The brief epic based on Ovid current in Shakespeare's time

Annette Anderson
State University of Iowa

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Recommended Citation
https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.6o0yfem4.

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THE BRIEF EPIC BASED ON OVID CURRENT IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

by

Annette Andersen

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts of the Graduate College of the
State University of Iowa,
1922
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I

Ovid on the Continent

The influence of Ovid in literature is less evident and direct than that of Virgil, yet it made itself felt in the literary traditions that followed as a result of his works. Besides furnishing later poets and writers with interesting material for stories, quotations and references, his poems gave rise to a certain form of literature. "The simple tale of intrigue, or the Ovidian love-story... consists in its primitive form of a very meager plot in which the lover in pursuit of a woman... attains the fulfilment of his desires. Thus Ovid, who had set down nothing more than simple principles of intrigue for the satisfaction of purely physical desires, logically sketched for future times the outlines of the 'Ovidian tale', in which a man seeks to win a woman, or the other way about, by following prescribed rules."\(^1\) Frequently it is called 'the Ovidian epic', or the "Mythologische Kleinepos",\(^a\) although, strictly speaking,

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\(^a\) Bohme, Traugott, Spenser's Literarisches Nachleben bis zu Shelley, Palaestra XCI (Berlin, 1911).
it is not an epic, having neither the matter nor the form characteristic of the epic. Many of the narrative poems discussed later deal with characters or incidents that are familiar in myths or legends, but turn the main interest from deeds to character, emotion and spiritual development, which may be considered variations of the epic type.2

The church, as the center of learning during the Middle Ages, at first looked with great disfavor on the study of pagan literature. Typical of this attitude of the church is the warning of Isidore of Seville to young scholars that Ovid above all pagan writers must be shunned.3 But in spite of the general disapproval, the reading of Ovid's works, particularly the Metamorphoses, continued; for copies of his poems have been found in monasteries of France and Germany dating from the ninth century. Even as early as the eighth century, Ovid's works were well-known at Charlemagne's court,4 and scholars there imitated Ovid in their Latin poems.5 Theodolfus, one of these scholars, believed "profound truths were contained in his poems, if properly (i.e., allegorically) understood".6 Webbe in his Discourse of English


5. Sandys, ibid.,

6. Ibid.
Poetrie (1586) explains that a poet must teach the truth allegorically under pleasing fables in order to get the people to read works full of good morals, a belief almost universally accepted by the Renaissance writers. Webbe also quotes the *Metamorphoses* as a "fount of ethical teaching." As examples of this belief, there is the long poem, *Ovid Moralise*, written about the fourteenth century, by Chrétien Legouais, and the long Ovidian allegorical commentary by Pierre Berquiere. The medieval accounts of Ovid's life, also, were designed to prove that he was a Christian who wrote with a moral purpose. This allegorical interpretation of Ovid's works lasted for several centuries, but often, in later editions, the moral explanation was in the form of a preface or an appendix, not necessarily read, yet of importance in case of censorial inspection. Even as late as Shakespeare's time, this allegorical interpretation persisted, as may be seen in the Emblem Books, several of which illustrate the 'morals' taught by Ovid.

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11. Ibid. p. 17.

in his *Metamorphoses*. But such a belief was of value in that it lessened the opposition of the church, and the *Metamorphoses*, with a moral for each story, could be studied in the schools.\textsuperscript{13}

With the introduction of Ovid into the schools about the tenth century,\textsuperscript{14} the popularity of his poems began to increase rapidly. Young students used the *Metamorphoses* in their study of Latin rhetoric; poets, striving for skill in expression and style, not only imitated Ovid consciously, but also found material for stories in his works.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, by the twelfth century, Ovid's works were known and imitated in practically all European countries, and it was not long until his poems were translated into the vernacular.

In Germany, a verse translation of the *Metamorphoses* made by Albrecht von Halberstadt appeared as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century. Parts of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Heroides* were also borrowed in the long poems of Conrad of Wurzburg on the Trojan War.\textsuperscript{16}

Since he offered so much material for love-songs, Ovid was an especial favorite of the Troubadours, who played no small part in spreading his stories throughout the European countries.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} Schovill, op. cit., pp. 12-13; p. 12, ftn. 17. \\
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 13. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 12-13. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Schevill, op. cit., p. 23, p. 101.
In the *Roman de la Rose* "more than two thousand lines . . .

are inspired by Ovid."\(^{18}\) *Ars Amatoria* was translated by Chrétien de Troyes, though this work is no longer extant. Philip de Vitri translated and moralised the *Metamorphoses* into French verse about the beginning of the fourteenth century, at the request of the wife of Philip V. In 1539, *Le premier Livre de la Metamorphose*\(^{19}\) translated by Clement Marot gave evidence of the continued interest in Ovid's works. He also translated from a Latin version Musaeus' poem of *Hero and Leander*,\(^{20}\) which probably influenced Marlowe and Chapman. Ronsard, in 1564, wrote *Venus et Adone*, and later, *Amours d'Helène*,\(^{21}\) showing Ovidian influence. Lee thinks that Shakespeare may have been acquainted with Ronsard's works, as were Lodge, Daniel, Chapman and other Elizabethan writers.\(^{22}\)

Many of the French poets were mediums through which strong Italian influences passed on to the English poets, the Italians themselves being great admirers of Ovid. Boccaccio,

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22. Desportes, Durant, Ronsard all influenced by Italian literature, especially Marino (strongly Ovidian) and they in turn influenced English writers. Cf. Lodge's *Rosalynd* with Desportes' *Diane*; Chapman's *The Amorous Zodiacke* with Gilles Durant's poem of the same name; Chapman's poem is really nothing but a translation of the French poem; Lee, *French Renaissance in England*, p. 231.
who had studied Ovid in school, shows his admiration through numerous references and conscious or unconscious imitations in his works. Alberti wrote two treatises on love (1471) in imitation of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*. Dante, interpreting the poem allegorically, accepted the *Metamorphoses* as his model. While he quotes chiefly from the *Metamorphoses*, he was also familiar with the other works of Ovid, *Remedia Amoris, Heroides, Ars Amatorias*. Another Italian of great influence, especially on the French writers, is Marino, "the literary dictator of the seventeenth century", who in the latter part of the sixteenth century wrote *L'Adone* — "an epic of voluptuousness". "This fact, though disagreeable, has to be noted. It is too characteristic of the wave of feeling at that time passing over Europe, to be ignored. The morbid strain which touched the Courts alike of Valois, Medici, and Stuarts; which infected the poetry of Marlowe and of Shakespeare . . . cannot be neglected. In Marino's *Adone* it reaches its artistic climax." 

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Marino's poem, although not published until 1623, was known much earlier.28 Parts of it may have been brought to England by those who travelled to Italy and by those particularly interested in Italian poetry, as, Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, and Daniel, since it was very popular. "Marino is, more than any other poet, the counterpart of Ovid: his fertility of imagination, his ready accumulation of circumstances and expressions, his easy flow of language, his harmonious versification, are in no degree inferior."29

Ovidian influence spread to England from Spain also, as is evident from the great number of plays and stories dealing with Spanish subjects during the Elizabethan period. One poem worthy of note is that by de Mendoza, Fabula de Adonis, written in eight-line stanzas. Mendoza, who had studied at the universities at Bologna, Padua and Rome, was interested in Greek and Latin manuscripts, reading much of the classical as well as Italian literature. He visited England in diplomatic services in 1537 and 1553.


Ovid in England

But Englishmen were familiar with Ovid's stories before any of his works were translated into the vernacular. As early as the twelfth century, "we find the monks of Canterbury using his poems as a treasury of stock quotations". Aiding still further in making Ovid popular are such writers as Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate.

Chaucer, who influenced English literature greatly, refers to Ovid more often than to any other Latin writer. "His chief book was Ovid; and it is almost certain, from the freedom with which he quotes him, that he had a MS. copy of his own among his 'sixty bokes olde and newe'." While most of his references to classical mythology come from the *Metamorphoses*, yet he was familiar also with the *Fasti*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Remedia Amoris*, and


Heroides. The Legende of Good Women contains chiefly Ovidian stories, both from the Metamorphoses and Heroides, but there are some taken from Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus and De Genealogia Deorum, while the story of Dido shows Chaucer's knowledge of Virgil's Aeneid. The latter legend he begins:

"Glorie and honour, Virgile Mantuan,
Be to thy name: and I shal, as I kme,
Folowe thy lanterne as thou goste byforn.
How Eneas to Dido was forsworne --
In thyne Eneyde and Naso wol I take
The tenour."

And in conclusion, he says:

"But who wol al this letter have in mynde,
Rede Ovyde, and in him he shal hit fynde."

In the Legend of Pyramus and Thisbe, taken from the Metamorphoses, Chaucer gives his source:

"This yonge man was cleped Piramus
And Tesbe highte the maide, -- Naso seith thus".

The Legend of Hyspiple and Medea is taken from the Metamorphoses and Heroides:

"Wel kan Ovyde hir letter in verse endyte".

The Legends of Phillis and Hypermnestra are taken from the Heroides.

while Philomela and Ariadne are from the *Metamorphoses* alone. The Legend of Lucrecie is based chiefly on Ovid's story in the *Fasti*:

"As sayth Ovyde and Titus Lyvius".

Chaucer follows Ovid closely throughout, omitting or changing little of the story as found in his source. In the Prologue of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, Chaucer refers to the *Ars Amatoria*:

"Ovides Art, and booke many on";

and in *The Dethe of Blaunche the Ducheasse* to *Remedia Amoris*:

"May noght make my sorwes slyde,—
Nought al the remedies of Ovyde".

In this poem, also, there is the story of Ceyx and Alcyone taken from the *Metamorphoses*. In the first book of the *House of Fame*, Chaucer tells the story of Aeneas and Dido, using Virgil's work as his chief source:

"Rede Virgile in Enèidos,
Or the Epistle of Ovide".

The description of the House of Fame is very similar to Ovid's accounts:

"Amid the world tweene heaven, and earth, and sea, there is a place,
Set from the bounds of eche of them indifferently in space,
From whence is seene what ever thing is practised any where,
Fame hath his dwelling there,
Who in the toppe of all the house is lodged in a towre,
A thousand entryes, glades, and holes are framed in
this bowre.
There are no doors too shut. The doores stand open
nyght and day.
The house is all of sounding brasse, and roreth every
way,
Reporting dowble every woord it heareth people say:
There is no rest within, there is no silence anywhere,
Yit is there not a yelling out, but humming, as it were
The sound of surges beeing heard farre of."  

Chaucer's house was not made of "sounding brass", but

"Was maad of twigges, falwe, rede
And eek this hous hath of entrees
As fele of leves as ben on trees
In somer, wann they grene been,
And on the roof men may yit seen
A thousand holes, and wel moo,
To leten wel the soun out go.
And eek by day in evertyde
Been al the dores opened wide
And by nyght eechcon unshette;
No porter ther is non to lette
No maner tydyngs in to pace;
Ne never reste is in that place,
That hit nys fild ful of tydynges,
Other loude, or in whisprynges."

Gower was likewise indebted to Ovid's works for material
used in his English poem, Confessio Amantis. Most of the stories
drawn from Ovid come from the Metamorphoses; a few from the Heroides.
Gower liked Ovid so well that he borrowed long passages from the
Roman poet without any acknowledgment. But, according to Macaulay,


he occasionally adds charm and individuality to the Ovidian stories through small alterations. Such instances are the stories of Narcissus, and Acis and Galatea, contained in the Confessio Amantis. His treatment of the Tale of Canace is "most pathetically rendered, far better than by Ovid". Gower follows Ovid and Chaucer in his version of the story of Lucrece, but he has a very long introduction to his poem, making it nearly twice as long as Chaucer's story.

Lydgate, who had studied in European universities and was familiar with classical, as well as French and Italian literature, shows his knowledge of Ovidian material in his works. He was also a close follower of Chaucer, imitating the latter's The Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse in his Black Knight, and The House of Fame in The Temple of Glass, -- the title of Lydgate's poem being suggested, perhaps, by a line in The House of Fame.

"But as I sleep, me mette I was
Withyn a temple y-mad of glas."

But, while he imitated Chaucer, yet he knew Ovid's works, perhaps more thoroughly than Chaucer. In his Reson and Sensuallyte, Lydgate tells the story of Venus and Adonis briefly,


"Adonydes, Yong, lusty, fresh, and pereles, Of hardynesse and fers corage, Fairer eke of his visage Than ever, in soth, was Absolon".

"The boor stondying at diffence With foomy mouth and tusshes kene."

Venus warned him of the dangers of hunting the boar, but urged him

"To hunte at hem yt may not vaylle, But at other bestys smale, Bothe on hille and in vale, To chosen hem she bad not spare, g As the konyn and the hare, But for thys yong Adonydes Was negligent and Rekkeles. For which, in sooth, he loste hys lyf."

As these stories became well-known, the people were no longer satisfied with the reading of short extracts and paraphrases, but desired to read all of Ovid's works. In response to this demand, numerous translations from the classics began to be made.

Many of these earlier translations were not accurate, but they presented the contents in an interesting style. Of such, Schevill\(^\text{10}\) says: "The works of Ovid form a particularly important and interesting study, not only because they contributed from the twelfth to the seventeenth century to the formation of certain

9. Cf. Venus and Adonis:
1. 674 - "Uncouple at the timorous flying hare."
1. 687 - "And sometime where earth-delving conies keep."

10. Schevill, op. cit., p. 4.
traditions; they also acquired new prestige during the Renascence by means of translations chiefly of a popular character, which by their spirit and form take rank with fiction, and thus deserve to be enrolled with the literature of the times."

The earliest extant English translation of any of the works of Ovid was made during the reign of Queen Mary by an unknown translator who gave us his version of Penelope's letter to Ulysses from the Heroides. In the introduction to The Golden Legend, Caxton mentions his translation of the Metamorphoses. The printed copy has been lost, but a manuscript containing the last part was found with the inscription, "Translated and finished by me William Caxton at Westminster the twenty-second day of April, the year of our Lord 1480, and the twentieth year of the reign of King Edward the fourth." In 1560, there was published the Fable of Ovid treating of Narcissus translated out of Latin into English metre, with a moral thereunto, very pleasant to rede by Thomas Howell. Thomas Underdowne, in 1565, published the pleasant fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis. Ovid's Heroicall Epistles in English Verse, a translation by George Turbervile, was printed in 1567. In 1569, Thomas Underdowne published another work, Ovid his Invective against Ibis, wherunto is added by the

translator, a short draught of all stories and tales contained therein, very pleasant to be read. George Gascoigne's A Hundredth Sundrie Flowres bounde up in one small poesie (1572) contains many passages translated from Ovid. Thomas Churchyard in 1578 published part of Ovid's De Tristibus. Thomas Peend translated one fable of the Metamorphoses, Salmacis, in free English rhyme, but on learning that Golding had already undertaken the translation of the Metamorphoses, he did not continue his work. George Chapman, in 1595, published Ovid's Banquet of Sense, a coronet for his Mistress Philosophy. Two years later Marlowe's version of the Elegies, later ordered to be burned for its immoral tendencies, was published, although it had been written several years before. From the list of noted translators during this period, it is evident that there was a great deal of interest in Ovid and his works.

Of all the translators, Golding was one of the most popular. He published the first four books of the Metamorphoses in 1565, and finished the remainder in 1567. His translation was written in rhymed couplets of fourteen syllables to a line. Warton says that Golding's "style is poetical and spirited, and his versification clear: his manner ornamental and diffuse, yet with a sufficient observance of the original." That this work


was popular may be judged from the fact that it was used as a text in the schools, and, during Shakespeare's life-time, passed through seven editions.\textsuperscript{15} Golding's version, since it was early made a part of the school curriculum, created a greater interest in Ovid's works and, among the Elizabethan writers, was the chief source for knowledge of the myths and legends of the Greeks and the Romans.\textsuperscript{16} But Golding was also under the influence of the medieval belief in regard to Ovid's work, for in a rhymed preface to Leicester to whom he had dedicated the work, he explains the "heavenly meaning" of the \textit{Metamorphoses}.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{17} Jusserand, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 369.
III

Shakespeare's Predecessors in Use of Ovidian Material

After the adoption of Golding's version of the *Metamorphoses* as a text in the schools, Ovidian stories naturally became the favorite themes for writers and poets. Prominent among those who made use of Ovidian material are Painter, Lodge, Daniel, Spenser, and Marlowe.

Painter, who was thoroughly familiar with the classical as well as the contemporary continental languages, made a collection of stories which he had translated from Latin, Greek, French, and Italian sources. That *The Palace of Pleasure* was a popular work is shown by the fact that it was frequently used as the source for the plots of other stories and plays. Through this work the Italian novelists were first made well-known to the English readers.¹ In *The Rape of Lucrece*, Painter follows Livy's version, telling the story briefly and devoting about a third of it to the description of Brutus at the death of Lucrece, his vow to drive the Tarquins out of Rome, his oration to the citizens of

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1. Dictionary of National Biography, s.v.
Rome, and the final downfall of the Tarquins -- details which Shakespeare omitted. Lodge was a good classical scholar and well-read in the modern literature of the continent, especially French. He imitated Desportes and Ronsard very freely, sometimes giving as his own works translations of poems of the two French writers. Concerning Desportes he wrote, "Few men are able to second the sweet conceits of Philip Desportes, whose poetical writings are for the most part Englished, and ordinarily in everybody's hands." Since Lodge was thus influenced by foreign literature, his followers would undoubtedly also be influenced to some extent. In Scilae Metamorphoses (1589) and in the poem of Corinna and Corulus in the prose work, The Delectable Historie of Forbonius and Frisgeria, Lodge shows Ovidian influence in the choice of his subject matter, but there is also a French influence evident in his long description of Corinna.

Corinna and Corulus is really a pastoral poem, but there are several passages in Venus and Adonis which seem very similar in thought to these:

"Him sought she oft, with many a sweete regard, 
With sundrie tokens she her sutes preferd, 
Her care to keepe his feeding flocke from stray, 
Whilst carelessse he amidst the lawnes did play. 
Her sweete regards she spent upon his face; 
Her countrie cates she sent to gaine his grace; 
Her garlands gaie to decke his temples faire; 
Her doubled sighs bestowd on gliding aire; 
Her pleasant kisse where she might steale a touch, 

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Corinna's zeale to Corulus was such.  
He, wanton shepheard, glorying in her sute,  
These signes of zeale to folly did impute:  
Not waying of her many loving sightes,  
Her watrie eyes, her secret moane by nights;  

But scorning  
He left the place where she did love to bide,  
And drave his flocke another way beside."

But it is in Glaucus and Scylla, or the Scillae Metamorphoses, a poem of almost one hundred fifty stanzas, that the greatest similarity is noticeable. Glaucus bewails the fact that the beautiful scilla disregards his love. Cupid cures Glaucus, so that he ceases to care for her, and then Cupid wounds Scilla, who now woos Glaucus without avail. Giving up hope, Scilla goes to Sicillia, where Furie, Wan-hope, Dispaire and Woe bind her to the rocks, -- a place which all seafarers have since avoided. Spencer's influence is evident in the use of these allegorical figures. However, the poem, as a whole, lacks the passion of Venus and Adonis, yet the story and the description of Scilla are Ovidian. "It is not too much to say that Venus and Adonis is a direct imitation of Glaucus and Scilla -- an imitation, indeed, which vastly outshines its original but none the less was distinctly composed in emulation of the older poem."3 The similarity extends to stanza and rhyme scheme as well as to treatment of subject.

"He that hath seen the sweet Arcadian boy
Wiping the purple from his forced wound,
His pretty tears betokening his annoy,
His sighs, his cries, his falling on the ground,
    The echoes ringing from the rocks his fall,
    The trees with tears reporting of his thrall;
And Venus starting at her love-mate's cry,
Forcing her birds to haste her chariot on,
And full of grief at last with piteous eye,
Seen where all pale with death he lay alone,
    Whose beauty quailed, as wont the lilies droop,
When wasteful winter winds do make them stoop.
Her dainty hand addressed to daw her dear,
Her roseal lip allied to his pale cheek,
Her sighs, and then her looks and heavy cheer,
Her bitter threates, and then her passions meek;
    How on his senseless corpse she lay a-crying
    As if th'e boy were then but new a-dying."

Lodge's poem, however, was not very popular, perhaps because it was eclipsed by Shakespeare's poems that followed so soon.

Samuel Daniel, who was just two years older than Shakespeare, began writing about the same time. A visit to Italy had brought him into contact with Italian writers, their influence being evident chiefly in his Sonnets to Delia. His Complaint of Rosamond, published in 1592, and written in rhyme royal was very popular. In stanza-form and rhyme it is similar to Shakespeare's Lucrece, but parts of Venus and Adonis show the influence of this poem. His poem, A Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius, is modelled after Ovid's Heroides and is written in eight-line stanzas. The poems seem rather monotonous because of the lack of color and passion, making Daniel "a Polonius among
The Complaint of Rosamond, about one hundred thirty stanzas in length, deals with an historical subject. There are some passages in it which are similar to parts of Lucrece and Venus and Adonis.

Rosamond:

"He greetes me with a casket richly wrought; So rare, that Arte did seeme to strive with Nature, To expresse the cunning Worke-mans curious thought."

Venus and Adonis:

"His art with nature's workmanship at strife."

Rosamond:

"Com'd was the Night (mother of sleepe and feare) Who with her sable-mantle friendly covers The sweet-stolne sport of joyfull meeting Lovers."

Lucrece:

"Till sable Night, mother of Dread and fear, Upon the world dim darkness doth display, And in her vaulty prison stows the Day."

Rosamond:

"The ungather'd Rose defended with the thornes."

Lucrece:

"I know what thorns the growing rose defends."

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Rosamond:
"Reade in my face the ruines of my youth
The wracke of yeeres upon my aged brow."

Lucrece:
"In her the painter had anatomiz'd
Time's ruin, beauty's wreck and grim care's reign."

Rosamond:
"I saw the sinne, wherein my foot was ent'ring,
I saw how that dishonour did attend it,
I saw the shame whereon my flesh was vent'ring,
Yet had I not the power for to defend it.
So weake is sence, when error hath condemn'd it.
   We see what's good, and thereto we consent,
   But yet we choose the worst, and soone repent."

Lucrece:
"I have debated, even in my soul,
   What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed;
But nothing can affection's course control,
Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.
I know repentant tears ensue the deed,
   Reproach, disdain and deadly emnity;
   Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy."

Spenser used Ovidian themes in his Faerie Queene, telling the story of Venus and her love for Adonis rather briefly, after the manner of Ovid. He refers to the story twice: once, as it is depicted in the tapestry hung in the Lady of Delight's Castle,

"Lo, where beyond he lyeth languishing,
Deadly engored of a great wild Bore,
And by his side the goddesse groveling
Makes for him endlesse mone, and evermore
With her soft garment wipes away the gore,
Which stains his snowy skin with hatefull hew,
But when she saw no helpe might him restore,
Him to a dainty flowre she did transmew,
Which in that cloth was wrought, as if it lively grew."^5

Reference is again made in the description of the Bower of Bliss, where Venus keeps Adonis forever. ^6 Spenser probably had a direct influence over Shakespeare, since he may have met Shakespeare on some of his visits to London, ^7 as well as an indirect influence through the works of contemporary poets. Also in the lyrical tone and wonderful word-pictures one may see the influence of Spenser over Shakespeare.^8

Marlowe's poem, Hero and Leander, was very popular among the poets. It was not published until 1598, when George Chapman, the great classical scholar, completed it, but, in all probability, it was in circulation before 1592. ^9 Although the story of Hero and Leander is told in Ovid's Amores, Marlowe's poem is thought to be a paraphrase of Musaeus' poem in the Greek. ^10 But Marlowe was thoroughly familiar with Ovid's works, having translated the Elegies into English heroic verse with "full justice to the sensuous warmth of the original". ^11 Hero and Leander

5. Spenser, Faerie Queene, Book III, i, 36-42.
6. Ibid., Book III, vi, 46-49.
9. It was entered on the Stationers' Books, September 28, 1593, but was not published until 1598.
is in rhymed couplets, only the first two sestads of which were written by Marlowe. Shakespeare may have received some suggestions from such passages:

"The outside of her garments were of lawn,
The lining purple silk, with gilt stars drawn;
Her wide sleeves green, and border'd with a grove,
Where Venus in her naked glory strove
To please the careless and disdainful eyes
Of proud Adonis, that before her lies."

"The men of wealthy Sestos every year,
For his sake whom their goddess held so dear,
Rose-cheek'd Adonis, kept a solemn feast."

Venus and Adonis:

"Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase."

"Marlowe bequeathed to the world the fragment of a narrative poem, which stands higher in poetic quality, both of conception and execution, than any similar work of the Elizabethan age, not excepting Venus and Adonis",¹² but it was not improved by Chapman's addition, for the too great length wearies the reader and causes him to forget the really poetic beauty of Marlowe's portion.

The fact that poets whose influence is dynamic in literature used Ovidian material freely was an encouragement to younger poets to follow their example.

IV

Shakespeare's Knowledge of Ovid

The Elizabethans were greatly interested in the languages and literature of the continent. Scholars and others travelled in France and Italy, bringing back foreign influences.\(^1\) There were also many French and Italian visitors in England; some of them stayed several years or taught in the universities,\(^2\) and all undoubtedly did much to encourage foreign travel and study. The literature of the time was full of translations and quotations from Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish sources. It was also the fashion to discuss foreign poetry, and the Elizabethans "besprinkled their talk with quotations, to prove their literary

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tastes". Latin was the chief subject for study in the schools and Greek was also studied quite commonly; Queen Elizabeth herself set an example by learning both these languages.

The Free Grammar School at Stratford, which Shakespeare attended, was primarily a school for learning Latin, as its course of study shows. In the first year, Lily's Latin Grammar was studied with Aesop's Fables for reading; in the second and third years, Sententiae Pueriles, Mantuanus' Eclogues, and the Disticha of Cato were read. Cicero was studied the fourth year, but he seems to have made little impression on Shakespeare, partly, perhaps, because Ovid's Metamorphoses and De Tristibus were read the same year, the former both in the original and in Golding's version. It was during the fifth year that Virgil's Aeneid and Terence were read, while in the sixth year the works of Horace, Plautus, (whose Menechmi was his source for the Comedy of Errors), Juvenal, and Seneca were studied. Shakespeare shows the keen interest he had in Ovid by frequent references to his works.

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influence of Ovid is at least four times as great as that of Virgil; the whole character of Shakespeare's mythology is essentially Ovidian. 7 Aside from numerous references to these Latin writers, we have further evidence of the thoroughness of his Latin training in the many words of Latin origin, which he used in a way that shows a knowledge of the derivation. 8 "There is however another piece of evidence which deserves to be mentioned. In the Bodleian library is a copy of Ovid's Metamorphoses, printed by Aldus in 1502, which bears on the title page the signature 'Wm. Shr. ', and opposite is written in what appears to be a seventeenth century hand: 'This little Booke of Ovid was given to me by W. Hall who say'd it was once Will. Shakesperes T. N. 1682'." 9

As to his knowledge of other languages, there is much dispute. Lee thinks that one who had had such a thorough training in Latin as Shakespeare, must have been able to read French and Italian well enough to get the content. 10 "Of modern languages, French was the easiest for an Elizabethan Englishman to acquire,

7. Root, R. K., Classical Mythology in Shakespeare, (Holt & Co., New York, 1903), p. 3. In this book and the one previously mentioned (n. 6) there is a tabulated list of allusions to everyone of the fifteen books of the Metamorphoses in the poems and plays.


and the French passages and scenes in *Henry V* make it fairly certain that Shakespeare had a working knowledge of this tongue.\footnote{Neilson and Thorndike, op. cit., Chapter III, p. 56.}

It seems probable that he knew the works of Ronsard, Rabelais, and Montaigne, judging from passages in his plays and sonnets reminiscent of the works of the French writers. But he may have known these chiefly through the use of translations, such as, Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Essays*. He was acquainted with Italian literature, although he must have known that, too, through the medium of French or English translations. “Sidney’s sonnets, along with those of Daniel, Drayton, Constable, Watson, and Barnes, formed the main channel, through which the French and Italian influences reached Shakespeare.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 61.} So, however slight Shakespeare’s knowledge of foreign language was, it was at least sufficient to give him a general idea of the trend in literature and some of the best stories that he might use for plots in his own works.
During the Elizabethan age, literature was nearly the only way for an ambitious young writer to gain the interest and support of the nobility. Plays were not considered literature, since they were primarily for the stage rather than the press; lasting fame had to come from poetry and so it was that Shakespeare wrote his poems, Venus and Adonis, Lucrece, and the Sonnets.

There is much debate about the date of Shakespeare's first poem, owing chiefly to his own statement in the dedication of Venus and Adonis, calling it "the first heir of my invention". Some are inclined to take him at his word and believe that the poems were his very first attempts in the field of writing; that he had them written in an unfinished form when he first came to London. Others think that, since plays were not considered real

literary work, Shakespeare disregarded them, even though he had written several plays before he published his poems. Some also believe that Venus and Adonis was not written until 1593, in which year the theatres of London were closed on account of the plague. Shakespeare may have returned to Stratford in February, when the theatres were closed, and during his "idle hours" may have written Venus and Adonis, which was entered on the Stationers' Register on April 18, 1593. Two references from the poem itself are given as proof of the time of the writing:

"To drive infection from the dangerous year, . . . the plague is banisht. . . ."

Just as in his plays he generally chose a well-known story, so in his poems did Shakespeare take themes familiar in literature. But, whereas earlier writers had treated the stories briefly and usually as an inferior portion of another story, Shakespeare developed these ideas into long, independent poems. In Venus and Adonis, the story of which had been told by Spenser, Marlowe, and Lodge, he combined into one story three separate incidents from Ovid, namely, Venus' love for Adonis, the nymph Salmacis' appeal to the passionless Hermaphroditus, and the

Calydonian boar-hunt. In Ovid there is no suggestion of coldness on the part of Adonis; Shakespeare took this from the story of Salmacis. The incidents of which Ovid disposed in a few lines, Shakespeare expanded to two hundred and one, six-line stanzas. Shakespeare acknowledged his debt to Ovid by using a couplet from the Amores on the title page to Venus and Adonis:

"Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua."

"Let base-conceited wits admire vile things,
Fair Phoebus lead me to the Muses' springs."

He shows the influence of Ovid in a number of ways, and in Venus and Adonis reflects Ovid's phrases and thoughts. Lee says that this poem "catches more fully than any foreign or domestic effort the glow of Ovidian fire". Shakespeare's choice of subject, of course, is largely Ovidian, although it is also characteristic of the poetry of the Italian Renaissance in its glowing color and audacity. Both show a latent dramatic instinct, and both have the same sensuous pictorial treatment of theme. But Shakespeare surpasses Ovid in his description of the outdoors, which is typically English, and of animal life, which is almost unequalled for "truth and delicacy of observation." His figures of speech show

5. Ibid., Book VIII, 284-6.
6. From Marlowe's translation of the Elegies, XV.
how observant he was in regard to nature:

"Look, the world's comforter, with weary gait,  
His day's hot task hath ended in the west;  
The owl, night's herald, shrinks, 'tis very late;  
The sheep are gone to fold, birds to their nest,  
And coal-black clouds that shadow heaven's light  
Do summon us to part and bid good night."  

"The snail, whose tender horns being hit,  
Shrinks backwards in his shelly cave with pain,  
And there, all smother'd up, in shade doth sit,  
Long after fearing to creep forth again."  

Ovid was content with giving a beautiful picture and telling an interesting story, whereas Shakespeare, as in his plays, tries to analyse character, to show human nature in varying moods, and to expose the result of a wrong act on character. He also distinguishes between passion and love as Ovid did not. "Shakespeare rises where Ovid sinks. He handles the passion of love as a master, while Ovid is 'Soft Fancy's slave'. Ovid might encourage lawless love; Shakespeare faithfully shows its blighting suicidal issue."

In verse form he followed neither Ovid nor Golding's rhymed couplet, but shows rather the influence of Lodge and earlier writers, using a stanza of six lines. Lee says that in his choice of meter Shakespeare shows his "susceptibility to a current

9. l. 529.  
10. l. 1033  
vogue", as this stanza form was popular among Elizabethan poets. He was following his models rather consciously, so that the meter with its definite pause at the end of each line becomes slightly monotonous. Venus and Adonis is criticized for the almost saccharine quality of the writing; for the imitation of Italian conceits and artificiality, characteristic of so much of the literature of the period. There is also a tendency toward Euphuism, shown particularly in Venus' funeral oration or lament.

The story of Lucrece which Shakespeare published in the following year had been told by Ovid in the Fasti, and no translation of it is known to have been made previous to this year. The story, however, was popular on the continent throughout the Middle Ages, and likewise became well-known in England. Chaucer had told the story in his Legend of Good Women; Gower in Confessio Amantis; Lydgate in The Fall of Princes; and Painter in his Palace of Pleasure. It was a favorite theme for ballads, too, such as John Alda's The Grievous Complaint of Lucrece (1558), and James

17. St. Augustine, Civitas Dei; Boccaccio, De Claris Mulieribus; Gesta Romanorum; Hans Sachs, Ein schon Spil von der Geschicht der Edlin Romerin Lucretia, (Strassburg, 1550).
Roberts' *A Ballad of the Death of Lucryssia* (1569). "Lucretia was the grand example of conjugal fidelity throughout the Gothic Ages." Shakespeare follows Ovid's story rather closely, using some of the same figures of speech that Ovid had used, but he expanded the story into a poem much longer than Ovid's, by the digressions on Time, Night, and Opportunity, and the story of the fall of Troy, all of which tend to delay the narrative and make the poem somewhat monotonous. The description of the fall of Troy shows his familiarity with Virgil's *Aeneid*. That Shakespeare knew other versions of Lucrece's story than that of Ovid is clear from the prose argument of the poem, for here, he mentions that Publius Valerius is the companion of Collatine, as do Livy and Painter, whereas Ovid omits him. Shakespeare's statement that "bearing the dead body to Rome, Brutus acquainted the people with the doer and manner of the vile deed" is found neither in Ovid nor in Livy nor Painter. Ovid merely says "Brutus is by". Chaucer and Gower say she murdered herself in Rome instead of Ardea. Shakespeare's way of beginning his story without the many details given


20. In connection with this, it is interesting to note the article by Sidney Colvin, *The Sack of Troy in Shakespeare's Lucrece* and *in some fifteenth Century drawings and tapestries*, in *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare*, ed. I. Gollancz, (Oxford University Press, 1916); there is a good discussion of the poem in the introduction to the Facsimile edition of the First Quarto of *Lucrece* by F. J. Furnivall.
by Ovid, Livy and Chaucer shows his latent dramatic instinct. In

to Lucrece, Shakespeare shows an improvement in his handling of meter
ard verse form, using the rhyme-royal, which Chaucer, Gascoigne,
Sidney, Spenser, and Daniel had made popular. He seems to break
away to an extent from the conscious, regular pause in thought at
the end of the line, and uses run-on lines with greater freedom.

On the whole, this poem is more serious and restrained
in tone than Venus and Adonis, still showing his keen interest in
the analysis of character. He tries to show the result of a moral
wrong, not only upon the individual, but also, as in the case of
Tarquin's crime, upon an entire family. He emphasizes this by
skillfully introducing the story of the fall of Troy -- the downfall
of a people because of the guilt of one individual. Lucrece
loses much of the charm that is in Venus and Adonis, because,
since the scene of the story is laid indoors, there is no oppor-
tunity for Shakespeare to give such glowing pictures of nature as
he presented in the earlier poem.

These poems are like his early plays, in conforming to
a literary vogue, which delighted in an ornate style of writing,
and in "exhibiting marks of the conscious exercise of technical
dexterity."\(^{21}\)

That they were popular is evident from the fact that
there were so many imitators of Shakespeare's poems, either in

\(^{21}\) Neilson and Thorndike, op. cit., p. 87.
choice of subject or in style. As proof of this sudden popularity, there are references to the poems in contemporary works, as in Heywood's *Fair Mayde of the Exchange*, (1607), wherein a character says:

"I never read anything but *Venus and Adonis.*"

The reply is,

"Why, that's the very quintessence of love, 
If you remember but a verse or two, 
I'll pawn my head, goods, land and all 't will doe."

Gabriel Harvey (1598) says:

"The younger sort take much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, but his Lucrece and his *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* have it in them to please the wiser sort." Another indication of popularity is the printing of six editions of *Venus and Adonis* between the years 1593 and 1602, and six more by 1636. Of *Lucrece* five editions had been made before Shakespeare's death.

Judging from the frequent complimentary references to *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* in contemporary poems and plays, and from the large number of editions, it is probable that to them Shakespeare owed the securing of his position as a writer. His success and the great popularity won by his poems encouraged other poets to follow his example. As usual with imitations, their poetry lacks the poetic beauty of Shakespeare's poems, and
have been described as "amatory compositions without anything to break the monotony or vary the continued metaphors and classical and mythological allusions, which pall on the mind of the reader by their familiarity and endless repetitions." The borrowings and imitations of these poems continued until the middle of the seventeenth century, when, owing either to the supremacy of the Puritans, or to natural decline, they practically ceased.

Other Writers in Ovidian Vogue

Among the imitators and followers of Shakespeare is William Barksted, who, in 1607, published the poem, Mirrha, the Mother of Adonis. In his choice of an Ovidian theme he followed Shakespeare's example, his poem being almost a paraphrase of the story of Mirrha in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Although his poem lacks the colorful description of *Venus and Adonis*, it is written in the amatory tone of the latter. In the last stanza, Barksted shows whose influence led him to the choice of his subject and how much Shakespeare's poems were admired by his followers:

"But stay, my Muse, in thine own confines keep,
And wage not warre with so deere-lov'd a neighbor,
But having sung thy day-song, rest and sleep;
Preserve thy small fame, and his greater favor.
His song was worthie merit; Shakespeare, hee
Sung the faire blossom, thou the withered tree.
Laurel is due to him; his are and wit
Hath purchased it; cyprus thy brows will fit."

He wrote another poem, *Hiren or the Faire Greek*, (1611) which owes as much to *Venus and Adonis* as his earlier poem. "An anonymous writer selected the first of these themes [i.e., the love of Myrrha for her father Cinyras] for a poem called *The Scourge of Venus* (1613), so closely similar in style to Barksted's acknowledged work that it is a temptation, in spite of the repetition of subject, to suppose the writers identical." The unknown poet followed Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* in the use of the six-line stanza. At the end there is a reference to *Venus and Adonis*:

"As yearces increase, so beauty doth likewise,  
And he's more faire tomorrow than today,  
His beauty more and more did still arise,  
That envy did delight, in him bewray,  
Venus fell in love with him at last,  
Who scourg'd him for his mother's lusting past."

In all these imitations it is noticeable that the poets' problem was, apparently, to get some new characters for the same meager plot. Since the *Metamorphoses* furnished abundant material from which they might draw characters, the majority followed Shakespeare in turning to Ovid.

Another poet using the same theme of Myrrha and Cinyras is James Gresham in his poem, *The Picture of Incest* (1626), "a bold and somewhat bald rendering of the unpleasant story . . .

2. Gosse, Edmund, op. cit., p. 112; *The Scourge of Venus, Occasional Issues*, Vol. 2, 1876; Hazlitt, W. C., *Shakespeare* (Quaritch, London), says that this poem really belongs to Heywood, although it was appropriated by Henry Austin.

as told by Ovid. Shakespeare's poems appear better in their "splendours" after one reads "these homely and low-level versions."

Richard Barnfield, probably the earliest imitator of Shakespeare, borrowed freely from him without feeling the necessity of acknowledgment, although he praised Shakespeare in A Remembrance of some English Poets along with Spenser, Daniel, and Drayton:

"And Shakespeare, thou, whose honey-flowing vaine, (Pleasing the world) thy praises doth containe; Whose Venus and whose Lucrece, sweet and chaste, Thy name in fame's immortal booke have placed; Live ever you, at least in fame live ever! Well may the body die, but fame die never!"

In 1594 he published The Affectionate Shepherd containing the Complaint of Daphnis for the love of Ganymede. This, so he says in his preface to Cynthia, was "nothing else, but an imitation of Virgil, in the second Eclogue of Alexis", but merely the suggestion could have come from Virgil, for his imitations were of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's works. This poem is written in the same meter and with the same rhyme scheme as Venus and Adonis, and there are many phrases and passages which reveal the sources of this young poet's work. The Affectionate Shepherd begins with practically the same description as that of Venus and Adonis,

"Scarce had the morning Starre hid from the light, Heavens crimson Canopie with stars bespangled,
But I began to rue th' unhappy sight
Of that faire Boy that had my hart intangled."

_Venus and Adonis:_

"Even as the sun with purple colour'd face
Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase;
Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn."

The description of the "love-hating Boy" is given a great deal of emphasis as in _Venus and Adonis:_

"His Ivory-white and Alabaster skin
Is stain'd throughout with rare Vermillion red,
Whose twinkling starrie lights do never blin
To shine on lovely Venus (Beauties bed:)
But as the Lillie and the blushing Rose,
So white and red on him in order grows."

There is also a constant repetition of the idea that Ganymede is a "love-scorning Boy, cruell, unkinde"; he is offered all sorts of tempting delights, if only he will

"... lend thine eares unto my doleful Dittie!"

But Barnfield fails to keep the pagan tone, and the poem ends in a semi-Christian sermon full of advice:

"In Pan repose thy trust; extoll his praise
Honor thy Parents (to prolong thy dayes),
Let not thy left hand know what right hand gives".

In Barnfield's poem there is also evidence of strong influence of
Marlowe's works, particularly *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*. Marlowe's play opens with a scene between Jupiter and Ganymede, which may have furnished Barnfield the suggestion for his poem as well as the name Ganymede. There are several passages which show Barnfield's indebtedness to Marlowe:

*Dido:*

"From Juno's bird I'll pluck her spotted pride,  
To make thee fans wherewith to cool thy face."

**The Affectionate Shepherd:**

"With Phoenix's feathers shall thy face be fann'd,  
Cooling those cheeks, that being cool'd wax red,  
Like lillies in a bed of roses shed."

*Dido:*

"I have an orchard that hath store of plums,  
Brown almonds, services, ripe figs, and dates,  
Dewberries, apples, yellow oranges;  
A garden where are bee-hives full of honey."

**The Affectionate Shepherd:**

"Then would I lead thee to my pleasant bower  
Filled full of grapes, of mulberries, and cherries;  
Then shouldst thou be my wasp or else my bee.  
I have fine orchards full of mellowed fruit."

In the following year, Barnfield, acquainted with both Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare's poems, attempted to follow his masters with his *Cassandra*. Here, too, he uses the

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same stanza and rhyme scheme as that of Venus and Adonis, as well as many suggestions, although Cassandra was undoubtedly influenced by Lucrece, judging from the numerous similarities in phrasing and general tone. It is not as long as Shakespeare's poems, but is clearly Ovidian in its choice of theme -- the love of Phoebus for Cassandra -- in its lack of characterization, in the love of description, especially of the description of the charm and beauty of the characters. Barnfield seems to have modelled his description of Cassandra in her bed after Shakespeare's description of Lucrece, and just as Tarquin admired the beauty of Lucrece asleep, so Phoebus "with great joy her (sleeping) gazed upon". Phoebus himself is described so that

"Not faire Adonis in his chiepest pride,  
Did seeme more faire, then young Apollo seemed".

Barnfield gives a few stanzas to the story of the fall of Troy, after which Cassandra goes with Agamemnon. When Agamemnon is killed, Cassandra laments her fate much as Lucrece and Venus do, and, like Lucrece, Cassandra stabs herself. In his description of the grieving Cassandra, there is some similarity to Shakespeare's description of Venus:

"Here ended shee; and then her teares began,  
That (chorus-like) at every word downe rained,  
Which like a paire of christall fountaines ran,  
Along her lovely cheekes: with roses stained:  
Which as they wither still (for want of raine)  
Those silver showers water them againe."
Venus and Adonis:

"O how her eyes and tears did lend and borrow!
Her eye seen in the tears, tears in her eye;
Both crystals, where they view'd each other's sorrow,
But like a stormy day, now wind, now rain,
Sighs dry her cheeks, tears make them wet again."

"With tears, which chorus-like her eyes did rain."

Passages which show Barnfield's plagiarism of Shakespeare's poems are rather frequent:

Cassandra:

"Now silent night drew on, when all things sleepe,
Save theeves, and cares."

Lucrece:

"Now leaden slumber with life's strength doth fight;
And everyone to rest themselves betake,
Save thieves and cares and troubled minds that wake."

Cassandra:

"Looke how a brightsome Planet in the skie,
Shootes suddenly from the beholders eie."

Venus and Adonis:

"Look, how a bright star shooteth from the sky,
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye."

At the same time that he wrote The Affectionate Shepherd, he also wrote a short poem of nine stanzas, The Complaint of
Chastitie, inspired, perhaps, by Drayton's poem, as he mentions it in the sub-title, Briefly touching the cause of the death of Matilda Fitzwalters an English ladie; sometime loved of King John after poisoned. The Storie is at large written by Michael Drayton. In this poem he borrows rather freely from Venus and Adonis, following Lucrece in stanza-form. But The Complaint of Chastitie cannot be considered an Ovidian epic; it is too short, it has none of that amatory tone characteristic of the Ovidian story, and the subject is not at all Ovidian. It is really just the lament of Lucrece removed from its pagan setting.

Michael Drayton, in 1594, published Mathilda the Chaste, in England's Heroicall Epistles, the heroine of his poem coming from English history. The stanza and rhyming scheme are similar to those of Venus and Adonis, but his heroine has much in common with Lucrece. In style, the poem seems to have been modelled on Ovid's Heroides, and in the preface to the volume he says of Ovid: "... whose imitator I partly professe to be". "It may be said without exaggeration that in fluency of versification, in facility of expression, and in occasional touches of tenderness and pathos, the Elizabethan poet proves himself a not unworthy pupil of the skilful Roman artist." That he was familiar with Shakespeare's Lucrece is evident from the introduction to his poem:

"Lucrece, of whom proud Rome hath boasted long,
Lately revived to live another age,
And here arriv'd to tell of Tarquin's wrong,
Her chaste denial, and the tyrant's rage,
Acting her passions on our stately stage,
She is remember'd, all forgetting me,
Yet I as fair and chaste as ere was she."

Because this stanza is found only in the first two editions and omitted from all succeeding ones, it is thought that Drayton, a friend of Shakespeare, became angry at him for some unknown reason and therefore ordered the tribute to Shakespeare's poem to be kept out.

In The Barons' Wars, Drayton follows history very closely, so much so that it becomes like a common chronicle. It was written in the same stanza and rhyme-form as Lucrece when it was first published, but, in later editions, beginning with the edition of 1603, another line was added after the fourth verse. Although neither this poem nor Mathilda can be considered an Ovidian epic, Drayton was influenced by the writers of the Ovidian vogue, chiefly Marlowe and Shakespeare, noticeable in the delight in playing with words, in ornate descriptions, such as description of the Queen, which reminds one of Shakespeare's description of Lucrece,

"Where her faire breasts at liberty are let,
Where violet veines in curious branches flow,
Where Venus Swans and milkie Doves are set,
Upon the swelling mounts of driven snow."

Since such descriptions became literary conventionalities, it would be unfair to call Drayton's a conscious imitation. His poem, *Endimion and Phoebe*, written in couplets, shows the influence of Daniel, Lodge, and Marlowe in particular. His tendency toward pastoral poetry is reminiscent of Spenser, as is evident in the Arcadian setting of the poem:

"In this faire Region on a goodly Plaine,  
Stretching her bounds unto the bording Maine,  
The Mountaine Latmus over-lookes the Sea,  
Smiling to see the Ocean billowes play:  
Latmus, where young Endimion used to keepe  
His fairest flock of silver-fleeced sheepe."

Phoebe woos Endimion:

"Upon each tree she carves Endimion's name  
In Gordian knots, with Phoebe to the same."

While *Endimion and Phoebe* has some of the characteristics of the Ovidian epic, yet the tone is altogether different from the passionate tone of the other Ovidian poems:

"I am great Phoebe, Latmus sacred Queene,  
Who from the skies have hither past unseene,  
And by thy chast love hither was I led,  
Where full three years thy fayre flock have I fed,  
Upon these Mountaines and these fertile plaines,  
And crowned thee King of all the Sheepheards swaines:  
Nor wanton, nor lascivious is my love,  
Nor never lust my chast thoughts once could move."

Drayton frequently has passages of descriptive beauty of nature, such as:
"The Nightingale, woods Herauld of the Spring,
The whistling Woofull, Mavis carrolling,
Tuning theyr trebbles to the waters fall,
Which made the musique more angelicall:
Whilst gentle Zephre murmuring among,
Kept Tyme, and bare the burthen to the song."

Added to the Ovidian romance, there is also a great deal of learning in his description of the current astronomical ideas, and the influence of the planets on man's life. "This is one of the most beautiful and interesting of Drayton's poems. In it the sweetness and simplicity of pastoral are exalted by the touch of the heroic; and the occasional display of philosophy and quaint learning, astronomical, medical and what not, . . . . is not without its historical interest or its charm."7

Another Ovidian epic, Brittain's Ida, was published in 1628, but probably written about 1608. For a long time, it was attributed to Spenser, but now it is believed that it was written by Phineas Fletcher.8 Although in form it shows the admiration of the author for Spenser, yet in subject matter and general style it shows the influence of Shakespeare and the Ovidian vogue. The poem deals with the love of Venus and Anchises in the passionate style of Ovidian stories. The first canto is devoted to a recital of the charms of Anchises, young, beautiful, and scorning love, as Adonis:

"Where lovely bashfulnesse did sweetely raine,
In blushing scarlet cloth'd, and purple fine.
A hundred hearts had this delightfull shrine,
(Still cold it selfe) inflam'd with hot desire,
That well the face might seeme, in divers tire,
To be a burning snow, or else a freezing fire."

Likewise Adonis:

"the tender boy,
Who blush'd and pouted in a dull disdain,
With leaden appetite, unapt to toy;
She red and hot as coals of glowing fire,
He red for shame, but frosty in desire."

Just as Adonis' chief pleasure is hunting, so Anchises enjoyed

". through the plaines to chace the nimble Hart,
With well tun'd hounds; or with his certaine dart,
The tusked Boare, or savage Beare to wound."

Canto II reminds one of the Bower of Blisse in Spenser's Faerie Queene,

"Diones Garden of delight,
With wonder holds Anchises sight;
While from the Bower such Musique sounds,
As all his senses neere confounds."

But the song Anchises hears is Venus' philosophy,

"Enjoy while yet thou mayst thy lifes sweet pleasure."

Venus herself "stretch't on a Lilly-bed" asleep is described at
even greater length than Shakespeare's Lucrece, but she is different from the Venus in Venus and Adonis. Here, she is the "smiling
Queene", rather amused at the boyish love of Anchises, and lacking the violence of passion characteristic of Shakespeare's heroine. But Anchises, unlike Adonis, pleads zealously for the love of Venus, and when it is granted,

" . . . he (ah foolish Boy!) Too proud, and too impatient of his joy, To woods, and heav'n, and earth his blisse imparted; That Jove upon him donwne his thunder darted, Blasting his splendid face, and all his beauty swarted."

Francis Beaumont's *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* is another poem inspired by

"The wanton Ovid, whose inticing rimes Have with attractive wonder forc't attention."

It is a poem of more than a thousand lines, written in heroic couplet, distinctly Ovidian in tone, Beaumont having taken this story, which Shakespeare also used in his *Venus and Adonis*, from the *Metamorphoses*. As usual in these poems, a long euphuistic description of the boy is given:

"His cheeke was sanguine, and his lip as red As are the blushing leaves of the Rose spred; And I have heard that, till this boy was borne, Roses grew white upon the virgin thorne, Till one day walking to a pleasant spring, To heare how cunningly the birds could sing,

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Laying him downe upon a flowry bed,
The Roses blush'd, and turned themselves to red.
The Rose that blush'd not, for his great offence
The gods did punish, and for impudence,
They gave this doome, that was agreed by all;
The smell of the White Rose should be but small."

The nymphs took strands of his hair to make "abilliments of gold";
Venus, thinking Hermaphroditus' eyes rather dull, " . . .
. puld the sparkling eyes from Cupid's face", and gave them
to her favorite. The nymph, Salmacis, is, likewise, superlatively beautiful,

"Her teeth were whiter then the morning's milke,
Her lip was softer then the softest silks,
Her haire as farre surpast the burnisht gold,
As silver doth excell the basest mold."

The poem is half humorous in its description of Jove's falling in
love with the nymph; his going to Astraea's home; his attempts to
pass the porter guarding the entrance to this goddess' door, and
her consent that the nymph should be made a star.

"Here Venus, fearing lest the love of Jove
Should make this mayd be plac'd in heaven above,
Because she thought this Nymph so wondrous bright,
That she would dazel her accustom'd light;
And fearing now she would not first be seen
Of all the glittering starres, as she had beene,
But that the wanton Nymph would ev'ry night
Be first that should salute eche mortall sight,
Began to tell great Jove, she grieved to see
The heaven so full of his iniquity."

Venus enlists Vulcan in her complaint against Jove, and in the
morning at the court of Astraea,
"In limpt the Blacke-smith, after stept his Queene".

When Vulcan refused to make thunderbolts for Jove, if he placed anyone else in heaven

"To dimme the shining of his beauteous Queene",

Jove reluctantly gave up his love, for

"... he saw, with better sight,
He should be scorn'd by every mortall wight,
If he should want his thunderbolts, to beate
Aspiring mortals from his glittering seate".

When Salmacis sees Hermaphroditus, she woos him as ardently as Venus did Adonis:

Salmacis and Hermaphroditus:

"Be not obdurate to a silly mayd:
A flinty heart within a snowy brest."

Venus and Adonis:

"Art thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel?"

Salmacis and Hermaphroditus:

"But still the more she did the boy beseech,
The more he powted at her wanton speech."

Although Chapman's poem, Ovid's Banquet of Sense, can scarcely be called an Ovidian epic, it, undoubtedly, represents
Chapman's attempt to follow the literary vogue and to win popularity as had Shakespeare. He obtained the material for his poem from Ovid's *Elegies*, the characters in the poem being Ovid and Corinna. "What, in Ovid's hands, had been mere Pagan sensuousness becomes, under his touch, analytic obscenity." Chapman consciously introduces digression, of which he speaks in the preface, "the philosophical conceits, that my new pen so seriously courteth", but this moral tone which he attempts fails of its purpose and shows Chapman's inability to imitate Shakespeare successfully. It is too pedantic, and monotonously long, just as his completion of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

In 1600, Henry Constable published *The Shepheard's Song* of *Venus and Adonis*, the theme of which was influenced by Shakespeare's poem. Throughout, it seems to be a brief imitation of the longer poem, but there is no similarity in verse form or rhyming.

"I am now too young
To be won by beauty,
Tender are my yeeres,
I am yet a bud."

*Venus and Adonis*:

"Who plucks the bud before one leaf put forth?"

---

Shepheard's Song:

"'Grislie boar is up!'
Huntsmen follow fast.
At the name of boar,
Venus seemed dying,
Deadly-colored pale,
Roses overcast."

The poem ends:

"Echo every cry expressed:
Venus by her power
Turn'd him to a flower,
Which she weareth in her crest."

Marston's The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image 11 (1598) is an imitation of Venus and Adonis, "falling as far below the latter in richness of imagery, as it transcended it in lewdness of description". 12 It is the story of the sculptor, Pigmaion,

whose his love-hating minde
Disdain'd to yeeld servile affection,
Or amorous sute to any woman-kinde."

He falls in love with the statue of a woman that he has carved. He prays Venus to change the statue to a living woman, and the metamorphosis takes place. The sensuous description of her beauty is thoroughly Ovidian. Marston's poem was censured severely by other writers, and feeling that he had gone too far, he pretended

that he had written it as a satire on the "amorous poetry of the
day".

A poem of great interest in connection with Shakespeare's
poem is the one called Willobie his Avisa, published anonymously
in 1594. In the preface there is the earliest known printed allu-
sion to Shakespeare's name:

"In Lavine land, though Livy boast
There hath been seen a constant dame;
Though Rome lament that she have lost
The garland of her rarest fame;
Yet now we see that here is found,
As great a faith in English ground.
Though Collatine have dearly bought
To high renown a lasting life
And found, that, most in vain have sought
To have a fair and constant wife
Yet Tarquin pluckt his glittering grape
And Shakespeare paints poor Lucrece's rape."

That this satirical poem was a libellous production seems clear
from the fact that it was suppressed and withdrawn from print in
1596, and it was probably a person of some influence who brought
about its suppression.

The poem is long, including seventy-two cantos with
stanzas like those of Venus and Adonis. Avisa, the heroine of
the poem, is a "modest maide", living in the country:

"At east of this a castle stands;
By ancient shepherds built of old;
And lately was in shepherds' hands;
Though now by brothers bought and sold.

At west side springs a crystal well,  
There doth this chaste Avisa dwell."

She is tempted by a nobleman, but, ever discreet and pure, she sends him away overawed and impressed by her numerous Biblical quotations or bored by her homilies. After her marriage, she lives in a city, in a tavern, perhaps.

"See yonder house, where hangs the badge of England's saint."

Various men woo her, but she remains a "chaste and constant wife". Towards the close of the poem, H. W. betrays his love for Avisa to his friend, W. S., who not long before, had been in love with her, but, now, recovered, gives good advice to H. W. with the hope that he "the new actor" have better luck than the "old player". This reference has caused some to believe that Shakespeare was meant by W. S. and that H. W. was Henry Wriothesly, Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's patron, to whom Venus and Adonis and Lucrece had been dedicated.

Decline of Ovidian Vogue

The vogue of writing poems of the Ovidian type, amatory and passionate, began to decline in the early part of the seventeenth century. An important reason for this was that writers contemporary with or a little later than Shakespeare did not approve of such poems. One of the earliest of these is Robert Southwell, who, in the preface to his longest poem, St. Peter's Complaint, (1595) writes:

"Still finest wits are 'stilling Venus' rose,
In Paynim toyes the sweetest vaines are spent;
To Christian works few have their talents lent."

and again:

"Ambitious heads, dreame you of Fortune's pride,
Fill volumes with you forg'd goddess' prays;
You Fancie's drudge, plunged in Follie's tide,
Devote your fabling wits to lovers' lays."

Henry Crosse in Vertue's Commonwealth, (1603) condemns amatory poems and books, believing that true poetry should teach
virtue, not vice. "With these daintie cates they furnish and set out their filthy and vicious bookes; now what do they, but tye youth in ye fetters of lust & keepe them in the thoughts of love? for do they not with glosing words tickle and stirre up the affections to be more conceited of some fond passion, to be more ungraciously subtilly? and doo they not labour in vaine cunning to infect and poison delicate youth?"¹

Giles Fletcher, in his poem, Christ's Victoria over Death, (1610), also rebukes those who devote all their time to the writing of such love-poetry.

"Go giddy brains, whose wits are thought so fresh,
Pluck all the flow'rs that Nature forth doth throw,
Go stick them on the cheeks of wanton flesh;
Poor idol (forc't at once to fall and grow) 
Of fading roses and of melting snow!
Your songs exceed your matter; this of mine
The matter which it sings shall make divine,
As stars dull puddles guild, in which their beauties shine."

Another example of protest against the vogue of sensuous poetry is found in George Herbert's Two Sonnets (1610):

"My God, where is that antient heat towards thee
Wherewith whole shoals of Martyrs once did burn,
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
Wear Venus' livery, only serve her turn?
Why are not Sonnets made of thee, and layes
Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise

¹. Occasional Issues, Vol. 6, (1678), pp. 99-100
As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove
Outstrip their Cupid easily in flight?
Or, since thy ways are deep and still the same,
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose
Than that which one day Worms may chance refuse?"

"Sure, Lord, there is enough in thee to dry
Oceans of Ink; for as the Deluge did
Cover the Earth, so doth thy Majesty;
Each cloud distils thy praise, and doth forbid
Poets to turn it to another use,
Roses and Lilies speak thee; and to make
A pair of cheeks of them, is thy abuse
Why should I Women's eyes for Chrystal take?
Such poor invention burns in their low mind
Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go
To praise, and on thee, Lord, some ink bestow.
Open the bones, and you shall nothing find
In the best face but filth; when Lord, in Thee
The beauty lies in the discovery."

Finally, the supremacy of the Puritans about the middle
of the century tended to hasten the decline of Ovidian poetry
which had been inspired by the pagan spirit of the Italian Ren-
aissance. However, in all probability, the vogue would have died
out of its own accord, for the imitations were generally poor,—
the same exaggerated conceits were becoming monotonous to the
reading public, and literary taste was turning to a more serious
type of work.
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