

VENUS AND ADONIS

1 Even as the sun with purple-colored face
2 Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
3 Rose-cheeked Adonis hied him to the chase;
4 Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.
5 Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him,
6 And like a bold-faced suitor 'gins to woo him.

NOTES

- 1–6 The stanza is netted together with variations on the idea of pursuit. It begins with Apollo taking leave of the dawn; the dawn does not pursue Apollo but stays behind weeping. Next we see Adonis engaged in the hunt, another kind of pursuit. And, finally, Venus pursues Adonis. Thus Venus is like the dawn in being a woman filled with amorous desire for a man but unlike her because Venus actively pursues the object of her desire. Venus is also like and unlike Adonis: like him because she is actively hunting, unlike him because she hunts not animals but her beloved.
- 1 “Even as” momentarily suggests an emerging simile comparing the sun to Adonis in some way (*Even as* = “like”).
- 2 “Weeping” refers to the morning dew; the lines suggest that Aurora, the goddess of dawn, weeps when Apollo leaves her. The adjective “weeping” puts the word “morn” in a context rich with potential for punning: “morn” / “mourn.” That pun remains undelivered in the line.
- 3 *Hied him* = “hastened”; note that the sound of “high” in “hied” echoes the idea of sunrise. This line removes the possibility of a simile between the sun and Adonis. We see now that the sun rises at the same time as Adonis starts hunting (*Even as* = “while”). However, the phrase “Rose-cheeked” establishes another set of comparisons between the two. Both the sun and Adonis are described as having colorful faces, and the color “rose” has been traditionally associated with the dawn. (Homer consistently describes dawn as “rose fingered”; see, for example, *The Iliad* 1.569: “When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more.”) The undelivered verb meaning of “rose” also pertains to the idea of sunrise.
- 4 *laughed to scorn* = “made fun of,” “derided.” The line establishes a rhetorical contrast between “Hunting” and “love” with the formula “X he Y-ed, but Q he Z-ed.” Yet the contrast is complicated in several ways. First, the verb in the first half of the parallel becomes the noun in the second half:

“loved”/“love.” Moreover, one of the most common metaphors for love is hunting.

- 5 *Sick-thoughted* = “lovesick” The phrase “Sick-thoughted Venus” echoes the phrase “Rose-checked Adonis”; both are the first five syllables of their respective lines, and both describe a character with a hyphenated adjective. *makes amain* = “hastens” Thus “makes amain unto him” is a complex echo of “hied him to the chase” in line 3, suggesting the various similarities and differences between Adonis’s pursuit of game and Venus’s pursuit of Adonis. Note the consonance and assonance in “mAkes amAin.”

- 6 This line contains another abortive simile (see line 1). The word “like” leads us to expect that Venus will be compared to something, but Venus is not *like* “a bold-faced suitor” she *is* one. This rhetorical parallel provides yet another link between Adonis and Venus.

The adjective “bold-faced” is the last in a series of hyphenated adjectives in this stanza. It echoes both the “purple-colored face” in line 1 and “Rose-checked Adonis” in line 3.

- 5–6 The rhyming couplet that closes this stanza is deeply but casually complex. Both line 5 and 6 have feminine endings, “him” is an extra, unstressed syllable in each. The couplet contains a two syllable rhyme: “-to him” / “woo him.” (Strictly speaking, “him”/“him” is not a rhyme at all.) But note that the *to* sound in “unto him” appears in line 6 as well: “*to* woo him.” Thus the last three syllables of the stanza not only contain a rhyme with the previous line but also contain an internal rhyme “to woo,” and the first half of that internal rhyme contains the sound of the first half of the two syllable rhyme from the previous line. The intricacy of the couplet rhyme is yet another complexity that Shakespeare’s language enables us to master without effort.