be radicalized one step further, to become a completely positive philosophy, where "the addition of concrete actuality to universals, the translation of supersensible possibilities into sensible realities, means an increase, not a loss, of value; that, indeed, the very essence of the good consists in the maximal actualization of variety; and that the world of temporal and sensible experience is thus good, and the supreme mani-

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[50] ibid., pp. 83-4.

festation of the divine."[51] Perhaps it was with this view of creation in mind that Titian painted his divinely sensual "Venus of Urbino." On the other hand, there can be little doubt that the painter who saw her as lust and those who concentrated on her heavenly nature, subscribed to the *remeatio* theory of God.

Whatever the confusion in the Renaissance, there can be little doubt of Shakespeare's persuasion. Venus, herself, admonishes Adonis with the argument of increase:

> Seeds spring from seeds and beauty breedeth beauty
> Thou wast begot. To get it is thy duty.
>
> (*Venus and Adonis*, 167-8)

— lines which receive added weight if one recalls to mind the "seeds of nature" and the beauty of God. Moreover, numerous of the sonnets also expound the theory of plenitude and its virtues. In the comedies, the promise of fertility, with which many of them end, is contrasted positively to the sterility which has usually dominated the earlier action. There are enough examples in Shakespeare's work to posit, with some measure of safety, that he saw the Natural Venus as divine.

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[51] *ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

III. RAPTIO the annunciation:

> Obe. That very time I saw – but thou couldst not –
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth
> Cupid all armed.
>
> (A Midsummer-Night's Dream
> II, i, 156-8)

The experience of raptio is placed in the middle of Ficino's divine circle because it is, in a sense, the final movement of emanatio and the first movement of remeatio. In the emanatio phase, God's love descends through the higher levels until it reaches the World Soul (Aphrodite). She, in turn, gives birth to a son (Eros) who transmits this love to the world itself. Raptio is the moment when the god Eros invades human consciousness, inducing a divine madness. The human experience of divinity (raptio) induces a hunger for further knowledge of God, which finds expression in the ascent of remeatio through love:

> All we must remember is that the bounty bestowed by the gods upon lower beings was conceived by the Neo-Platonists as a kind of overflowing (emanatio), which produced a vivifying rapture or conversion (called by Ficino conversio, raptio or vivificatio) whereby the lower beings were drawn back to heaven and rejoined the gods, (remeatio). [52]

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[52] Wind, op. cit., p. 37.

In the Phaedrus, where the raptio of Eros is discussed at length, the madness of love is called "the greatest of heaven's blessings."[53] The lover, so blessed, is able to perceive, through his beloved, a manifestation of divine beauty. Moreover, his experience of raptio may lead him to express his love either spiritually or physically. If he is spiritually inclined and self-controlled, his love will grant him happiness and harmony in life and reunion with the heavenly force after death. If, on the other hand, he expresses his love through physical union, the rewards are hardly lessened. In life he experiences "bliss" and after death, though not as prepared as the philosophically inclined, he, too, is given admittance into divine presence. In contrast, the lover whose perception of beauty is not god-inspired is driven by his passion to act in a base manner. He is compared to a "brutish beast" who pursues "wantonness" and whose pleasure is "a violation of nature." Inspired love is the only means by which lovers achieve remeatio and this is in accordance with Diotima's teachings in the Symposium, where the act of ascension is always accomplished under the influence of love (Eros).

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[53]Plato, Phaedrus, trans. Jowett, op. cit., p. 262.

Plotinus defines the raptio of Eros as the force which draws one towards pure beauty. Following Plato, he recognizes three kinds of Amor: the love that incites the soul to merge with divine beauty; the love that seeks to unite with beauty through procreation; and the love which is carnal desire. The last of these Plotinus dismisses as "sin." He is in agreement with Plato that this attraction is not informed by Eros:

> Where the procreative desire is lawless or against the purposes of nature, the first inspiration has been natural, but they have diverged from the way, they have slipped and fallen, and they grovel; they neither understand whither Love sought to lead them nor have they any instinct to production; they have not mastered the right use of the images of beauty; they do not know what the Authentic Beauty is. [54]

The lover, however, who seeks the Beautiful through the sexual act, behaves in accordance with the laws of nature. Since nature can only produce by looking toward the Good, any act which is subject to her laws must have a like objective. Therefore, though this lover is moved by physical beauty, he unconsciously sees in the earthly image a reflection of its divine counterpart:

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[54] Plotinus, op. cit., p. 192.

> There are souls to whom earthly beauty is a leading to the memory of that in the higher realm and these love the earthly as an image; those that have not attained to this memory do not understand what is happening within them, and take the image for the reality. 55

The raptio of this earthly love is inspired by the Celestial Eros, born of Penia and Poros. The Plotinian distinction between Celestial Beings and Gods, we recall, is that the Celestial ". . . though eternal Beings and directly next to the Gods, are already a step towards ourselves and stand between the divine and the human."[56] Consequently, the raptio which accompanies a sexual act of love satisfies at one level while it creates an insatiable longing on another. Having experienced the divinity of the physical world, the soul is left hungry for the further raptio of the higher realm. This satisfaction is reserved, however, for those whose "Pure love seeks the beauty alone."[57]

Plotinus calls the force which inspires pure love a God. Those who come under the domination of this Eros do not stop at worshipping the physical beauty of the world, but also venerate ". . . the beauty of the other world while they, still, have no contempt for this in which they

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[55] ibid., p. 191.

[56] ibid., p. 192.

[57] ibid., p. 195.

recognize, as it were, a last outgrowth, an attenuation of the higher."[58]

Though Plotinus makes some important distinctions between the two forms of love, he continually presses the point that both "are on the right path." The raptio inspired by the Celestial Eros differs only in degree, not in kind, from that which belongs to the one God. Thus procreative love is allowed a divine aspect.

According to Panofsky, the Platonic Eros was lost to the western world for several centuries. During the Classical and Mediaeval periods, the winged god was perceived either as an image of the generative force in the world, or as a figure which allegorically or metaphorically explained the psychological aspects of love:

> Plato's theory of love has left no trace in Greek and Roman poetry. Didactic poets like Lucretius or Oppian glorified love as an all powerful and omnipresent force, but conceived of this force as a natural, not metaphysical principle, pervading, yet not transcending the material universe. In lyrics, on the other hand, love was depicted as the strongest of human emotions, blissful and torturing, life-giving and deadly; but neither Theocritus nor Tibullus, neither Callimachus nor Ovid would have thought of elevating the object of this emotion to a 'supercelestial realm.' [59]

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[58] ibid., p. 196.

[59] Panofsky, op. cit., p. 99.

The tradition that received Platonism when it re-entered the western world, through the Islamic and eastern mystic religions, polarized the image of Eros to the point that delicate distinctions (such as Plotinus' distinction between the god and the Celestial Being) barely survived. The transcendental aspect of Eros, recognizable to the Church, was easily merged with the Christian caritas.[60] Moreover, the raptio, which the divine Eros inspired, had an obvious parallel in the converting experience of St. Paul.[61] But the God of sexual love was assimilated by ". . . the various forms of 'sensual' love which came under the heading of cupiditas (appetitus mali, or amor mundi, or amor carnalis)."[62]

The Renaissance thus inherited a tradition of Eros which, in many cases, sharply differentiated his spiritual aspects from his sensual ones. For Ficino the raptio of Eros was ". . . that kind of passion that God inspires in us (which) raises man above man and changes him into a God."[63] On the other hand, the passionate raptio of sexual love, originally sung by the troubadours, was a common theme of Renaissance poetry.

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[60]Panofsky, op. cit., p. 99.

[61]Wind, op. cit., p. 56.

[62]Panofsky, op. cit., p. 99.

[63]Ficino, Sopra lo amore, VII, xiii, quoted by John C. Nelson, op. cit., p. 177.

The icon used to depict Amor Mundi was Cupid with a bandage over his eyes: "Cupid is nude and blind because he 'deprives men of their garments, their possessions, their good sense and their wisdom.'"[64] His antithesis, Amor Dei, was shown without the blindfold because he could see the divine essence with eyes of light. But despite the emphasis placed on the duality of Eros, attempts were made during the Renaissance to establish, once again, a harmony between the two natures of the winged god. Edgar Wind has argued that the raptio which Eros inspired necessarily caused blindness because it was above human comprehension (approaching a Theos agnostos) and he has interpreted Blind Cupid as a positive reaching symbol of this form of limited enlightenment.[65] A major exponent of this view was Giordano Bruno who, in De gli eroici furori, described nine kinds of divine blindness.[65a] Moreover, there are more potent examples in Bruno's work of an attempted reconciliation between the supernal and terrene aspects of Eros. When speaking of a sonnet in which Bruno uses the image of an "Ancient oak,

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[64]Panofsky, op. cit., p. 107.

[65]Wind, op. cit., Chap. IV, "Orpheus in Praise of Blind Love," pp. 53ff.

[65a]Giordano Bruno, The Heroic Frenzies, trans. Paul Eugene Memmo Jr. (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1964), esp. pp. 258ff.

which spreads its branches to the air, and fixes its roots in the earth,"[66] to symbolize the union of the celestial with the corporeal, P.E. Memmo writes:

> In the next group of sonnets the lover finally abandons the ideal of complete denial of his corporeal nature in order to achieve unity with the Deity. Bruno returns to an idea which becomes his final philosophy of the soul. The lover sees that such a denial creates an artificial cleavage between the corporeal and the spiritual, a dichotomy that does not exist in the true nature of the soul, for the corporeal and the spiritual elements complement each other to form the whole. [66a]

Whether he spoke in a mocking tone or not, Shakespeare was aware of the duality of Eros and of the problems caused by the fissure in the god's nature, for he wrote in A Midsummer-Night's Dream:

> Hel. Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity.
> Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
> And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
> Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste;
> Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.
> And therefore is love said to be a child
> Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
>
> (I, i, 233-9)

It is this same beguiling love, a blind love, that leads back to the light in the play. A remeatio takes place in A Midsummer-Night's Dream, completing the circle which we have outlined in this chapter.

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[66] Ibid., Part I, fifth dialogue, p. 162.

[66a] "The Sonnet Sequence of 'De gli Eroica Furori,' introd. to Giordano Bruno, The Heroic Frenzies, op. cit., p. 39.

Chapter I.

VENUS AND ADONIS.

Shakespeare's first attempt at writing outside the dramatic form was the poem Venus and Adonis. It has been speculated that he wrote the narrative poem in order to establish himself as a serious artist, since dramas, particularly those performed in the London theatres, were not considered part of the "literature" of the time.[67] Christopher Marlowe had achieved success with Hero and Leander and his example may have persuaded Shakespeare to try his hand at the Ovidian genre. Whatever his reasons, Venus and Adonis, published in 1593, was well received and remained popular enough to warrant many editions.

Despite its favourable reception in Elizabethan England, a brief look at subsequent criticism of Venus and Adonis reveals an inordinate amount of dissension amongst

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[67] The Arden Edition of the Works of Shakespeare: The Poems, ed. F.T. Prince (London: Methuen & Co., 1961), introd. xxvi. All textual quotations of Venus and Adonis are from this edition of the poem.

scholars. While the poets Coleridge[68] and Keats[69] thought the poem a worthy example of Shakespeare's genius, critics have tended to take a harsher view. Thus H. E. Rollins, when introducing the Variorum edition of the poems, could write: "Today scholars and critics seldom mention Venus and Adonis and Lucrece without apologies expressed or implied."[70]

Similarly, there has been argument over the didactic nature of the poem's content. Some critics have supported Venus, citing Shakespeare's positive attitude to "increase" in the Sonnets as evidence. Others have found the poem overly erotic. Franklin Dickey and Lu Emily Pearson, while they differ on minor points, clear the poem of this charge by seeing in it a moralistic tirade on the dangers of sexual excess. Dickey asserts that Venus signifies a generative force, in itself acceptable,

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[68] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Bibliographia Literaria (1817), (London: J.M. Dent, 1906), Chap. XV: "The specific symptoms of poetic power elucidated in a critical analysis of Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis and Rape of Lucrece," p. 167.

[69] Several scholars make note of a letter which Keats wrote to John Hamilton Reynolds (Nov. 22, 1817) in which he quoted lines from Venus and Adonis saying that Shakespeare "has left nothing to say about nothing or anything." The Letters of John Keats, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1935), p. 65.

[70] A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Poems, ed. H. E. Rollins (Philadelphia and London: 1938), p. 474.

but destructive when overpowering man's reasoning faculty[71]; while Miss Pearson writes: "Venus is shown as the destructive agent of sensual love; Adonis as reason in love. The one sullies whatever it touches, the other honours and makes it beautiful."[72] R. Putney takes a different approach in suggesting that Venus and Adonis is "A sparkling and sophisticated comedy . . ."[73] He finds that the poem is "of course, the trifle Shakespeare called it in his dedication."[74] Both these attitudes to the poem (moralistic and comic) have been taken to task by J. W. Lever, who comments ironically: "At best, therefore, the poem must be taken as a very funny story which somehow forgets the joke, or as a highly cautionary tale, which in showing the dangers of caution, does not point the moral at all well."[75]

Hereward T. Price, placing himself outside the central critical battles, has bravely asserted that Venus and Adonis

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[71]Franklin M. Dickey, Not Wisely but Too Well (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Lib., 1957), Chap. V, "Attitudes toward Love in Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece," p. 46.

[72]Lu Emily Pearson, Elizabethan Love Conventions (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1933), p. 285.

[73]Rufus Putney, "Venus and Adonis: Amour with Humor," Philological Quarterly, XX, no. 4, (October, 1941), p. 534.

[74]ibid., p. 548.

[75]J. W. Lever, "Venus and the Second Chance," Shakespeare Survey, XV (1962), p. 81.

is essentially a tragedy. He finds that the major theme, showing its kinship to Romeo and Juliet and Lucrece, is ". . . the destruction of something exquisite by what is outrageously vile."[76] His argument is challenged by Huntington Brown, who claims that ". . . he seems hardly responsive at all to the delightful strain of comedy that pervades the early action and to some extent the pathetic denouement as well."[77] Brown goes on to make his point that "If anything, what we have here is good versus good, though with a measure of imperfection on each side."[78] J. D. Jahn, in an article which spends most of its pages condemning Adonis for his coy refusal of Venus, eventually finds himself in agreement with Brown's interpretation:

> Venus and Adonis, then, presents flawed alternatives that come out of the carpe diem tradition. On one hand the reader cannot endorse mere eroticism. Adonis is perceptive enough to see that Venus makes reason 'bawd to lust's abuse.' But Adonis' behaviour is not an acceptable alternative either. Aside from the fact that his coquetry is cruel, it leads to a limited understanding of man's place in the cycle of life. It leads, finally, to waste. [79]

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[76] Hereward T. Price, "Function of Imagery in Venus and Adonis," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, XXXI (1945), p. 277.

[77] Huntington Brown, "Venus and Adonis: The Action, The Narrator, and the Critics," The Michigan Academician (1969), p. 74.

[78] ibid., p. 86.

[79] J. D. Jahn, "The Lamb of Lust: The Role of Adonis in Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis," Shakespeare Studies, VI (1970), p. 24.

Such is the manner in which modern criticism transforms the poem's rather ambivalent content to a state of delicate balance. The problem with this view is that it oversimplifies the poem. It limits Venus to a personification of excessive lust (a view which I will argue against) and Adonis to the embodiment of cold chastity. The villain, it claims, is excessiveness, thereby reducing the poem to a simple reworking of the proverb, "all things in moderation."

While I find myself in agreement with many points raised by the scholars I have mentioned, I have chosen to examine Venus and Adonis from a mythological perspective. Implicit in this approach is the conviction that, in any work of art, a mythological figure refers beyond itself to the cosmology from whence it came. In other words, when we are presented with the goddess of Love, as we are in Venus and Adonis, we are no longer dealing with the world of everyday events. It is, of course, possible for a writer to develop mythological themes without using the images of pagan tradition. The gods are forces which do not have to be named to be present (I will argue that this is the case in Antony and Cleopatra), but when they do appear in the work of an artist, it is unwise to deny their divinity by interpreting them as mortal. Such a stance can lead to the

excessiveness which one critic displays when describing Venus as ". . . a fluttery and apprehensive Doll Tearsheet of forty."[80]

The presence of Venus in the poem tells us that the "real" world has expanded to include the divine. If we allow the earth's surface to stand as a metaphor for the "real" world, we can then see how a god or goddess is capable of adding an upperworld (heaven) or an underworld (hell) to our mental geography, for these "otherworlds" are the provinces of the gods. To question whether Adonis is "coy" or Venus "lustful" may be, in itself, valid, but it stops short of acknowledging the mythological forces which are at work in the poem. Let us stay with the larger definition of myth given by Mircea Eliade:

> Myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence. . . . In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the world. . . . it is as a result of the intervention of Supernatural Beings that man himself is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being. [81]

Shakespeare's main source for Venus and Adonis was Ovid's Metamorphoses (either the original or the Golding

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[80] Don Cameron Allen, "On Venus and Adonis," Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies (Folcroft, Penn.: Folcroft Pr., 1959), p. 111.

[81] Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (1968), pp. 5-6.

translation of 1567), where the story of Venus' love for Adonis is recounted in Book X. Behind Ovid lay a tradition which associated Adonis with a series of early vegetation gods whose annual union with the Earth Goddess produced an abundant harvest and whose yearly death was necessary for the continuation of the seasonal cycle. Though Adonis' death was mourned, his sacrifice ensured the perpetuation of the life, death and rebirth of natural growth.[82] While Ovid does not stress the vegetation aspects of Adonis, there is nothing in the Metamorphoses which directly contravenes his function as a fertility god. His union with Venus, his death and subsequent metamorphosis, all take place in accordance with the ancient myth. It is in Shakespeare that Adonis, though still a beautiful, potentially erotic youth, suddenly becomes, frustratingly and tragically, the unwilling lover.

It has been suggested that examples of unrequited love abound in Elizabethan poetry and that consequently there were many precedents for Shakespeare's reluctant lover. Spenser, Greene, Marlowe and Books II and IV of Ovid's Metamorphoses have been mentioned as possible

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[82]The vegetation thesis in mythology comes from James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, 2 Vols. (New York: Folcroft Pr., 1959, 1969), p. 111.

influences.[83] But while these works may have influenced his treatment of the myth, Shakespeare did not choose to write about Hero and Leander, Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, or Narcissus. He wrote of Venus and Adonis and in reconstructing their story he departed radically from the established myth. In his version, Venus' gift of love is rejected and the necessary union with Adonis is never consummated. Thus the triumph of generation which the ancient myth celebrates becomes, in Shakespeare's poem, the failure of love in the world.[84]

One cannot claim a vision as dark as love's failure, for a work which "treats sexual desire in the spirit of romantic comedy,"[85] without coming to terms with the humorous elements in the poem. The comic voice, present in Venus and Adonis, is undeniable. Indeed there are several incidents where the mocking tone of the narrator all but dominates the action. It is, however, a mistake to fall under the spell of the poet's laughter completely. Prince's assertion that the spirit of Venus and Adonis is

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[83] Douglas Bush, Mythology & the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 142. See also, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), I, pp. 161ff.

[84] I follow the interpretation of J. W. Lever in his article "Venus and the Second Chance," loc. cit., where the negative aspects of love in Venus and Adonis are investigated.

[85] Prince, op. cit., introd. xxxiv.

one of "romantic comedy" falls apart if one searches for the purpose of a better world or for the celebration of fertility which is the province of comedy. Moreover, as J. W. Lever points out, the death of Adonis is hardly suitable material for a work the sole purpose of which is to amuse.

We are not dealing, therefore, with a comedy, but rather with a narrator whose perception of the poem's events ranges from genuine amusement to detached irony. In choosing to speak through such a voice, Shakespeare may have been following the long tradition of writers who chose to conceal the seriousness of their vision under the guise of laughter. The Renaissance held that a divine mystery was best presented to the public in a suitable disguise and so they employed the use of elaborate metaphors, images, paradoxes and emblems to cloak the 'truth' which they symbolized. One such device was to interweave "the divine secrets with the fabric of fables, so that anyone reading those hymns 'would think they contained nothing but the sheerest tales and trifles.'"[86] This technique was described as serio ludere (literally, "playing in earnest") and it was derived from Plato:

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[86] Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 237.

> Lucian, Apuleius, even Plutarch had chattered of mysteries in a mocking tone. Their literary manner was admired and copied not only by professional stylists like Aldus, Erasmus, Aleander, and More — it was adopted also in the philosophical schools. Serio ludere was a Socratic maxim of Cusanus, Ficino, Pico, Calcagnini — not to mention Bocchi, who introduced the very phrase into the title of his Symbolicae quaestiones: 'quas serio ludebat.' [87]

Since Shakespeare was familiar with some of the writers who followed this tradition, he may have been influenced by them. Certainly the strange mixture of seriousness and comedy in Venus and Adonis suggests that it owes something to the serio ludere manner.

Despite the mocking tone, there is an underlying darkness in Venus and Adonis which has been noted by several critics. Price, for instance, sees the exploration of this darkness as central to any discussion of the poem. The world which Shakespeare's lovers inhabit is, for him, ". . . not a pleasant place," and thus "The business both of the scholar and of the critic is to discover what happens in that world to make it a thing of such horror."[88]

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[87] ibid., p. 236.

[88] Price, loc cit., p. 276.

While I cannot accept Price's argument that the world of Venus and Adonis is flawed by the lustful aggression of Shakespeare's goddess, I do agree that the poem's theme centres on the dark or negative forces which slowly overtake the paradisial condition of the opening stanzas. While Venus pleads in vain for union with Adonis, we move from a garden scene, where the goddess lies weightless upon a primrose bank, safe from the serpent's hiss, to a pre-creation darkness:

> 'For he being dead, with him is beauty slain,
> And, beauty dead, black chaos comes again.'
>
> (1019-20)

We descend, as it were, from heaven (paradise) to hell; but it is not the hell of Christianity, rather it is the pagan place of Tartarus, the condition of the world before divinity made order out of chaos.

From Hesiod onwards, the creating factor of the world has been identified as love (Eros). In the ancient cosmologies, the shaping of the world began when Chaos united with Spirit. Eros was born out of their union. Moreover, this was the only Eros capable of ordering the world. Love which was not informed by spirit was unable to free itself from the chaotic condition: "Physical enjoy-

ment was — here the perception of the ancient was extremely subtle — identified with Chaos itself, and only out of its jointure with Spirit could desire (Eros) come."[89]

As has been discussed in the introduction, the central position of Aphrodite/Eros in the cosmology of the world was carried forward to the Renaissance through Neoplatonism. From Plato through Plotinus to Ficino and Castiglione, love was seen as the force which lifted man out of chaos and gave him entrance to the secrets of cosmic order. Since love was the creator of the universe ("Each of these worlds is formless at first; but it gradually takes shape through the activity of divine love — love is therefore the ultimate bond of the cosmos — nodus perpetuus et copula mundi "),[90] it followed that man must be moved by love before he could take his place in the created world. On a microcosmic level, man dwelt in chaos until such time as he, initiated by love, was able to discover divine order both in himself and in the world. This was the miracle of the raptio of Eros.

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[89] Charles Olson, The Special View of History (Berkeley, Calif.: Oyez, 1970), p. 51.

[90] John Vyvyan, Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 36. See footnote 12 in the Introduction.

In Venus and Adonis the power of love is held in the figure of Aphrodite. Appearing in all her manifestations, from Aphrodite Urania to Aphrodite Pandemos, she attempts to initiate Adonis into the mysteries of Eros. At the other end of the spectrum, chaos, which has the major sway over Adonis from the beginning of the poem, lies passively waiting to reclaim him. The dramatic tension in the poem is built upon the struggle between the forces of creation and order, which are held in the goddess of Love, and the forces of chaos, which enter the poem in the figure of the boar.

The object for whom love and chaos compete in the poem is, of course, Adonis. He appears to dwell in a land halfway between the two, though his reluctance to love and his predilection for the "hard hunt" show that he belongs more to the "dark," from whence he came, than to the "light." It is as though, in Adonis' case, the darkness, which is the state of the unformed world, has become a mist. Aphrodite can thus perceive him and, moved by his beauty, judges that he is ready for the experience of raptio which will give him entrance into a lighted world:

> 'Love is a spirit all compact of fire,
> Not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire.'
>
> (149-50)

But Adonis, confused by the haze through which he views the world, can see neither the goddess nor the forces of chaos clearly. Exercising his free will, he persists in viewing Aphrodite's advances as lust and he is equally inept at gauging the dangers of hunting the boar.

Adonis' inability to perceive his situation clearly is due, in part, to the "no man's land" which he inhabits. Having, through his beauty, ventured far enough toward divinity to attract Venus, he is not yet ready for the metamorphic rebirth which union with the goddess implies. Moreover, his state of confusion, on a mythological level, is mirrored on a material level by his youth. As an adolescent he has left his boyhood behind but has not yet attained maturity.

Though on all fronts Adonis has reached a point of transition, he is unable, when approached by the goddess, to make this recognition. Throughout the poem he uses the excuse of his youth as a means of discouraging the amorous Venus. Furthermore, the accuracy of his self-image is upheld by the narrator who, as D. C. Allen points out, employs such images as "a bird in a tangled net,""a dabchick hiding in the waves" and "a wild bird being tamed," to elicit sympathy for the innocent Adonis.[91] Venus, however, using

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[91]Allen, loc. cit., p. 102.

the vision which is her divine gift, is able to perceive Adonis with more clarity than either the narrator or the young hunter himself. While she acknowledges Adonis' youth,

> 'The tender spring upon thy tempting lip
> Shews thee unripe, yet mayst thou well be
> tasted.'
>
> (127-8)

she recognizes that his beauty overshadows his age. In accordance with the Neoplatonic teaching that love is a desire for Beauty, we are presented, through the figure of Adonis, with the power of Beauty to inspire even the goddess of Love.

In Plato's Symposium Diotima teaches that, while Eros is the guiding force under which one climbs the steps of the Platonic ladder, it is Beauty which inspires the ascent. Love of Beauty leading finally to the perception of ". . . that which is beautiful by itself alone, . . ."[92] allows the aspiring climber to make the upward moves which each step of the ladder demands. The inspirational powers of Beauty play a central role in Plotinus' philosophy, as they do for Ficino, who defines love as ". . . a desire for the fruition

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[92] Plato, Symposium, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in The Dialogues of Plato, II (London: Sphere Books, 1970), p. 225.

of beauty, . . ."[93] and this definition of love is reiterated by the authors of the Trattati d'amore who almost unanimously agree that love is a desire for beauty.

The voice of the goddess in Venus and Adonis stands alone in acknowledging the power of beauty. The narrator stays in the background while Adonis, himself, though he indulges in narcissism, seems largely unaware of the extensive power he holds. But Venus, who is herself inspired by his beauty, continually reminds us of its divine origins.

In her initial address to Adonis, Venus gives an indication of the quality of his beauty when she calls him "Thrice fairer than myself." (7) It is the province of Venus, as both Aphrodite Urania and Aphrodite Pandemos, to radiate ". . . the divine goodness which manifests itself in beauty, . . ."[94] and this power she multiplies by three when speaking of Adonis. That a mortal should surpass, in fairness, a goddess who is famed for this quality, is abnormal. Time and again the ancient myths warn against such hubris. The story of Psyche and Eros,

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[93] Ficino, Convito, trans. Erwin Panofsky, in Studies in Iconology (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1939, 1967), p. 141.

[94] ibid., pp. 141-2.

familiar to Elizabethan England through William Adlington's translation of Apuleius, recounts the impropriety of immortal beauty invested in earthly form. Moreover, the Renaissance believed that since divine beauty filtered down to the earth through many spheres or heavens, there could be no perfect beauty of earth.[95]

Adonis is, however, distinguished from other mortals by virtue of his unique birth. Nature, Venus tells us, defied her own laws when she created the beautiful youth, fashioning him ". . . with herself at strife," (11). Like Prometheus, she stole his beauty and brought his form to earth:

> 'Cynthia for shame obscures her silver shine,
> Till forging Nature be condemn'd of treason,
> For stealing moulds from heaven that were divine;
> Wherein she fram'd thee in high heaven's despite,
> To shame the sun by day and her by night.'
>
> (728-32)

Thus, betraying universal law, Nature gave earthly form to that beauty which had hitherto belonged to divinity.

As beauty in the Neoplatonic system activates the universe, so Adonis, in microcosmic form, is essential to the activity of the world:

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[95] ibid., p. 133.

'Nature that made thee, with herself at strife,
Saith that the world hath ending with thy
life.'

(11-12)

Without beauty at its centre, the cosmic order collapses, and Adonis mirrors this catastrophe on earth. With him "is beauty slain" and this signifies not only the coming of "black chaos," but also the "mutual overthrow of mortal kind "[96]:

'To wail his death who lives and must not die
Till mutual overthrow of mortal kind;
For he being dead, with him is beauty slain,
And, beauty dead, black chaos comes again.'

(1017-20)

Yet, while he lived, Adonis not only captured the goddess of Love, but also, Venus tells us, walked Orpheus-like throughout the world, charming all natural creatures:

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

(1093-8)

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[96]Prince makes note of the passage, comparing it to Rom. I, i, 222ff., and Oth. III, iii, 91ff., and stating: "Here the cosmic application of the conceit recalls the loose Platonic tradition within which Shakespeare wrote."

Such is the manner in which Venus perceives her reluctant lover. She sees divine beauty in Adonis and thus, following Neoplatonic tradition, has no choice but to love him. We are invited, by the narrator, to mock the goddess who finds herself so ensnared. The situation does, indeed, lend itself to the comic voice. Nevertheless, the events of the poem uphold the accuracy of Venus' vision. Adonis does die according to her prophecy and chaos does triumph when, at the end of the poem, both beauty and love leave the world. But while Adonis lives, Venus, inspired by his beauty, unfolds her composite nature in an effort to woo him away from chaos into a world informed by Eros.

The Venus in Shakespeare's poem contains elements of both Aphrodite Urania and Aphrodite Pandemos. In bringing these seemingly contradictory aspects of the goddess together, Shakespeare was following a Renaissance tradition which sought to convey that it was through the union of these contraries that her divine nature was most truly expressed.[97] A system which proposed a strong opposition between the heavenly and natural manifestations of the goddess allowed for no commerce between the divine

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[97]Wind, op. cit., pp. 138-9.

and material worlds. On the other hand, if Aphrodite Pandemos appeared, as she did in the works of Botticelli, as a goddess of fertility who also referred back to her heavenly sister, then she could be seen as the "power that moves the visible world, infusing the transcendent order into the corporeal."[98]

Shakespeare's goddess, though she is predominantly of the earth, does contain elements of her heavenly sister. As Venus Urania, she is able to perceive a beauty in Adonis which transcends the physical:

> 'Had I no eyes, but ears, my ears would love
> That inward beauty and invisible...'
>
> (433-4)

Moreover, she is able to offer him the experience of raptio which is promised in the lines,

> 'Love is a spirit all compact of fire,
> Not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire.'
>
> (149-50)

As the celestial Venus, acting through her earthly counterpart, she ". . . takes hold of the intermediary faculties in man, i.e., imagination and sensual perception, and impels him to procreate a likeness of divine beauty

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[98]Wind, op. cit., p. 140.

in the physical world."[99]

Venus admonishes Adonis countless times on the futility of his chaste state. Her argument is based on the theory of "increase," which Shakespeare also champions in several of the sonnets. While she tempts Adonis with the promise of immortality which procreation contains,

> 'And so in spite of death thou dost survive,
> In that thy likeness still is left alive.'
>
> (173-4)

she also stresses the responsibility of each man to contribute to the world's bounty,

> 'Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty breedeth beauty;
> Thou wast begot, to get it is thy duty.'
>
> (166-8)

The images Venus uses reflect her natural function, for as the terrestrial Aphrodite, she is not only responsible for the recreation of divine beauty on earth, but also for planting the seeds of God's divine principles (rationes seminales) into the material world.[100] Adonis, however, firmly refuses to be wooed by the argument for increase.

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[99] Panofsky, op. cit., p. 143.

[100] Walter C. Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Louisiana State Univ. Pr., 1937, 1959), p. 40. See footnote 53 in the Introduction.

In frustration, Venus recalls for Adonis the example of the great war god, maintaining that for her sake he has relinquished his power in battle. She is speaking of the unarmed Mars:

> 'Over my altars hath he hung his lance,
> His batter'd shield, his uncontrolled crest,
> And for my sake hath learn'd to sport and dance,
> To toy, to wanton, dally, smile and jest ...'
>
> (103-6)

The device of serio ludere can be heard in these lines, for underneath the mocking flavour which Shakespeare gives to her tale, lies the mystery of the union of Mars and Venus, recorded in Ovid's Metamorphoses, Book IV, which celebrates the Triumph of Love. From Lucretius,[101] to Pico della Mirandola,[102] the discordia concors of the union of the goddess of Love and the god of War fascinated artists and philosophers alike. Since by uniting herself with Mars, Venus tames and mitigates his warlike nature, creating a harmony and a beauty greater than either god or goddess holds when solitary, Shakespeare may have included

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[101] "With Lucretius, who, we remember, interpreted Venus as the great generative force in nature, she alone is capable of neutralizing the destructive principle symbolized by Mars" Panofsky, op. cit., p. 164.

[102] ". . . — for this reason it is said by the poets that Venus loves Mars, because Beauty, which we call Venus, cannot subsist without contrariety; and that Venus tames and mitigates Mars, because the tempering power restrains and overcomes the strife and hate which persist between contrary elements." Pico della Mirandola, "On the general nature of beauty," Commento IV, vi, quoted in Wind, op. cit., p. 89.

the episode to demonstrate the possibility of a harmonious union, in the poem, between the opposing natures of the goddess and the beautiful, but reluctant, youth.

On its simplest level the "contrariety" between Venus and Adonis can be seen as procreative love in opposition to chaste beauty. This opposition is further developed by the fact that while Venus pursues the youth, hoping to unite with him, Adonis desires only to hunt the boar. His beauty is thus informed by an aggression which works against the attainment of a *discordia concors*.

With the beneficial example of War subdued by Love to her credit (the union of Mars and Venus), Venus attempts to win over the youth's rare beauty. In accordance with the Renaissance motto, "*Pulchritudo* — *Amor* — *Voluptas*" (which Ficino describes as a microcosm of the *circuitus spiritualis*, equating *emanatio* with *pulchritudo*, *raptio* with *Amor* and *remeatio* with *voluptas*,[103] Venus tries to produce a "divine pleasure" (*voluptas*) by uniting the love which Adonis has inspired in her with his beauty. Moreover, she is not merely concerned with

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[103] Wind, *op. cit.*, Chap. III, "The Medal of Pico della Mirandola," esp. pp. 43-6.

her own gratification, since her offer of love includes a metamorphosis for Adonis:

> 'The kiss shall be thine own as well as mine.'
>
> (117)

Left in its virginal state, as Venus points out, Adonis' chaste beauty is a negative force in the world, but coupled with her divine nature it would produce a discordia concors.

Though Venus enacts, by desiring union with Adonis, the aspiring nature of love, she also contains a darker side. The frenzy of passion which she feels for the beautiful youth occasionally brings forth her devouring aspect. The images of Venus as a bird of prey are some of the most memorable in the poem. For example:

> Even as an empty eagle, sharp by fast,
> Tires with her beak on feathers, flesh and bone,
> Shaking her wings, devouring all in haste,
> Till either gorge be stuff'd or prey be gone:
> Even so she kiss'd his brow, his cheek, his chin,
> And where she ends she doth anew begin.
>
> (55-60)

The ferocity which she displays in these lines was recognized by the Renaissance as part of her nature. It was thought to derive from her union with Mars, since in conquering the war god she assumed part of his savagery.

The mystery of this transposition was expressed in the paradox that "True fierceness is thus conceived as potentially amiable, and true amiability as potentially fierce."[104] However, though it is the martial Venus who is portrayed throughout the poem as a bird of prey, it must not be forgotten that it is not an expression of Mars alone, but of Mars in Venus. Therefore, as the images suggest, the devouring aspect is tempered by love, for Venus, both as an eagle and as a vulture (547-52), has as her quarry the kiss of love: "Even so she kiss'd his brow, his cheek, his chin." M. C. Bradbrook writes concerning this "kiss":

> Venus is an eagle, a vulture, a wild bird and a falcon. She is the beast of prey and Adonis the hunted quarry; she had hunted Adonis, and to escape he hunts the boar. When the boar kills him, it seems only to be repeating Venus' insensate possessiveness:
>
> 'Had I been tooth'd like him, I must confess,
> With kissing him I should have killed him first.'[105]

Miss Bradbrook's statement, that the boar only repeats the ferocity inherent in Venus, overlooks the point that to die by the kiss of a goddess was a metaphor for initiation into the holy mysteries of Eros.

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[104] Wind, op. cit., p. 94.

[105] M. C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 63. The quotation is from lines 1117-18 in Venus and Adonis.

The use of predatory, rapacious birds, as an image for love's metamorphic powers, was common to Ancient and Renaissance mythologies alike. Homer, Virgil and Ovid[106] mention that the beautiful Ganymede, fairest of mortals, was abducted to heaven by Zeus in the form of an eagle. Later artists interpreted this abduction as a metaphor for the divine experience of raptio: "For the Renaissance, . . . it was a matter of course to prefer an interpretation which connected the myth of Ganymede with the Neoplatonic doctrine of the furor divinus."[107] The eagle appears as an image of this mystic rapture in Dante's Purgatorio IX where, like Ganymede, the poet is raised in the eagle's claws to a higher heaven (PLATE 1).[108] The same bird appears again in Michelangelo's drawing of the abduction of Ganymede, a work which shows the beautiful youth lifted ". . . in a state of trance without a will or a thought of his own, reduced to passive immobility by the iron grip of the gigantic eagle,"[109] a drawing made in 1532 for the boy Tomasso Cavalieri, to symbolize the furor amatorius

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[106] Iliad XX, 232-35; Aeneid V, 252ff.; Metamorphoses X, 155ff.

[107] Panofsky, op. cit., p. 214. And, ". . . his abduction denotes the rise of the Mind to a state of enraptured contemplation." p. 215.

[108] In the Paradiso canto IXXX, the eagle in the heaven of Jupiter is formed of a constellation of moving angels, continuing the state of rapture (without furor) to the highest of heavens.

[109] Panofsky, op. cit., p. 216.

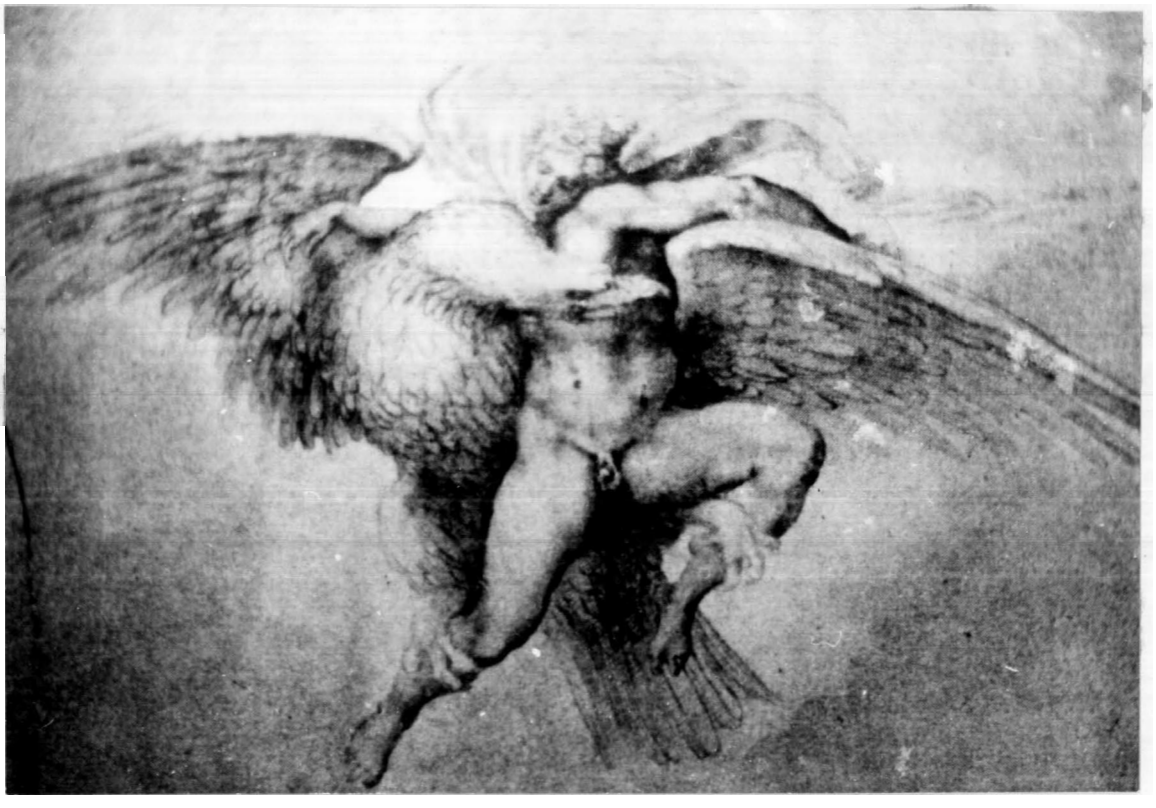

PLATE 1. Michelangelo (after), "Ganymede," Chalk Drawing for Tomasso Cavalieri, 1532.

PLATE 2. Gustave Dore, Illustration for The Divine Comedy, Paradise canto 9.

(Plate 2). It is not strange, therefore, that Venus should appear as a bird of prey when offering the experience of raptio, as her kiss implies, to the reluctant Adonis. The words "rapture," meaning ecstatic delight, and "raptorial," meaning an order of birds of prey, called the Raptores, are etymologically linked, as are raptus, "seized and carried off" (our modern word "rape") and raptio.

There emerges, in Shakespeare's poem, a goddess of formidable powers. She contains the heavenly, terrestrial, maternal, procreative and martial orders of love. She can offer immortality on the one hand and devour sexually on the other, without losing the totality which is her true nature. As Venus Urania she offers Adonis love that is ". . . all compact of fire," while as Aphrodite Pandemos she promises him kisses to quell the hunger of love:

> 'And yet not cloy thy lips with loath'd satiety,
> But rather famish them amid their plenty.'
>
> (19-20)

When he refuses to respond to such a gift, she offers him all the delights of her body in the famous conceit:

> '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.'
>
> (231-4)

In her maternal manifestation she holds Adonis as tenderly as a babe:

> 'Fondling,' she saith, 'since I have hemm'd thee here
> Within the circuit of this ivory pale . . .'
>
> (229-30)

And as Venus Genetrix, she continually warns him of the dangers of self-imposed chastity:

> 'Fair flowers that are not gather'd in their prime
> Rot and consume themselves in little time.'
>
> (131-2)

When the example of his horse fails to convince Adonis that his position is unnatural, Venus resorts to her martial aspect and attacks him. But all in vain, for Adonis steadfastly refuses to respond to any of her arguments.

In his innocence and inexperience, Adonis does not comprehend the nature of the gifts with which he is presented. He rejects procreative love, claiming,

> 'You do it for increase: O strange excuse,
> When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse.'
>
> (791-2)

Venus, however, has argued that it is self-imposed chastity, not procreation, which defeats beauty. Her

argument is so central to the theme of the poem that I would like to quote key passages of it in full:

> '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.
>
> Now of this dark night I perceive the reason:
> Cynthia for shame obscures her silver shine,
> Till forging nature be condemn'd of treason,
> For stealing moulds from heaven, that were divine:
> Wherein she fram'd thee, in high heaven's despite
> To shame the sun by day and her by night.
>
> And therefore hath she brib'd 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.'
>
> (724-38)

The crime which nature committed when, against universal law, she created, in Adonis, perfect beauty on earth, is to be avenged by the chaste Diana. Fearing the power of beauty, she will rob it of its divinity, causing it to "mingle with infirmities" and become "the subject of tyranny." Since beauty inspires love, love also will die and this act will bring an end to the world. For Diana, Venus tells us, has sworn "nature's death, for framing thee so fair." (744). In Venus and Adonis, chastity, as it is held in the virgin goddess, cannot admit Eros and so imposes its sterile condition on the world of the poem.

Though Adonis is the centre of the cosmic feud between nature and chastity, he cannot accept the love which would, by drawing him into a world ordered by divinity, save him from destruction. The single form of love he acknowledges is his enthusiasm for the hunt:

> Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase;
> Hunting he lov'd, but love he laugh'd to scorn
>
> (3-4)

Not only does his passion for hunting reflect his affiliation with Diana, the huntress, but it is also, in his case, an essentially narcissistic act, calculated to enhance his self-image. It is the same narcissistic quality which so blinds Adonis to the presence of Eros in the world. When approached by the goddess, he either discredits love by naming it lust, or he pleads his young age, for he is not capable of breaking open the closed circle of self-admiration. Venus, herself, suggests this when she compares him to the beautiful boy Narcissus:

> 'Is thine own heart to thine own face affected?
> Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left?
> Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected;
> Steal thine own freedom, and complain on theft.
> Narcissus so himself himself forsook,
> And died to kiss his shadow in the brook.'
>
> (157-62)

Implicit in the potential union of Venus and Adonis is a kind of death. Though the linking of death with the sexual

act was a common enough theme in Renaissance literature, the love which Venus has to offer not only includes a metaphorical death for Adonis, but also points toward a rebirth into the mystery of Eros: "To die was to be loved by a god and partake through him (her) of eternal bliss."[110] Adonis, however, blind to her example and unheedful of her cry,

> 'Do I delight to die, or life desire?
> But now I liv'd, and life was death's annoy;
> But now I died, and death was lively joy.'
>
> (496-8)

— holds firmly to his argument that

> 'My love to love is love but to disgrace it;
> For I have heard it is a life in death,
> That laughs and weeps, and all but with a
> breath.'
>
> (412-14)

Adonis not only consistently refuses Venus, but he is also adamant that he will hunt the boar. He remains as deaf to her arguments against this hunt as he does to her offer of love, refusing to substitute a tamer animal in its place. While Venus' quarry is love and the quest of her hunt is Adonis, his quarry shall be the animal of blind chaos and death, a beast as short-sighted as himself.

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[110] Wind, op. cit., p. 154.

From Adonis' point of view, hunting the brutal creature is safer than surrendering to the embraces of the goddess. He will not step into her spread nets nor into the trap of love, seeking, instead, the object of his own hunt. The boar is merely an object in his personal landscape which he presumes he will hunt and slay. Moreover, the success of this blind determination is meant to strengthen his self-esteem and consequently to reinforce the closed circle of admiration in which he lives. Uniting with Venus, on the other hand, would involve opening this circle — a terrifying experience, rightly associated with a rapture akin to death — to include the giving, receiving and returning of love (emanatio, raptio and remeatio), for the goddess ". . . defined, as it were, the universal system of exchange by which divine gifts are graciously circulated."[111] By closing himself off from the vital forces of life, Adonis is trapped within a mirror that will break open upon chaos. He is vulnerable to the attack of the boar which he hunts. Venus knows this and in a desperate attempt to dissuade him, she foretells his doom:

> 'I prophesy thy death, my living sorrow,
> If thou encounter with the boar to-morrow.'
>
> (671-2)

She is, however, powerless to help him. M. C. Bradbrook writes: "Venus has no supernatural powers; she is as helpless

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[111] Wind, op. cit., p. 88.

as any country lass to save Adonis or even reach him quickly."[112] Contrary to this, I believe that Venus is powerless, not because she lacks supernatural powers, but because Adonis has refused to admit her divinity into his closed world. She cannot enter a situation which has not welcomed her presence.

A world which is not informed by the entrance of Eros is one where chaos reigns supreme and it is within this chaotic landscape that Shakespeare's boar dwells. The boar, alone among the creatures of the world, has not the sight to be moved by Adonis' beauty and so he has power to kill him. Venus tells us that the boar, reflecting an affiliation with chaos, never lifts his eyes from the ground:

> 'But this foul, grim, and urchin-snouted boar,
> Whose downward eye still looketh for a grave,
> Ne'er saw the beauteous livery that he wore'
>
> (1105-7)

Moreover, any upward gaze which the animal, inspired by Adonis' beauty, might have been capable of, so enraptured him that he unwittingly killed the youth:

> 'If he did see his face, why then I know
> He thought to kiss him, and hath kill'd him so.'
>
> (1109-10)

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[112]Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 64.

There is, however, no reason for the boar's attack other than his own survival. A blind brute, he acts according to his instincts in a world where instincts run wild. He is, indeed, ". . . a mindless nemesis at the core of life."[113]

The death of Adonis symbolizes the death, on earth, of that beauty which inspires love. Love in the form of Venus is forever severed from beauty and so the circuitus spiritualis of Pulchritudo—Amor—Voluptas is broken, not just for the individual (in the case of Adonis), but for the entire world: ". . . the ancient Eros has become the principle not only of Life but of Light, — Light pursuing and penetrating darkness."[114] Since the creation of Voluptas through the union of love and beauty is no longer possible, "black chaos" will, indeed, "come again," a darkness uninformed by light and love.

The lowest form of physical attraction which is, in itself, identified with chaos, is all that is left after the death of Adonis. Venus paints this grim picture when she foretells the future of love in the world. The fall of love which she prophesies has been present in disguised

[113] J. W. Lever, loc. cit., p. 84.

[114] Jane E. Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 645.

forms from the beginning of the poem. Love which denies the entrance of spirit has caused Adonis to bring forth the lustful elements of the goddess, at the expense of her composite nature. Venus does not, however, blame Adonis. He appears to be, in her eyes, merely the victim. Her anger is rather directed toward a world in which the move from innocence to experience denies the existence of the divine. But Venus is the goddess of love, herself, and so personified she cannot really stop loving. Lines such as

> 'Sith in his prime Death doth my love destroy,
> They that love best their love shall not enjoy.'
>
> (1163-4)

— suggest that she acts out of spite, but her prophecy is really a melancholy statement of foreknowledge. She does not say "I curse," but rather, "I prophesy," and the future of love which she forecasts is one in which Eros is not present, where love is subject to a world of unguided chaos.

The most notable aspect of love in the fallen world, Venus tells us, is imbalance. All the images of this section of the poem are ones in which contraries clash in discord and harmony (as it is held in Eros) is not able to unite them. Love which should be the eternal principle of union finds "sweet beginning, but unsavoury end " (1138).

Similarly,

> 'The strongest body shall it make most weak,
> Strike the wise dumb and teach the fool to
> speak.'
>
> (1145-6)

Love, the uniting principle of all contraries, male and female, has become blind, the unguided love which moves in error through divided chaos. The conflicting images become darker and darker, culminating in the blackest:

> '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.'
>
> (1159-62)

Love was meant to create harmony out of discord, to unite contraries, to lead to the apex of beauty. Instead we have the tragic inversion of blind love. Love will be the cause of further discord and chaos, war and strife, in the world. Because Adonis could not see love, she, too, has become sightless in the final climax of despair which closes the poem. It is the final statement of the victory of death, chance and chaos over both beauty and divine love.

Adonis is, however, accorded a modified type of "resurrection." In the ancient myth his rebirth was the celebrated return of annual fertility to the earth. In Ovid,

the metamorphosis takes the form of a continually present reminder and renewal of Venus' love for Adonis. Moreover, the goddess, herself, creates the flower which immortalizes her lover, the fragile anemone.[115] In Shakespeare's poem, Adonis' transformation does not herald the return of fertility and beauty, nor is Venus the agent of the seasonal cycle. The event of his reappearance happens independently and the youth who was described as "The field's chief flower," (8), becomes exactly and literally that. The anemone, a short-lived and beautiful spring flower, could signify, in Shakespeare's poem, the mutability of beauty in the fallen world. Adonis does, however, receive, in death, the raptio which he refused Venus in his lifetime. Like an eagle deserting the lower world of nature's chaos, Venus takes the flower with her through the "empty skies" to Paphos, the island where she was born from the sea, where she intends to stay forever, far from the reaches of mankind.

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[115] Ovid, Metamorphoses, end of Bk. X: "But the enjoyment of this flower is of brief duration: for it is so fragile, its petals so lightly attached, that it quickly falls, shaken from its stem by those same winds that give it its name, anemone." Trans. Mary M. Innes (Penguin Books, 1955), p. 245.

Chapter II.

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

From the fallen world of Venus and Adonis, a world which Aphrodite, herself, abandoned, leaving only her mournful prophecies, we move to the optimistic and celebratory realm of A Midsummer-Night's Dream. I have chosen to move in this direction because the play, through its positive forces, balances the essentially negative tone of Venus and Adonis. It is the other side of the poem. If the failure of love dominated Venus and Adonis, then the success of love is the subject of the play. While in the narrative poem we watched the transforming powers of Eros defeated, one by one, the opposite is true of A Midsummer-Night's Dream. The movement of the play, in contrast to the reductive action of Venus and Adonis, is ultimately magically expansive. It reopens what appeared to be the closed ending of Venus and Adonis.

Critics have looked at the thematic structure of A Midsummer-Night's Dream from many perspectives. James L.

Calderwood[116] and Richard Henze[117] concentrate on the role of the imagination in love and art as it is revealed through the play. In contrast, D. A. Traversi, though acknowledging the complexity of thought and action in the play, finds that the civilized order of marriage triumphs over the darker magic of the imagination.[118] John Vyvyan[119] uncovers the Platonic elements in Shakespeare's comedy of love, a view which is developed and modified by Charles R. Lyons.[120] David P. Young[121] and R. A. Zimbardo[122] trace the ultimate harmony of A Midsummer-Night's Dream to a

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[116] James L. Calderwood, "A Midsummer-Night's Dream: The Illusion of Drama," Modern Language Quarterly, vol. 26, (1965), pp. 506-522.

[117] Richard Henze, "A Midsummer Night's Dream: Analogous Image," Shakespeare Studies VII (1974), pp. 115-123.

[118] D. A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, 3rd. ed. rev. and exp. (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 130-48.

[119] John Vyvyan, Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), chap. V, pp. 77-91.

[120] Charles R. Lyons, Shakespeare and the Ambiguity of Love's Triumph (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), chap. I, pp. 21-43.

[121] David P. Young, Something of Great Constancy (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1966). Prof. Young devotes an entire book to the study of A Midsummer-Night's Dream in which he discusses not only the theme of discordia concors but also the imagery, social context and folklore background of the play.

[122] R. A. Zimbardo, "Regeneration and Reconciliation in A Midsummer-Night's Dream," Shakespeare Studies VI (1970), pp. 35-50.

mystical union of discordia concors: "A Midsummer-Night's Dream then is the dream of reconciliation, the concordance of discordant parts. It is a vision of the sacred moment objectified and held up for us to look at and to be consoled by."[123] Taking the philosophical background of the play as his starting point, Richard Cody analyzes the vision of A Midsummer-Night's Dream from a mythological perspective. He finds that the figures of Venus and Diana, Cupid, Bacchus, Apollo and Pan have bearing on the mystical quality of the play's content:

> How Shakespeare reconciles Diana and Venus, one may say, is in the manner of Tasso in his intermedia. First he poses a Protean discord in which Diana prevails. Then he transposes it, by way of Apollo-Bacchus, to a Panic concord in which Venus prevails. From Phoebe to Phoebus, from Phoebus to Bacchus, from Bacchus to Venus, is not for a mythologer very far. Yet in another sense it is all the way. 124

Yet another article, also in the mythological vein, attempts to show the influence of Apuleius on the structure of the play.[125] The variety of critical approaches points out the richness of the play's content. Each point of view, in its own way, illuminates certain aspects of the work, though none alone accounts for the totality of the comedy's vision. Keeping in mind the expansive nature of A Midsummer-

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[123] ibid., p. 48.

[124] Richard Cody, Landscapes of the Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1969), p. 140.

[125] James A. S. McPeek, "The Psyche Myth and A Midsummer-Night's Dream," Shakespeare Quarterly XXIII (1972), 69-79.

Night's Dream, I return to the topic at hand, which is Shakespeare's use of Love mythology.

As Richard Cody points out, the three aspects of the circuitus spiritualis, — emanatio, raptio and remeatio, — are all dramatized in A Midsummer-Night's Dream.[126] These experiences, we recall, describe the means by which divinity enters the world and is apprehended by mortals. As many critics have recognized, A Midsummer-Night's Dream is divided into four levels of action. The hierarchical system in the play shows the mechanicals on the bottom, the lovers in the middle and Hippolyta and Theseus, as earthly rulers, on the top. Above the social structure, but still beneath the moon, is the fairy realm governed by Titania and Oberon. But none of these levels is, according to Renaissance cosmology, within the range of the divine. The dwelling place of the gods, the source of all the world's divinity, lies above the moon.[127] I will suggest that a fifth level of action is identified in the

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[126] Cody, op. cit., p. 133. While I agree with Richard Cody that the stages of the circuitus spiritualis are enacted in the play, I think it is Eros rather than Bacchus, who is responsible for the experience of divinity which the characters undergo. See the section on "Raptio" in the Introduction.

[127] I have drawn my knowledge of Renaissance cosmology primarily from C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1970), particularly chap. V, "The Heavens," chap. VI, "The Longaevi," and chap. VII, "The Earth."

play through the use of image. Specifically, the presence of the winged god Eros who, called to earth by sympathetic magic, descends through the various levels of action to inform the play throughout with the miracle of love. We begin with a social construct uninformed by the presence of Eros, a world similar to the one deserted by Venus in Venus and Adonis. Love which brings about "the manifestation in man of the great informing power which brought the universe out of chaos and which now maintains it in order and in concord "[128] is seen as the parent of discord. The chaotic condition of the opening acts is slowly dispelled, once the power of Love is brought to earth (emanatio) through the figure of Eros. The raptio he inspires, notwithstanding the confusion always present when the divine and the mundane merge, culminates in the vision of harmony with which the play ends.

The mood of the play is, from the very beginning, a festive one. The audience knows from the title that the time of the play is Midsummer's Eve, originally a celebration of the summer solstice. As David P. Young points out,[129]

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[128] J. S. Harrison, Platonism in English Poetry (New York: 1903), p. 107, cited by Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 78.

[129] Young, op. cit., pp. 18ff.

the very mention of this holiday in the title of the play would have planted many expectations in the minds of an Elizabethan audience, notably the emergence of the Fairies and Robin Goodfellow. Furthermore, when the play opens, we learn there is yet another cause for celebration: the royal wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. True to the tenet of dramaturgy, that the exposition should contain, in embryonic form, the ending of the play, Shakespeare opens A Midsummer-Night's Dream on the festive note which will close the play.

But the joyful humour of the play's opening is no sooner established than it is undercut by a darker mood. The promise of marital harmony, which Theseus projects in the opening scene, is marred by the Egeus / Hermia conflict. We learn that Eros is not honoured in this world, as might have been expected from Theseus' impatient anticipation of his "nuptial hour," but instead is subject to the harsh Athenian law which condemns Hermia to one of two regions which cannot admit the winged god: death or unalterable chastity. Moreover, Hermia's dilemma is not an isolated incident, a fortuitous twist of fate, but a condition of the world which we have entered:

> Lys. Ay me! For aught that ever I could read,
> Could ever hear by tale or history,
> The course of true love never did run smooth;
>
> (I, i, 132-4)

Following on Theseus' harsh judgement, the lovers retreat to commiserate. It is our first intimate view of the quality of love in their world and as they voice their complaints we see Venus' prophecy fulfilled. Love, as they describe it, struggles to bring chaos into order but is defeated at all turns:

> Lys. But, either it was different in blood —
> Her. O cross! too high to be enthrall'd to low.
> Lys. Or else misgraffed in respect of years, —
> Her. O spite! too old to be engag'd to young.
>
> (I, i, 135-8)

And Lysander's statement —

> Lys. Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
> War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it.
>
> (I, i, 141-2)

attests to Venus' premonition that:

> 'It shall be cause of war and dire events,
> And set dissension 'twixt the son and sire. . .'
>
> (Venus and Adonis, 1159-60).

Hermia and Lysander clearly tell us that the world we have entered is one which cannot be informed by Eros. And, as if to reinforce the image of that world, Shakespeare introduces Helena, in the same scene, lamenting yet

another misuse of Cupid's powers. Here is the classic case of the false lover and again the voice of Venus is heard:

> 'It shall be fickle, false and full of fraud'
>
> (Venus and Adonis, 1141)

As these images of the fallen nature of love, gathering strength through repetition, reach their crescendo, the divine side of Eros, his "light," enters the play in Helena's vision of the dual-natured Cupid:[130]

> Hel. Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity.
> Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.
> And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.
> Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;
> Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste:
> And therefore is Love said to be a child,
> Because in choice he is so oft beguil'd.
>
> (I, i, 232-9)

The opening lines, here, follow fairly closely the Neoplatonic theory that: ". . . the highest mysteries transcend the understanding and must be apprehended through a state of darkness (blind Cupid) in which the distinctions of logic vanish."[131] In this state, love can bring black chaos ("Things base and vile, holding no quantity") into the light of divine order, giving it shape, "form and dignity." The

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[130] On the dual-natured Eros, see Introduction, p. 33.

[131] Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 54.

remaining lines of Helena's speech describe blind love from an earthly perspective, Amor mundi. This is the god who blinds the eyes of men to the world without simultaneously opening them to the mysteries of divinity. Yet the activities of the earthly Eros have their share of celestial power, for this love is a reflection, so to speak, of its higher counterpart. The two gods, Amor dei and Amor mundi portray, as Vyvyan points out, stages in the apprehension of Love's power:

> In her soliloquy, Helena goes on to what seems to be a contradiction, stressing love's blindness. . . . But there is no contradiction when we remember that Shakespearean love is a progressive activity — always there is blindness, partial blindness, and at last clear sight. [132]

Since the two aspects of Cupid do follow, the one from the other, they can be brought together in reconciliation.[133] In A Midsummer-Night's Dream the two orders of Eros, which Helena recognizes in her speech, will not oppose each other but rather they will unite to form the harmony which the union of contraries implies.

Helena's speech, particularly the lines "Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity" — looks forward to the joining of Titania

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[132] Vyvyan, op. cit., p. 84.

[133] The philosophy of Giordano Bruno shows an attempt to reconcile the two sides of Eros. See Introduction, pp. 33-34.

and Bottom, while simultaneously offering an image of hope at a moment in the play when the fulfilment of Love seems unattainable. However, this image of Eros "translating" the world is destined, at this point, to dip beneath the surface of the play and be held in memory, like a subterranean river, until the time when it reappears not as a possibility but as an active force. Meanwhile the frustrations of love return with the introduction of "The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe."

It is through the vehicle of "The most lamentable comedy" (which itself implies a discordia concors) that Bottom is persuaded into the role of lover. His "chief humour" is, however, not amorous but aggressively militant as expressed in the tyrant's tale. In this choice he recalls the warrior past of Theseus and to some extent Adonis, who entered this range in his adulation of the hunter's role. But Bottom, who has been cast in the play within a play — "A lover, that kills himself most gallantly for love" (I, ii, 26) — will appear in the larger work as a lover whose scope and importance far surpass the possibilities of Pyramus and Thisbe, and to do this he must forsake the Herculean in favour of Amor:

> Bot. This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein; a lover is more condoling.
>
> (I, ii, 42-4)

Nor do his attempts to caricature the feminine side of love

> Bot. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice, 'Thisne, Thisne!' 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear; thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!'
>
> (I, ii, 55-7)

— or to out lion the lion, save him from his fated role of Pyramus. He is to play the lover and, as such, dangerously enter two worlds which do not admit the power of Eros, the world of his play and the larger realm of A Midsummer-Night's Dream.

Throughout these first scenes, the play's landscape has been discovered as one in which the dark side of love thrives in an atmosphere of chaos and tragedy. Though comedy has been present, the festive promise of the play's beginning has not been realized. It would be reasonable, on the part of the audience, to expect that with the entrance of the Fairies, celebration (as the title suggests) will at last commence. But this expectation is not met. Whatever ails the world at large has originated in the Fairy world and with far-reaching consequences.

The Fairy world, according to C. S. Lewis, was located in the aerial sphere of Renaissance cosmology.[134] Shakespeare's Fairies do not seem to belong exclusively to either the earth or the air, but to partake of both regions. This places them correctly in the aerial universe which begins under the moon and extends downwards to the earth. The "spirits" who inhabit this region defy classification: "They intrude a welcome hint of wildness and uncertainty into a universe that is in danger of being a little too self-explanatory, too luminous."[135] The Fairies in A Midsummer-Night's Dream appear to be a mélange of popular folklore and classical mythology filtered through the playwright's imagination. As M. W. Latham points out, the spirits who attend on Titania have no basis in folk tradition but are Shakespeare's unique creation.[136] Titania and Oberon (though taken from literary sources) express a kinship to the Renaissance High Fairies in that they are not dwarflike in appearance nor demonic by nature. As C. S. Lewis remarks, Oberon assures us that he is a spirit of "another sort," differentiating himself from the "damned spirits" who "willfully themselves

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[134] C. S. Lewis, op. cit., pp. 117ff.

[135] ibid., p. 122.

[136] M. W. Latham, The Elizabethan Fairies (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1930), chap. V, "The Fairies of Shakespeare," pp. 176-218.

exile from light."[137]

High Fairies, such as Shakespeare's Oberon, occupying the middle ground, could serve as intermediaries between the aethereal, divine universe above the moon and the region of the earth. They were thought to be ". . . of a middle nature between man and Angel, as were Daemons thought to be of old."[138] Moreover, certain types of Fairies were closely associated with the elements. Titania appears to be one of ". . . those spirits which according to the principle of plenitude, existed in every element."[139] Though Titania's name suggests that she is a manifestation of Diana, she does not consistently behave in the manner of Ovid's chaste goddess. Moreover, being a fairy and inhabiting the aerial realm, she could not express the total nature of the goddess. But while she, herself, is not Diana, she appears to be an agent through whom the gods manifest themselves, and she, in her turn, transports their

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[137] Lewis, op. cit., p. 138.

[138] Robert Kirk, Secret Commonwealth (1961), cited by C. S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 135.

[139] Lewis, op. cit., p. 134. Lewis takes this information from Ficino, Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate. On the role of Fairies and Daemons as intermediaries in Shakespeare, see Robert H. West, Shakespeare & the Outer Mystery (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Pr., 1968), chap. VI; W. C. Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Louisiana State Univ. Pr., 1937, 1959).

images into the world of the play.

With the appearance of the Fairies, the world of the play extends to include the semi-divine. But what should be a joyful addition to the drama, turns around on itself and exposes the darkest vision of chaos which the play has, up to this moment, proposed. The storm of events exposing the misinformed dark side of love, which operated throughout Act I, reaches its strongest dimension as the source of confusion in the Fairy world is revealed.

The conflict between Titania and Oberon centers around the guardianship of the changeling boy. Oberon, Puck tells us, ". . . would have the child / Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild " (II, i, 24-5), while Titania, refusing to surrender him, "Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy." (II, i, 27). The theme is a familiar one. In Venus and Adonis, Adonis enacted the role of the Indian boy by refusing the erotic world, with tragic results. In A Midsummer-Night's Dream, however, the changeling boy remains in the background, while the question as to which world has the predominant claim upon him is fought in the foreground between the King and Queen of the Fairies. The peaceful settlement of this argument is, of course, central to the play. Such a settlement will eventually

↳ make pass. by Tit Ang Bottom and giving Oberon the boy

come about by the substitution of Bottom for the changeling boy. The consequent joining of Bottom and Titania will admit the power of Aphrodite, denied in Venus and Adonis, into the world of A Midsummer-Night's Dream. But I will return to this problem at a later point in the essay. For the moment it is enough to recognize that the feud between the masculine and feminine claims to the world lies at the core of the confusion in Fairyland.

Until this feud is resolved, the world of the play will not be able to admit Eros, and will remain, chafing as it is, under the influence of the virgin Diana. From her first appearance in Theseus' opening lines —

> The. but O! methinks how slow
> This old moon wanes; she lingers my desires,
> Like to a step-dame, or a dowager
> Long withering out a young man's revenue.
>
> (I, i, 3-6)

which has set the play's tenor, the Moon Goddess' hold over the movement of the drama has appeared again and again, forming a leitmotif in Act I. The metamorphosis of Diana into Aphrodite, which is her natural movement and one that has been anticipated from the play's beginning, has been frustrated at every turn and has come to a standstill in the conflict between Oberon and Titania. The insults they

hurl at each other in their first angry encounter express this conflict fully:

> Tita. What! jealous Oberon. Fairies, skip hence;
> I have foresworn his bed and company.
>
> (II, i, 61-2).

Titania, under the influence of the moonlight, has donned the face of Diana and retreated into a celibate world. Oberon attempts to expose the falsity of her virgin mask by calling her "rash wanton!" and by assigning to her the role of the temptress who leads Theseus through a maze of lovers:

> Obe. Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night
> From Perigouna, whom he ravished?
> And make him with fair Aegle break his faith,
> With Ariadne, and Antiopa?
>
> (II, i, 77-80)

but to no avail. Diana's angry hold over the world remains supreme.

The "elemental spirit" aspect of Titania is fully realized in her angry retort to Oberon. It is she who re-enacts the aethereal dance of the stars in the mutable world of the Fairies, consequently transmitting their celestial movements to the earth itself. But her role

as divine medium cannot succeed if her dance is obstructed by strife. Oberon's jealous desire for the changeling child has prompted Titania to forsake Aphrodite in favour of Diana. This move has resulted in the consequent collapse of the world's elemental harmony, for love (Eros) is the power by which the divine spheres create their dance. In Titania's magnificent central speech, in which the collapse of elemental harmony and its consequent upheaval of the seasons' right cycle is disclosed, the dark side of Diana reaches its fullest manifestation:

> Tita. Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
> Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
> That rheumatic diseases do abound
>
> (II, i, 103-5)

Diana's wrath is the penalty that the world of A Midsummer-Night's Dream pays for its refusal to admit the light of Eros.

Oberon clearly names the manner by which the stagnating moon may be transformed into the life-giving nature of Aphrodite when he says to Titania;

> Obe. Do you amend it! it lies in you.
> Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
> I do but beg a little changeling boy,
> To be my henchman.
>
> (II, i, 118-21)

Their argument has come full cycle; the discord between them shows no evidence of waning. Oberon wants to claim the changeling boy for his world, while Titania is equally adamant in her refusal to surrender him. The result is that the masculine, as it is held in Oberon's desire to have the boy — "Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild " — and the feminine, as it, in turn, finds its own expression in Titania's maternal possessiveness, have polarized. In the extreme stance which each has taken, there remains no room for the presence of Eros, a presence which would, given entrance, unite them in a concordant discord.

The closing of the quarrel scene between Oberon and Titania heralds a major turning point in the play. The storm of frustration which has been gathering throughout reaches its finale in the closed circular argument between the King and Queen of Fairyland. Nothing in the play can move forward until this locked circle is broken. The possibilities of action which the drama has suggested, up to this point, can continue only in a tragic direction. A new ingredient must enter the world of the play in order to break up the stasis which has a stranglehold on any further movement. The "new ingredient" which is required

is "Eros," and it is Oberon who becomes the agent through whom the winged god gains entrance into A Midsummer-Night's Dream.

Oberon's vision of the mermaid singing the harmony of spheres while seated on a dolphin's back, has been the subject of much critical commentary.[140]

> Obe. My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou remember'st
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
> To hear the sea-maid's music.
>
> (II, i, 148-54)

Whatever else it may symbolize, Oberon's vision contains a mermaid riding on a dolphin's back whose power of song is able to calm the seas and cause the divine stars to leave their fixed course. Her ability to make the "rude sea" civil shows that she does not belong to the tradition

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[140] H. H. Furness, A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: A Midsummer-Night's Dream (New York: Dover Pub., 1963). Prof. Furness provides 17 pages of notes on Oberon's speech, most of which deal with the political allegory which the lines suggest. James A. S. McPeek writes: "It seems generally accepted that Shakespeare may have remembered here impressions, however derived, from the entertainments for Elizabeth at Kenilworth (1575) and Elvethan (1591), spectacles that presented singing mermaids, dolphins, Tritons, fireworks (shooting stars) and spells supposedly calming the seas." He argues, however, that another possible source can be found in Apuleius' The Golden Ass. McPeek, loc. cit., pp. 73-4.

of sirens who lure man to shipwreck and death by sweet singing, but is a different order of spiritus.[141] On the other hand, she upsets universal order, as nature did in Venus and Adonis, by causing the stars to shoot "madly from their spheres." This last image suggests that, rightly or wrongly, certain divine influences are, through the enchanting song of the siren, brought from the heavens above the moon to the earth.

The capturing of divinity by this means hints at the Ficinian doctrine of natural magic by which the initiate strengthened his communion with God by focusing his attention on an image of the divine, so that "The spiritus which is the channel for the influences of the stars has been caught and stored in the magic talisman."[142] But sight was not the only sense which might be used in this

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[141] Plato gave the sirens a place as singers of the spheres: "The Spindle turned on the knees of Necessity. Upon each of its circles stood a Siren, who was carried round with its movement, uttering a single sound on one note, so that all the eight made up the concords of a single scale." The Republic of Plato, trans. Francis M. Cornford (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1945, 1964), p. 355. Oberon's mermaid, who utters "dulcet and harmonious breath," may belong in some measure to the Platonic tradition. For a more detailed consideration of the Platonic siren in literature, see Jane E. Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1908), "The Ker as Siren," pp. 197ff., esp. p. 205.

[142] Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (New York: Vintage, 1969), chap. IV, "Ficino's Natural Magic," p. 77.

manner. Song, particularly Orphic Song, could be employed as another means of entering the divine. Oberon's vision combines both the visual talisman and oral incantation in the form of the singing mermaid image.

By placing the mermaid on a dolphin's back, Shakespeare gives to his image the powers of rescue which were associated with the dolphin, an animal well-known for saving drowning sailors. In an Alciatus emblem of 1581, the myth of Arion rescued by the dolphin is represented.[143] We see Arion thrown overboard and simultaneously heading safely for land while playing his harp on the back of the dolphin who is saving him. The emblem may have suggested Shakespeare's singing siren riding the back of the dolphin. It is fitting, at any rate, that an image which will, in a sense, "rescue" the play and calm the turbulence should contain the symbol of the dolphin.

Up to this point, Puck and Oberon have shared the same recollection. When questioned by the Fairy King, Puck is able to recall the singing mermaid: "I remember " (II, i, 154). They did not, however, share the secret of Cupid's appearance. Oberon has held back this knowledge

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[143] Henry Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers (New York, Burt Franklin, c1869), p. 280.

and is only now ready to reveal his total vision to Puck:

> Obe. That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid all arm'd
>
> (II, i, 155-7)

By stating a visibility that Puck could not see, Oberon reminds us of his stature as a High Fairy. He has been able to see Eros charmed by the siren enter the aerial world ("between the cold moon and the earth") while Puck, who belongs to a lower order of Fairy (the prankster), has been barred this vision. The appearance of Eros, who is the only force higher than Oberon in the play, adds a fifth level in the play's hierarchical structure. It marks the entrance of celestial love into the world of A Midsummer-Night's Dream, heralded by the shooting stars which descended to hear the mermaid's song. But Eros does not stay, as Oberon first sees him, a visiting god in the aerial universe. Displaying his dual nature (he is not only Amor dei but also Amor mundi), he draws his bow and shoots the power of love down to the earth. Oberon, alone of the characters in the play, witnesses this occurrence, since he is a creature of the aerial universe. The raptio of Eros is thus at his disposal.

The "light" of Eros has manifested itself in "a little western flower," (II, i, 166). Its colouring — "Before, milk-white; now purple with love's wound " (II, i, 167) — recalls the metamorphosis of Adonis:

> A purple flower sprung up, chequer'd with white;
> Resembling well his pale cheeks, and the blood
> Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.
>
> (Venus and Adonis, 1168-70)

and suggests that the flower itself is in a state of transformation, for the plant that appeared as a reductive image of Adonis, in vegetation form in the poem, has become, in the play, the agent through which love will inform the world. The maidens call this new flower "Love in idleness" (II, i, 168), an accurate name for a flower which contains the divinity of Eros, but which has, indeed, lain "idle," unused thus far by the world of the play.

The flower's capacity to ". . . make man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees." (II, i, 171-2), recalls the image of blind Cupid mentioned earlier by Helena. Oberon ignores the divine side of Eros which can translate "Things base and vile" to "form and dignity" and concentrates instead on the negative aspects of Cupid's blindness. Though Oberon is a medium by which "Love" enters the play, he is, as he shows by his selfish

understanding of the god, a limited agent. By calling up the lower form of blind Eros at the expense of his higher, Oberon makes himself directly responsible for the confusion amongst the lovers, which grows out of this scene. The god, which he has introduced to the world for his own purposes, will remain trapped on the eyelids of the characters, causing blindness, and, by extension, on the surface of the play, until such time as his rites are enacted in the union of Titania and Bottom.

The "love juice" which is to be placed on the eyelids of Titania is, as described by Oberon, an inversion of the erotic powers of the god. Eros, who has been defined as ". . . the principle not only of Life but of Light . . . Light pursuing and penetrating darkness, . . ."[144] is here cast as the agent by which darkness, as it is held in "Blind Cupid," will overpower the world of the play. On the obvious level Oberon intends to use this blindness to defraud Titania of her Indian boy. But the means to this end betray the inverted nature of the god:

> Obe. The next thing then she, waking, looks upon —
> Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
> On meddling monkey or on busy ape —
> She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
>
> (II, i, 179-82)

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[144]Harrison, op. cit., p. 645.

The god Eros, who holds the power to transform "bestial" aspects of mankind to a higher order, will, under direction from Oberon, enslave semi-divine Titania to one of a number of "beasts" which roam a pre-erotic and consequently chaotic world. Moreover, the potential tragedy of the play's vision, which has continually lurked beneath the drama's surface, reappears with the vision of the Fairy Queen maddened by Blind Love pursuing "lion, bear, or wolf, or bull." This image darkens further still if one recalls Adonis' tragic pursuit of the wild boar. But the latent danger of Oberon's scheme is tempered by his statement that Titania's weapon in her blinded condition will be "the soul of love." Contrary to the notion that those who are held in the grip of Blind Love are guided by passion — "Painters cover his eyes with a bandage to emphasize the fact that people in love do not know where they drive, being without judgement or discrimination and guided by mere passion."[145] — Titania will be led through her descent by the soul of love itself. Thus, while calling up the darker powers of Eros, rather than his visionary faculties, Oberon also suggests a way by which the opposite metamorphosis (darkness into light) may take place.

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[145] Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1939, 1967), p. 108.

It is, indeed, necessary for Eros to enter the world of the play in his inverted form. We know from the action of the first act that the society of A Midsummer-Night's Dream is not capable of embracing his total divinity. The limitations of that social structure must first be shattered before a new order, in which love is able to thrive, can emerge. Eros must descend in order to inform. The tools by which such a metamorphosis can be accomplished are the inversions of light into darkness, comic into tragic and life into death. By turning the world upside down and weighting its balance towards the negative, the potential presence of tragic darkness, which has hovered under the play from the beginning , will surface and be explored and the results of this exploration will be purgative.

The inversion of the world which is introduced in Oberon's manipulation of Titania is reproduced in the scene directly following his speech, when the lovers Helena and Demetrius re-enter the play. Their scene begins the long descent into confusion which will occupy the quartet of lovers for the next two acts.[146] All the elements

[146] Richard Cody writes: "The young lovers, and Titania and Bottom, do not actually dream at all, even in the story. They suffer a trick of Cupid, an erotic transfiguration in the garden of Diana, a pastoral raptio." op. cit., p. 142.

of the chthonic world are present. Amor, which should delight, has become the instrument of torment. The right order of love has been reversed, as in Titania's case, placing Helena in the role of pursuer

> Hel. The story shall be changed:
> Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;
> The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
> Makes speed to catch the tiger — bootless speed,
> When cowardice pursues, then valour flees.
>
> (II, i, 230-4)

— and even this pursuit, which holds much comic potential, is darkened by the threat of personal violence against her:

> Dem. You do impeach your modesty too much,
> To leave the city, and commit yourself
> Into the hands of one that loves you not;
> And the ill counsel of a desert place
> With the rich worth of your virginity.
>
> (II, i, 214-19)

The transformations of "light" love to "dark" hate grow throughout this scene until the submission of the comic vision to the tragic reaches its climax when, in Helena's parting lines, we see that the death aspects of Love have overpowered its life-generating forces:

> Hel. I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell,
> To die upon the hand I love so well.
>
> (II, i, 243-44)

The Helena / Demetrius scene foreshadows, in microcosmic form, the descent of all four lovers into a chaotic world. Joined by Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius will continue to enact the inversion of Love, and by extension of their world, until such time as they are delivered into the custody of sleep by a sympathetic Oberon.

"Light" Love will metamorphose into "dark" hate as Lysander, blinded by Oberon's "love juice," renounces his passion for Hermia: "Thy love! out, tawny Tartar, out! Out, loathed medicine! hated poison, hence!" (III, ii, 264-5) — and this theme will be further explored in the breakdown of the friendship between Helena and Hermia. Furthermore, the Triumph of Death over Life, foreshadowed in the Helena / Demetrius scene, will emerge as a possible solution as the confused lovers call upon its ominous powers with increasing frequency. An example can be found in Hermia's lines:

> Her. No! then I well perceive you are not high:
> Either death or you I'll find immediately.
>
> (II, ii, 155-6)

This possibility of tragedy, as it is held in Death, will finally reach its fullest expression and consequent resolution when the lovers engage in a mock-battle (III, ii) under the guidance of Oberon.

But while the lovers are exploring the chthonic aspects of their inverted world, the positive side of Eros, the "soul of love," is slowly revealing, in the Fairy realm, the manner by which the world of the play will finally be restored to right order. It is, however, necessary for the Fairy world to enter the same chthonic condition as that of the lovers, before Eros can expose his "light" through the union of Bottom and Titania.

The entrance of the dark god into Fairyland is fully articulated by Oberon as he lays the spell of "Blind Cupid" over the sleeping Titania:

> Obe. What thou seest when thou dost wake,
> Do it for thy true-love take;
> Love and languish for his sake:
> Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
> Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
> In thy eye that shall appear
> When thou wak'st, it is thy dear!
> Wake when some vile thing is near.
>
> (II, ii, 27-34)

Oberon's recital of this ominous charm, while Titania lies "Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight " (II, i, 254), suggests a relationship to the Persephone myth, for Titania, like the kidnapped Kore, will be the victim of a chthonic god (the Underworld Eros) and, as such, will descend to the very "Bottom" of the play's world.

Bottom, in his role as the dual lover of Thisbe and of Titania, enacts on a microcosmic level the entire stagnation, descent and ascent of the play's dramatic action. Oblivious to Oberon's plot and to the confusions of the lovers, he re-enters the play in Act III, mirroring the reductive attitudes that pervade Act I. With the authority of a Theseus subjugating the laws of Eros to those of Athens, Bottom proposes that the world of the imagination be sabotaged by reducing it to "reality":

> Bot. Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them out of fear.
>
> (III, i, 18-23)

Bottom pays for this denial of the imagination when he is translated into an ass by an irritated Puck. In his new state he is no longer able to say, with certainty, that he is "Bottom the weaver." He has, through the metamorphosis, entered a range of participation which is similar to the lovers' confusion. However, though he has "descended" into the guise of an ass, Bottom does not, as the lovers do, call upon death as a possible means of escape. Instead he chooses song, a song about birds who

are creatures of the air rather than the underworld[147] (in contrast with the repeated snake imagery of the lovers' world[148]).

If we recall that it was by song that the Siren lured Eros into the aerial world, and also that song played an important role in the Orphic mysteries as a means by which the divine could be apprehended, Titania's opening line — "What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?" (III, i, 122) — escapes the charge that it is merely comic and, while retaining its comic aspects, proposes that a higher order of Eros is about to enter.

By yet another inversion, Titania transforms the "beast," with whom she is to unite, into an "angel" (III, i, 122). Her "blindness," far from being a limiting factor, allows her to metamorphose Bottom from one of the lowliest positions on the Chain of Being to one of the highest. The

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[147] Bottom's transformation is, as Richard Cody points out, both lucid and holy: "Encomia of the ass as 'both absurd in essence and the carrier of divine mysteries' were too well known by the 1590s to escape implication in such scenes as these of Bottom and the Fairy Queen. And like every other figure in the play, Bottom translated means reverence as well as laughter, mystery as well as humour, wisdom as well as folly." Cody, op. cit., p. 138.

[148] On the serpent imagery which surrounds the lovers, see McPeek, loc. cit., p. 71. The presence of serpents shows us a fallen world in contrast to the serpentless paradise which Venus inhabited in Venus and Adonis.

darkness that she has entered under Oberon's spell is of the order which transcends itself, creating vision out of chaos. By loving Bottom with "the soul of love" that is normally reserved for adulation of the gods themselves, Titania enacts the worship of Eros in his full divinity and consequently proposes for the play a method by which the dark god may be transformed.

The Fairy Queen's "blindness" to Bottom's gross features recalls Helena's speech —

> Hel. Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity.
>
> (I, i, 232-3)

Moreover, Titania looks at Bottom, ". . . not with the eyes, but with the mind" (I, i, 234), and it is a mind attuned to divinity as she recalls the Ficinian doctrine of natural magic by using the vehicles of song:

> Tita. I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:
> Mine eye is much enamour'd of thy note
>
> (III, i, 144-5)

and image:

> Tita. So is mine ear enthralled to thy shape
>
> (III, i, 146)

— to achieve an experience of the "angel" which she believes Bottom to be, and which will allow her ". . . to swear, I love thee " (III, i, 148).

Bottom betrays his ignorance of the high station which Titania has given him when he replies to her declaration of love with: "Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that " (III, i, 135). His statement rings true if one looks solely with the eyes. However, Titania is possessed at the moment when she "loves" Bottom by a divine vision which transcends the limitations of reason. Thus Bottom's statement

> Bot. And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays — the more the pity that some honest neighbours will not make them friends.
>
> (III, i, 136-8)

— betrays his inability to comprehend the mystery in which he is a participant, while coincidentally showing him as an eminently suitable candidate for that mystery. His very lack of understanding is requisite for the enactment of a mystery which cannot be apprehended by reason. Bottom himself will come to this realization when he describes his experiences as ". . . a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was " (IV, i, 212). But for the moment he is, even in his translated state, reluctant to part with a rational perception of the world. We, who have seen what happens when "reason and love" "keep company" in Lysander's declaration of love for Helena —

> Lys. The will of man is by his reason swayed,
> And reason says you are the worthier maid.
> Things growing are not ripe until their season;
> So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason.
> And touching now the point of human skill,
> Reason becomes the marshall to my will
>
> (II, ii, 121-6)

— can only agree with Titania when she admonishes Bottom: "Out of this wood do not desire to go " (III, i, 143).

Titania's promise to purge Bottom's ". . . . mortal grossness so / That thou shalt like an airy spirit go " (III, i, 168), refers back to her original perception of the "beast" as "angel" while, at the same time, looking ahead to her attempts at placing Bottom correctly in the Fairy world. The purgative powers of Eros which are, while Titania remains spellbound, at her command, recall the ability of Venus to make love into ". . . a spirit all compact of fire / Not gross to sink, but light and will aspire " (Venus and Adonis, 149-50). But while the proposed purification failed to materialize in Venus and Adonis, in A Midsummer-Night's Dream it is accomplished by the tenacity with which Titania clings to her "blind" perception of Bottom as angelic, thus introducing the world of the play to the "light" of Eros, a light which will penetrate and transform the chthonic elements of the dramatic action.

Both David P. Young and R. A. Zimbardo point out the many contraries which are transformed to a state of discordia concors through the union of Titania and Bottom. Their "marriage" implies a discordia concors, for through it the lowest level of human existence — Bottom, the mechanical, lowered to the figure of an ass — is joined to the highest level of consciousness — the divine aspect of Titania, the Fairy Queen. The harmonious union of these incongruous lovers illustrates, in metaphorical terms, the descent of Eros from the aerial world to the lowest level of the play's social structure. As divinity, in Renaissance cosmology, filters down through the many spheres of influence, the light of Eros, discovered in Titania's blindness, also permeates the entire world of the play from top to "Bottom."

Once the rite of Eros has been enacted, the play is freed from its previous sterile condition and the metamorphosis of Diana into Aphrodite is accomplished. The new world of the play is discovered as one which is as favourable to the presence of Eros as the old world was unfavourable. But the mystery which brought about this transformation is beyond comprehension and as such it remains out of the reach of reason even after the charm has been lifted from the eyes of the participants and the world has returned to normal. None of the characters is capable of

understanding what has occurred, though each senses that the world has undergone a transformation making it favourable to "true" love.

Bottom, who was closest among mortals to the experience, has the most accurate perception. He knows that he has seen "A most rare vision," a dream, "past the wit of man to say what dream it was." In contrast, Titania, who was the agent of Eros, is unable, once her vision is restored, to recall any portion of the mystery at all:

> Tita. My Oberon! what visions have I seen!
> Methought I was enamour'd of an Ass.
>
> (IV, i, 82-3)

It would seem that Bottom, on whom the divinity of Eros finally settled, is also the one who retains the clearest sense of awe at what has happened.

For the lovers the events of the night take on, in the light of day, the quality of dreams. This is particularly true of Demetrius, for he, alone, has not been released from the flower's charms:

> Dem. Are you sure
> That we are awake? It seems to me
> That yet we sleep, we dream.
>
> (IV, i, 192-4)

Demetrius remains under the spell of Eros, for in his case the blindness is revelatory. While the other lovers have returned to their former alliances, which in the new world can now be realized, Demetrius has transferred his devotion from Hermia to Helena. Nor is this merely a contrivance on Shakespeare's part to round out the plot. Demetrius, when placed under the spell of love, was struck not only by the blindness of Amor mundi but also by the light of Amor dei:

> Obe. When his love he doth espy,
> Let her shine as gloriously
> As the Venus of the sky.
>
> (III, ii, 105-8)

Since the powers of Aphrodite Urania were evoked, Demetrius does not need to be released from his dream, for he has, by loving Helena, entered a state of being which transcends both the "normal" waking state and the blindness of Amor mundi.

Theseus shows, by not imposing the law which he upheld in Act I on the transformed lovers, that he, too, is part of the new climate which favours the presence of love. Yet, despite his participation in the new world, he is unable to accept the mysterious occurrences as they are related to him. The miracle which has transformed the

world from chaos to order is, for him, the effect of a too "strong imagination " (V, i, 18). Hippolyta is closer in her estimate:

> Hyp. But all the story of the night told over,
> And all their minds transfigur'd so together,
> More witnesseth than fancy's images,
> And grows to something of great constancy,
> But, howsoever, strange and admirable.
>
> (V, i, 23-7)

It is left for the wedded lovers to wait out the evening by watching "The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe." The playlet reflects, as Theseus points out, the discordia concors which has become the new condition of the world:

> The. A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus
> And his love Thisbe; 'very tragical myth.'
> Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?
> That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.
> How shall we find the concord of this discord?
>
> (V, i, 56-60)

Though tragic in content, this entertainment cannot carry a dark vision into a world informed by Eros. In such a state of harmony, tragedy becomes burlesque. The final vision of A Midsummer-Night's Dream is as far away from the darkness of tragedy as is possible. The world has become a place where all opposition is neutralized through harmonious union, and therein lies the concord of the discord which Theseus wishes to find.

We end in a world which is blessed by Fairies. It is, in contrast to Venus and Adonis, a form of paradise remade. We have witnessed a miracle of divinity, a dream "past the wit of man." As such it is not for us to understand it, in totality. Therefore, in true serio ludere fashion, the mysterious transformation of the world is disguised by the prankster, Puck, who cautions us:

> Puck. If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended:
> That you have but slumbered here
> While these visions did appear.
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding but a dream,
> Gentles, do not reprehend
>
> (V, i, 413-18)

Chapter III.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

From a realm inhabited by a goddess in Venus and Adonis and a world watched over by fairies in A Midsummer-Night's Dream, we move to the more realistic setting of Antony and Cleopatra. Venus is not personified in the later play, nor does the figure of Eros descend to inform the drama, yet Antony and Cleopatra shares with the two earlier works an exploration of Love's mysteries. The poem, we recall, ended with Venus's despairing prophecy, while the comedy proposed the healing triumph of Eros. Both these themes reappear in Antony and Cleopatra, where love is first seen as the subject of discord, only to emerge in the later acts as "something of great constancy."

The thematic relationship of these works is further developed by their common use of mythology as a mode of expression. While the gods and goddesses of classical myth do not actually appear in Antony and Cleopatra, the play is nevertheless informed by the mystic vision of Venus in union with Mars. Before discussing Shakespeare's

use of this particular myth, however, I will briefly look at the place of mythology, in general, in Antony and Cleopatra.

Though Shakespeare does not include the heavenly spheres in the literal cosmology of Antony and Cleopatra, the gods are made present through the associative power of imagery. Cleopatra is given attributes of Isis and Venus, while Antony is surrounded by images of Hercules and Mars. The figures of mythology inform the personalities of both, giving them a stature which distinguishes them from other characters in the play. There is, so to speak, a latent god within them, which it is their duty to discover and to express, to its fullest capacity in mortal form.

This would suggest that Shakespeare, in this late play, was more concerned with the potential of man to uncover the presence of divinity within him, than with the interchange between celestial and terrestrial realms. In other words, the division made between heaven and earth by cosmological geography is, in Antony and Cleopatra, broken down. We do not witness the descent of a heavenly god or goddess, as in Venus and Adonis and A Midsummer-Night's Dream, nor do we leave the world to ascend to

higher knowledge, as in Dante's Divine Comedy. Instead, we are shown a growth toward divinity, inspired by love, which is possible on earth. Love is viewed, as it were, from the bottom up rather than from the top down and consequently its metamorphic powers do not depend on a personified Venus or Eros, but rather upon the ability, which is man's, to express himself in heavenly forms.[149] Similarly, the philosophical terminology which has helped throughout this paper to express the movements of love on a mythological level, does not apply to Antony and Cleopatra. Since no godhead or divine force is identified in the play, the experiences of emanatio and raptio cannot be expressed. A modified form of remeatio is possible, however, since love rises, in the final acts, to reflect a divine form.

While both Venus and Adonis and A Midsummer-Night's Dream show the interference of celestial forces in their worlds, the circumference of Antony and Cleopatra describes only the earth. A large part of the play's

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[149] By shifting his emphasis from supernal figures to human ones, Shakespeare may have been reflecting the process by which Mediaeval concern with heavenly hierarchies gave way to the new Renaissance belief in the importance of man's position in the cosmos. The celebration of man's new stature is best expressed by Pico della Mirandola: "Oh, wondrous and unsurpassable felicity of man, to whom it is granted to have what he chooses, to be what he wills to be!" Oration on the Dignity of Man, trans. Robert Caponigri (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956, 1967), p. 8.

power may derive from this limitation, for denied access to divinity through cosmology, the world of Antony and Cleopatra, as Maurice Charney points out,[150] presses its earthly delineation to overflowing. Similarly, we watch the passionate love of Antony and Cleopatra strive to achieve its heavenly form without the aid of divine intervention.

While critics have long recognized that the love between Antony and Cleopatra reaches its climax in a transcendent mystery,[151] the mythology which surrounds this apotheosis is generally referred to only in passing. Detailed studies of the play's use of myth include Eugene M. Waith's The Herculean Hero,[152] which traces the relationship of Antony and Hercules, and Michael Lloyd's article on "Cleopatra as Isis."[153] Ernest Schanzer briefly discusses the pantheon of mythological

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[150] Maurice Charney, Shakespeare's Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery in the Drama (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1961), pp. 79ff.

[151] See especially, G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1932; reprinted by Methuen & Co., 1963).

[152] Eugene M. Waith, The Herculean Hero (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962).

[153] Michael Lloyd, "Cleopatra as Isis," Shakespeare Survey 12 (1959), pp. 88-94.

figures in the play,[154] as does Harold Fisch in his article on "The Limits of Mythology."[155] Shakespeare's knowledge of Venus and Mars is thoroughly investigated by Raymond B. Waddington, who sees their myth as central to an understanding of the play.[156]

The union of Mars and Venus, though it does not stand alone as the only use of mythology in the play, informs the love theme throughout. Antony is associated with Mars on several occasions, while Enobarbus captures the Venus aspect of Cleopatra in his famous tribute to her (II, ii, 190-205). The most important use of myth, however, lies in the analogy between the surrender of

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[154] Ernest Schanzer, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (New York: Schoken Bks., 1963), pp. 153ff.

[155] Harold Fisch, "Antony and Cleopatra: The Limits of Mythology," Shakespeare Survey 23 (1970), pp. 59-67.

[156] Raymond B. Waddington, "Antony and Cleopatra: 'What Venus did with Mars,'" Shakespeare Studies II (1966), pp. 210-227. While I have found Mr. Waddington's article both useful and illuminating, my paper differs from his, because he is primarily concerned with showing how the Venus / Mars myth dominates and consumes the mythological references to Hercules and Isis in the play. His discussion of the union of Venus and Mars concentrates on Renaissance sources and opinions of the mythological meaning, though he does, towards the conclusion of his article, begin to apply the philosophy to the text.

Mars to Venus and Antony's corresponding surrender to Cleopatra. There are many parallels in the play which suggest that the model for the love relationship between Antony and Cleopatra is the Venus / Mars myth. I have therefore chosen to restrict my discussion to the use of this myth and to refer to the Herculean and Isis motifs only when they contribute to an understanding of love in the play.

We recall that the conquering of Mars by Venus was understood as a sublime mystery in which the mating of contraries produced Harmonia, the child of their union. Pico della Mirandola's statement, ". . . if Mars were always subordinated to Venus, that is, the contrariety of the component elements to their due proportion, nothing would ever perish "[157] — suggests that the myth points toward a paradisial condition. Two Renaissance paintings, which I shall introduce here, express the proportioning of contrary elements which leads to imperishable harmony. The first is the "Venus and Mars" of Paolo Veronese (PLATE 3) which ". . . represents allegorically the chastening effect of the harmony between the irascible and the concupiscible. Mars hides the lower part of Venus' body and thus chastens concupiscience; Venus puts one arm on the shoulder of the

[157] Pico della Mirandola, "On the General Nature of Beauty," Commento II, vi, quoted by Edgar Wind in Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 89.

kneeling Mars, restraining irascibility. And the restraint of irascibility is playfully restated by the Cupid who uses Mars' sword to restrain his war-horse."[158] The second painting is "The Triumph of Venus," by Francesco Cossa (PLATE 4), which shows the kneeling Mars who has given himself in vassalage to the goddess Venus. He is bound to her throne by chains which symbolize the fetters of love.[159] In both paintings, Venus is victorious over the warlike Mars, for the allegory symbolized the hope that love is more powerful than strife.[160] Mars, conquered by love, is still dressed in armour and though in the Cossa painting he kneels, his gaze meets that of Venus proudly, for ". . . the planet Mars always retains, even when dominated by the planet Venus, a certain degree of boldness and bellicose fervour — a point clearly brought out by Ficino in De amore V, viii, and not neglected by Cossa."[161]

Shakespeare introduced the union of Mars and Venus in Venus and Adonis:

> Over my altars hath he hung his lance,
> His batter'd shield, his uncontrolled crest,
> And for my sake hath learn'd to sport and dance,

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[158] Robert Kellogg and Oliver Steele, eds., Books I and II of The Faerie Queene (New York: Odyssey Pr., 1965), introd. p. 51.

[159] Wind, op. cit., p. 89.

[160] Wind, op. cit., p. 89.

[161] Wind, op. cit., p. 90.

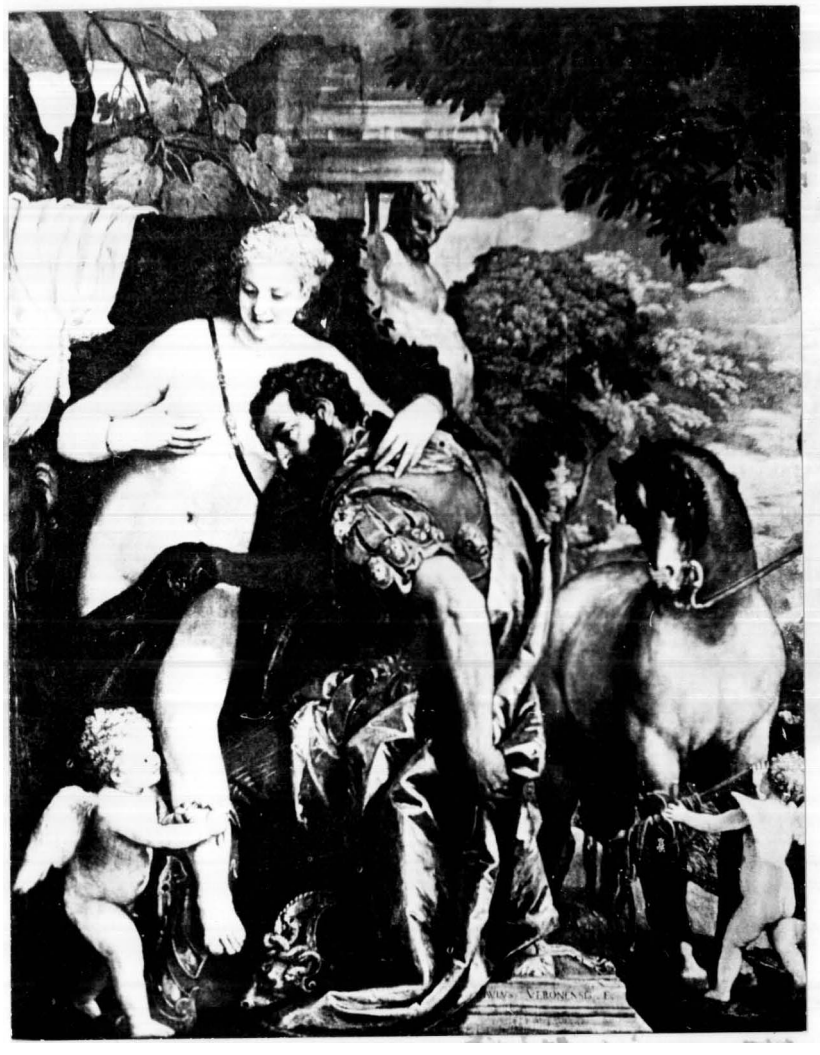

PLATE 3. Paolo Veronese, "Mars and Venus," Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

PLATE 4. Francesco Cossa, "The Triumph of Venus," Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara.

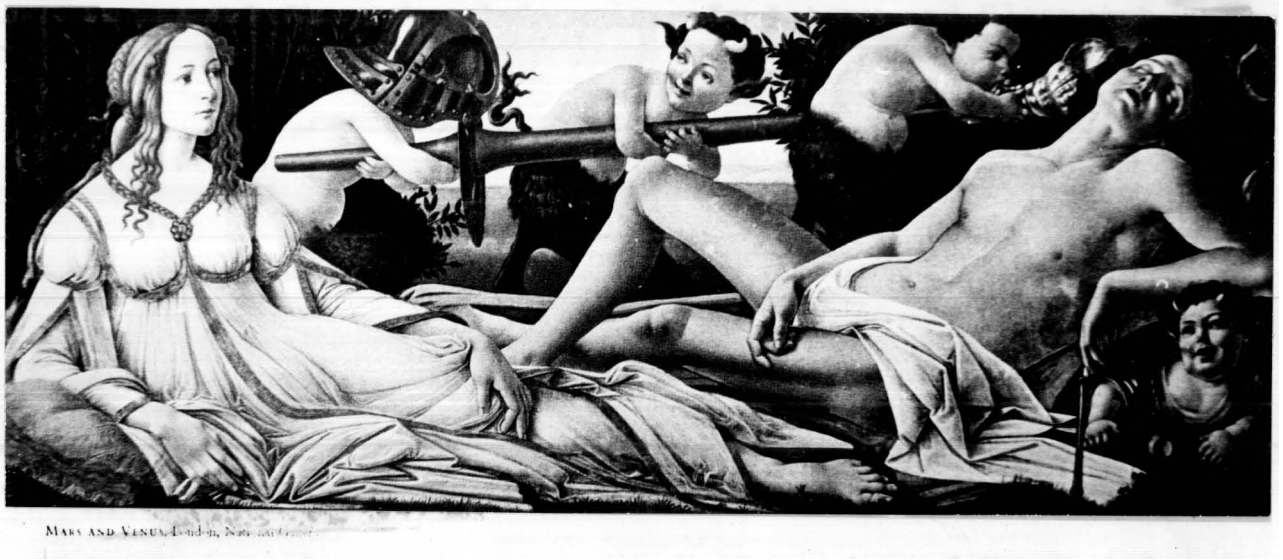

PLATE 5. Botticelli, "Mars and Venus," National Gallery, London.

To toy, to wanton, dally, smile, and jest;
Scorning his churlish drum and ensign red,
Making my arms his field, his tent my bed.

(103-8)

The poem, as we have seen, did not end on the note of harmony, promised by the Venus / Mars union, but rather on one of discord and despair. In Antony and Cleopatra we move through the despair voiced in Venus' direful prophecy, to a rediscovery of the "imperishable" condition which the union of Venus and Mars produces.[162]

But the range of Antony and Cleopatra, as I have already suggested, does not include the heavenly spheres; it is a play firmly grounded on the earth. Already we are faced with one of the complex problems in the play's mythic structure. The union of Venus and Mars was a great Renaissance mystery, immortalized, as Pico della Mirandola wrote, in the stars: "Similarly, according to the ancient astrologers . . . Venus was placed in the centre of heaven next to Mars, because she must tame his impulse which is by nature destructive

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[162]For a discussion on the relationship between the fall of love in Venus and Adonis and its rebirth in Antony and Cleopatra, see J. W. Lever's article, "Venus and the Second Chance," Shakespeare Survey XV (1962), pp. 81-88.

and corrupting."[163] The gaze that revealed the mysterious harmony of their union looked heavenward and yet Shakespeare chose to recreate their story in a worldly context. The theological impropriety of such an action is analogous to Nature's own when, stealing moulds from heaven, she created the divinely beautiful Adonis. Divine beauty, the poem told us, cannot survive on earth. Similarly, though Antony and Cleopatra strive to enact the myth of Venus and Mars on earth, they cannot escape their worldly condition. Their attempt to enact the divine in the mundane sphere gives birth to strife and confusion. Antony's claim that the lovers need "new heaven, new earth." (I, i, 17) in order to measure the strength of their union, proves true, as they must metamorphose themselves, leaving their worldly personae behind, in order to realize the harmony of Venus and Mars.

At the play's opening, Antony and Cleopatra are innocent of the price which must be paid for the crime of their hubris. Without penalty they have each claimed

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[163] Pico della Mirandola, quoted in Wind, op. cit., p. 89. Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology (London: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1939, 1967), p. 164: ". . . in every astrological treatise we find the axiom that Venus by her mildness tempers the ferocity of Mars while he, her 'suitor,' is never strong enough to shatter her gentle power.

a portion of divinity for themselves. They alone, of all the characters in the play, are informed by mythological imagery that strives to ascend. Antony, Caesar tells us, previously showed qualities which transcended human frailty:

> Caes. When thou once
> Wast beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
> Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
> Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,
> Thou daintily brought up, with patience more
> Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
> The stale of horses, and the gilded puddle
> Which beasts would cough at: thy palate then did deign
> The roughest berry, on the rudest hedge;
> Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
> The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps
> It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
> Which some did die to look on: and all this —
> It wounds thine honour that I speak it now —
> Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek
> So much as lank'd not.
>
> (I, iv, 56-71)

Similarly, Cleopatra appeared, according to Enobarbus:

> Eno. O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature.
>
> (II, ii, 200-1)

It should be noted that we receive these informations from the two least likely sources, Caesar on Antony, and Enobarbus on Cleopatra (which enhances their plausibility). The suggestion that Antony and Cleopatra have individually stretched the limits of human possibility, allotted by

nature — Antony as the soldier Mars, and Cleopatra as the love and beauty associated only with Venus — lays the foundation for their hubris in love.

The surrender of the warlike Mars to the affirmative powers of Venus cannot take place within the confines of Antony and Cleopatra. Any attempt, on the part of the lovers, to become "a race of heaven" (I, iii, 37) must of necessity fail, for, as we have witnessed in Venus and Adonis, to achieve the godly on earth is an unpardonable sin which the fixed order of cosmology forbids. Thus the opening scene shows a fallen Mars, a fallen Venus and a charade of counterfeit harmony which their union is meant to embody. Philo recounts the negative state into which their godlike qualities have collapsed:

> Phi. Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure: those his goddly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust.
>
> (I, i, 1-9)

The positive aspects of the Venus / Mars conjunction are, here, entirely negated. Philo laments Antony's loss of his martial powers, and his vassalage to love, while Cleopatra is reduced to a seductive "tawny front," a sensuous gipsy or witch. Antony's surrender to his queen, in love, is

further descried as "the bellows and the fan," which cools the passions of "lust."

The fallen image of Venus and Mars shows us the harmonious balance of their union undone. The Veronese painting (PLATE 3) depicts a series of restricting forces which keep both the ferocity of Mars and the voluptuousness of Venus in check. When either the sensual or martial aspect of their partnership becomes dominant and overpowering, then the mystical significance of their balanced union is broken and the myth of perfection dissolves into chaos. When the sensual side of Venus dominates, the goddess becomes an enchantress whose powers of love enslave rather than temper the strength of Mars. When Mars and Venus are properly united, then even though Venus is the stronger, yet Mars retains his valour. The enchantress Venus, on the other hand, robs her victims of their strength, by exhausting them in struggles of passion. Botticelli's painting of "Venus and Mars" (PLATE 5) shows the result, and suggests a modified version of the enchantress theme. Mars lies naked, physically exhausted, while Venus is both clothed and alert. Her Cupids play with Mars' disarrayed armour, while he lies defenceless and vulnerable.[164]

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[164] As Edgar Wind points out, "The reduction of Mars to a sleeping loving swain, surrounded by amoretti playing at war, is with all due allowance for the wide influence of horoscopy, emphatically not an astrological image." Wind, op. cit., p. 90.

The motif of the enslaved Mars opens the play Antony and Cleopatra. Antony, who was once "The triple pillar of the world," has been "transform'd" "Into a strumpet's fool":

> Phi. Look where they come:
> Take but good note, and you shall see in him
> The triple pillar of the world transform'd
> Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see.
>
> (I, i, 10-14)

Yet there are indications in this first scene that the love between Antony and Cleopatra had, at its birth, a nobler form. We recall that both Antony and Cleopatra had achieved, prior to their meeting, an expression of personal divinity which brought them the reluctant admiration of Caesar and Enobarbus. We can further deduce, from the nature of their first exchange and by piecing together fragments of expository information, that when the lovers first confronted each other they underwent an experience of raptio. Antony's claim to a love that is beyond measure and Cleopatra's memory of "a race of heaven" points toward a high experience of the divinity of Eros. Moreover, Antony behaves as befits a man who has been struck by the winged god, as Socrates recounts in the Phaedrus:

> . . . and this is the sweetest of all pleasures at the time, and is the reason why the soul of the lover will never forsake his beautiful one, whom he esteems above all; he has forgotten mother and brethren and companions, and he thinks nothing of the neglect and loss of his property; the rules and properties of life, on which he formerly prided himself, he now despises, . . . 165

And yet, while the lovers have forsaken, for a time, the world of politics, they have not withdrawn from the material world of sensual appetite. Countless images of eating and drinking as well as sexual excess surround them.[166]

On one level they represent the fallen lovers of Plotinian philosophy who, while inspired at first, ". . . neither understand whither Love sought to lead them nor have they any instinct to production; they have not mastered the right use of the images of beauty; they do not know what the Authentic Beauty is."[167] The nature of this love, however, is transitory. Ficino, we recall, remarked that the trouble with sensual pleasure was not that it was enjoyable but that it did not last.[168] Yet

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[165] Plato, Phaedrus, trans. Benjamin Jowett in The Dialogues of Plato, vol. II (London: Sphere Bks., 1970), p. 269.

[166] Charney, op. cit., chap. IV, "The Imagery of Antony and Cleopatra," sect. ii, "Eating and Drinking," p. 102.

[167] Plotinus, The Enneads, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), III.v, "Love," p. 192.

the love between Antony and Cleopatra, despite Antony's attempts to break away, has a permanence which, though always present, must wait to receive its fullest expression in the last acts.[168] This would suggest that the nature of their passion is closer to that born of Penia and Poros. This is a love which, while it moves toward the Good, can never be truly satisfied. It has a mixed quality: "On the one hand there is in it the lack which keeps it craving; on the other, it is not entirely destitute, the deficient seeks more of what it has, and certainly nothing absolutely void of good would ever go seeking the Good."[169] From Enobarbus' point of view, this is the basis of Cleopatra's attraction and by extension the basis of the lovers' mutual adoration:

> Eno. Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
> Where most she satisfies.
>
> (II, ii, 235-8)

Thus the love between Antony and Cleopatra is neither the lust that Philo condemns as the agent of Antony's destruction, nor the celestially inspired bliss which Antony and Cleopatra claim. It lies somewhere between the two. The

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[168] Wind, op. cit., p. 55.

[169] Plotinus, op. cit., p. 200.

lovers have experienced the furor or raptio which prompts them to describe their love using the metaphors of heaven, but they have also pushed the sensual to its limits and are thus more in contact with the world than either is ready to admit.

The partial truth of Philo's remarks becomes apparent as Antony attempts to free himself from Cleopatra's power. His sudden "Roman thought" (I, ii, 80), as Cleopatra foresees, has far reaching consequences for the drama of their love. The messengers carry news of past and future wars, and Antony, in a mood to listen, dons the very martial aspect which he had surrendered completely to love. Once the break is made, Antony is able to see Cleopatra more clearly and the queen of his love becomes visible as an enchantress, ". . . cunning past man's thought " (I, ii, 143):

> Ant. I must from this enchanting queen break off,
> Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
> My idleness doth hatch. Ho now, Enobarbus!
>
> (I, ii, 125-7)

As Antony moves further into the strength of his martial aspect, Cleopatra tries, through whatever means are at her disposal, to recapture him. All her wiles are exposed, to such a degree that Charmian feels compelled to warn her:

> Char. In each thing give him way, cross him in nothing.
>
> (I, iii, 9)

But the lovers are moving so rapidly in opposing directions that a break is unavoidable. Cleopatra pleads the cause of Venus, recalling the harmony of their former union:

> Cleo. Eternity was in our lips, and eyes,
> Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,
> But was a race of heaven. They are so still,
> Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
> Art turn'd the greatest liar.
>
> (I, iii, 35-9)

But Antony is firm in his role as a warrior:

> Ant. The strong necessity of time commands
> Our services awhile
>
> (I, iii, 42-3)

We see that they are divided, that love's binding force no longer holds them. Antony pays token compliments:

> Ant. I go from hence
> Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war,
> As thou affects.
>
> (I, iii, 69-71)

But it is Cleopatra who must forge their reconciliation. Backed into a corner, she abruptly changes face and surrenders to the power of Mars:

> Cleo. Your honour calls you hence,
> Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
> And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
> Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
> Be strew'd before your feet!
>
> (I, iii, 97-101)

The harmony of the Venus / Mars myth depends, as has been noted, on a series of restraints which creates a balance. Act I opened with the unrestrained powers of Venus dominant. Antony's retrieval of his martial character swings the balance of power in the opposing direction. It is he who now dominates and who, in consequence, destroys the possibility for harmonious union. With Antony's transformation, we move from Egypt to the Roman world, where nothing of a transcendent nature can be expressed. The mystic vision of Venus and Mars becomes, in this new world of state politics, the impossible dream of the eunuch Mardian who lingers on the memory of the god and goddess:

> Mar. Yet have I fierce affections, and think
> What Venus did with Mars.
>
> Cleo. O Charmian!
> Where think'st thou he is now?
>
> (I, v, 17-19)

Mardian's yearnings express, in microcosm, the movement of the myth in the play. Just as "What Venus did to Mars" is unattainable to him, it is equally so for the play, now that Antony has entered the Roman sphere of war and order, which are kinds of enforced chaos for love.

The Roman world reflects a state in which the powers of love are wholly subservient to political expediency and the defence, in war, of the nation. In spite of the emphasis

placed on its rational structure, Rome is the servant of chaos in the play.[170] Because Rome is not informed by the presence of Eros who, we recall, has the power to shape chaos into form, the martial order which it imposes on the world is dangerous. It is an order devoid of the harmonizing principle of love and, as such, severed from that divine order which filters down through the many spheres of influence to govern over the earth. While the political situation in Egypt is more or less passed over, much attention is given to the politics of Rome, which are, as might be expected, in a state of turmoil and decay, unstable and chaotic. The balance of power between the three triumvirs is unsteady. Wars have been fought which extend political unrest past the limits of state into the family structure itself (I, ii, 85-91). Pompey, who is ally with treacherous pirates, threatens to attack and the Roman populace has become:

> Ant. Our slippery people,
> Whose love is never link'd to the deserver
> Till his deserts are past, . . .
>
> (I, ii, 183-5)

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[170] J. W. Lever, loc. cit., pp. 87-8. Prof. Lever suggests that the counterpart to the boar, symbol of chaos in Venus and Adonis is, in Antony and Cleopatra, Caesar.

However, it is not the unstable politics of Rome, per se, but their mythological expression, which relates directly to the metaphorical use of Venus and Mars in the play. The presence of chaos in Antony and Cleopatra, a chaos resulting from Rome's martial persuasion, is discovered on a mythic level in the figure of Fortuna and her hold over the play's events.[171] She is the very representative of instability, as Boethius has her explain:

> Inconstancy is my very essence; it is the game I never cease to play as I turn my wheel in its ever changing circle, filled with joy as I bring the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top. Yes, rise up on my wheel if you like, but don't count it an injury when by the same token you begin to fall, as the rules of the game will require. You must surely have been aware of my ways. [172]

Fortuna's disruptive and fickle qualities[173] are the antithesis of the harmony and balance of Venus and Mars. Being mutability, akin to chaos, she is the perfect symbol

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[171] On the role of fortune in Antony and Cleopatra, see: Marilyn Williamson, "Fortune in Antony and Cleopatra," Journal of English and Germanic Philology LXVII (1968), pp. 432ff.; Michael Lloyd, "Antony and the Game of Chance," J. Eng. Ger. Phil. LXI (1962), pp. 548ff.; Philip J. Traci, The Love Play of Antony and Cleopatra (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1970), pp. 132ff.

[172] Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. E. V. Watts (Penguin Bks., 1969), p. 57.

[173] On Fortuna, see: H. R. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1927); Samuel C. Chew, The Pilgrimage of Life, chap. 3, "The World of Fortune," (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Pr., 1962).

for a world in which the powers of love are conquered by the ferocity of the bellicose Mars. Antony's departure to Rome leads him into the sphere of fortune, a chaos of mutability that excludes all promise of love. It is not until he escapes the wheel of fortune and the Roman sphere of erratic change, as he does later in the play, that a reconstruction of the union of Mars and Venus, in its unperishable condition, is again possible.

In Rome, Antony continues to strengthen his martial image. Pompey, who hopes that Antony will remain Cleopatra's enchanted victim —

> Pom. but all the charms of love,
> Salt Cleopatra, soften thy wan'd lip!
> Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,
> Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
> Keep his brain fuming; Epicurean cooks
> Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
> That sleep and feeding may prorogue his humour,
> Even till a Lethe'd dulness —
>
> (II, i, 20-27)

finds that the sleeping unarmed Mars, whom he took to be an unknowing ally, has risen and is in Rome preparing for battle. Similarly, though Caesar expects apologies, he meets a proud Antony who speaks as Enobarbus hoped he would, ". . . as loud as Mars " (II, ii, 6). Confronted by an Antony who has regained his former stature, both Caesar and Pompey are forced to negotiate.

Caesar takes the initiative, binding Antony's loyalty by a marriage of convenience. Answering his own question, "What hoop should hold us stanch, from edge to edge" (II, ii, 121), he makes the offer of marriage to his sister Octavia. There is little hope that the powers of Eros will arise from this union, as it is so obviously made for political purposes. Antony, however, more concerned for his fortune than love, accepts the match to enhance his political prestige. He has, it would seem, accomplished all that he intended by his return to Rome. Donning his martial aspect, the balance of power with Caesar has been restored, while the war with Pompey has been averted.

The respect which is accorded to Antony in Rome shows that he has succeeded in rebuilding his damaged reputation. Cleopatra seems to have faded into the background, while Antony has become, once more, the hero remembered by Philo in the opening lines of the play. Yet two incidents reveal that Antony is neither free of Egypt nor secure in Rome. The first is Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra; the second, Antony's exchange with the fortune-teller.

After the extravagance of Egypt, the Roman world has been, for a time, an attractive alternative. The political turmoil which made it appear chaotic, in Act I,

has since been rectified. Yet for all its apparently restored order, it remains a world devoid of the harmonious influence of Eros and no one makes this clearer than Enobarbus, who recalls the vision of Cleopatra's beauty:

> Eno. I will tell you.
> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne
> Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggar'd all description . . .
>
> (II, ii, 190-98)

The picture is exotic and foreign to Roman thought. Waves under the barge are caressed by the strokes of oars. The femininity is strikingly different from Roman masculinity and the sensuality of Cleopatra, her "smiling Cupids," "burnish'd throne," purple sails, "love-sick" winds, "divers-coloured fans," leap out at us against a severe Roman landscape. Even Agrippa, Roman of Romans, can only gasp in wonder, "O, rare for Antony!" (II, ii, 205).

Enobarbus' tribute to Cleopatra appears at a time when the myth of Mars and Venus, having expressed its two extremes of pleasure and martial strife, seems to have

faded from the play's concerns. But the myth is reawakened by this remembrance of Cleopatra's beauty. By placing Venus, as she appears through Cleopatra, in the centre of a world dominated by political concerns, Shakespeare reminds us that a far greater harmony than the orderly negotiations which we have witnessed, hovers over the play.

Antony, however, is not privy to this information. He has moved too far into the martial persuasion of Rome to be influenced by the apparition of the "Rare Egyptian!" (II, ii, 218). He must comprehend the Roman world through unshaded eyes, since he suffers blindness, not of love, but of political regimentation. He begins to see when he takes a sideways glance which brings him face to face with fortune and the presence of the soothsayer.

Critics disagree over Antony's intense reaction to the fortune he is given. Some claim he is weakly superstitious, others that he is merely looking for a visible excuse to return to Egypt and Cleopatra. The reason, however, seems clear enough. Fortuna is the reigning goddess, responsible for the rise and fall of men in political concerns, whose sway over Rome is total, and it does not pay to mock her. Pompey, who vainly boasts,

Pom. Well, I know not
What counts harsh fortune casts upon my face,
But in my bosom shall she never come,
To make my heart her vassal.

(II, vi, 53-6)

refuses fortune's gifts and is, we later learn, murdered for his miscalculation. Antony is sufficiently aware of her power to question the soothsayer:

Ant. Say to me,
Whose fortunes shall rise higher, Caesar's or mine?

Sooth. Caesar's.
Therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side:
Thy demon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is
Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
Where Caesar's is not. But near him, thy angel
Becomes afeard; as being o'erpower'd, therefore
Make space enough between you.

(II, iii, 14-22)

and the definitive reply is credulous enough to frighten him: "Speak this no more " (II, iii, 22). Though he cautions the soothsayer to silence, his eyes are opened. His "Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable " spirit, on which his heroic stature rests, counts for nothing when set against the rise and fall of fortune's wheel. To retain the valour of his martial image, he must leave Rome. The direction which his thoughts take at this crucial moment is natural: "I' the east my pleasure lies." He faces the difference between political marriage and the

reunion of Mars and Venus:

> Ant. I will to Egypt:
> And though I make this marriage for my peace,
> I' the east my pleasure lies.
>
> (II, iii, 37-9)

As if taking a cue from Antony, Cleopatra obligingly provides us with two concrete images of the nature of "pleasure." It should be noted that while much has been changing in Rome, Cleopatra has, metaphorically, slept out "this great gap of time / My Antony is away " (I, v, 5-6). Antony's transformation into an independent Mars has bypassed her world, and still confident of her powers she captures him in dream images which continue to reflect the enchantress motif of Act I. Displaying her desire for sensual satisfaction, she orders,

> Cleo. Give me some music; music, moody food
> Of us that trade in love.
>
> (II, v, 1-2)

Against this background of licentious melody, she conjures pictures of Antony made prey to her magical charms:

> Cleo. Give me mine angle, we'll to the river there,
> My music playing far off. I will betray
> Tawny-finn'd fishes, my bended hook shall pierce
> Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,
> I'll think them every one an Antony,
> And say "Ah, ha! y'are caught."
>
> (II, v, 10-15).

Hooked like a fish on the barbs of love, Antony is Mars enslaved by a fallen Venus. Cleopatra makes the point even more explicit:

> Cleo. That time? O times!
> I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night
> I laugh'd him into patience, and next morn,
> Ere the ninth hour, I drank him to his bed;
> Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
> I wore his sword Philippan.
>
> (II, v, 18-23)

The exchange of clothing, dressing Antony in feminine garb and herself in his masculine attire, is reminiscent, though a misapplication, of the doctrine that ". . . Venus is not only joined to Mars but that his nature is an essential part of her own and vice versa. True fierceness is thus conceived as potentially amiable, and true amiability as potentially fierce."[174] Yet once again we are presented a distorted image of an essential truth. On a mythic level, harmony is achieved when the martial aspect of Venus and the amorous aspect of Mars are in a kind of balance. But the picture Cleopatra paints does not show us love informed by strength, nor strength tempered by love. It shows an exchange merely, not an harmonious union.

The most forceful expression of the fallen nature of Antony and Cleopatra's love is portrayed in events which

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[174]Wind, op. cit., p. 94.

surround the battle of Actium. Much has transpired during Antony's absence from Egypt, yet when the lovers appear, reunited, they continue to reflect the negative aspects of the Venus / Mars union. Though Antony has retrieved his martial powers, he is once more overpowered by Cleopatra, a situation which Enobarbus endeavours to correct:

> Eno. Your presence needs must puzzle Antony,
> Take from his heart, take from his brain, from's time,
> What should not be spar'd. He is already
> Traduc'd for levity, and 'tis said in Rome
> That Photinus, an eunuch, and your maids
> Manage this war.
>
> (III, vii, 10-15)

Neither Antony nor Cleopatra, however, will listen to the voice of reason. When love and war battle for the same ground, Antony chooses the victor — the triumph of Venus over Mars is absolute. It is not yet the triumph of the true mystery where, we recall, the warring instincts of Mars were tamed, leaving his valour intact. Instead Antony has become "The noble ruin of her magic" (III, x, 19), still enchanted by Cleopatra's powers, a defeated Mars who is painfully aware of his loss of valour.

The excessiveness of their love costs both Antony and Cleopatra their stations of rule over the world. As they come to realize their defeat, we see the death throes of the myth which has harnessed their love for so long. It is as though the worst must be vented to its limits before it fades to make room for the new. Cleopatra reaches the climax of her role as enchantress when Antony names her a witch who shall die in humiliation for her betrayal:

> Ant. Ah, thou spell! Avaunt!
>
> Cleo. Why is my lord enrag'd against his love?
>
> Ant. Vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving,
> And blemish Caesar's triumph. Let him take thee,
> And hoist thee up to the shouting plebeians,
> Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot
> Of all thy sex. Most monster-like be shown. . .
>
> (IV, xii, 30-36)

Antony succumbs to rage, which is the logical release of his courtship of the ferocity of Mars, throughout the play. Since all restraint has vanished, we see the very extreme of the fallen image of Venus and Mars. Stretched to the breaking point, the mythic pattern, which has held their love in bondage, shatters and frees them to begin the reconstruction of the true Venus / Mars union.

The mystery of the Venus / Mars conjunction cannot be fully expressed as long as Antony and Cleopatra remain

part of fortune's world. In both the Renaissance and Mediaeval cosmologies, Fortuna's domain was restricted to the sublunary or mutable sphere over which she reigned. Until now her sway over Antony and Cleopatra has defined, in a sense, the ceiling of possible actions in their world. From now on the myth of Venus and Mars in perfect union challenges her limits. The imperishability of the mythic love proposes a constancy which is in opposition to Fortune's turning wheel. It is a mystery which is beyond Fortune's grasp and free of her fickle power, placed cosmologically in the immutable region above the moon.[175] Yet Fortuna is a presiding force throughout Antony and Cleopatra and any attempt to create a mystery of love which transcends her mutable powers is doomed to failure. Antony and Cleopatra must leave her sublunary world to reach the divine expression of their union. Indeed this is what happens as the play proceeds to a close.

Recognizing the transitory nature of his own being, Antony comments on the mutability of mundane events as the world slowly dissolves and changes before his eyes:

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[175] "Though the earth pays homage to Fortune's fickleness and men as blind as beetles advance her wheel, the heavens are not subject to her but surmount all her changes and chances." Chew, op. cit., p. 57.

Ant. Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapour sometime, like a bear, or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
They are black vesper's pageants.

Eros. Ay, my lord.

Ant. That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

(IV, xiv, 2-11)

Cleopatra makes the same recognition, even more forthrightly, challenging Fortuna's power without reservation:

Cleo. No, let me speak, and let me rail so high,
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provok'd by my offence.

(IV, xv, 43-5)

With these castigations of fortune, both lovers metaphorically transcend the domain of mutability and prepare to leave the mundane sphere behind as they approach their deaths.

At the edge of life they are finally free to reveal the mystery which leads to the imperishable harmony of Venus and Mars. Antony, though still the ardent lover of the opening scene of the play, has regained his lost valour:

Ant. Peace!
Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,
But Antony's hath triumph'd on himself.

(IV, xv, 13-15)

No longer subject to Caesar's fortune, nor conquered by earthly pleasure, he is at last free to express his valour in union with Venus. He brings his gift of valour as a token of love to Cleopatra, while she, perhaps signifying the ascent of remeatio, hoists him to the top of her monument,[176] awarding the victorious Mars his place in triumph. Thus Antony achieves, before his death, the image of Mars that Veronese celebrated in his painting of "Mars and Venus " — the perfect warrior whose love informs his strength.[177]

Left to lament her loss of Antony, Cleopatra openly chances hubris, holding back nothing. Like Venus at the loss of Adonis, she cries:

Cleo. My desolation does begin to make
A better life: 'tis paltry to be Caesar:
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's.

(V, ii, 1-8)

An outlaw in love, Cleopatra metamorphoses herself into an image of Venus, which complements Antony's final portrayal of

[176] Frances Yates, The Art of Memory (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 365.

[177] Wind, op. cit., p. 94.

Mars. She reaches for the constancy which is the true form of the Venus / Mars union, above fortune and the moon:

> Cleo. now from head to foot
> I am marble constant: now the fleeting moon
> No planet is of mine.
>
> (V, ii, 238-40)

She expresses a longing for mystical union or marriage, in alchemical imagery where the spirit is divided from the dross. It is her moment of remeatio, of conversion and ascent, where air and fire rise to leave baser elements of earth and water at lower levels:

> Cleo. Husband I come:
> Now to that name, my courage prove the title!
> I am fire, and air; my other elements
> I give to baser life.
>
> (V, ii, 286-89)

At the moment of her death she is once more called by the name of the goddess whose figura she will become after death: "O eastern star!" (V, ii, 307) — the star of Venus.[178]

Both Antony and Cleopatra embrace death as their new manifestations demand. Antony, a Mars tempered by Venus, seeks love in his vision of death:

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[178] Waddington, loc. cit., p. 215.

Ant. But I will be
A bridegroom in my death, and run into't
As to a lover's bed.

(IV, xiv, 99-101)

Cleopatra correspondingly expresses strength in her resolution to die:

Cleo. We'll bury him: and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us.

(IV, xv, 86-88)

Though cheated of the means to end her life in "the high Roman fashion" she desires, she achieves the dignity which belongs to Venus restrained by Mars:

Caes. Bravest at the last,
She levell'd all our purposes, and being royal
Took her own way: . . .

(V, ii, 333-5)

Though we have been able to witness the transformations of a fallen Venus and a fallen Mars into their true figurations, we cannot follow their course to an imperishable union. A mystery beyond the confines of their world, it is also beyond ours as audience. We can only imagine the harmony which both Antony and Cleopatra describe as their final and eternal condition. For Antony, this is a kind of paradise, a land of souls where lovers walk hand in hand amidst the flowers of spring:

> Ant. 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 Aeneas, shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours. Come, Eros, Eros!
>
> (IV, xiv, 50-54)

Cleopatra recalls her first meeting with Antony, when she appeared as the true Venus at the birth of their love: "I am again for Cydnus, to meet Mark Antony " (V, ii, 227-8). These are the signs left by the lovers which we must use to follow them, in our imaginations, to the heavenly spheres where the true union of Venus and Mars shines constantly.

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