VENUS, ADONIS, AND THE HORSES

By Robert P. Miller

The episode of the Courser and the Jennet in *Venus and Adonis* has received considerable attention as a noteworthy example of the youthful Shakespeare's mastery of descriptive realism, but the few attempts to relate the part thematically to the whole have been unspecific in their application, leaving the poem open to the criticism of lacking organic unity.[1] A critical approach which takes commonplace Renaissance symbols and moral ideas into consideration may offer possibilities for a better understanding of this passage both in its own right and in its relation to the main narrative. If so, a fresh approach to the poem as a whole may be indicated. For if the horses and associated details are considered symbolically, we may view the episode as expressing—through a fairly complex analysis of romantic love—a ' moral dimension ' in the poem: the concept of love thus presented being reinforced and heightened by the poet's stylistic treatment of his material. The following study points to a degree of conscious artistry and control of his medium earlier in the career of Shakespeare than is generally assumed. Further, it shows that his seemingly digressive treatment of the horses may be said to form an integral part of the total conception of the poem. Finally, it suggests a mature attitude toward romantic courtship on the part of the early Shakespeare.

[1] For typical evaluations emphasizing the "realistic description" in *Venus and Adonis* see Edward Dowden, *Shakspere: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* (London, 1875) pp. 50-51; George Wyndham, ed., *The Poems of Shakespeare* (New York, 1898), pp. lxxxii-lxxxvi, xci. Such evaluations reflect the Stratford theory of Shakespearean imagery and are allied with the idea that Shakespeare came to London with *Venus and Adonis* "in his pocket" (cf. E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare* [Oxford, 1930] I, 545). The commentaries of Gervinus and Sievers seek thematic significance in the episode, while more recently valuable interpretive suggestions have been offered by Carleton Brown, ed., *Venus and Adonis*, in *The Tudor Shakespeare* (New York, 1913) p. xiii, and Hereward T. Price, "Function of Imagery in *Venus and Adonis*," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, XXXI (1945), 292.

The section of *Venus and Adonis* devoted to the horses deserves attention for several reasons. It is by far the most extensive interpolation of material extraneous to the Ovidian source to be found in the poem. Matter of Shakespeare's own invention has here been deliberately inserted into a story well known to the reading audience he was addressing,[2] and would presumably have attracted notice as a significant departure from the traditional account. Although it may have been included as a mere exercise in ingenuity, it is more likely that the episode was intended to emphasize or to clarify Shakespeare's own interpretation of Ovid's tale. In this connection we may note, furthermore, that this is the only place in the poem where the author describes at all extensively, in his own words, something not immediately concerned with Venus and Adonis themselves. (In effect, he has introduced two new characters at this point.) Ideas or attitudes expressed here are therefore presumably his own, as distinguished from those of his characters, and important enough to warrant lengthy digressive treatment. The significant decision to include the digression, as well as the provocative nature of this material, suggest that a thorough examination of the passage should be a fruitful preliminary step for the interpretation of *Venus and Adonis*.

I

Formal considerations indicate that the episode of the Courser and the Jennet (lines 259-324)[3] was conceived as a unified whole. It has a beginning, middle and end, artistically organized with relation to each other. The Jennet, who is mentioned only in this section, appears "from forth a copp's that neighbors by," and the two horses, at the end of the digression, disappear back into the thicket. Adonis seeks to take his horse at both beginning and end. The account intervenes between these

[2] Dedication, genre, and subject lead us to believe that *Venus* was addressed to sophisticated and literate readers. Casual allusions in contemporary literature presume acquaintance with this tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a closely studied school text.

[3] All references are to the poems as edited by Hyder E. Rollins in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Poems* (Philadelphia and London, 1938), hereafter cited as *Variorum*, and to the plays as edited by G. L. Kittredge in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Boston, 1936).

efforts as though it took no time, or were out of time. If, as such an entity, it is examined from the point of view of stylistic exposition, the episode shows a highly conscious and consistent presentation of its material in a humorously ironic manner. It will be seen that for this purpose Shakespeare takes full advantage of contrasting modes of diction, of the nature of his stanza, and of verbal ambiguity, in order to develop *two* subjects in his interlude; and that, in addition, the artistic effects he attempts to achieve depend upon the recognition of this dual reference: that is, to horses and to men, which are implicitly compared throughout.

As at least a reflection of the main plot, the episode deals with a love-affair. The Jennet tempts the Courser, and the action proceeds according to the artificial conventions of romantic courtship.[4] The Courser becomes a suitor, and tries, in equine fashion, by posturing to impress his lady. He neighs his proposal, only to meet (as lovers always do) with disdain (307-312), the mistress' cruelty. His resulting melancholy (313-316) is in due course followed by pity, however, and finally by consent on the part of the "faire breeder." Isolated from its context in the poem, the entire episode is, in its own right, a parody of the game of romantic courtship familiar to the Elizabethan reader—for these are, after all, only horses. In context, the fact that Shakespeare has chosen to parody this concept of courtship is of additional significance.

The particular force of the parody depends upon the style in which it is presented. Reflecting the traditional atmosphere of love, much of the description is conducted in the refined and artificial language associated with romance, but hardly appropriate for realistically conceived horses. The Courser and Jennet are treated in terms conventionally applied to the ideal knight and his lady. Courtly overtones abound; there are echoes of the heroic hyperbole. On the other hand, we are not allowed to forget that these are horses, although no two horses ever acted in exactly this way. An element of realistic wording preserves the duality of reference between lovers and beasts.

[4] T. W. Baldwin, *On the Literary Genetics of Shakspere's Poems & Sonnets* (Urbana, 1950), pp. 25-26, takes notice of the Ovidian "art of love" in the horses' "romance."

They are said to "neigh," "snort," "trot," bite flies in fume, and to possess a "melting buttocke" (something the romantic lover never mentions outright). The Courser is described at length as an ideal *horse*.[5] When he and the Jennet elope, a last deflating touch is added to the picture of their flight: in their hasty speed they outstrip no noble bird, but "crowes"—which brings the whole episode, at the last, back to the more naturalistic animal world.[6] The intended contrast between the activities of horses and those of romantic lovers is consciously maintained and utilized for the purpose of irony in the interplay of discordant poetic styles. Further, Shakespeare's handling of stanza structure and his use of the double meaning of certain words aid in presenting an ironic view.

In general, throughout the poem, Shakespeare develops an idea or description slowly in the quatrain of his stanza, and epitomizes it in the couplet where the rhetorical emphasis naturally falls. The nature of the stanza invites this technique. The same form, however, is peculiarly appropriate for the purpose of irony. That is, the development of the quatrain may be *punctured* by the couplet, and the sense of the whole quickly reversed. The concluding line of stanza 50 (discussed below) undercuts both this and the preceding stanza by presenting one "lack" which, especially in the human analogy, may make the entire roll of virtues superfluous; the animal implication of line 312 makes the romantic build-up of stanza 52 ironic; while the concluding line of stanza 54 (discussed above, n. 6), in its widest sense, undercuts the whole episode. The intent of this formal technique is obviously to make fun, not of the horses themselves, but of the conventions of romantic courtship insofar as the horses' actions reflect them; just as in

[5] Cf. Carleton Brown, "Shakespeare and the Horse," *The Library*, third series, III (April, 1912), 152-180.

[6] "Out stripping crowes, that striue to ouerfly them." In this final line Shakespeare accomplishes several ends without straining the sense—a mark of mature artistry. Besides a) the deflating touch provided by the crows, and b) the suggestion of speed (i.e. haste, rashness), there is possibly c) a suggestion of the "soaring" of romantic love (for which cp. *Romeo and Juliet*, I. iv. 11-24, where there is also some joking at the expense of this idea), also made ironic by the comparison to crows. Further, d) English crows are carrion birds, a quality which associates them thematically with other flesh-eating birds and with images of gluttony in the poem. It may be added that the crow is a traditional symbol of sin.

style artificial, romantic diction is made fun of, not only by the presence of the horses, but also by its juxtaposition with a more realistic terminology.

The same double reference is maintained, furthermore, in individual words. For instance, stanza 52 is stylistically constructed with this double standard in mind (307-312).

> He lookes vpon his loue, and neighes vnto her,
> She answers him, as if she knew his minde,
> Being proud as females are, to see him woo her,
> She puts on outward strangenesse, seemes vnkinde:
> Spurnes at his loue, and scorns the heat he feeles,
> Beating his kind imbracements with her heeles.

Everything in the quatrain would be much more appropriate to human lovers than to horses, with the exception of the phrase "neighes vnto her" carefully planted in the first line.[7] While the Courser proposes and the Jennet manifests her proud disdain, the reader is not to forget that these are animals. The preliminary illusion, however, of the polite ritual of love-making is effectively dispelled with subtle changes of terminology, and with increasing force. The shift in reference begins with the word "spurnes," which Shakespeare uses in a double sense. The politer sense of contempt or disdain[8] is, by addition of the preposition *at*, given an active, animal force: "to kick (*at*

[7] *Variorum*, p. 32, notes to lines 259-262 references to the *Ars Amatoria*. It is also possible that Shakespeare intended to allude to the adulterous nature of the horses' love-making, by use of a familiar Biblical image which also compares horses to men. *Neighing* in the Bible is associated with adultery: cf. Jeremiah 13:27 and 5:7-8. The Geneva Bible (London, 1583) notes marginally to *neyings* (Jer. 13:27), "He compareth idolaters to horses inflamed after mares." Jerome comments to Jer. 5:8, "Simulque tantum ostendit insaniam libidinis, ut non solum appetitum voluptatis, sed . . . *hinnitum* vocet, et servet equorum furentium ad libidinem metaphorem." (*PL* 24, col. 743).

George Sandys, in the commentary to Bk. IX of his *Ovids Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures* (London, 1640), p. 176, states, "horses [were] the ancient Hieroglyphick of lust; as such desires in the sacred Scriptures are compared to their neighings." Erasmus uses this conception as part of his expression, without reference to the Biblical text: ". . . equus erat libidini, & adulterio serviens, & adhinniens omni foeminae." (*Enarratio in Psalmvm XXXVIII*, in *Opera Omnia* [Leyden, 1703-1706], V, 461A). With this compare *Venus and Adonis*, 790—part of Adonis' refutation of Venus' arguments. Perhaps in the Renaissance even Ovid's line, "Femina cornipedi semper adhinnit equo," was interpreted is such a light.

[8] *NED*, *s.v. Spurn*, v^1, 6.

something)." [9] Both meanings are carried in the phrase, though the romantic mistress is not usually said to "spurn at" her lover or "his loue." The implication of this phrase is fully carried out in the last line: she *beats* "his kind imbracements *with her heeles*"—an act undeniably animal. With the context shifted from lovers to horses the polite term "kind imbracements" has been introduced, but the physical picture of the line is perfectly apparent, and the ridiculous affectation of the term is obvious.[10]

"*Kind* imbracements" has itself a dual meaning: in the politer context, *gentle, affectionate, courteous* [11] (as it apparently has in the earlier phrase "seemes vnkind"), and in the animal context, *natural*.[12] In her disdain, then, the Jennet also "seemes" as if she is going to act unnaturally; and later she is said to "grow kinder," upon her acceptance of the Courser's suit (318). The double possibility in meaning points up a philosophical distinction between man and animal at the heart of the episode. More important for the present point, it takes advantage of the double reference consciously worked out in the stanza.

By a shifting manipulation of style and subject Shakespeare thus plays variations of irony and parody. Basically humorous, his artistic intent is evidently to ridicule an artificial system by exposing its essential nature, using as actors horses, whose motivations cannot be questioned insofar as they are only animals. His handling of the episode implies the criticism that the love game played by the romancers is little more than a polite formula created to disguise the fact that the 'service of Venus' is actually to follow the dictates of natural sexual desire. The carefully chosen terms and effects depend upon this assumption for their force. In lines 314-315,

> He vailes his taile that like a falling plume,
> Coole shadow to his melting buttocke lent,

we may see how closely style reflects the burden of the author's

[9] *NED, s.v. Spurn, v*[1], 2; cf. also 3, 5.
[10] Line 790 contains a significant echo of this term.
[11] *NED, s.v. Kind, a,* 5, 6.
[12] *NED, s.v. Kind, a,* 1. Cp. lines 187, 204.

attitude. Under the refined language exists the fact that these are but horses: the last three words turn the lines back on themselves in tone. Under the "falling plume" exists the "melting buttocke." The dangerous 'lover's melancholy,' it is suggested, is sexual frustration disguised; the courtly activity of the romantic ritual is a rich caparison for lust.

II

That the purpose of the episode is to comment by parallelism upon the main narrative is sufficiently evident from the application made by Venus to her own affair (sts. 65-68), in which she praises the horses. The first stanza of the episode itself indicates the existence and nature of this parallelism. As in the case of Venus and Adonis themselves, it is the female who makes the first advances. The Courser, however, unlike Adonis, immediately follows the impulses of his animal nature (263-264).

> The strong-neckt steed being tied vnto a tree,
> Breaketh his raine, and to her straight goes hee.

His actions therefore contrast forcibly with those of his parallel in the main narrative.

The fact that, although the actors in the episode are horses, their described activities must be interpreted by reference to human as well as equine conduct, suggests the application intended by the author. But if the horses are parallel to Venus and Adonis in a significant number of respects, the technique must yet be termed '*conditional parallelism*.'[13] That is, the Courser does not do what Adonis does; he does what Adonis *would* do *if* he were the kind of man Venus wishes him to be. The episode is conditional in that it indicates what would be the nature of the love affair if Adonis were differently constituted. It also expresses Shakespeare's criticism of this possibility, the particulars of which are implied by his use of certain Renaissance conventions.

If we look at the episode as a conditional parallel of the main

[13] The term is my own coinage. I do not want to force the term *allegory*. 'Conditional' presentation is basic to the traditional allegorical method of expression, and as such is generally without temporal significance.

action, and take *human* nature into consideration, it is possible to explain the significance of elements which are more meaningful in relation to men than to horses. In selecting a horse as the main actor of the passage Shakespeare was able to expand a very common traditional image: that of the horse, the bridle and the rider. At least as old as the black horse of Plato's *Phaedrus*, this image provides a useful analogy with the faculties of man. The horse, in later convention, symbolizes the lower appetites of the flesh,[14] while the rein and rider stand for the powers of reason which are theoretically supposed to control and direct such lusts.[15] Used in this way, the image may be found frequently in Renaissance literature. Arthur Golding, for example, in the rhymed prefatory epistle to his translation of the *Metamorphoses* (1567), says,

> The man in whom the fyre of furious lust dooth reigne
> Dooth run to mischeefe like a horse that getteth loose the reyne.[16]

Spenser's Sansjoy excuses his rash behavior before Lucifera with a reference to the convention:

> Pardon the errour of enraged wight,
> Whom great griefe made forget the raines to hold
> Of reasons rule; [17]

while in *Hero and Leander* (*c.* 1593) Marlowe makes use of the same image to describe a romantic lover.

> For as a hot proud horse highly disdains
> To have his head controll'd, but breaks the reins,

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[14] Cf. note 7. The horse is a natural symbol of lust, even outside of its context with rider and bridle. Alexander Ross, onetime master of Southampton Grammar School, writes in his *Mystagogus Poeticus* (2nd edn., London, 1648), p. 397, that the story of Hippodamia shows "that they onely shall obtain true happinesse, who can subdue the untamed and unruly horses of their lusts and affections." Baldwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25, prints Renaissance statements which stress the natural lustfulness of horses.

[15] The emblem of the rider describes the rational man. It will be recalled that Adonis is introduced as a rider, and that Venus immediately tries to tempt him to give up the reins.

[16] *The .xv. Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis* . . . (1567), ed. W. H. D. Rouse (London, 1904), p. 3. These are lines 137-138 of the epistle. Cp. lines 561-580, concerning the intent of his book.

[17] *The Faerie Queene*, I, iv, 41. Ed. Greenlaw, *et. al.* (*Variorum Edn.*, Baltimore, 1932), I, 53.

Spits forth the ringled bit, and with his hooves
Checks the submissive ground: so he that loves,
The more he is restrain'd, the worse he fares;
What is it now but mad Leander dares? [18]

As applied to the nature of man, the horse that has broken his reins represents the appetite no longer in control of the rational faculty, and reflects, in terms of Christian morality, a capitulation to the consequences of Adam's Fall, contrary to the best interests of man and society. For Renaissance moral doctrine the importance of reason can hardly be overemphasized. Man was considered, most fundamentally, as *duplex*: that is, composed of two parts, soul and body, often called the 'inward' and 'outward' man, after the terminology of the Bible.[19] When originally created, these parts worked in harmonious order, the body serving the mind, as the horse obeys the rider. The Fall of Adam, however, disturbed this ideal order, so that, as a result of original sin, the rational powers were weakened and the appetites of the flesh assumed greater power than before, continually seeking to usurp the control of the will.[20] The reins of reason's rule became weaker, and a less agreeable bondage, since they checked immoderate pleasure of the flesh.

The 'inward man' and the 'outward man,' it was affirmed in Renaissance catechisms and moral treatises, are both equipped with appropriate senses: the senses of the body operating for the perception of material things, and the mental senses which perceive incorporeal and immaterial things.[21] Two types of judgment are accordingly possible, depending on which type of perception is utilized; and the will acts in accordance with the dictates of such judgments. But whereas the reason refers its

[18] *Sest.* II, 141-146. Ed. L. C. Martin (London, 1931), pp. 57-58. Cf. the play of *Sir Thomas More*, IV. i. 139 ff., in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford, 1908), p. 404, for an interesting dramatic use of the bridle. Other examples are easily found.

[19] 2 Corinthians 4 : 16. Cp. *Hamlet*, II. ii. 5-7.

[20] Cf. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book I*, ed. R. W. Church (Oxford, 1905), I, viii, 6 (p. 39).

[21] Cf. St. Augustine, *Liber de spiritu et anima* (*PL* 40, col. 819) for a classical statement of this principle. The concept of 'double vision'—the metaphorical distinction between physical and spiritual *sight* is the most common form of this idea, a favorite of Shakespeare's. Cf. Hooker, *op. cit.*, I, vii, 2 (p. 28): "Goodness is seen with eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye, is reason."

judgment to ulterior criteria, principally the will of God, the flesh refers only to the immediate satisfaction of itself. When the eye of the mind is blinded and the powers of the *rational* judgment are weakened in man, the will abides by the preferences of the fleshly senses. The 'wilful' (or 'self-willed') man acts without the benefit of wisdom. Fallen man will not abide the healthy bridle that would subject his will to the higher will of God, but, like Adam, acts by his own direction for self-satisfaction only. Like the Courses, he conducts himself according to the untrustworthy judgments of the external senses; in human relationships he seeks with outward show to "captiuate the eye" of the flesh in others. To allow the appetities alone to select the objects of desire, without attention to the more perceptive checks of reason, is a recapitulation of Adam's loss of perfection [22]—a submission to the impulsive, brute aspects of one's nature.

> VVhile Lust is in his pride no exclamation
> Can curbe his heate, or reine his rash desire,
> Till like a Iade, self-will himselfe doth tire.[23]

Shakespeare works the image of the horse, rein, and rider into the fabric of the courser-jennet episode, using its moral associations to intensify the commentary there. The breaking of the bridle is referred to in the couplets of the two introductory stanzas of the episode—a position of rhetorical importance, the effect of which is to indicate immediately the nature of the activity that follows. The first reference (264) is general and subordinate to the sense of the whole couplet; but the second picks up the allusion and particularizes it, indicating clearly its metaphorical significance (269-270).

> The yron bit he crusheth tweene his teeth,
> *Controlling what he was controlled with.*

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[22] Sir John Davies, in his poem *Nosce teipsum* (facs. ed. Clare Howard [New York, 1941], p. 114), says that Adam, by tasting the forbidden fruit, "to giue *Passion* eyes, made *Reason* blind." After that, "then grew *Reason* darke, that *she* no more Could the faire Formes of *God* and *Truth* discerne." Cf. *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, transl. by I. H., ed. Rev. Thomas Harding for the Parker Society (Cambridge, 1849-1852), II, 368-369; *Early Writings of John Hooper*, ed. Rev. Samuel Carr for the Parker Society (Cambridge, 1843), p. 87; Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (2nd edn., New York, 1949), p. 23.

[23] *The Rape of Lucrece*, 705-707.

Later yet, completing the long catalogue of the points of a perfect horse, there is a third reference, this time to the rider (299-300).

> Looke what a Horse should haue, he did not lack,
> *Saue a proud rider on so proud a back.*

The rhetorical emphasis accorded these statements by position and repetition, is artistically warranted only if they are also considered in relation to human conduct, as a description of man breaking away from reason, thinly disguised in other terms. Although the "proud rider" is an addition to the conventional roll of the points of a good horse,[24] it is Shakespeare himself who says that this horse needs one, and the comment is therefore the more significant. Like references to bit and bridle, it is completely meaningful only in the wider context of psychological analogy.

By allusion this image reinforces the stylistic implications of the episode. Besides presenting the ritual of romantic courtship ironically, and suggesting that beneath it lie the sexual appetites, Shakespeare uses a conventional symbol of lust for this presentation, and stresses a particular criticism: that is, that this procedure is also essentially irrational—that in it the appetites exceed their proper bounds to run wild self-willfully.

III

Other conventional moral distinctions are pertinent to this passage. The Fall of Adam was a fall from the ideal (rational) human state, Adam's willful act weakening in his posterity the image of God: the rational mind. Post-lapsarian man, born in the image of Adam, is traditionally termed the 'old man' (*vetus homo*) or the 'natural man' (*homo animalis*).[25] The

[24] Carleton Brown, "Shakespeare and the Horse," *op. cit.*, conveniently lists the various conventional points.

[25] The term 'the old man' (cf. Romans 6:6, Col. 3:9, Eph. 4:22) is often referred to in contradistinction to 'the new man,' the true image of God. Cf. *A Short Catechism* (1553) in *The Two Liturgies, A. D. 1549, and A. D. 1552*, ed. Rev. Joseph Ketley for the Parker Society (Cambridge, 1844), p. 512; Alexander Nowell, *A Catechisme* (transl. Thomas Norton, 1570) ed. G. E. Corrie for the Parker Society (Cambridge, 1853), p. 177; Bullinger, *op. cit.*, III, 98.

For the term 'the natural man' (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14) the Vulgate reads *animalem*

'old,' 'natural,' or 'animal' man is simply fallen and unregenerate man acting in obedience to the promptings of his corrupted nature, that is, of the 'flesh.'[26] But Man is characterized by his possession of the rational mind, and he may be called *Man* only so long as he exercises his characteristic faculty.[27] An *animal rationalis*, by revolting from reason he makes himself a beast, limited to the sensual nature of the 'external man.' Man fallen from reason becomes, then, in a very literal sense for the Renaissance, *bestial*, an 'animal man.'[28] Shakespeare's choice of animal terms in the episode strongly implies the criticism of 'bestiality' in its conventional moral sense. More particularly, the metaphor of the beast suggests an undesirable state of human nature: that of the unregenerate 'natural man.' On the plane of the human analogy, the Courser (an ideal specimen of horseflesh whose "courage" is lust politely termed[29]) embodies the main characteristics of this heir of fallen Adam, whom Shakespeare thus presents engaged in the ritual of romantic love-making—a conditional Adonis.

A further distinction, however, is important in this connection. While the 'animal man' assents to a depraved version of his true nature, the beast, which possesses a characteristically *sensual* nature, may be said to be properly sensual in motivation, and to fulfill thereby its purpose in the great scheme of the universe. Natural agents, says Hooker, "keep the law of their kind unwittingly."[30] By the same logic, however, man

hominem. Cf. Bullinger, *op. cit.*, III, 99: "The natural man (that is, that old man which is not yet regenerate by the Holy Ghost). . . ." Also *ibid.*, II, 393. The term is very common in the sermons.

[26] Bullinger, *op. cit.*, III, 98: "The word 'flesh' therefore doth import the natural power and faculties of man; even all that, I mean, which we have or take of our first grandsire Adam."

[27] Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 124:

> *The Soule a Substance* and a *Spirit* is,
> Which God himselfe doth in the Bodie make,
> Which makes the man, for euery man from this
> The *Nature* of a Man and name doth take.

[28] Cf. Spencer, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13, 19-20 and documentation there for these general ideas. The image of the beast is discussed by George Coffin Taylor, "Shakespeare's Use of the Idea of the Beast in Man," *SP* XLII (1945), 530-543.

[29] *Variorum*, p. 33, line 276 n.

[30] Hooker, *op. cit.*, I, iii, 2 (p. 12). With regard to sexual desire, it was often noted that the animal world was subject to natural continence. Since the desire is

is designed primarily for rational, not sensual activity, for his characteristic nature is created rational. That is, reason in man is supposed to utilize the more instinctive powers for a higher end. Some actions to be expected in beasts are inexcusable in men. For example, while the satisfaction of bodily sense may be said to be the principle of animal conduct, for human conduct the external senses should be regarded as instruments, to be *used* by the reason.[31] Sensual satisfaction for its own sake is condemned, for this is to *enjoy* (or *ab*use) what is properly a useful thing. The comment of St. Augustine, frequently echoed, that " omnis . . . humana perversio est, quod etiam vitium vocatur, fruendis uti velle, atque utendis frui," [32] is a convenient standard by which to judge the extent of reason's bawdry to " lusts abuse."

The distinction between human and bestial modes of conduct forms the basis for one final important aspect of the comparison between man and animal in the courser-jennet episode. This concerns the problem of propagation, which is the subject also of much of Venus' argument elsewhere in the poem. The implication, emphasized verbally by Shakespeare, reinforces the criticism of artificiality which lies behind his stylistic treatment of the episode.

If Adonis is unlike his Courser in his unwillingness to follow the dictates of his appetites, the Jennet is unlike Venus in one respect not immediately apparent. The mare is mentioned seven times in the episode: three times romantically as the Courser's " loue," once indeterminately as a " female," but the other three times as a " breeder." She is introduced as " a breeding Iennet " (260), the horse calls her a " faire breeder " (282), and as an " vnbackt breeder " she leaves the scene (320). Significantly, the Jennet is mentioned specifically as an animal only in these terms. Shakespeare is careful to point out that *this* " female " is a *breeder*, and to keep the idea in his reader's

generally limited to seasonal mating periods, the wit or reason necessary to human continence is unnecessary.

[31] Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 127, says that the soul " Doth as her instruments the *Senses* vse." Compare the terminology in Hooker, *op. cit.*, I, vii, 7 (p. 32), and *Othello*, I. iii. 271.

[32] *De diversis quaestionibus*, I, *qu.* xxx (*PL* 40, col. 19). The first distinction in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* treats the concepts of use and enjoyment.

mind. Insofar as the actors are to be considered as *animals*, then, the sensual urge to copulate exists for the purpose of propagation, and insures the perpetuation of species lacking rational comprehension of the problem of mortality. The repetition of the word *breeder* is rediberately introduced with regard to the horses, whose "imbracements" are, after all, "kind." But to direct attention to the *use* is to point up the *abuse* when it occurs elsewhere in connection with Venus. The repetition of the word *breeder* is deliberately introduced with reference to the Jennet in order to emphasize the abuse which Venus represents. Where Adonis is unwilling she is too willful. Venus, who would imitate the horses in action, wishes, nevertheless, only to enjoy that which should be used.

Reason clearly explains to the lover in *The Romaunt of the Rose* the folly of Venus' position:

> Of other thing loue retcheth nought
> But setteth her harte and all her thought
> More for delectacioun
> Than any procreacioun
> Of other fruict by engendrure
> Which loue to God is nat pleasure.[33]

According to Renaissance morality also, love-making which stresses intercourse for the sake of pleasure only is artificial, a perversion of nature because a misuse of natural functions. This love falls into the old confusion of *utendum* and *fruendum*, use and abuse—a confusion that lies behind much of the persuasive philosophy of the goddess of love throughout *Venus and Adonis*.

V

Adonis, then, is exhibiting not modern priggishness but sound Renaissance morality when he somewhat coldly chides Venus (787-792):

> VVhat haue you vrg'd, that I can not reproue?
> The path is smooth that leadeth on to danger,
> I hate not loue, but your deuise in loue,
> That lends imbracements vnto euery stranger,
> You do it for increase, ô straunge excuse!
> VVhen reason is the bawd to lusts abuse.

[33] *The Woorkes of Geffrey Chaucer*, ed. William Thynne (1561), Fol. cxxxviii, col. 2 [*sig.* Dd^{6} *recto*].

Venus, by praising the Courser as an example for Adonis to emulate (sts. 65-68), unwittingly makes clear her position in the poem, and also clarifies the relationship which this episode bears to the larger whole. The Courser is developed as a conditional Adonis for Venus to point to as that which she would like Adonis to be. But Shakespeare has developed the portrait of the Courser in such a manner as to leave no doubt in his reader's mind about the poet's own attitude toward the type of love Venus represents. He treats the entire episode with ironic humor, exposing the pretensions in the ritual of romantic courtship as it is acted out by the horses. By indicating their sexual motivation, he stresses the artificiality of romantic conventions. In addition, he includes in his description images and allusions which, by their traditional associations, show his position more precisely to be that of conventional Renaissance morality.

As a result, Venus is depicted exuberantly praising fallen and unregenerate man as the ideal lover, to be emulated by Adonis; and it is evident that her school lesson is intended to teach him the 'wisdom' by which Adam fell. The horse is not only, as a beast, an appropriate symbol of the 'animal man' defined in Renaissance catechisms and moral tracts, but is also *per se* a conventional symbol of lust or of the fleshly appetites. In the world of Venus, too, reason has no place, for reason would control the immoderate enjoyment of such appetites. Therefore it is not surprising to find her attitude toward "the raines of reasons rule" in conflict with the attitude of Shakespeare. For her the "leatherne raine" is a "base thong," a "pettie bondage," by which one is "seruilly maisterd"; and she advises breaking it. The bondage she offers is more pleasing—a "red rose chaine": the *roseae catenae* of temporal delights, as Boethius called them,[34] by which she kept the warlike Mars "seruile." It is clear that what the goddess of love desires is abandonment to the enjoyment of sensual pleasure for its own sake, not for the purpose of propagation.

[34] *De consolatione philosophiae*, ed. Adrianus a Forti Scuto and Georgius D. Smith (London, 1925), *lib.* III, *met.* x, 1-3:

> Huch omnes pariter uenite capti
> quos ligat fallax roseis catenis
> terrenas habitans libido mentes.

The ritual of romantic courtship—that which Venus stands for—is presented by Shakespeare in an artistically complex and coherent manner as an activity unworthy of the nature of man.[35]

If Shakespeare's attitude embodies the principles of conventionally accepted moral doctrine, the tenor, however, of the courser-jennet episode is far from homiletic. Shakespeare is giving artistic expression to current ideas. The activity he describes was to him apparently an aspect of human folly, and, although its degenerate nature is quite precisely specified, his total presentation of it is delightfully humorous. The delicacy of Shakespeare's treatment is more evident if his use of the horse-bridle image is set beside that of Golding. One is Puritanical, the other is moral. Is it not possible that the episode of the Courser and the Jennet may sound the keynote for *Venus and Adonis* as a whole?

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[35] It may be seen that the materials from which Shakespeare created the courser-jennet episode were of a long and powerful tradition, not limited to the Renaissance. It is interesting to note that the ideas of the bestial man, the rein, true and false freedom and bondage, continence in man and beast, use and enjoyment, may all be found fully developed in a similar psychological context by one of the founders of this tradition: in a single passage (concerning adultery) of one of St. Augustine's most important sermons, *De decem plagis et decem praeceptis* [cap. V] (*PL* 38, cols. 69-70).