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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**Memento Amori:**  
**Transformations of the Imagery and Associations**  
**of the God Eros in English Renaissance Poetry**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze, dne 16. srpna 2021

## **Declaration**

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prague, 16 August 2021

## **Acknowledgements**

## **Abstrakt**

Práce se zabývá motiv Eróta ve vztahu ke konceptu smrti v anglické renesanční poezii. Klade si za cíl mapovat systematické proměny metaforiky a konceptuálních asociací spojených s Erótem a Thanatem. Zaměřuje se především na literaturu, zejména na tradici sonetů, s přihlédnutím rovněž k dobovému výtvarnému umění. Mapuje proměny napříč řecko-římskou antikou, zejména zkoumá díla Hesioda, Sapphó a Ovidia, potom skrz renesanci, kde se zaměřuje na básně Cavalcantiho a Petrarchy a závěrem se obrací na Alžbětinskou dobu, kde analyzuje sonety Thomase Wyatta, Sira Philipa Sidneyho, Edmunda Spensera, Micheala Drytona a Samuela Daniela.

**Klíčová slova: Eros, Thanatos, Antika, Renaissance, Sonnet, Poezie, Láska, Smrt**

**Abstract**

The thesis aims to explore the motif of Eros in relation to the concept of death in English Renaissance poetry. Focusing predominantly on literature, namely the sonnet tradition, but also on period corresponding visual art, the paper attempt to map the systematic transformations of the imagery and conceptual associations of Eros and Thanatos. It traces the changes and transformations firstly throughout the Greco-Roman Antiquity, exploring the works of Hesiod, Sappho and Ovid, then from antiquity to the Renaissance, focusing on Cavalcanti's and Petrarch's poetry and ultimately turning to the Elizabethan era, analysing the sonnets of Thomas Wyatt, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton and Samuel Daniel

**Keywords: Eros, Thanatos, Antiquity, Renaissance, Sonnet, Poetry, Death, Love**

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## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the motif of Eros in relation to the concept of death in English Renaissance poetry, tracing the ways the imagery and conceptual associations of Eros and Thanatos changed and transformed once *uprooted* from their spatial and temporal environment of Greco-Roman antiquity, and then *replanted* in the somewhat hostile conditions of Christian monotheism, with its rigid sexual mores, opposition to pagan conceptions of death and afterlife etc. While the focus will mostly stay on literature, namely the sonnet tradition, the thesis will draw insights also from visual arts from corresponding historical periods. The hypothesis is that the relation of Eros and Thanatos will undergo systematic transformations with the changing cultural environments: already in the transition from Greek to the Roman era; then from antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; and ultimately from there to the Elizabethan era.

The first chapter will establish the cultural context of Eros and Thanatos in Greek antiquity and the subsequent developments of this association in Greek poetry. The original relationship between Eros and Thanatos will be shown to be one of functional analogy: love and death united through the analogy with sweetness of sleep. Then it will consider the transmission of this cultural concept to the Roman era, where it found expression in the works of Ovid. It will then be demonstrated that the Greek concept of functional analogy between Eros and Thanatos did not survive the detour through Rome. Instead the Renaissance would be handed down a new union between love and death: that of cause and effect, of love as sickness unto death.

The second chapter will be dealing with the problematic transmission and transformation of this newer tradition, confronting the issues posed by the changing attitudes to both love and death in the Christian era, when the union between love and death would be significantly suppressed. Considering all the various developments in the tradition before the

Renaissance, it will be established that the Renaissance did not represent a radical departure from the preceding ages; rather that it was the culmination of the developments that preceded it. It will be shown that the union between love and death was renewed then, but did not return in its pure Ovidian form. Analysing Renaissance visual art and the Sonnet tradition it will be demonstrated that the formula of as sickness unto death was modified in accordance with the idea of death's supremacy over love: death was no longer an accidental effect of love's power, but the *driving* force behind it.

The third chapter will treat the English reception of this tradition. It will be shown that although popular, the tradition as articulated by Petrarch was not received well by the Elizabethan era. The first English sonneteers Wyatt and Sidney would often deliberately diverge from the model, either innovating on it or returning to older models. Only later would the responses be more welcoming: while Spenser would still continue in the developments set out by his predecessors, other like Drayton or Daniel would be engaged in the gradual reclaiming of the later Renaissance tradition of love and death. Only with Daniel, however, would the Petrarch model fully return, reintroducing the new Renaissance relationship between love and death: the one where death is not an accidental effect of love's power, but where death is the dominant force behind love.

## 1 Eros and Thanatos

“Death is the mate of Love. Together they rule the world”, so Sigmund Freud comes to believe in the latter days of his life.<sup>1</sup> It came to him as a shocking revelation in light of the traumatic experience of soldiers who survived World War I: psychoanalysis dictates that all dreams are but expressions of sexual desire, no matter how well disguised, but many psychoanalysts including Freud himself failed to account for the dreams of the soldiers, in which they continually relived the events that had traumatized them.<sup>2</sup> After initial reluctance to put the powers of death alongside the familiar instincts of self-preservation and sex,<sup>3</sup> he had no choice but to admit that Eros (the “sex-drive”) is sometimes *ousted* by Thanatos (the “death-drive”) that makes us crave “quietude, constancy, nonexistence”.<sup>4</sup> If love is thus compromised by death, however, his observation about them being mates was a bit unfortunate, they come off more as *rivals*. In fact, rather than with his drives, his quote resonates more with the ancient Greek gods he named them after. It is no secret that Freud was inspired by classical antiquity, the name of his drives and complexes reveal as much,<sup>5</sup> but what might be interesting for the purposes of this thesis is his second most prominent inspiration – Shakespeare.<sup>6</sup> His sources together thus aptly outline the scope of this thesis, as it shall try to investigate the union of Eros and Thanatos from antiquity to the Renaissance.

### 1.1 The Greek Tradition

The union between Eros and Thanatos was, indeed, nothing new. Rather than rivals, however, the gods were more like allies or partners, working together in a shared domain.

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<sup>1</sup> See George Sylvester Viereck, *Glimpses of the Great* (London: Duckworth, 1930), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Todd Dufresne, *The Late Sigmund Freud: Or, The Last Word on Psychoanalysis, Society, and All the Riddles of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 15.

<sup>3</sup> See Dufresne, *The Late Sigmund Freud*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Dufresne, *The Late Sigmund Freud*, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Take for example the Oedipus/Electra complex. For a more detailed analysis of Freud’s classical influences consider Fabio Stok, “Sigmund Freud’s experience with the Classics”, *Classica - Revista Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos* 24, no 1/2 (2011): 52-72. UC Digitalis, [http://dx.doi.org/10.14195/2176-6436\\_24\\_4](http://dx.doi.org/10.14195/2176-6436_24_4).

<sup>6</sup> Notably, Freud demonstrated the Oedipus complex on *Hamlet*. For his relationship with Shakespeare take a look at Norman N. Holland, “Freud on Shakespeare”, *PMLA* 75, no. 3 (1960): 163-73. Jstor, doi:10.2307/460328.

### 1.1.1 Philosophy

As Zdeněk Kratochvíl observed, there was already a rich tradition in ancient Greece that identified sexual climax with death, or rather “a small death”: for one, Plato<sup>7</sup> describes it as breaking of wings in his *Phaedrus*; for another, Democritus<sup>8</sup> equates sexual intercourse with a “slight attack of apoplexy”.<sup>9</sup> Some authors, however, take it even further: while commenting on the *phallic* hymns sung in honour of Dionysus,<sup>10</sup> Heraclitus writes that Hades and Dionysus are the same,<sup>11</sup> linking the creative powers of life with the powers of death. Elsewhere he wrote: “When they are born, they wish to live and to meet with their dooms -- or rather to rest -- and they leave children behind them to meet with their dooms in turn.”<sup>12</sup> Heraclitus was convinced, as Kratochvíl demonstrates, that love and death are intrinsically bound through procreation: more mortals means more dying, passing on one’s genetical material is preparing a replacement for oneself, and one’s children cannot properly assume their place in the world unless the parents “retire”, “rest” and ultimately “fade away” from being.<sup>13</sup> His association of sensual pleasure with water further illustrates his understanding of the union between Eros and Thanatos, as he identifies death with the same movement for *dissolution*, *ebbing* of the soul and *melting* away into the formlessness of Oceanus.<sup>14</sup> Heraclitus would have it that our desire for love and for death are motivated by the same source. Together with the other thinkers he thus links sexual climax with the *climax* of life: Eros and Thanatos serve an analogical function –

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<sup>7</sup> The sensation of love for Plato leads to the (re)growing of wings that the soul had formerly lost, if the lovers refrain from carnal desire, their wings get fully regrown, but if they *consummate* their love, they emerge “wingless” in the afterlife. See Plato, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Reginald Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 96-106.

<sup>8</sup> Democritus, “B32”, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, ed and trans. Kathleen Banks Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 150.

<sup>9</sup> See Zdeněk Kratochvíl, *Dělský potápěč k Hérakleitově Řeči* (Praha: Herrmann & synové, 2006), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Drunken revelries were often associated with Eros, as testified by Ovid: “Banquets, too, give you an entrée, offer / More to the palate than wine: / There flushed Love has often clasped the horns of reclining / Bacchus in a seductive embrace”. Ovid, “The Art of Love”, *The Erotic Poems*, ed. and trans. Peter Green (London: Penguin books, 1983), I.229-232.

<sup>11</sup> Heraclitus, “B15”, *The Fragments of Heraclitus*, <http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/files/ge.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Heraclitus, “B20”. *The Fragments of Heraclitus*, <http://www.heraclitusfragments.com/files/ge.html>.

<sup>13</sup> See Kratochvíl, *Potápěč*, 320.

<sup>14</sup> Kratochvíl, *Potápěč*, 321.

the discharging of vital energies.<sup>15</sup> All this gives us an idea how the philosophers viewed this alliance of Eros and Thanatos.

### 1.1.2 Visual Arts

Still, the idea was not just confined to philosophy, other artifacts from ancient Greece only complement the testimonies above. The visual representations of Eros and Thanatos, for example, only add to the confusion of love and death. Consider the depiction of Eros on the attic vase found at Vulci (fig.1): this Eros is an attractive young man, such as might have inspired Shakespeare to write his sonnets. Now compare this with the statue of Thanatos excavated at Ephesus (fig.2): like Eros on the vulci vase, death is also a winged handsome youth. One could certainly second Heraclitus that Love and Death look a lot alike,<sup>16</sup> for they are hard to tell apart. Yet, would not Shakespeare be confused too, whose beauty to praise, whose power to oppose? The only way out of this is to hold on to the little difference one can find: the sword resting on Thanatos' side, recalling his life-*severing* occupation. There is little security in this victory, however, for Eros' bow could just as easily provoke similar associations: the Greek themselves compared its effects to a *deadly* weapon, as shall be demonstrated later. Not to mention that the iconic weapons need not always be present.

In fact, the white-ground lekythos attributed to the so-called "Thanatos Painter" (fig. 3) represents one such situation: the figure depicted seems almost interchangeable with the depiction of Eros above, but he is carrying a dead body, the context is certainly funerary, so it cannot really be the god of love. The picture should be somewhat clearer, however, when looking at the other side of the vase (fig. 4.): where one finds another winged figure, bearded and not as vibrant, who helps to carry the body. The painting on the lekythos should thus be recognized as the memorable scene from the Iliad, where Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) are sent to carry away the body of the hero Sarpedon from the battlefield of Troy. The British

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<sup>15</sup> Kratochvíl, *Potápěč*, 153.

<sup>16</sup> It would seem that Dionysus and Hades are the same, after all.

Museum, which happens to store the piece, identifies the beardless figure as Hypnos and the bearded one as Thanatos, though not with absolute certainty.<sup>17</sup> Hypnos and Thanatos, after all, are twin-brothers in Greek mythology,<sup>18</sup> their close similarity being succinctly expressed by Ovid: “what’s sleep but the image of frozen death!”<sup>19</sup> Still, even without definitive word on the identity of the gods, the subject matter of the decoration remains clear: it is centred around death, not sleep, since Sarpedon was brutally killed on the battlefield. In this context, the two winged figures (both Hypnos and Thanatos) represent just two sides of the same coin (death): the unpleasant (bearded) side is the pain of dying, and the pleasant (shaved) side is relief, eternal rest.<sup>20</sup> The presence of the amor-like figure<sup>21</sup> gives a pleasant colouring to death through the sweetness of relief, rest and *sleep*, seen as similar in sweetness to the feelings of love. Hence, the opinion of the philosophers is replicated by the visual arts.

Through the visual artifacts and philosophical testimonies of antiquity it was established that the union between Eros and Thanatos was already a widespread notion in Greece at that time. The relationship between the two gods was one of functional analogy. The philosophers associated sexual climax with the climax of life, linking the pleasure of love with death, or going as far as to suggest that our desire for both is motivated by the same source. The visual arts only added to this *confusion* of Eros and Thanatos, constructing a parallel between the sweetness of eternal rest and the sweetness of love. The Greek tradition thus lends Thanatos

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<sup>17</sup> The Euphronios Krater, another vase depicting the same scene, has them both bearded. On top of that, it provides inscriptions identifying each figure: the winged man on the left, holding the hero by the legs is Hypnos, while the other one holding him by torso is Thanatos. They are not differentiated much, both wear armour and helmets, but if one of them looks more sombre, it is Hypnos. Should it, however, be considered authoritative? Hesiod’s description of the two gods, after all, seem to confirm the sentiment of the British Museum: “One of them passes gently over the earth and the broad back of the sea and is soothing for human beings. But the other one’s temper is of iron, and the bronze heart in his chest is pitiless.” Hesiod, “Theogony”, *Hesiod: Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), lines 768-769.

<sup>18</sup> Take for example the line from Hesiod: “The other holds Sleep in her hands, the brother of Death”. Hesiod, “Theogony”, line 756.

<sup>19</sup> Ovid, “Amores”, *The Love Poems*, ed. and trans. A. S. Kline, II.9B.17. Poetry in translation, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/klineaslovepoems.php>. All future references to book, elegy, and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>20</sup> This association would also correspond to Hesiod’s characterisation of the gods in the footnotes above.

<sup>21</sup> While depicting both figures as sombre bearded men might reflect a more negative outlook on death.

a very positive colouring through Eros, associating him with pleasure and sexual desire: both serve as a pleasant discharge of vital energies. The development of this tradition in Greek lyric poetry, however, was a bit different.

### 1.1.3 Poetry

Among the Greek poets, only two feature Eros and Thanatos as somewhat interconnected in their works – Hesiod and Sappho. Together they showcase the opposite end of this tradition: not death rendered more pleasant through love, but love rendered more negative through death. Hesiod is the trickier one of the two: as Glenn W. Most rightly observes, he only refers to the god directly in two passages in all his poetry and he never uses the word (*erôs*) as an ordinary substantive either.<sup>22</sup> Both instances are found in his *Theogony*, the book concerned with the origins and genealogies of the gods. References to Eros are thus scarce but, to borrow Most’s phrase, “the workings of the divinity he calls Eros if not the person of the god himself” are central to the history and structure of Hesiod’s divine cosmos. “If we view Eros less as a specific god than as an abstract force impelling sexual reproduction”, we see how he can vanish for the rest of the poem, “since what matters about him is not his person itself but rather the reproductive energies he embodies.”<sup>23</sup>

Through the genealogies Hesiod introduces Eros as an overwhelming, unstoppable force behind the *generation* of the cosmos. He is first mentioned at the very beginning of the poem, among the primordial deities, giving him primacy over the gods as well: “Eros, who is the most beautiful among the immortal gods, the limb-melter – he overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings in their breast.”<sup>24</sup> But though being associated with creation, here he is also linked to death, as noted by Armand D’Angour, the epithet “limb melter” (λοσιμελής), recalls Homer’s use of “loosening of limbs” to describe

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<sup>22</sup> See Glenn W. Most, “Eros in Hesiod”, *Erôs in Ancient Greece*, ed. Ed Sanders, Chiara Thumiger, Christopher Carey, Nick Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 163.

<sup>23</sup> Most, “Eros in Hesiod”, 163-166.

<sup>24</sup> Hesiod, “Theogony”, lines 120-22.

death in combat,<sup>25</sup> and, as Most affirms, it is elsewhere also applied to Sleep and Death.<sup>26</sup> The image has likewise striking affinities with Heraclitus' view of death as *dissolution* and *melting* away into the formlessness of Oceanus. Through the epithet Love owns up to his associations with the sweetness of *rest* borrowed from Death and Sleep: the pleasant discharge of vital energies. Yet, it seems it is not only the pleasant that got through – there is a *threat* attached to this pleasure: “he overpowers the mind and thoughtful counsel of all gods and men alike”. While the *Theogony* thus somewhat preserves the positive rendering of Love and Death as found in the philosophers, it already betrays a change of attitude.

Whatever dangers Eros holds for the gods, however, is not much explored by Hesiod, it is something the later tradition would expand upon instead. Hesiod himself returns to the dangers of love only in the *Works and Days*, where the subject moves away from gods to mortals. No matter what negative associations love borrowed from death, they are, after all, far more serious for mortals than for *immortals*. As demonstrated by Most:<sup>27</sup> for Hesiod, human Eros seems to be a “threat not entirely different from disease or death,” one that makes the life of man, already difficult in his wretched state of hard work on the fields,<sup>28</sup> all the more difficult. Given Hesiod's insistence on “thoughtful counsel” and prudent planning as paramount to human survival, one can see, together with Most, how Hesiod could have thought Eros on a par with disease: if he halts the work on the fields; if he leads to people's losing their *head*, privileging their immediate needs over future ones;<sup>29</sup> and if sufficient provisions are not

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<sup>25</sup> Armand D'Angour, “Love's Battlefield: Rethinking Sappho Fragment 31”, *Erôs in Ancient Greece*, ed. Ed Sanders, Chiara Thumiger, Christopher Carey, Nick Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 61.

<sup>26</sup> Most, “Eros in Hesiod”, 172.

<sup>27</sup> See Most, “Eros in Hesiod”, 174.

<sup>28</sup> Recall the Hesiodic ages: the golden age, when men “just like gods they spent their lives, with a spirit free from care, entirely apart from toil and distress” and “the grain-giving field bore crops of its own accord”; as opposed to the current iron age, when men “will not cease from toil and distress by day, nor from being worn out by suffering at night, and the gods will give them grievous cares”. See Hesiod, “Works and Days”, *Hesiod: Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), lines 109-178.

<sup>29</sup> Whenever a woman appears in the *Works and days*, it is, as Most puts it, “a dire threat to the hardworking male farmer whose success, and even survival, seem to depend upon a resolute concentration of his energies upon labour and forethought”. Most, “Eros in Hesiod”, 173.

provided, he is, like any disease, just a prelude to death.<sup>30</sup> The status of Eros being comparable to a disease is, furthermore, the first sign of a development that would ultimately overtake the older tradition and predominate in the Christian era.

Although the union of love and death seems to be here as strong as in the testimonies above, here we thus see the opposite side of the equation: not only is Thanatos implicitly rendered more pleasant through Eros, becoming associated with delight and “relief”, but Eros is also rendered more dangerous through Thanatos and so is delight and rest. While the philosophers above thought that pleasure was not inherently bad,<sup>31</sup> Hesiod clearly thinks that *idling* and *self-indulging* are wrong, almost detestable, unless the rational counsel stays in control, which is what Eros would not have, because “he overpowers the mind” like death. The two gods still serve an analogical function, but now they are partners in crime, the result is different: a *life-threatening* discharge of vital energies. Yet, it must be admitted that this change is captured here much “in between the lines”.

Sappho, on the other hand, is more straightforward in her associations, although some things she shares with Hesiod. As Armand D’Angour observed, her poems reflect that “[l]ove can be likened to an experience of Heaven, but also that it can be the cause of bitter suffering and conflict, more akin to the battlefield.”<sup>32</sup> He also notes that Sappho expresses these “ambivalent feelings aroused by Eros” largely in terms adopted from martial epic – Homer.<sup>33</sup>

All this can be well illustrated by her description of the god himself: “Eros limbslackener shakes me again – that sweet, bitter, impossible creature.”<sup>34</sup> The epithet “limbslackener” is the

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<sup>30</sup> See Most, “Eros in Hesiod”, 174.

<sup>31</sup> As noted earlier, Heraclitus rather advocated avoiding extremes: he did not think that pleasure and the occasional “watering” of the soul were to be avoided, but that they were simply part of life. Kratochvíl, *Potápěč*, 193-196. Neither did Plato speak too harshly of the lovers in his *Phaedrus*, even with those broken wings “they carry off no mean reward for their lovers’ madness”. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 106.

<sup>32</sup> See Armand D’Angour, “Love’s Battlefield: Rethinking Sappho Fragment 31”, *Erôs in Ancient Greece*, ed. Ed Sanders, Chiara Thumiger, Christopher Carey, Nick Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.

<sup>33</sup> D’Angour, “Love’s Battlefield”, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Sappho, *Poetry of Sappho*, ed. and trans. Jim Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), LP 130. All future references to fragments will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

same as Hesiod's "limb melter" in the Greek original (λυσιμελής), it is not only associated with death and sleep, as noted earlier, but it is also a call-back to Homer and his military themes, just think of Homer's "loosening of limbs" used to describe death in combat. One can also find already in Sappho the association of love with a dripping wound,<sup>35</sup> later to be emphasized by the iconography of Eros equipped with his bow and arrows – love's weapons. It is one of her larger fragments, however, that is of great importance to this thesis, since it has been translated by Catullus to Latin, pointing to the transmission to Rome and the dissemination of her poetry:<sup>36</sup>

In my eyes he matches the gods, that man who  
sits there facing you—any man whatever—  
listening from closeby to the sweetness of your  
voice as you talk, the  
sweetness of your laughter: yes, that—I swear it—  
sets the heart to shaking inside my breast, since  
once I look at you for a moment, I can't  
speak any longer,  
but my tongue breaks down, and then all at once a  
subtle fire races inside my skin, my  
eyes can't see a thing and a whirring whistle  
thrums at my hearing,  
cold sweat covers me and a trembling takes  
ahold of me all over: I'm greener than the  
grass is and appear to myself to be little  
short of dying (LP 31).

Not only does it present a sequence of physical sensations akin to those encountered on the battlefield, as D'Angour rightly points out, "loss of voice, cold sweat, trembling, and pallor",<sup>37</sup> but also the idea of death, the prospect of *dying* at the sight of the beloved. But consider also the associations with fire, here it is "subtle fire races inside my skin", elsewhere she writes: "You came, and I was made to have you: / your breath cooled my heart that was burning with desire" (LP 48). All this could be sufficient grounds to link love to a *disease*, as it portrays the experience as a strange *irritation*, echoing Hesiod's argument, but notice also how the beloved cured the burning affliction with her cool "breath", shifting the negative associations of Eros

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<sup>35</sup> Sappho, "LP 37", *The Digital Sappho*, <https://digitalsappho.org/fragments/fr37/>.

<sup>36</sup> D'Angour, "Love's Battlefield", 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> D'Angour, "Love's Battlefield", 63.

from love as a whole to frustrated love only. While Sappho thus shares a lot of her imagery and conceptual associations with Hesiod, she does not share his ultimately condemning stance to love and pleasure. Through the union of Eros and Thanatos, Hesiod still associates death with rest and pleasure, but it renders love more negative to him in turn, because he thinks *idling* and *love* are equally *lethal*, unless the rational mind stays in control, unless survival has first been taken care of; but Sappho limits her negative associations of love to the experience of frustrated love or just (yet unsatisfied) desire which feels like *dying*, while she links the deathly relief and delight to love fulfilled. It is her attitude that the reader will encounter in the next chapters on Renaissance poetry. Yet, now that both ends of the Greek tradition of Eros and Thanatos were established, it is necessary to consider how they were preserved for the Renaissance.

Very little of the literary and visual artifacts above would be available to the modern period. The proper boom of Greek visual art would not happen until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Greece again politically opened up to the West after years of Ottoman occupation.<sup>38</sup> Not to mention that knowledge of Greek had completely disappeared in the Latin West until the later years of the Renaissance.<sup>39</sup> We know that Hesiod – along with Homer – was among the authors whom Petrarch wished to read, but never managed to get a first-hand experience of, due to his poor knowledge of Greek.<sup>40</sup> The first significant resurgence of Greek-learning can only be traced to the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> century within the humanist circle of Florence taught by the Byzantine Ambassador Manuel Chrysoloras.<sup>41</sup> Yet, not only were the fruits of this development too late for the sonnet tradition of the Italian Renaissance to come in contact with Hesiod, but they were too late for England as well: Hesiod was first printed on English soil in 1590 by

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<sup>38</sup> Timothy Webb, “Romantic Hellenism”, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 149-151.

<sup>39</sup> Niccolò Zorzi, “Hesiod in the Byzantine and Early Renaissance Periods”, *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod*, ed. Alexander C. Loney and Stephen Scully (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 413.

<sup>40</sup> Zorzi, “Hesiod in the Byzantine”, 424.

<sup>41</sup> Zorzi, “Hesiod in the Byzantine”, 424.

Richard Field<sup>42</sup> and first translated to English only in 1618 by George Chapman.<sup>43</sup> Similar case was with Sappho, whatever texts survived to the Byzantine empire were probably lost during the sacking of Constantinople in 1204. Most of her work became accessible to the West only during the 1890s and what was preserved was until then most likely unintelligible due to insufficient knowledge of archaic Greek language and culture.<sup>44</sup>

The only way the Greek tradition of Eros and Thanatos could be available was through its mediation in Rome. Greek architecture, art, religion, and other cultural artifacts were all absorbed by the newly emerging cultural centre of the ancient world.<sup>45</sup> Not even the Greek gods were exempt from this:<sup>46</sup> Roman understanding of the divine forces, even those of love and death, would very much be informed by the Greeks. Some of the texts that informed this chapter about the Greek tradition of Eros and Thanatos, after all, would likewise find expression in Rome: Hesiod's subject matter and themes were largely adopted by Ovid and so was Sappho.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, before going to the Renaissance, one needs to make a detour through Rome, taking Ovid as the end-focus of the ancient tradition of Eros and Thanatos.

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<sup>42</sup> Jessica Wolfe, "Hesiod and Christian Humanism, 1471-1667", *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod*. ed. Alexander C. Loney and Stephen Scully (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 437.

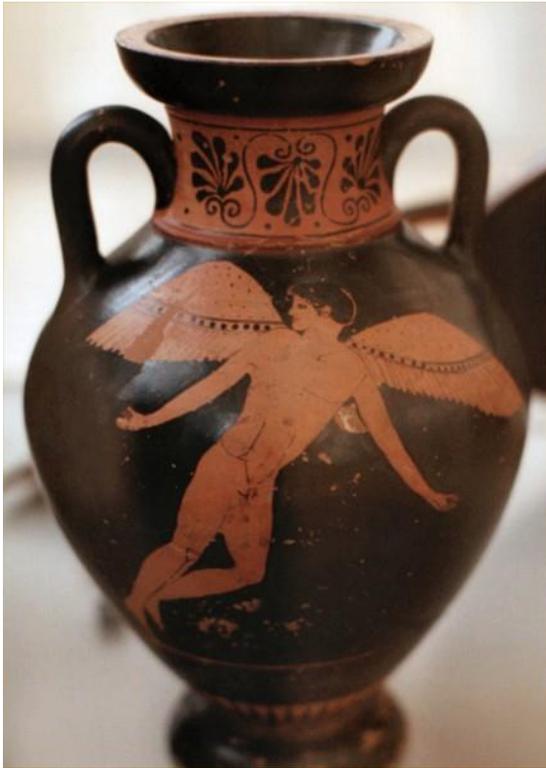
<sup>43</sup> Although Wolfe demonstrates that Edmund Spenser took some inspiration from Hesiod already in his *Faerie Queen*, it is still a minority example. See Wolfe, 437-439.

<sup>44</sup> Jim Powell, "The Texts of Sappho's Poems", *Poetry of Sappho*, ed. Jim Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45-46.

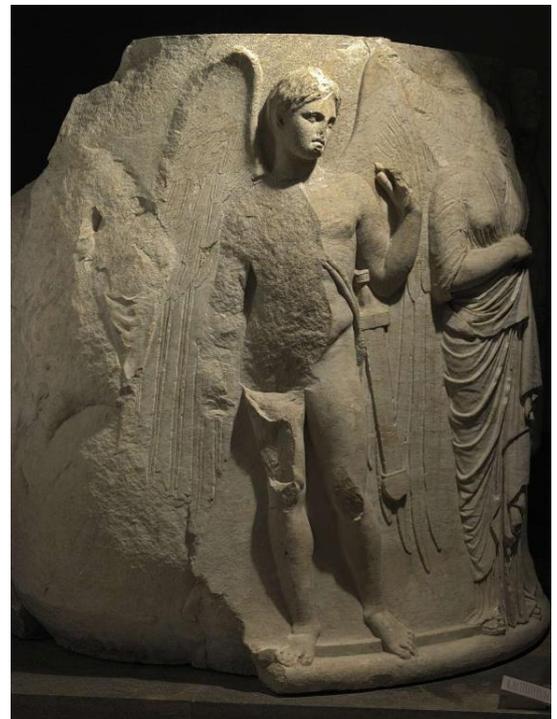
<sup>45</sup> Larry Slawson, "Greek Influence on the Roman Empire", *Owlcation*, published July 2, 2021, <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Greek-Influence-on-Rome>.

<sup>46</sup> Slawson, "Greek Influence".

<sup>47</sup> D'Angour, "Love's Battlefield", 59.



1. A depiction of Eros on the Attic vase found at Vulci, red-figure vase painting, 480 BCE Altes Museum, Berlin, photograph by Zdeněk Kratochvíl, <http://fysis.cz/Z/20BoziOst/Eros/ipmap00001.htm>



2. A detail of Thanatos from the column excavated at the Later Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, Marble Statue, 340-320 BCE, The British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1872-0803-9](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1872-0803-9)



3. A winged figure depicted on a white-ground lekythos found at Ampelokepoi, The Thanatos Painter, white-ground vase painting, 435-425 BC, The British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1876-0328-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1876-0328-1)



4. Hypnos and Thanatos carrying the body of Sarpedon from the battlefield of Troy, The Thanatos Painter, white-ground vase painting, 435-425 BC, The British Museum, London, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1876-0328-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1876-0328-1)

## 1.2 The Roman Tradition

A couple of centuries have passed since Hesiod and Sappho wrote their poetry and before Ovid took up their mantle. Meanwhile, the gods of Greece had moved to Rome, in new garments and under new aliases – Eros had become Cupid and Aphrodite Venus – and it is in this form that the Renaissance received them. This transition is also not without its losses, the gods shed some elements in favour of others: Eros is now understood only as a son of Aphrodite rather than a primordial god, and his appearance is fixed to a small child with his iconic bow and arrows. This is the climate in which we find Ovid – who continues the tradition of identifying Eros with Thanatos but modifies it also in quite a significant way.

### 1.2.1 Preservation

It was noted above that Ovid's connection to the Greek tradition of Eros and Thanatos is mediated through Hesiod and Sappho. As demonstrated by Ioannis Ziogas, Hesiod is prominently alluded to throughout Ovid's work: the *Metamorphoses* borrows from the *Theogony* and the *Ars Amatoria* from the *Catalogue of Women*.<sup>48</sup> The distinctive traits of Hesiod that attracted Ovid, according to Ziogas, were not only stylistic features like personified abstractions or etymological wordplay, but also the thematic diversity of his poetry: "Hesiod's interests range from the creation of the world to mundane things of everyday life."<sup>49</sup> He also speaks to Ovid as "the poet of peaceful pursuits", as opposed to Homer or Virgil and their military themes.<sup>50</sup> Ovid's reaction to martial epic and his attempt to subvert it and adopt it for his own poetry, however, recall Sappho as well.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Judith P. Hallet argues that Ovid identifies himself as "Sappho's true Roman counterpart",<sup>52</sup> but before Ovid wrote, there was

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<sup>48</sup> Ioannis Ziogas, "Ovid's Hesiodic Voices", *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod*, ed. Alexander C. Loney and Stephen Scully (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 378-390.

<sup>49</sup> See Ziogas, "Ovid's Hesiodic Voices", 377.

<sup>50</sup> Ziogas, "Ovid's Hesiodic Voices", 377.

<sup>51</sup> Alison Sharrock, "Gender and sexuality", *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 102.

<sup>52</sup> Judith P. Hallett, "Ovid's Sappho and Roman Women Love Poets", *Dictynna* 6 | 2009 (November 2010): 11. OpenEdition Journals, <https://doi.org/10.4000/dictynna.269>

already a rich tradition of love poetry developed by Propertius, Tibullus, Gallus, and Catullus, going back to Sappho as the source, providing more of an “apostolic succession” for Ovid rather than sudden revelation.<sup>53</sup> From these predecessors he inherited the elegiac genre in which the poet-lover is enslaved to his mistress, abandoning the prospects of civic and military life for one of decadence instead.<sup>54</sup> Ovid connects this notion of “servitium amoris” (to be in service to love) with the idea that love is a war in its own right,<sup>55</sup> further echoing Sappho’s connection of love with the battlefield.

Nowhere is their joint influence on Ovid more felt, however, than in the episode of Apollo and Daphne from the *Metamorphoses*. The passage describes how Apollo is transformed by Cupid from an epic hero who fights with the monstrous Python into a desperate lover who pursues restlessly the beautiful nymph Daphne. Ziogas calls the passage “programmatically” to the rest of the poem, because of the shift in tone from the serious account of creation to the very Hesiodic message about the power of Eros,<sup>56</sup> but its programmatic potential can be seen even beyond that as a singular meeting-point of both of Ovid’s great influences. According to him, one can see the Hesiodic influence immediately: “Amor’s victory over Apollo recalls the powers of Hesiod’s primordial Eros, who conquers all gods and mortals.”<sup>57</sup> Yet, there are already echoes going back to Sappho as well: having just killed the dragon, Apollo chastens Cupid that the bow is a heroic weapon, not behaving for him to bear – which reminds us of the tension of establishing one’s love poetry in opposition to a military career or martial epic. Cupid’s reply thus serves not only as a very Hesiodic statement about the power of love, but also as affirming Sappho’s connection of love with heroic feats: “Thy dart may pierce all things

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<sup>53</sup> Alison Sharrock, “Ovid and the discourses of love: the amatory works”, *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 150.

<sup>54</sup> Sharrock, “the discourses of love”, 150.

<sup>55</sup> Just recall the “Love is a War” passage from the *Amores*: “Every lover’s on active service, my friend, active service, believe me / And Cupid has his headquarters in the field. / Fighting and love-making belong to the same age-group.” (*Am*, I.9.1-3.)

<sup>56</sup> See Ziogas, “Ovid’s Hesiodic Voices”, 386.

<sup>57</sup> Ziogas, “Ovid’s Hesiodic Voices”, 386

else, Apollo, but mine shall pierce thee; and by as much as all living things are less than a deity, by so much less is thy glory than mine.”<sup>58</sup> Another familiar element from Sappho is that the association of love with a “consuming fire”: “so was the god consumed with flames, so did he burn in all his heart, and feed his fruitless love on hope” (*Met*, I.495-497). Just like in Sappho, the consuming fire is identified here with (yet unsatisfied) desire or frustrated love, the fire needs a beloved to cool it with her breath – to *extinguish*/kill the “irritation”. It is thus certain that the two great Greek voices that influenced Ovid come together in this passage.

The similarities with Hesiod in the *Metamorphoses*, however, do not end there. Of course, the most prominent theme of the extensive poem is transformations, but it could be well argued that the second one is love, which leads Alison Sharrock to come up with a pun on its name “*MetAMORphoses*”, while considering “the outrageous bilingual wordplay” that is present throughout Ovid’s work.<sup>59</sup> Although the name Eros/Cupid does not come up often in the poem, just like in Hesiod, love seems to be the motivating force that drives most of its stories and events. Where he is mentioned, however, he is given similar prominence as in Hesiod – take for example the moment when Venus addresses him:

O son, both arms and hands to me, and source of all my power, take now those shafts, Cupid, with which you conquer all, and shoot your swift arrows into the heart of that god to whom the final lot of the triple kingdom fell. You rule the gods, and Jove himself; you conquer and control the deities of the sea, and the very king that rules the deities of the sea. Why does Tartarus hold back? Why do you not extend your mother’s empire and your own? (*Met*, V.364-372)

One can clearly see here the idea of Eros that conquers the hearts of both gods and men - the “*Amor vincit Omnia*” sentiment that is already present in the Greek poet. But speaking of love

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<sup>58</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Books 1-8*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson and trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), I.464-466. All future references to book and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>59</sup> Sharrock, “Gender and sexuality”, 98.

as conqueror, of love triumphant, it might be useful to compare a similar sequence from a work more influenced by Sappho – the triumph of love in the *Amores*:

Your stepfather Mars himself will lend you a chariot,  
and it is fitting you go, the people acclaiming your  
triumph,  
with you skilfully handling the yoked birds.  
leading captive youths and captive girls:  
that procession will be a magnificent triumph.  
I myself, fresh prize, will just now have received my  
wound  
and my captive mind will display its new chains.  
You'll lead Conscience, hands twisted behind her back,  
and Shame, and whoever Love's sect includes.  
All will fear you: stretching their arms towards you  
the crowd will cry 'hurrah for the triumph!  
You'll have your flattering followers Delusion and  
Passion,  
the continual crew that follows at your side.  
With these troops you overcome men and gods  
(*Am*, I.2.24-37)

Not only is this a beautiful prelude to Renaissance triumphs, but it also is an assimilation of Hesiodic notions into the terms and images more reminiscent of Sappho: he does not need to overcome men and gods alone anymore, now he has his "troops"; the line "my captive mind will display its new chains", furthermore, instantly recalls Hesiod's association of Eros as overpowering the "thoughtful counsel". Yet, this is not the only way Ovid modifies or departs from the tradition.

### 1.2.2 Innovation

The triumph precedes an encounter with the god, who sets off the events and even the composition of the poems:

I was singing, while he quickly selected an arrow  
from his open quiver, to engineer my ruin,  
and vigorously bent the sinuous bow against his knee.  
and said, Poet take this effort for your song!  
Woe is me! That boy has true shafts.  
I burn, and Love rules my vacant heart. (*Am*, I.1.21-26)

Of course, there are still the associations with “ruin”, or “woe”, elsewhere the reference to a “wound” – love still has association with “undoing”, “crippling”, but it does not seem to evoke the powers of death anymore. All this represents a certain departure from the previous tradition, which is further emphasized in the following excerpt:

Pierce me, boy! I’m offered naked to your weapons:  
this is your power, this is what your strength does:  
as if your arrows came here now fired by themselves –  
their quiver is scarcely more familiar than me!  
Unhappy, the man who spends the night in slumber,  
and calls sleep itself the greatest of gifts!  
Foolish, what’s sleep but the image of frozen death!  
The grave grants us enough time for sleep.  
Now my girl’s lying words deceive me:  
I still live in hope of great delight (*Am*, II.9B.11-20)

Sleep and death are shown here clearly in opposition to love, the old metaphors of sleep and death – that first nourished the happy visions of philosophy and of archaic art, and then supplied the negative connotations for the poets – no longer *fit*, do not recall one another. It is not a rare instance either, on the contrary, one encounters them quite often in close proximity in the *Amores*, but always unrelated:

Let my enemies sleep on a couch, bereft,  
and relax their limbs in the midst of the bed!  
But let wild love shatter my indolent slumber:  
let me not be the only one weighing the mattress down!  
(*Am*, II.10.17-20)

The by-now-familiar metaphor of relaxing of limbs is here often used in opposition to amorous activities: the city-lover comes to his mistress at night, when her husband is asleep; he is awake while others are sleeping. The acts of love in the *Amores* are still naturally followed by sleep, but it seems the usual postcoital limpness no longer recalls any association with a “loosening of limbs“ or any of the like. But this division is nowhere as apparent as in this passage:

I don’t come accompanied by armies and weapons:  
I was alone till cruel Love arrived.  
I couldn’t dismiss him even if I wanted:

I'd first have to separate myself from my limbs.  
(*Am*, I.6.33-36)

The same associations with death and sleep thus survive, but not the old metaphors for the union of love and death. The old language and imagery suited for it do not recall the same connections anymore. It is thus apparent that the functional analogy between love and death is broken, the lover seeks a very different kind of pleasure in love than in sleep and eternal rest. The discharge of vital energies also no longer unites the two concepts – while death and sleep are still associated with rest, love wakes and “shatters” sleep.

One of the reasons why the old union of Eros and Thanatos should be thus lost to Ovid is that, by the Roman era, both concepts have significantly grown apart. Just compare those handsome youths from the previous section with Roman depictions of the same entities. The mosaic found at Thysdrus (fig. 5) testifies, as noted above, how Eros got progressively younger, appearing more frequently as a small child or even a baby. The mosaic from Pompeii (fig. 6), on the other hand, shows how death went in the opposite direction: from a handsome youth he turned into a decayed corpse, a skeleton. Their conceptual distancing is then further emphasized by the emerging “*carpe diem*” (seize the day) motif: the skeleton serves to remind the viewer of their limited time on earth and encourage them to enjoy the pleasure of life while they can, raising a fundamental opposition between the joy of life and the joys of death.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the same sentiment can actually be seen in Ovid's repeated denouncing of sleep in the excerpts above: while he is still alive, he shuns sleep because it would only remind him of death, instead he wants to live, to *wake*, to be surging with energy; to the point where the natural pleasures of sleep seem in direct opposition to life.

Thus it would almost seem that the union between Eros and Thanatos disappears in Ovid completely. After all, he himself tries to clear Cupid's name of any association with death he might have previously held: “You might have employed the naked arrows of warfare, / but your

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<sup>60</sup> Phillipe Aries, *Dějiny Smrti*, ed. Martin Nodl and trans. Danuše Navrátilová (Prague: Argo, 2020), 145.

shafts are untainted by deadman's blood.”<sup>61</sup> His resting the connection, however, confirms he was aware of one – one that is different from the Greek union of Eros and Thanatos. It is no more the relationship of “analogy”, but of “cause and effect” that he is now trying to disassociate from love:

Good luck to the happy lover, let him  
Rejoice in his passion, sail on with a following wind -  
But for those who suffer the whims of an unworthy mistress  
Help is at hand: learn the comfort which my art  
Has to bestow! Why does one poor lover fasten  
A noose round his neck, and swing - depressing load -  
From the roofbeam, or another run a sword through his  
gizzard?  
*You, Love, you peace-lover, you get blamed*  
For their slaughter. (*Rem*, 13-21)

Here it is literal death that is associated with love: actual suicides. While Ovid yet resists the connection,<sup>62</sup> he still unequivocally identifies love as the cause of their death: unhappy love. It is for those *diagnosed* with this strange condition that he is writing his *Remedia Amores* (Cures for Love), where he repeatedly treats of love as a “disease” (*Rem*, 82;92;526) with no further reservations. Despite his initial efforts to conceal Cupid’s blame, he still gives off the feeling that love can develop into a sickness that, if untreated, leads unto death.

Death thus reunites with love through the discourse of love as illness, one that was only latent in the Greek poets, but only now gets fully explored by Ovid. The fiery metaphors of Sappho are here clearly employed in connection to the disease-like quality of love: “If you pick an unsuitable moment / Your veto will irritate, inflame the disease” (*Rem*, 133-134). The remedies he prescribes, furthermore, betray his indebtedness to Hesiod’s discourse of Eros as disease: “Cupid homes in on sloth, detests the active – so give that / Bored mind of yours some

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<sup>61</sup> Ovid, “Remedia Amoris”, *The Erotic Poems*, ed. and trans. Peter Green (London: Penguin books, 1983), lines 25-38. All future references to lines will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>62</sup> It could be argued that Ovid is trying to shift all the blame on the “unworthy mistress”, but that would not be a very honest defence, since elsewhere he put unrequited love under Cupid’s jurisdiction as well: “There he took from his quiver two darts of opposite effect: one puts to flight, the other kindles the flame of love” (*Met*, I.468-469). He shoots Apollo with the latter, Daphne with the former (*Met*, I.472-473).

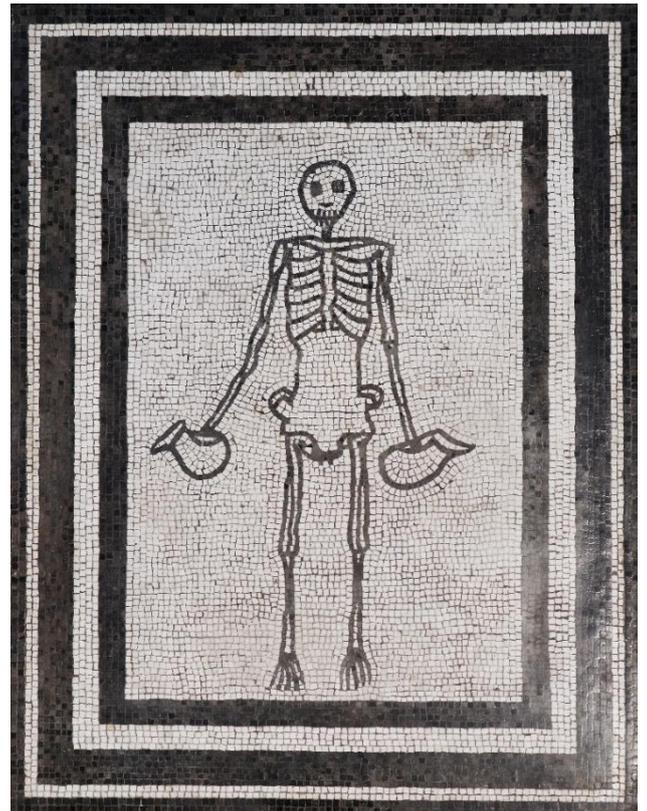
really absorbing work” (*Rem*, 149-150). Hesiod thought *idling* and *love* life-threatening in general, but Ovid applies a similar sentiment to unhappy love.<sup>63</sup> Although the Greek concept of functional analogy between Eros and Thanatos was lost to Ovid, he thus hands down a new union between love and death to the Renaissance: of cause and effect, of love as sickness unto death. Yet, while Ovid situated himself in the position of love’s doctor, rather than curing mankind of unhappy love for good, he started an epidemic in the love poetry of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, where the poets, who came after him, would “happily” claim to be out of the reach of Medicine.

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<sup>63</sup> Ovid adopts here Hesiod’s insistence on survival, thoughtful counsel, of work taking precedence over idling or indulging, for his own purposes. He even recommends farming as one of the things to divert the mind from love: “What else diverts the mind? Country matters, good farming” (*Rem*, 169).



5. A depiction of Cupid holding a torch, mosaic , 2<sup>nd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> century CE, El Djem Museum, El Djem, photograph by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El\\_Jem\\_Museum\\_Roman\\_mosaics.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:El_Jem_Museum_Roman_mosaics.jpg)



6. So-called *Carpe Diem*, mosaic , 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Naples National Archaeological Museum, photograph by Marie-Lan Nguyen:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carpe\\_Diem\\_MAN\\_Napoli\\_Inv9978.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carpe_Diem_MAN_Napoli_Inv9978.jpg)

## 1 Memento Amori

The new union of love and death as left behind by Ovid would continue to inspire other poets for a time. Even in the transitional period between antiquity and the Christian era, love poetry with Cupid/Eros as key actor was still produced in an outstanding number and variety: for example, Ausonius' *Cupido cruciatus* (4<sup>th</sup> century) or Modestinus' *Cupido dormiens* (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>64</sup> Whereas Ausonius already bears signs of the changing mentality when he speaks of the lovers "who fall into sin of their own free will",<sup>65</sup> Modestinus continues to write about love in the Ovidian spirit. Take for instance the following passage where Eros is judged by his late victims: "Round him came ghosts, from Pluto's gloomy hall / Set free, ghosts whom his cruel brand had scorched, / "Look! 'tis my hunter!" Phaedra said."<sup>66</sup> Since his accusers come from the underworld, the association of love with literal death is still very strong here. Unlike Ovid, however, who sought to clear Cupid's name from murder, Modestinus associates him more openly with death and killing: calling him a hunter, he makes him kill not by accident but by design. This strange new element, which was absent in the ancient poets treated above, would continue to influence the Renaissance. This is, of course, not to imply that Modestinus' text exercised a direct influence on later poets; only that it can be viewed as a testimony to an uninterrupted – however later suppressed – development and continuity in the tradition even after Ovid. With the ultimate decline of antiquity, however, further transmission and development would be increasingly more difficult.

### 1.1 Transmission and Transformation

The advent of the Christian era posed a number of obstacles for the continued survival of a tradition attached to two pagan deities, as the newly emerging monotheism renounced the

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<sup>64</sup> Roger P.H. Green, "Latin love elegy in Late Antiquity", *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy*, ed. Thea S. Thorsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 257-258.

<sup>65</sup> Ausonius, "Cupid Crucified", *Ausonius*, ed. and trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White (London: William Heinemann, 1951), 207.

<sup>66</sup> Modestinus, "Cupid Asleep", *Minor Latin Poets*, ed. J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1934), 539-541.

gods of Greco-Roman antiquity as demons and false idols, striving laboriously to eradicate them from places of worship.<sup>67</sup> Yet, as Jean Seznec had argued, pronouncing the death of the gods would be premature.<sup>68</sup> The gods “served as vehicles for ideas so profound and tenacious that it would have been impossible for them to perish”,<sup>69</sup> and this applied to Eros and Thanatos more than to any other gods. Rather than being the end of the polytheistic deities, the rise of monotheism thus needed them to adapt. Curiously enough, it was the pagans themselves who provided them with the means to survive: being alienated from their own religion, they integrated it with philosophy, taking the gods as expressions of moral and philosophical ideas, or in other words, allegories.<sup>70</sup> Thanks to the allegorical tradition, the gods and the discourses surrounding them continued to be appealing to medieval and later Christian audience despite their pagan status,<sup>71</sup> which lead medieval scholars like Theodulf of Orléans to even catalogue the ancient attributes of Amor: “Tela, puer, virus, fax tuus ardor, Amor...” (net, child, disease, torch of your heart, Love).<sup>72</sup> What should be also of attention is how neatly the disease motif from Ovid now goes along with the hunting motif from Modestinus. While allegory thus pushed them into a safe *compartment* where they could not challenge the supremacy of the one God, it protected them from complete eradication by the Church. As Seznec remarks, “the gods of antiquity had survived as the incarnation of ideas”.<sup>73</sup> Eros will thus be referred to as Amor (love in Italian) or simply Love in English, along with Thanatos being Mors (in Italian) Death (in English). Another problem posed by the advent of Christianity, however, were the changing attitudes to death and love respectively.

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<sup>67</sup> Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), 45.

<sup>68</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 149.

<sup>69</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Theodulf of Orléans, “De libris quos legere solebam”, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini I*, ed. Ernst Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), line 38.

<sup>73</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 5.

### 1.1.1 Love and Death Bound

In the previous chapter, it was shown how death had become a skeleton in late antiquity who served as a warning, a reminder: one should beware that his time here is limited and, therefore, enjoy life to the fullest while he can. A culture's relation to death, however, changes with the relations to the afterlife. So, while death would continue to be depicted as a skeleton or a cadaver for the ages to come,<sup>74</sup> its role would change drastically in the early Middle Ages. The beginning of the Christian era resounded with the *good news*: God “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light” (2 Tim. 1:20, NKJ). Biological death was defeated – now it served only as a gateway to the next life and the early Christian centuries had only positive expectations. As Phillipe Aries observed, the depictions of the end of days in the early Middle Ages often omitted the fate of the damned, because the first Christians presupposed the salvation of all baptized – salvation was sure for everyone in Christ.<sup>75</sup> The idea of death that predominates at the time is what Aries calls the “tame death” – one that is accepted and tolerated as necessity, the gateway to the next life; one that listens to the sick who beg her to ease their suffering, one that has to give warning first, before striking one down, either by way of a supernatural sign like visions or a natural one like disease or old age.<sup>76</sup> Death was thus put on a leash, its biological dimension suppressed.

Love's fate, on the other hand, was bound with Ovid, and, as his work was difficult to reconcile with the new philosophy and way of life, the earliest Christian centuries were not kind to either.<sup>77</sup> Moving away from classical conceptions of love, the Christians embraced “the ideal of ascetism and chastity” as the guideline for their existence.<sup>78</sup> Thus they started distinguishing between a *spiritual* praiseworthy kind of love, and a *profane* detestable one: this found

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<sup>74</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 145.

<sup>75</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 131-132.

<sup>76</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 19-31.

<sup>77</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 91.

<sup>78</sup> Klaus Oschema, “Sacred or Profane? Reflections on Love and Friendship in the Middle Ages”, *Love/Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800*, eds. Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter and Miri Rubin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 47.

expression also on the linguistic level as verbal form *amare* and its substantive form *amor* were gradually replaced with *diligere* or *agapan*.<sup>79</sup> The fixation on sexual dimension of love was thus gone, it was now bound in servitude to sacred love: erotic language being used to describe mystical experiences of saints etc.<sup>80</sup> Ovid too was then made to serve: his *Remedia Amoris* was read by monks to dampen their desires,<sup>81</sup> to cure themselves of love in general, not just unhappy love. Biological dimension of love, like death's, was also defeated.

### 1.1.2 Love and Death Unbound

Yet, even while tame, death had retained a second face: *wild* death, which terrified people despite their calm cohabitation with its tame counterpart. In contrast to the latter, wild death was sudden, would not give any warning, which at the time felt unnatural, like death was breaking its penance.<sup>82</sup> Starting with the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this other side of death was starting to move out of its bonds. Around that time, as Aries points out, more emphasis was put on the final-judgement aspect of the end of days: alongside the bliss of the saved was being now depicted the suffering of the damned, and, gradually, even the clergy would appear among the ranks of the damned, marking the end of any security in salvation.<sup>83</sup> The role of death as the gate-way to the afterlife was thus being re-evaluated just as the prospects of eternity had changed, and fear of hell and damnation extended naturally on dying itself – on biological death again. Thus Death would become a boogiemer embracing his corpse-like mien, reminding us of our limited time in this world and of the horrors in the next.<sup>84</sup> The sick would once again call Death, try to summon him, but now death would not listen, ignoring the poor wretch, he would continue in his rampage on those who covet life instead. This trend would then find expression

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<sup>79</sup> Oschema, "Sacred or Profane?", 48.

<sup>80</sup> Aldo S. Bernardo, "Sex and Salvation in the Middle Ages: From the Romance of the Rose to the Divine Comedy", *Italica* 67, no. 3 (1990): 306. Jstor, doi:10.2307/478640.

<sup>81</sup> Raphael Lyne, "Love and exile after Ovid", *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 291.

<sup>82</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 21.

<sup>83</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 134-135.

<sup>84</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 147-151.

in allegorical circles, especially in the traditions of the Triumph of Death and Memento Mori. The world was thus made to *remember* biological death again.

While thus reminded of biological death, the people would likewise be made to *remember love*. The beginning of the twelfth century was a boom for allegorical interpretation. It was also around this time that perception of male-female relationship began to change, including now emotional concepts to heterosexual love, marriage, and sexuality.<sup>85</sup> Just as the Christians were re-evaluating their relationship to biological love, so they reconsidered their relationship to Ovid: by the Renaissance, allegorical interpretations of Ovid would flood Europe, the culmination of which was the *Ovide Moralisé*.<sup>86</sup> Love made his loosening of bonds known by starting an epidemic of love in poetry: as observed by Klaus Oschema, before the 12<sup>th</sup> century, love had never been “represented in literature in such a dense succession and discussed so intensely”.<sup>87</sup> During this period, Chrétien de Troyes supposedly translated two of Ovid’s major works on love, *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, but those are now lost to us.<sup>88</sup> His own poetic work, nonetheless, provides ample evidence of his familiarity with Ovid and the overall tradition. In his *Cliges*, for example, when the lover complains about the burden of love he identifies it with an illness: “I feel my own ill so heavy a burden that never shall I find healing for it by medicine or by potion or by herb or by root.”<sup>89</sup> Soon after he also describes Love as deadly: “This is the wound that kills me; this is the dart; this is the ray with which I am so cruelly inflamed.”<sup>90</sup> Ovid’s discourse of Love as sickness unto death thus successfully returns in the High Middle Ages.

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<sup>85</sup> Oschema, “Sacred or Profane?”, 52.

<sup>86</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 91.

<sup>87</sup> Oschema, “Sacred or Profane?”, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Green, 288.

<sup>89</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Cliges: A Romance*, trans. L. J. Gardiner (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966) Project Gutenberg, <https://gutenberg.org/files/2414/2414-h/2414-h.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> de Troyes.

One century later, the same influences can be found yet again in another French work *The Romance of the Rose*, a text that was widely translated and disseminated across Europe. It appropriately speaks of Death and Love as being close together: “But Love doth, about the point, / Spread an ointment and so anoint / The tip, it harms not too greatly;/ For Love did not wish to slay me” for “I’d have died, in truth, I know, / Without that salve”.<sup>91</sup> The discourse of the disease is naturally likewise present: “And he whom Love doth imprison, Hopes for health, and a cure”.<sup>92</sup> Yet, more importantly, this is another text that combines all the above with the motif of the hunt: “[he] stretched his nets all around, And set his snares over that ground, To trap young women and young men, For Love desires no prey but them.”<sup>93</sup> The developments from late antiquity thus join Ovid in his triumphant return, as biological love gains prominence again in Christian society. While the union between love and death was thus renewed through their biological dimension, it would not return in its pure Ovidian form.

## 1.2 Renaissance Reception

The allegorical tradition would continue well into the Renaissance, as evidenced even by later poets like Sidney: “It is most true, what we call *Cupid's* dart, / An image is, which for ourselves we carve; / And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart”.<sup>94</sup> In restoring the union between love and death, the Renaissance did not represent a radical departure from the Middle Ages;<sup>95</sup> rather it was the culmination of the developments that preceded it. While love in the Middle Ages already recalled its connection with death and disease; in the Renaissance, death started remembering its connection to love.

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<sup>91</sup> Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. A. S. Kline. 102. Poetry in Translation, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/LeRomanDeLaRosehome.php>.

<sup>92</sup> de Lorris, 153.

<sup>93</sup> de Lorris, 89.

<sup>94</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, “Astrophel and Stella”, *Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences*, ed. Herbert Grabes (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970), sonnet 5, lines 5-7. All future references to sonnet and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>95</sup> Seznec, *The Survival*, 103-104.

### 1.2.1 Visual Arts

This can be well demonstrated on the representations of Love and Death in Renaissance painting, most notably in the motif of triumphs. Take for example the depiction of Love in *The Triumph of Venus* by Dutch engraver Otto van Veen (fig. 7): here Amor is in a victory chariot with his mother Venus, and below them is a sad *pile* of mortals, land creatures, fish, and birds, all morbidly pierced with arrows. Their shared dominion does not end there, however, the immortals, the Sun and the Moon, are also pierced with arrows, confirming the overwhelming power of love. It would seem that, just like with Death, no one can escape Love. Now, compare this with the much earlier depiction of Death from the anonymous fresco *The Triumph of Death* on the wall of the Palazzo Abatellis (fig. 8): here Death is also sporting a bow and just as with Amor, there is a sad pile of bodies below him, all pierced with arrows. Still, there is a clear difference between the two piles: whereas love does not spare any of his arrows, death seems to be quite selective, leaving two groups alone. In the left corner, the reader will recognise the familiar beggars and wretches who, with folded hands, beseech Death to spare them of their suffering and take them to the next life – but he ignores their pleas and instead continues his rampage on the rich. The group in the right corner, on the other hand, seems more puzzling: a company of young men and women, surrounded by musicians, in an amorous atmosphere of what seems to be an outdoors ball if not the fabled garden of love – such ensemble certainly looks out of place in a triumph of death. Yet, though in Cupid's domain, they are here still at the mercy of death: looking closely, the reader will notice that two lovers had already been shot. It almost seems as if Cupid was accomplice here – they go to the garden expecting the arrow of love but instead receive the arrow of death. It appears Love and Death are working together again – but it is not on the same conditions as before.

Their new alliance should be even clearer when compared with Buonamico Buffalmacco's fresco *The Triumph of Death* (fig. 9): here a similar structure can be encountered, the beggars beseeching death on the left, the potentates and princes in the middle

already massacred, the lovers not suspecting anything, and death with his scythe slowly moving their way. This picture especially suggests a weird pact between the two forces: the Cupids with their drawn bows and Death with his lifted scythe seem both eager for harvest. The garden of love seems structured as death's trap or lure and Cupid as his companion on the hunt. Such a relationship between them would be further supported by the anonymous triumph of death from the 16<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 10): in this beautiful merger between both triumphs they share one sad pile of bodies. The composition strongly implies they are in no way equals, they divine their spoils like king and his thanes, like hunter and his retinue or his dogs. While both triumphs thus have structural similarities, the triumph of death seems to feature a certain sub-theme of victory or supremacy over love. This relationship does not recall the hierarchy from Ovid's cause and effect, where death, or more precisely suicide, was but an accidental manifestation of love's power. Here the situation seems reversed. Yet, to understand precisely what replaced the old conception, it is necessary to look to the developments in Renaissance poetry.

### 1.2.2 The Sonnet Tradition

It was shown that Ovid's conception of love and death did not return in its pure form, but its basic formula of love as sickness unto death survived and it would continue to sustain poetic imagination throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance. Through the formula, the Renaissance would express the new relationship between love and death in the Sonnet Tradition. One of the first poets to use the sonnet form was Guido Cavalcanti, the poet on the crossroads between the Medieval and the Renaissance era. His sonnet III summarizes all the previous key developments:

He was Amor, who since he found you, dwells  
Ever with me, and he was come from far;  
An archer is he as the Scythians are  
Whose only joy is killing someone else.  
My sobbing eyes are drawn upon his wrack,  
And such harsh sighs upon my heart he casteth  
That I depart from that sad me he wasteth,  
With Death drawn close upon my wavering track,

Leading such tortures in his sombre train  
As, by all custom, wear out other men.<sup>96</sup>

That death follows Amor's darts is here clearly connected with the idea of love as a mortal disease: Love does not directly cause death, he invites it – he is, like any illness, a prelude to death. The fact that Amor's only joy is “killing someone else”, furthermore, recalls the idea that he kills by design found already in Modestinus. It also nicely illustrates how the relationship of love and death changed since the time of Ovid. In the Ovidian discourse, the sickness unto death meant the death is a possible outcome of unhappy love, if untreated; here it manifests more as a remnant of the old attitude to death, when it had to give warning before claiming someone's soul, announcing its coming by way of disease.

It is thus not surprising that the poet should invoke other aspects of the tame death – love for him is such a terrible condition that he begs death for release:

DEATH who art haught, the wretched's remedy,  
Grace! Grace! hands joined I do beseech it thee,  
Come, see and conquer for worse things on me  
Are launched by love. (Sonnet 33, 1-4)

Calling Death “the wretched's remedy” he is appealing to his history of helping the sick from their suffering, but just like the beggars the poet is ignored by this new Death, who does not save from diseases any longer, but instead considers them his many servants.<sup>97</sup> The idea of servitude, furthermore, recalls the theme of supremacy from the visual representations of Love and Death – which is treated by Cavalcanti:

They dragged me to a place where a sad horde  
Of such as love and whom Love Tortureth  
Cried out, all pitying as I met their sight,  
"Now art thou servant unto such a Lord  
Thou'lt have none other one save only Death"  
(Sonnet 5, 10-14)

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<sup>96</sup> Guido Cavalcanti, *The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti*, trans. Ezra Pound (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1912), sonnet 3, lines 5-14. Sonnet Central, <http://www.sonnets.org/pound.htm>. All future references to sonnet and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>97</sup> Aries, *Dějiny*, 161.

What seems at first as a description of Love's triumph, his sad pile of conquered souls, turns out to be shared with death. Here again they share the spoils of their hunt, but there seems to be a certain successiveness to it: Love gets to *play* with them first, while Death *claims* them second. The dynamic could be likened to a hunting *dog* first chasing down the prey and the human/e, civilized *hunter* dealing the final blow. Death is no longer the tame hunter, however, who would have spared his prey of unnecessary pain, he gives full consent to the tortures his servants perpetrate. The formula of love as sickness unto death was thus modified in accordance with the idea of death's supremacy over love: death is no longer an accidental effect of love's power, but the *driving* force behind it.

The form in which the new formula would be received by the rest of the World, however, was only later laid down by Petrarch. Indeed, it is not Cavalcanti, but his younger compatriot who would turn into a world sensation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>98</sup> The developments captured by Cavalcanti were all preserved quite well by Petrarch. The formula of love as sickness unto death finds expression on multiple occasions in his sonnets: he talks of his beloved as “the cause of my death”<sup>99</sup> or as one “guilty of my death” (Sonnet 159, 8) or elsewhere he complains that his love “carries me sadly towards death” (Sonnet 16, 11). He also talks openly about the new alliance between love and death: “I'm so afraid of those lovely eyes' assault / in which Love and my death exist” (Sonnet 39, 1-2). Passing on the idea of love and death sharing hunting grounds together, he preserves also the association with the hunt. He even develops the image to further detail:

The flame that burns me and destroys me  
flows from lovely clear smooth living ice,  
and so drains and dries the veins and heart  
that I melt away almost invisibly.

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<sup>98</sup> William J. Kennedy, “European Beginnings and Transmissions: Dante, Petrarch and the Sonnet Sequence”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*. ed. A. D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84.

<sup>99</sup> Francesco Petrarch, *The Complete Canzoniere*, ed. and trans. A. S. Kline, sonnet 46, 14. Poetry in Translation, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Petrarchhome.php>. All future references to sonnet and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Death, his arm already lifted for the blow,  
like an angry thundering sky, or a roaring lion,  
comes following my life that flies,  
and I am mute, and tremble, filled with fear.  
Mercy and Love combined might still stand  
as a double column, to protect me  
between the weary heart, and the mortal wound  
(Sonnet 202, 1-11)

Unlike in Cavalcanti, Death is here depicted more in line with his wild form: an animal that follows his track, a “roaring lion” on a hunt. Yet, the lover acts as if he was unaware that he could escape his terrible pursuer by reading the *Remedia Amoris* (or at least trying the cures prescribed there), instead he puts all his hope on two benefactors (but neither hears his pleas): “and if mortal prayers rise to heaven, / let death or mercy end my sorrow.” (Sonnet 153, 3-4). Just like the beggars, he is still appealing to death’s history of helping the sick, but would not mind being saved by the lady who could easily heal his affliction by requiting his love. In both scenarios, love is too terrible to bear, just as in Cavalcanti above.

Petrarch, however, elaborates on the specifics of this strange disease. Using the Augustinian understanding of death as “splitter of body and soul”, he explains his condition as his soul and body being slowly torn apart: “The soul, that Death drives from its place, / parts from me, and free of that net, / goes towards her who menaces” (sonnet 256, 9-11). Whenever he thus departs in his thought to the beloved, he is already leaving his body *behind*. This is where love steps in as death’s hunting dog, it chases the soul from the lover’s body (as his thoughts drift more and more to the beloved) and when the soul is wearied down,<sup>100</sup> the hunt ends with death dealing the final blow, separating the soul and the body for good. Love is thus still death’s herald through which tame death would announces his coming, but who now is allowed by wild death to torture his victims at will. So, as long as the hunt remains unfinished, the speaker is driven to the point where he is torn between life and death (soul almost parted),

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<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere he complains about wearied down by love even without bring it death to the picture: “So my weary and afflicted spirits / little by little are exhausted” (Sonnet 256, 5-6).

from which arises his strange affliction: “in the same moment, [to] be alive and dead” (sonnet 93, 3). Death itself, on the other hand, holds a promise of happy metaphysical union between the lover and the beloved, when the spirit is cut off from the body for good, it can stay attached to the lady instead: should he be buried in the grave at least he has a hope that his spirit “might still remain with [her]“ (Sonnet 82, 8-7). Through the role of Amor as the chaser and death as the in/human hunter, he preserves the new relationship between love and death: love as a wild force driven by death.

Petrarch captured most of the new developments of the union of love and death in his sonnets, but he also introduced elements of his own. Through Augustinian understanding of death as soul-splitter, he elaborated on the specifics of love as a mortal disease: the soul is continually being chased away from the body, until ultimately the two separate resulting in death. Although he depicted Death more monstrous and beast-like than others, the prospect of dying was ultimately rendered more positive in his conception through the possible metaphysical union of the soul after death. The way he laid down the formula is the form in which it would be received by the rest of the World. It only remains to be seen how much of it was lost in translation.



7. (above) Otto van Veen, *The Triumph of Venus*, engraving, 1608 CE, George Peabody Library, Baltimore, photograph by John Hopkins Rare Books, <http://dcc.dickinson.edu/agent/otto-van-veen>

8. (below) *The Triumph of Death*, fresco, 1446 CE, Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo, photograph by José Luiz, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triumph\\_of\\_Death\\_-\\_Palazzo\\_Abatellis\\_-\\_Palermo\\_-\\_Italy\\_2015.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triumph_of_Death_-_Palazzo_Abatellis_-_Palermo_-_Italy_2015.JPG)





9. (above) A detail from Buonamico Buffalmacco's restored *The Triumph of Death*, fresco, 1355 CE, Camposanto, Pisa, photograph by Web Gallery of Art,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Triumph-Death-Buffalmacco-Pisa-after-restoration.jpg>

10. (below) A depiction of triumphant death (and love?), parchment drawing, 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, Graphiksammlung "Mensch und Tod" der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf,

[http://www.lamortdanslart.com/triomphe/triomphe\\_inconnu.jpg](http://www.lamortdanslart.com/triomphe/triomphe_inconnu.jpg)



## 2 Love and Death in England

The discourse of love as “sickness unto death” would not get to England just by way of the Italian sonnet tradition, but also through the Ovidian revival in the High Middle Ages. The *Ovide Moralisé* in particular reached two prominent English authors Gower and Chaucer of their time: Gower adapted Ovidian themes in his *Confessio Amantis* and Chaucer engaged with Ovid in his *The Legend of Good Women*.<sup>101</sup> The reunion of love and death would thus reach England ahead of time before the new tradition departed from Italy. With the advent of the printing press in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the sonnet soon turned from a regional peculiarity into a *world* sensation.<sup>102</sup> Petrarch’s sonnets in particular served as template for emulation at that time, providing a gold mine of expression for aspiring poets all over Christendom, as evidenced by Sir Philip Sidney’s later critique of the trend, which was ironically also a part of his own sonnet sequence: “You that poore Petrarch’s long deceased woes, / With new-borne sighes and denisend wit do sing, / You take wrong waies” (Sonnet 15, 7-8). Petrarch was introduced to England through the collective effort of two translators and imitators – Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey<sup>103</sup> – but not unchanged.

### 2.1 Pioneers

The formal adventures of the English sonnet are familiar to all students of literature, the changes the duo of translators implemented to accommodate the Italian verse-form to the English language, the reinvented rhyme scheme, the notorious final couplet etc. The changes to Petrarch’s content and themes, on the other hand, are much less explored. Having endured a number of metamorphoses already since *re-emerging* from antiquity, Amor goes through some more additional transformations in his English adventure.

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<sup>101</sup> Lyne, Raphael, “Love and exile after Ovid”, 288.

<sup>102</sup> William J. Kennedy, “European Beginnings and Transmissions: Dante, Petrarch and the Sonnet Sequence”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*. ed. A. D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84.

<sup>103</sup> Kennedy, 101.

### 2.1.1 Thomas Wyatt

As Patricia Thomson rightly observed, Wyatt is “the key figure in the history of this first phase of English Petrarchianism”.<sup>104</sup> While his friend Surrey translated only five of Petrarch’s sonnets, Wyatt translated or in some way imitated around twenty-five in total.<sup>105</sup> Through him, the prominent ideas of the Italian sonneteers about love and death were presented to the English audience. Some of his adaptations are very faithful to the originals in content. Comparing his translation of Petrarch’s sonnet 224 with a modern translation by A. S. Kline, the reader will see that the idea of love as “sickness unto death” comes through quite well:

Yf amours faith, an hert vnfayned,  
A swete languor, a great lovely desire,  
Yf honest will kyndelled in gentill fiere,  
Yf long error in a blynde maze chayned,  
Yf in my visage eche thought depaynted  
Or els in my sperklyng voyse lower or higher  
Which now fere, nowe shame, woefully doth tyer,  
Yf a pale colour which love hath stayned,  
Yf to have an othre than my selff more dere,  
If wailing or sighting continually,  
With sorrowful anger feding bissely,  
Yf burning a farr of and fresing nere  
Ar cause that by love my selff I destroye,  
Yours is the fault and myn the great annoye.  
(Wyatt)<sup>106</sup>

If loving faith, an undeceiving heart,  
sweet yearning, and courteous desire:  
if chaste wishes burning in a noble fire,  
long wandering in the blind labyrinth:  
if a brow that pictures every thought,  
or a voice broken by the pain within,  
or troubled by fear or by shame:  
if a loving pallor tinged with purple:  
if holding something dearer than oneself:  
if sighing and weeping every day,  
fed by grief, by anger and distress:  
if burning from afar, and freezing near,  
are the reasons why love makes me ill,  
mine is the hurt lady, and yours the guilt.  
(Kline, sonnet 224, 1-14.)

Both versions are almost identical, providing a “medical” overview of all the symptoms of the illness. The only difference is that Wyatt puts more stress on the fatal/deadly effect of the disease, “Ar cause that by love my self I destroye”, here muted in Petrarch, “are the reasons why love makes ill”, but elsewhere equally present as demonstrated above. This shows Wyatt’s strong familiarity with Petrarch’s corpus, connecting the isolated piece into the wider context.

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<sup>104</sup> Patricia Thomson, “The First English Petrarchans”, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1959): 86. Jstor, doi:10.2307/3816316.86

<sup>105</sup> Thomson, 86.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Wyatt, “From the Egerton Ms”, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Kenneth Kur (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), sonnet “Yf amours faith”, lines 1-14. All future references to sonnet and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

At other times, however, he considerably deviates from the original. Compare an excerpt from his translation of sonnet 82 with a modern rendition of the same passage:

But of hating myself that date is past And teeres continuell sore have me wried. I will not yet in my grave be buried; Nor on my tombe your name yfixed fast, As cruell cause that did the sperit soon hast Ffrom th'unhappy bonys by great sighes sterred. (Wyatt, sonnet "Was I never", 3-8)	but hatred of myself has reached its end, and I am weary of continual weeping: and I'd rather have a plain stone sepulchre, than your name be written as author of my hurt, on some marble: where my body's laid without my spirit, that might still remain with you. (Kline, sonnet 82, 3-8)
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Not only does the attitude towards the lady change markedly, but also the prospect of death is significantly altered here: while Petrarch is somewhat docile about his fate, expecting to be released from his suffering by death, Wyatt refuses to succumb to the illness and instead strives to liberate himself from the affliction on his own. This subtle but significant change could be for a simple reason: in both versions, love is still thought of as the "sickness unto death", in both, the great sighs and grief eventually chase the spirit out of the body, but what is lost from the original in the translation is the idea of a *mystical* union with the lady after death, the spirit still lingering around the lady. While Petrarch structures love as mortal disease on this Augustinian understanding of death as "splitter of body and soul" – whenever he departs in his thoughts to the beloved, he is already leaving his body *behind* – this overarching theme is lost to Wyatt, it does not carry over from this sonnet unto others, he uses it only to signify literal death. This can be further illustrated on Wyatt's translation of sonnet 134:

That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison And holdeth me not, yet can I scape nowise; Nor letteth me lyve, nor dye at my devise, And yet of deth it gyveth me occasion. (Wyatt, "I fynde no peace", 5-8)	One imprisons me, who neither frees nor jails me, nor keeps me to herself nor slips the noose: and Love does not destroy me, and does not loose me, wishes me not to live, but does not remove my bar. (Kline, sonnet 134, 4-7)
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Both sonnets use paradoxical terms to describe the affliction of the lover, but to different ends: Petrarch's "wishes me not to live, but does not remove my bar" constructs his Augustinian soul-*schism* as a complex displacement between life and death, whereas Wyatt's "Nor letteth me live, nor die at my devise / And yet of death it giveth me occasion" is concerned less with

metaphysics and more with loss of personal liberty, not being able to die on his own terms – instead of being torn between life and death, the speaker is thus still alive though already hastened to death by the cruelty of his mistress. Given his demonstrated knowledge of Petrarch’s corpus, this suggests a deliberate deviation from the original: translating Petrarch’s love poetics into a more condensed experience, omitting the complex metaphysics in favour of a more earth-bound experience. It as if Wyatt was returning back to Ovid: preferring a conception of the disease as curable, instead of it heralding certain death. It would thus seem there was a certain interplay between the two currents that influenced the English tradition – the Ovidian revival and the later Renaissance development. Yet, still the poet would not consider the prescriptions from *Remedia Amoris*, putting his hopes solely on the mistress. In this form, Petrarch became known to England.

His work would not command attention outside of the closed spaces of the court until it was published years after his death in Richard Tottel’s multi-authored *Songs and Sonnets* of 1557.<sup>107</sup> Only then would his poems make their influence on the young Sir Philip Sidney, whose writing would finally “kick off” the vogue for sonnet writing in England through the 1590s.<sup>108</sup>

### 2.1.2 Sir Philip Sidney

Sidney takes up the mantel of Wyatt and Surrey in introducing Petrarchan style and themes to Elizabethan England. In 1582, he authored the first original full sonnet sequence in English – *Astrophil and Stella*.<sup>109</sup> With Sidney, the discourse of love as sickness is not so prominent: he only mentions it here and there, for example in “As who by being poisond doth poison know” (Sonnet 16, 14) or when he states at one point somewhat ironically that his motivations to write about his condition is to investigate it: ““Art not asham’d to publish thy disease’? / Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare” (Sonnet 34, 5-6). A much more prominent

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<sup>107</sup> Kennedy, “European Beginnings and Transmissions”, 102.

<sup>108</sup> Kennedy, “European Beginnings and Transmissions”, 102.

<sup>109</sup> Kennedy, “European Beginnings and Transmissions”, 102.

theme, through which the *lethality* of the lover's condition is communicated, is the image of the mortal wound:

Flie, fly, my friends, I have my death wound; fly!  
See there that boy, that murthring boy I say,  
Who like a theefe, hid in darke bush doth ly,  
Till bloudie bullet get him wrongfull pray  
(Sonnet 20, 1-4)

Just consider the very first line – the way the speaker encourages his compatriots to run for their lives evokes a desperate defeat on the battlefield. Just as the sickness in the previous poets lead to a slow and painful death, so does the mortal wound – just as others have succumbed to the illness, here the speaker succumbs to his injuries, slowly bleeding to death:

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot  
Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed;  
But known worth did in mine of time proceed,  
Till by degrees it had full conquest got:  
I saw and liked, I liked but loved not;  
I lov'd, but straight did not what Love decreed.  
At length to love's decrees I, forc'd, agreed,  
Yet with repining at so partial lot.  
Now even that footstep of lost liberty  
Is gone, and now like slave-born Muscovite  
I call it praise to suffer tyranny;  
And now employ the remnant of my wit  
To make myself believe that all is well,  
While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.  
(Sonnet 2, 1-14)

The gradual spreading of love, intoxicating the body and mind of the lover, is further described in terms of conquest, evoking a hostile army slowly progressing through the homeland. As in Wyatt, it also serves as a replacement of Petrarch's conception of the metaphysical workings of love: instead of being torn between life and death, the speaker is yet alive but already in the process of dying, either from an illness, or a mortal wound. This can be further illustrated on sonnet 48:

Oh look, oh shine, oh let me die and see.  
For though I oft myself of them bemoan,

That though my heart their beamy darts be gone,  
Whose cureless wounds ev'n now most freshly bleed:  
Yet since my death-wound is already got,  
Dear killer, spare not thy sweet cruel shot:  
A kind of grace it is to kill with speed  
(Sonnet 48, 8-14)

Where Petrarch was asking for a release from the terrible soul-schism, Sidney is asking his “dear killer” to show a human side and grant him a quick release instead of the indignity of a slow death. It would seem the association with the human/e death were smoothly transferred on the character of the lady, who, though still deaf to their pleas, was at least not bestial like the death of the Late Middle Ages. Sidney, even more than Wyatt, abandons the model imagery of the Petrarchan soul-schism and sickness unto death, in favour of his own images and ways of describing the affliction. Neither did he pick up Wyatt’s strong resistance to death, but continues to appeal to death as a possible remedy. Both pioneers of Petrarchianism in England thus left very distinct templates.

## 2.2 Successors

Only with Sidney does the vogue for sonnet writing in England really begin. By the time Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser wrote their sonnets it was already to solidify their positions as competent writers. While Shakespeare is greatly concerned with the issues of death and reproduction, evoking more the concerns of ancient Greek treated in the first chapter, he does not contribute significantly to the tradition of associating love with death in his sonnets. Edmund Spenser, on the other hand, represents an interesting response to his two predecessors on this topic.

### 2.2.1 Edmund Spenser

Spenser assembled a sonnet sequence about his marriage to Elizabeth Boyle, *Amoretti* (1594), ostensibly to honour his bride but also partly to assert his professional claims as England’s foremost laureate poet in anticipation of publishing his expanded *Faerie Queene*

(1596). Like the poets before him, he likewise speaks of love's "wanton wings and darts of deadly power"<sup>110</sup>, speaks of love as a "double malady / of my harts wound and of my bides griefe" (Sonnet 50, 1) or elsewhere he says that his life "for her decayse" (Sonnet 38, 10). In his own conception of love as deadly disease, he continues in Wyatt's footsteps:

FAYRE eyes, the myrrour of my mazed hart,  
what wondrous vertue is contaynd in you  
the which both lyfe and death forth from you dart  
into the obiect of your mighty view?  
For, when ye mildly looke with louely hew,  
then is my soule with life and loue inspired:  
but when ye lowre, or looke on me askew  
then doe I die, as one with lightning fyred.  
But since that lyfe is more then death desyred,  
looke euer louely, as becomes you best,  
that your bright beams of my weak eies admyred,  
may kindle liuing fire within my brest.  
Such life should be the honor of your light,  
such death the sad ensample of your might.  
(Sonnet 7, 1-14)

Not being docile like Petrarch in accepting his fate, Spenser here picks up Wyatt's resistance to the disease and his refusal of the metaphysical: for him there is no mystical appeal in death, so, while he is not denying the awesome power his mistress commands, he chastens her for using it on him. In another sonnet, however, he is capable of considering death fortunate:

HOW long shall this lyke dying lyfe endure,  
And know no end of her owne mysery:  
but wast and weare away in termes vnsure,  
twixt feare and hope depending doubtfully.  
Yet better were attonce to let me die,  
and shew the last ensample of your pride:  
then to torment me thus with cruelty,  
to proue your powre, which I too wel haue tride.  
yet if in your hardned brest ye hide,  
a close intent at last to shew me grace:  
then all the woes and wrecks which I abide,  
as meanes of blisse I gladly wil embrace.  
And wish that more and greater they might be,

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<sup>110</sup> Edmund Spenser, "Amoretti", *Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences*, ed. Herbert Graces (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970), sonnet 4, lines 8. All future references to sonnet and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

that greater meede at last may turne to mee.  
(Sonnet 25, 1-14)

But instead of imitating the Petrarchan discourse, it returns to the more simple appeal to death's history of helping the sick and easing their suffering. Only the association with the human/e death are here smoothly transferred on the character of the lady, who, though still deaf to his pleas, was at least not bestial like the death from the Late Middle Ages. Spenser thus continues some of the developments begun by his predecessors, while continuing to enhance the tradition in his own way.

### 2.2.2 Michael Drayton

Michael Drayton makes yet another significant departure from the poets discussed above. Though he continues the discourse of love as a mortal disease, he stresses more the mental aspect of love's suffering:

AN evil spirit, your beauty haunts me still,  
Wherewith, alas, I have been long possest,  
Which ceaseth not to tempt me to each ill,  
Nor gives me once but one poor minute's rest ;  
In me it speaks, whether I sleep or wake,  
And when by means to drive it out I try,  
With greater torments then it me doth take,  
And tortures me in most extremity ;  
Before my face it lays down my despairs,  
And hastes me on unto a sudden death,  
Now tempting me to drown myself in tears,  
And then in sighing to give up my breath.  
Thus am I still provoked to every evil  
By this good wicked spirit, sweet angel-devil<sup>111</sup>

It is still the good old "sickness unto death" with all the sighing and wailing, but this time the physical symptoms seem of less interest to the poet as opposed to the mental manifestations of the illness – although love seems more clearly delimited as a psychic affliction as opposed to the psychosomatic and metaphysical models of the previous poets.

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<sup>111</sup> Michael Drayton, "Idea", *Daniel's Delia and Drayton's Idea*, ed. Arundell Esdaile (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), sonnet 20, lines 1-14. All future references to sonnet and line will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

His description of love's madness extends well even to the typical behaviour of the lover-poet in other sonnets:

WHY do I speak of joy, or write of love,  
When my heart is the very den of horror,  
And in my soul the pains of Hell I prove,  
With all his torments and infernal terror ?  
What should I say ? What yet remains to do ?  
My brain is dry with weeping all too long,  
My sighs be spent in uttering of my woe,  
And I want words wherewith to tell my wrong ;  
But, still distracted in Love's lunacy,  
And, bedlam-like, thus raging in my grief,  
Now rail upon her hair, then on her eye,  
Now call her Goddess, then I call her thief,  
Now I deny her, then I do confess her,  
Now do I curse her, then again I bless her.  
(Sonnet 41, 1-14)

The whole discourse of the sonnet, of exalting the lady, then reproaching her, even the act of writing the sonnets is here conceptualized as part of the lunacy: finally connecting the tradition of sonnet writing with the disease itself. And as final act of resistance to sonnet conventions, death is here for the first time not conceptualized as a pleasant/desirable release from the affliction:

TRUCE, gentle Love, a parley now I crave,  
Methinks 'tis long since first these wars begun ;  
Nor thou nor I the better yet can have ;  
Bad is the match where neither party won.  
I offer free conditions of fair peace,  
My heart for hostage that it shall remain ;  
Discharge our forces, here let malice cease,  
So for my pledge thou give me pledge again.  
Or if no thing but death will serve thy turn,  
Still thirsting for subversion of my state,  
Do what thou canst, rase, massacre and burn,  
Let the world see the utmost of thy hate ;  
I send defiance, since, if overthrown,  
Thou vanquishing, the conquest is my own.  
(Sonnet 63, 1-14)

The other poets have always constructed their disease or wounds as so unbearable that it would be a great service to grant them a merciful death, but not so Drayton. Here only Love and Death finally evoke Renaissance tradition where death share their spoils: where death is not an accidental effect of love's power, but the *driving* force behind it.

### 2.2.3 Samuel Daniel

Samuel Daniel carries on a number of things from Drayton, especially in his affiliation to the later Renaissance tradition. He continues the discourse of love as disease in his poem, maintaining that "Love is a sickness full of woes / All remedies refusing", but like Drayton he likewise insists that "Love is a torment of the mind". What he brings back from Petrarch is the dynamic of a soul-schism, metaphysical/ontological displacement:

Whilst youth and error led my wandring minde,  
And set my thoughts in heedeles waies to range:  
All vnawares a Goddess chaste I finde,  
Diana-like, to worke my suddaine change.  
For her no sooner had my view bewrayd,  
But with disdain to see me in that place:  
With fairest hand, the [sweete] vnkindest maide,  
Castes water-cold disdain vpon my face.  
Which turn'd my sport into a Harts dispaire,  
Which still is chac'd, whilst I have any breath,  
By mine owne thoughts: set on me by my faire,  
My thoughts like houndes, pursue me to my death.  
Those that I fostred of mine owne accord,  
Are made by her to murder thus their Lord.<sup>112</sup>

Acteon's transformations serves here to describe a sort of death: death of identity, loss of human form, of inner humanity, resulting in a displacement from the world of men. And yet also a prelude to literal death when Acteon is killed by his own hunting dogs – here his "thoughts like houndes" pursue him to death. Here the motif of the hunt is thus wonderfully restored: love as an emotion again takes on the role of the hunting dog of death.

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<sup>112</sup> Samuel Daniel, "Delia", *Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences*, ed. Herbert Grabes (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970), sonnet 5, lines 1-14.

Like in Petrarch, the displacement occurs on the level of one's entire body: while Petrarch's speaker was displaced in the Platonic duality of soul and body, here the speaker is estranged from his nature and from his own thoughts. In sonnet 20, he is pleading with death to catch up with his hunt dogs, finally finish the hunt and spare him suffering:

Come death the Anchor-holde of all my thoughtes,  
My last Resort whereto my soule appealeth;  
For all too long on earth my fancy dotes,  
Whilst my best blood my younge desi[er]s sealet.  
That hart is now the pospectiue of horror,  
That honored hath the cruelst faire that lyueth:  
The cruelst faire, that sees I languish for her,  
Yet neuer mercy to my merit giueth.

Though Daniel said above that love is a woe all remedies refusing, here death is certainly thought of as a possible alternative and release – in this he is more in line with the previous poets than with Drayton. If his lady (love) won't give him mercy, *another lady* (death) might. Yet, as with all the previous poets both mistress are too wild to answer his pleas. The later Renaissance tradition of love thus fully returns to the English discourse with Samuel Daniel: restoring the hunting motif with the image of Amor as the hunting dog and death as the human/e hunter together with the new union between love and death, where death is the dominant force behind love.

While Petrarch was thus immensely popular in the Renaissance, his Augustinian model of the love-disease and the later Renaissance developments he preserved were not initially received well in the English Renaissance. Poets like Wyatt and Sidney, often deliberately diverged from the model, either innovating further or returning to older models. With the later guard of the English poets the developments were even more varied: while Spenser continued in the developments from his predecessors, others like Drayton or Daniel were engaged in gradual reclaiming of the later Renaissance tradition of love and death. Only with Daniel, however, did the hunting motif fully return, reintroducing the new relationship between love

and death: the one where death is not an accidental effect of love's power, but where death is the dominant force behind love.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore the motif of Eros in relation to the concept of death in English Renaissance poetry, tracing the ways the imagery and conceptual associations of Eros and Thanatos changed and transformed once *uprooted* from their spatial and temporal environment of Greco-Roman antiquity, and then *replanted* in the somewhat hostile conditions of Christian monotheism, with its rigid sexual mores, opposition to pagan conceptions of death and afterlife etc. The focus was mostly on literature, namely the sonnet tradition, but evidence from visual arts was also considered. The hypothesis was that the relation of Eros and Thanatos would undergo systematic transformations with the changing cultural environment: first, in the transition from Greek to the Roman era; then from antiquity to the Renaissance; and ultimately to the Elizabethan era.

The first chapter established the cultural context of Eros and Thanatos in Greek antiquity and the subsequent developments in Greek poetry. It was shown that the original relationship between Eros and Thanatos was one of functional analogy: love and death were united through the analogy with sweetness of sleep. Then it was demonstrated how this tradition was mediated in the works of Ovid in the Roman era. The Greek concept of functional analogy between Eros and Thanatos was, however, ultimately lost to Ovid. He instead handed down a new union between love and death to the Renaissance: of cause and effect, of love as sickness unto death.

The second chapter was dealing with issues of transmission and transformation of this newer tradition, exploring the changing attitudes to both love and death in the Christian era, when the union between love and death was suppressed. It was established that the tradition changed significantly before the Renaissance and that the Renaissance did not represent a radical departure from the preceding ages; rather that it was the culmination of the developments that preceded it. When the union between love and death was renewed, however, it did not return in its pure Ovidian form. This was demonstrated on Renaissance visual art and

the Sonnet tradition, where the formula of love as sickness unto death was modified in accordance with the idea of death's supremacy over love: death was no longer an accidental effect of love's power, but the *driving* force behind it.

The third chapter treated the English reception of this tradition. It was shown that although popular, the tradition as articulated by Petrarch was not received well by the Elizabethan era. Poets like Wyatt and Sidney, often deliberately diverged from the model, either innovating further or returning to older models. Only later would the responses be more welcoming: while Spenser would still continue in the developments set out by his predecessors, others like Drayton or Daniel were engaged in the gradual reclaiming of the later Renaissance tradition of love and death. Only with Daniel, however, did the Petrarchan model fully return, reintroducing the new Renaissance relationship between love and death: the one where death is not an accidental effect of love's power, but where death is the dominant force behind love. The ancient models, though, partially revived in some isolated examples, were not that successful, however.

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