# II. Classical-Medieval

# 6

# *Vulcan Cuckolded by Mars:*
## *Archetypal Adultery and Its Subsequent Undercurrents*

In Book Eight of the *Odyssey* we experience a meta-recitation, in which appears the Homer-like blind minstrel (*aoidos*), Demodokos. The themes of his song are "war and love," and among the audience we find Odysseus, currently an anonymous guest at the palace of King Alkinoos. The war sung of in this situation of meta-recitation is the Trojan war, still fresh in their memory and inducing tears from Odysseus, among others. It is veritably a miniature epic; the *Iliad* writ small. Love, the other theme Demodokos sings of, on the other hand, has nothing remotely to do with the whole epic milieu. It is a love affair of an illicit kind, an adultery of gods: Mars and Venus, discovered while they are between the sheets together by Vulcan, Venus's cuckolded husband. Listening to the story, Odysseus, we are told, "found sweet pleasure in the tale." [1] How and why he finds it sweet is a question we had better leave open for now, but there is no question about its being a sweet piece of work. The whole passage (266–366), as in the case of "the Shield of Achilles" (Book Eighteen of the *Iliad*) has a formal unity, and is even detachable as a work in its own right. [2] And indeed in the subsequent history of Western literature this episode of divine adultery, *Ur*-soap opera, if you like, has been transmitted and interpreted as if it were an autonomous piece of work; there are innumerable modifications and each of them assumes its autonomy. [3] As we shall see, Cicero, Virgil, and Ovid all deal with it in their

1. All quotations from Homer (both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*,), are from R. Fitzgerald's translation.
2. Homer scholarship long assumed that the whole piece was a later interpolation (cf. Delcourt 9, 76–84). For an important refutation of this view, see Burkert.

own several ways, thus paving the way for various pathways of transmission in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in various forms, ranging from adaptation, commentary and moralization to mythological compilation. Transmission, of course, is, always at the mercy of historical contingency, and in the case of our tale historical as well as cultural contingency has apparently been exceptionally favorable, with the result that in due course—no one knows specifically when—something approaching an invariable structure or type has presumably emerged and at the same time registered itself in the liminality of sub-consciousness. As an established archetype structure it is to survive the Renaissance, the last epoch of explicity mythological discourse, and can be shown to be detectable even in some modern writing; e.g., Zola's *L'Assommoir* and, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. [4] On the former instance here is Michel Serres at his typical best:

> the character Gervaise in *L'Assommoir* limps: Here is the figure of the hereditary flaw (*tare*), the word *tare* meaning, in the first place, an imbalance. But, in addition, her husband, a roofer, falls from a roof and begins to limp just as she does. Gervaise has fallen to the lower classes, to the Goutte d'Or slum. She is friendly with a blacksmith, Gueule d'Or; she is the mother of Nana Mouche d'Or, whose career begins when she plays the part of a blond Venus in a Parisian theatre. Thus, by following the trace of the golden legend, one can reconstitute the affair of Vulcan, whose lair is precisely reconstituted on stage. Gervaise limps because of her flaw (*tare*); she is lame because of her fall… And it is mythology that reveals why the lame woman becomes a laundress through an original fault, flaw or fall, filth or crack, that must be washed away or sewn together, that she fails to whiten or mend. (Serres 41)

Here the figure and function of Vulcan is disseminated among the roles

3. Perhaps one of the earliest instances of this transmission is Plato's *Republic* (390), where ironically the myth is used to exemplify material which is unsuitable for the moral education of the young. For the medieval transmission of the myth in general, see Wood (108–41). Seznec, a classic in this genre, is surprisingly taciturn in this respect, referring to it but once (172).
4. See Hintz & Teunisse, "War, Love, and Industrialism: the Ares/Aphrodite/Hephaistus Complex in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*."



of wife, and adulterer,. and that of Venus, is similarly dispersed in mother and daughter. Distortion is evident and (*pace* Serres) one can hardly reconstruct with any precision an affair of Vulcan in its narrative details. And yet, it must be emphasised that one can never deny the relevance in its essentials of Serres' reading, which, eloquently reveals the traces of the "registered structure" as it is worked out in a novel written as late as the nineteenth century. Obviously, such subtle and complicated modification is characteristic of modern times, when mythology and mythopoesis have inevitably gone underground. But such modification is not a monopoly of the post-Renaissance era, either; something similar, as I will argue, was actually practised in the late Middle Ages in such forms as allegorical mythopoesis.

Odysseus, listening to Demodokos's song of divine adultery, as mentioned above, "found sweet pleasure" in it. "Sweet pleasure (*hesis*)" may be a felicitous expression indeed, to describe a soap-operatic episode, whose light and easy vein marks a sharp contrast to the serious and engrossing epic Demodokos recites on the same occasion. But at the same time, the unconcerned easiness of "sweet pleasure" is also a measure of the moral and narrative ambiguity inherent in the story. The very fact of adultery is succinctly presented at the outset; "how hidden in Hephaistos' house they played at love together, and the gifts of Ares dishonoring Hephaistos' bed." It is perhaps one of those rare universal truths that for the act of adultery, be it divine or human, the place of assignation does matter more than anything else, and it was in the marriage bed of Venus that it took place. This clandestine pleasure, however, was destined to be discovered sooner or later as the all-seeing Sun (Helios), we are told, bore witness to the deed. The complicity of Mars and Venus in the act of adultery is emphasised: Mars was expectantly on the lookout for Vulcan's leaving home, and upon his leaving, Venus in her turn lost no time in inviting Mars to come to her ("Come, and lie down, my darling, and be happy"). But, eventually, as it turned out, they were caught in Vulcan's net and shamefully exposed to the curious eyes of the other Olympian gods. Now, had the tale been concluded at this juncture it would have been one of those moral fables which purport to show that adultery will inevitably be punished with disgrace. It would have been morally simple and straightforward to end with the humiliating capture of the adulterous pair in the net of retributive vengeance. Hephasistos, too,

would then have been in a position to enjoy full sympathy from the Olympian audience when he appealed, "Aphrodite, Zeus's daughter, caught in the act, cheating me, her crippled husband, with Ares—devastating Ares. Clean-limbed beauty is her joy, not these bandy legs I came into the world with." The structure of the narrative, however, does not allow of such moral straightforwardness and simple retributive, poetic justice. It turned out that an irrepressible laughter arose among the Olympian gods gazing at the entrammelled and surprised lovers—laughter which can be interpreted as a scourge of justice. Along with the laughter an insidious view, equally irrepressible, gave itself away in a conversation between Apollo and Hermes. To the former's question as to whether he would accept a coverlet of chain if he could lie by Aphrodite's side, Hermes replied thus: "Wrap me in chains three times the weight of these, come goddesses and gods to see the fun: only let me lie beside the pale-golden one!" This provoked further hilarious laughter among the gods—laughter which can be understood, this time, to act as a virtual nullification of retributive justice. And as if to confirm the amoral nature of this laughter, Poseidon intervened, much to Hephaistos' chagrin, to save Ares from punishment. Unbound and set free, he fled to Thrace while Aphrodite on her part escaped to Paphos, territory sacred to her. Thus does the narrative come to an end, and we are left with a sense of moral uncertainty, if not bewilderment. [5]

One way to adjust the way of the gods to our sense of poetic justice would be to remind ourselves that they are, after all, the Olympian gods, notorious divinities often indulging in adultery and incest. But their familiarity with what are in human terms called unnatural and anti-social love affairs does not necessarily mean a total lack of any sense of transgression and violation, which are, in their turn, brought into being by some form of taboo and contract some first stirrings of order and repression. If the Olympian gods are not immune from acts of adultery and incest, it is probably because the Greek conception of the divine forces was characteristically formed at the level of contradictory desires at work.

5. In Burkert's view this sense of moral ambiguity is a function of Jovian Myth-political centralization, whose grip is taken to be tighter in the world of the *Odyssey* than in that of the *Iliad*. The laughter, not so much an indication of modernity as a remnant of ancient elements (and for us the source of moral ambiguity), plays the important role of safety valve lest the whole narrative of the *Odyssey*, structural or otherwise, be stultified.



These forces, desires, or (to use a pertinent recent formula) "flows" of the libido, [6] could express themselves only in transgression under the equivocal repressive norm, be it psychological, moral, or social. The point, at any event, must be made that the Olympian sense of truth did not repress the reality of divine adultery but supplied it with a suitable form. In the narrative in question we can see the existence of justice in the figure of the Sun, from whom nothing could be concealed, even what had been done and was going on in the hidden quarters of Lemnos, which probably includes the rightful marriage of Vulcan and Venus. And yet (or perhaps accordingly), there must needs lurk "flows of the libido." While there is a sense in which Vulcan's wrath and crafty vengeance are justified, there remains equally, a sense in which the seductive beauty of Venus is so irresistible and spontaneous that what it entails, libidinal flows/flaws and subsequent transgressions, can be considered somehow natural or as much given as the flaw of crippled Vulcan.

We are still far from being able to decide what kind of "sweet pleasure" Odysseus could and should find in this tale. It is highly possible that at the back of his mind there presented itself an image of Penelope overlapping with Venus. But perhaps this whole question is wrong and irrelevant. If he found "sweet pleasure" in the tale, as indeed he did according to Homer, then it would most probably be such a kind of pleasure as the dynamics of desire releases in its working through norm and violation, contract and transgression. It is in this sense that this tale of divine adultery can be called the "*Ur*-soap opera"; unlike the *Ur*-tragedy of incest which is fatally committed with no possibility of redemption, the tragi-comic soap opera of adultery lacks absolute irretrievability, the tragic sense of no return.

The narrative capacity of harbouring "flows of the libido" in norm and transgression and the concomitant moral openness of the tale largely define and anticipate its subsequent development and transformation (where Ovid, among others, is to play an important part). This narra-

6. Deuleuze and Guattari: 5. Cf. "Desire constantly couples continuous Flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the Flows" (loc. cit.).

Behind my strategy in resorting to such an avant-garde conception is the idea that it may be of some use to focus on the myth of the Vulcan/Venus/Mars complex as a substitute for the Oedipus complex, which has unduly been predominant since the end of the last century.

tive and moral multivalence has its origins largely in the ambivalent nature of each character and the relative individual freedom of each god. Thus, Vulcan is characterised by the flaw in his balance (bow legged) as well as by the fire of *ira justa*; Mars by his lapse in the criminal act of adultery but also by his comeliness and manliness; the so-called "two Venuses" (*urania* and *pandemos*) are not implied here but the ambivalence of esthetics and ethics, the denial of "*kalokagathos*," seems to be discernible. No divinity ever takes possession of absolute power. Helios, supposedly representing all-revealing justice, seems to be an exception to this rule, but the subsequent development of the tale indicates that it is after all not the case with him, either. Thus, for example, in the Ovidian treatment of the tale (*Metamorphoses*, IV. 169–89) Venus is going to avenge herself on the Sun (*Sol*) for the disgraceful discovery he has made: she will cause all his subsequent amours to fail. As a consequence, the Sun, a figure of sympathetic justice ("temperat": 169 "indoluit facto": 173), falling prey to Venerial retaliation is left at the mercy of "flows of the libido." Moreover, Ovid goes further in another instance (*Ars Amatoria*, II. 561ff), where the Sun is degraded into the role of a mere officious talebearer; were it not for his detection and tale-bearing, Ovid adds, the adulterous lovers could have kept their deed secret and hence would never have dare to do it openly and shamelessly [as they subsequently did] in the flame of passion stimulated all the more by the very detection (550–60). Here the whole story is construed in the service of an exemplum ("Quam mala, Sol, exempla moves!": 574) that shows the negative and contrary effects detection may entail in the matter of amour. "Flows of the libido" will gain momentum when dammed up in the repression of shame and guilt, whose intensification in open exposure will in its turn bring about an increase in the libidinous flows. This instance of Ovidian moralization marks how far our tale can go as *exemplum* in the direction of a psychology of eros. And, indeed, as such it will be later used and put in the mouth of *La Vieille* (the Old Woman) in the *Roman de la Rose* in defense of unrestrained sensuality and women's "natural" desire for sexual freedom. [7]

Ovid's third reference to the tale in the *Tristia* (II. 295–96) and that of Virgil in the *Aeneid* (VIII. 387) alike testify to the popularity and unflagging importance of this myth; both passages, for their proper interpretation, demand familiarity with it. Ovid refers to it in the course of defending his own work which is being blamed for having depraved women; his defense, typical of his outlook, asserts that "omnia perversas possunt corrumpere mentes" (all things can corrupt perverted minds: 301). And the perverted minds include hers, who looking on Pallas, "will ask why the virgin brought up Erichtonius, the child of sin," and,

> venerit in magni templum, tua munera, Martis,
> stat Venus Ultori iunctua, vir ante fores.
> (if she enters the temple of mighty Mars, thine own [Augustus'] gift,
> [in her perverted imagination] Venus stands united with Mars the
> Avenger, though her husband is at the door.) [8]

The passage calls for some historical explanation as well as knowledge of our myth. The temple mentioned here is the one Augustus dedicated to Mars the Avenger in 2 B.C. after the battle of Philippi. It stood in his own forum and enshrined Mars and Venus, the grouping of which came to acquire a new sense in the reign of Augustus as he tried to unite the austere cult of Venus—which was typical of Rome and distinct from the usual erotic cult—with that of Mars, an ancient national tutelary god. Thus, the pairing of Venus and Mars here has nothing whatsoever to do with the myth of their escapade and ought not to be associated even remotely with it, as happens in the perverted mind of Ovid's woman. There was actually no statue of Vulcan at the temple doors; "vir ante fores" (296) is a fabrication of the traditionally-moulded, if perverted, imagination.

As the Augustan sublimation of the Mars-Venus complex indicates, Venus as a specifically Roman deity (as the author of *La Religion Romaine de Vénus* tells us) was distinguished by her "*tenue* (continence)." Also characterised in this way, it is argued, was Virgil's Venus:

> pas d'allusion à 1'adultère d'Aphrodite avec Ares, sur lequel s'étend complaisemment Homère… Si Venus reste une déesse de l'amour, cet aspect

7. For this kind of "naturalism" in late medieval literature, see Scaglione, esp. pp. 101ff.

8. Translation mine. The translation of the Loeb edition reads: "If she…, Venus stands close to the Avenger, in the guise of a man before the door," which obviously fails to take into consideration the necessary mythological background and is hence patently wrong.

> devient secondaire chez Virgile. En tant que déesse de l'amour,…Venus inspire le plus légitime des désirs à son mari Vulcain… afin d'obtenir des armes pour son fils. (Schilling 363)

The last reference is to the *Aeneid*, VIII. 370sq., where Venus, coming to their "golden wedding chamber (thalamoque… coniugis aureo)" (372), asks her husband to make arms associated with Mars, whom she reveres ["sanctum mihi numen arma" : 382–83]

> niveis hinc atque hinc diva lacertis
> cunctantem amplexu molli fovet. ille repente
> accepit solitam flammam, notusque medullas
> intravit calor et labefacta per ossa curusco
> ignea rima micans percurrit lumine nimbos.
> sensit laeta dolis et formae conscia coniunx. (387–93)
> (and, as he falters, [she] throws her snowy arms round about him and fondles him in her soft embrace. At once he caught the wonted flame; the familiar warmth passed into his marrow and ran through his melting frame: even as when at times, bursting amid the thunder's peal, a sparkling streak of fire courses through the storm-clouds with dazzling light. His consort knew it, rejoicing in her wiles and conscious of her beauty.)

Is it conceivable, with due respect to Schilling's invaluable work, that Venus is here inspiring Vulcan with the most legitimate desire? Plainly not. The goddess sensed the wonted flame catching in Vulcan, and rejoiced in her wiles. Boldly enough, her wiles contain an implilcit reference to Mars ("sanctum mihi numen arma"). Since Aeneas was an offspring of Venus' extramarital affairs, Vulcan naturally had every reason to hesitate ("cunctantem") at his wife's "impudent (impudicus)" request. And "impudent" is a word borrowed from Servius, one of the most authoritative Virgilian exegetes in the Middle Ages. For Servius, there is an obvious question "which arises from Venus' impudent petition (quae nascitur ex petitione Veneris impudica)," i.e., how could Venus possibly make such an outrageous petition as having arms made for her son, who was born as a result of adultery ("petitura pro filio de adulterio procreato")? It was so unabashedly and flagrantly impudent that she needed "longum proemium." But at the same time she was conscious of her beauty and confident of her success.



> Deinde quod nact est occasionem eius temporis quo Marti arma faciebat, quem fuisse sciebat adulterum; per quod datur intelligi Vulcanum iam omnem suspitionem & iram, quam habuit circa Venerem, deposuisse, adeo vt arma etiam ipsi fabricaret adultero. Praeterea Vulcanum vxorium fuisse testatur & ipse Virgilius dicens, "Tunc pater eterno fatur deuinctus amore." (Servius 255)
> (Then she obtained the opportunity for the time, in which Vulcan should fabricate arms for Mars, though he knew him to be her lover; from this we are given to understand that Vulcan has overcome the distrust and wrath he had harboured toward her to such an extent that he could fabricate arms even for the adulterer. Furthermore, Vulcan's uxorious character is revealed when Virgil says, "Then he speaks, chained to her by never-changing love." [trans. mine]).

Adultery is the significant, if not obvious, element in the passage in question. If Vulcan accepted Venus' solicitation, "chained to to her by never-changing love," it is not because he was inspired with the legitimate ("legitime") love of holy matrimony but because he was, as Servius rightly points out, an incorrigibly and hopelessly devoted ("uxorius") husband.

Vulcan is not only a hopelessly devoted husband, irredeemably attached to the fiery "flows of the libido," but also a maker of "the shield of Aeneas," a prophetic artist. On the shield is described the providential panorama of the whole future history of Rome, which culminates in the *pax Augustanea*. Vulcan, we are told (*Aeneid*, VIII, 627), is not unskilled in prophecy and can foretell the times to come ("haud uatum ignarus uenturique inscius aeui"). Unable as he is to do away with the "flows of the libido," he is at the same time conversant and concerned with the principle of "order" that constitutes history. And it is this duality of his character, (flows and order) that the simile of the Jovian lighting purports to convey while describing the libidinal re-awakening in Vulcan of "the wonted flame (solitam flamam)" (389) of love. The lighting ("fulmen") Vulcan fabricated for Jove stands for the power of Jovian rule and can be taken as symbol of authoritative and normative power, another

aspect of *ira justa*. And it is precisely in this fulminating capacity, Virgil tells us, that the libidinous urge runs through the whole frame of Vulcan, even to the marrow. This characteristic ambivalence of flow and norm seems to be closely bound up with Vulcan himself and the Vulcan-figure. If we can adduce Serres' reading of Zola (quoted above) as a modern instance of this Vulcanian duality, for an ancient instance we can turn, by the same token, to Vico's reading of the Homeric "Shield of Achilles," the prototype of "the Shield of Aeneas." Vico invites us to regard it as a self-expression of the Vulcanian duality, which is represented in the descriptive juxtaposition on the shield of two cities, "the city of the nuptials" and "the city without the nuptials." In this juxtaposition of norm and flow Vico apparently read the origins of World History. [9]

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Broadly speaking, there were six lines of descent through which our myth, the triangular love affairs of Venus, Vulcan and Mars, was transmitted in the Middle Ages: (1) commentaries on and adaptation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, (2) those on/of Ovid's *metamorphoses*, (3) commentaries on Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, (4) astrological treatises, (5) iconographies, and (6) mythographies. Let me begin with the last-mentioned mythographical tradition since a typical case seems to provide us with an axis along which we can articulate other lines of descent. Mythographies, needless to say, are structurally eclectic and logically full of contradictions. Thus, sometimes our tale is used to serve only as a prologue to the story of Venus's revenge at large, and sometimes employed in its own right, exemplifying the moral corruption of virtue by lust. But, there is remarkable consistency in many of these examples. The mythographical tradition so formed is said to have survived up until the Renaissance. A typical example:

> Venus Vulcano in primis nupsit. Poatea perpetuum habens cum Marte adulterium. Sol tale scelus detexit; et Vulcanus illis conjacentibus superveniens, lectum catenis circumcinxit… Venus cum Marte rem habuit, quam Sol manifestens, Vulcano prodidit. Nam virtus, corrupta libidine, sole teste apparet, et turpiter catenata fervoris constriction tenetur. (Bode 84–85)
>
> (Venus first married Vulcan. Later as she was habitually commiting adultery with Mars, the Sun revealed the wicked deed; and Vulcan surrounded the bed with chains and surprised them while they lay together… Venus committed adultery with Mars, and the all-seeing. Sun disclosed the deed to Vulcan. Indeed, virtue, corrupted by inordinate desire, is discovered in the open testimony of the sun and is captured shamefully in the fetters of fury. [trans. mine])

9. See *The New Science*, Book II, 681. Cf. also Tanner: 58ff.



The quotation is from the so-called "Vatican mythographer" and the "moralization" which is to be taken from the tale is something like the impossibility of concealing the corruption by inordinate desire (Venus) of essential virtue (Mars), and the inevitability of its shameful disclosure at the hand of just rage (Vulcan's net/chain). This moralization, according to Robert Miller, made its presence felt "without substantial discrepancy from Fulgentius (c. 500) to George Sandys (1640)" to form a continuity of tradition, which includes several glossators on Ovid, Boccaccio and Natalis Comes as well as the Vatican mythographer (Miller 472). Within this homogeneous tradition, however, distinction can be made regarding the degree of emphasis placed on the moral lessons to be learned. Thus there are, on the one hand, those who stress the extent of corruption of an inner virtue by inordinate desire more than its disclosure by *ira justa*, while there are, on the other hand, those who prefer to emphasise the disclosure in the net/chains as just revenge. The difference adds up to one of interpretation; actually, it is more or less dependent on how we make out the passage quoted above, especially the final sentence—"turpiter catenata fervoris constrictione tenetur" The line is, in fact, a borrowing from Fulgentius (*Mithologiarum*, II. vii). Now "fervoris constrictione" can be read either as "by the fetters of libidinous passion" or as "in the binding net of retributive rage." Those who emphasise the corruption of virtue by lust tend to interpret the line as "shamefully held in the fetters of libidinous passion," reading it as a confirmation of "corrupta libidine." Thus Pierre Bersuire (Petrus Berchorius), for example, says in his "interpretative moralization" of the *Metamorphoses* that the tale can be employed in reproof of those who indulge in bad amorous desire and in the fetters of bad habit. [transl. mine]

(potest allegari contra eos qui malo amore se diligunt et cathena male consuetudinis.)

On the other hand, those who would rather stress retributive justice see in "fervoris constriction" the net of revengeful Vulcan. Natalis Comes, for example, says in his *Mythologiae*,

> Vulcanus ligauit Martem ac Venerem in rete nempe claudus celerem, & inualidus fortissimum bellorum Deum: quia nullae vires iniquum hominem possunt a iusta vindicta Dei protegere. Quare per haec etiam himines hortabantur ad integritatem & ad innocentiam, & ab omnni turpitudine reuocabant. [10]
> (Vulcan bound Mars and Venus in a net, obviously the crippled and impotent bound the quick and supremely powerful god of war: because nothing can be poweful enough to protect an unjust man from the just retribution of God… [trans. mine]).

This difference of emphasis is crucial to our discussion, because it determines the status, and even the existence or non-existence, of the figure of Vulcan in moralizations of the tale. While in one reading his presence is realised as "*iusta vindicta Dei*," in another reading Vulcan may remain submerged in the "fervor concupiscentiae" and "depraving 'libido' of Venus." Once again, one encounters the duality of Vulcan: This duality of Vulcan, together with the depraving and "fallen" libido of Venus, can be found, albeit potentially, in the two divinities appearing in Martianus Capella's *De1 nupiti Philologiae et Mercurii*. It was with some felicity that these potential functions were to be unfolded as such in the later commentaries devoted to the *De nuptiis*. In the passage in question are described the gifts which Psyche, the human soul, receives from Vulcan and Venus:

> Lemnius quoque faber illi insopibiles perennitatis igniculos, necaligantibus tenebris nocteque caeca opprime retur, encendit. Omnes uero inlecebras circa sensus cunctos apposuit Aphrodite… praeterea ne ullum tempus sine inlecebra oblectamentisque decurreret, pruritui subscalpentem circa ima corporis apposuerat uoluptatem. (4G)
> (The craftsman of Lemnos kindled for her [Psyche] ever-burning flamelets so that she might not be oppressed by gloomy shadows and blind night. Aphrodite had given to all her senses every kind of pleasure… and then, to make sure that she… was never without amusement and delectation, Aphrodite assigned Pleasure to stimulate desire in her by intimate titillation. [Stahl and Jonson 7])

10. Quoted in Miller: 473.



The potential duality of Vulcan can be squeezed out of both the semantic ambivalence of the words, "insopibiles perennitatis igniculos," and the contextual contiguity of Vulcan and Venus. As it turned out, notable commentators skilled in the "squeezing" method, such as Remigius of Auxerre and Bernardus Silvestris, did not fail to detect and appreciate the potential duality. Thus run their commentaries:

> Claudus fingitur quia ignia nunquam rectus sed anfractuosus incedit. Ponitur etiam Vulcanus pro igne obscenae cupiditatis, unde et Veneris fingitur maritus. Et bene LEMNIUS lutosus vocatur quia obscena voluptas prom igne naturalis ingenii accipitur. Ex quo naturali ingenio igniculi quidam INSOPIBILIS id est indeficientis et inextinguibilis, PERENNITATIS accenduntur quibus illuminetur anima ne opprimatur tenebris et caligine ignorantiae. (Remigius 79)
> ([Vulcan] is described as crippled: because the fire never is aflame in a neat and straight manner but always flickers. And Vulcan stands for the obscene fire of cupidity, hence, he is said to be a husband of Venus. He is pertinently called muddy LEMNIUS since filthy desire resides in muddy and unclean minds. But in this instance Vulcan is taken as the fire of innate genius. By this innate genius are kindled the flamelets of ETERNITY, which are UNSLEEPING, i.e., unfailing and inextinguishable. By these flamelets the soul is to be illuminated so that it may not be overwhelmed by the darkness and gloom of ignorance. [trans. mine]),

and

> Dextro pede claudus sinistro sustinetur, quia in consideratione eternorum debilis considerationi temporalium totus innititur. Licentia data

> est ei a love ducendi Pallada, quia naturalem potentiam ha bet a creatore, qua iungatur ei sapientia. Habet enim sibi innatum ingenium, que a est yis naturalis omnia concipiendi: rationem, que naturalis est potentia omnia discernendi; memoriiam, que est vis naturae omnia retinendi. His etsi perfectam scientiam non assequatur, potest tamen assequi … nichil videt set, potentia videndi non caret. (Bernard Silvestris 156)
> (Lame in his right foot he is supported by the left because, hindered in his attempt to consider the eternal, he is wholly devoted to the consideration of temporal things. He was granted by Jove the freedom to claim Pallas, because he possesses from the creator a natural capacity whereby wisdom may be united with him. For he possesses innate ingenuity ["ingenium"], the natural ability to understand all things; reason, the natural ability to distinguish all things; and memory, the natural ability to retain all things. And if he does not pursue perfect knowledge by these means, he is at least capable of doing so... though he sees nothing, he does not lack the capacity for vision.) [11]

A key word in both commentaries is "ingenium," at once the gift of nature ("naturale"; "innatum") and the origin of the animating force of soul, reason and memory. As such the word was not at all new in the commentary tradition of the *De nuptiis*: it had made its previous appearance in John Scotus Eriugena's gloss on the same passage, where Vulcan as "ingenium" was understood to be imparted to all mortals, so that they, thereby "illuminated, would seek after both themselves and God in a relentless quest for truth (illustrari… seipsos et deum assidua veritatis indagine inquirant)" (13). Vulcan as "ingenium" is associated with the "right" (foot), divine illumination and eternal truth, but at the same time his other, diametrically opposite, aspect is equally stressed: i.e., Vulcan as "cupiditas," inseparably bound up and associated with temporality, filth, and a "sinister (left)" flaw. Of this Vulcan no explicit mention was made in the original text of Martianus Capella, but something like the hermeneutic forces of the context, both textual and cultural, eventually came to reveal this aspect of Vulcan. Importantly, the revelation was made in connection with Venus. Remigius thus saw the origins of Vulcan's "obscene fire of cupidity" in his being the husband of Venus; in a similar

11. Translation by Wetherbee ([1972] 116).



vein, Venus' "inlecebrae" (allurements) were glossed as signifying

> omnia vitia quae merito originalils peccati rationali animae ingeruntur. (all the vices that are brought into the rational soul due to original sin.) (79)

Remigius was thus explicit about the connection between Venus' allurements and original sin, but he did not elaborate on the possible connections between this sinful Venus and Vulcan/Mars. The latter task was left to Bernardus Silvestris, who in his gloss on the same passage wrote as follows,

> Sed dicit *omnes illecebras*, et non modo *circa sensus*, sed circa *cunctos sensus*. Unde consonat locus hic illi, quo legis Venerem omnes quinque filias Solis ad illicitum amorem accendisse, quia adulteri eius et Marcis Sol index extitit. Mars enim Veneris complexibus polluitur dum virtus voluptatis illecebris corrumpitur. Testimonio Solis accusantur dum indicio rationis rei coniuncuntur. Vulcanus adamantio neux Martem legat dum ignis concupiscentieinsolubili consuetudine virtutem artat. Quinque filie Solis sunt qinque sensus; famuli rationis, uel filie doctrine dicuntur quia per rationem corriguntur. (Westra 159–160)
> (But Martianus Capella states *allurements*, by which he means not merely the senses but *all and sundry senses*. Hence this passage is consistent with another where Venus is said to have urged all five daughters of the sun to illicit amours because the sun bore witness to her adultery with Mars. Now, Mars is said to be dishonoured by the embrace of Venus in order to illustrate the moral that virtue is corrupted by the allurements of desire. They are accused on the testimony of the sun, to illustrate that they are convicted of adultery on the testimony of reason. Vulcan binds Mars in the adamantine fetters, to illustrate that the fire of concupiscence fetters virtue with the unbreakable bond of habit…[trans. mine])

With no knowledge of the mythographical tradition at hand, where, as we have noted, "fervoris constrictione" (in the fetters of rage/passion)—the meaning of Vulcan's net—could be taken for "the fetters of libidinous desire" as well, this gloss would necessarily seem a palpable distortion of the myth as it originally stood in classical antiquity. Where Vulcan, a

cuckolded and enraged husband, previously captured Mars, the arrant adulterer, in his revengeful net, Vulcan here has come to stand for the Venerial fire of concupiscence, which is characterised by the unbreakable shackles of bad habit, corrupting therewith the virtue that is Mars. This Vulcan, "ignis concupiscentie," succumbing to the "unbreakable shackles of habit" and even conniving at adultery, reminds us of Virgil's Vulcan who, as we remember, catches the "solita flamma (the wonted flame)" in Venus's embrace. But, just as this "wonted flame" is characterised almost in the same breath, by the simile of the Jovian lightenting ("ignea rima micans") as if to suggest Vulcan's dual capacity, even so in Bernard Silvester his "ignis concupiscentie" is to be understood in close conjunction with his "innatum ingenium"; the same holds true of Remigius' "ignis naturalis ingenii." This duality gains importance when it is realised that Vulcan may well symbolize a link between man's potential claim to true vision and his present immersion in original sin. And this precisely was the kind of link that was required by the visionary philosophy of the so-called "Twelfth-Century Renaissance." In this moment the paradigm of redemption seems to have been sought in the restoration of the divinely-ordained natural order, thought to be attainable by redressing "ignis concupiscentie" under the direction of "ignis innati ingeni." Reflecting this spirit of the age,Vulcan, the classical type of the cuckolded husband—the Christian equivalent being Joseph in the medieval mystery plays—came to acquire an aura of cosmic significance. [12]

However, so long as he retains his characteristic duality Vulcan is not likely to have genuinely cosmic significance. For to represent cosmic redemption would require a grand visionary fabrication, —indeed a kind of psychomachy. In such an allegorical universe our dual and ambivalent Vulcan would be shown (in comparison, for example, to the clear-cut case of the "two Venuses") to be insufficiently articulated. In the simple dynamics of reproval of vice and promotion of virtue, demanded by the allegorical design of cosmic redemption, the ambivalence of Vulcan would no doubt be inappropriate. If forced into such a world picture, his characteristic duality would certainly be in danger of disintegration.

And such disintegration actually took place in the twelfth century.

12. For "the twelfth-century Renaissance," see, among others, Wetherbee (1972) and Benson & Constable.



Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae* and Bernardus Silvestris's *Commentary on Virgil's "Aeneid*," probably the representative works of the age each in its own genre, bore witness to this: the Vulcanian duality was differentiated on the axis and analogy of "family" into two oppositional Vulcan figures, the legitimate husband of Venus and the Mars-like lover of Venus. Both relations in their own ways produced their respective offspring, authentic son and depraved bastard, so that there emerged a familial binary opposition: the legitimate, natural and ideal family vs. its antithesis, negation and loss. The latter idea, in fact is as old as Venus' adultery with Mars, and what is spawned out of this liaison, according to Cicero, is "Anteros."

> Tertia Iove nata et Diona, quae nupsit Volcano, sed ex ea et Marte natus Anteros dicitur.
> (The third [Venus] is the daughter of Jupiter and Dione, who wedded Vulcan, but who is said to have been the mother of Anteros by Mars.)
> (*De natura deorum*, III, 59)

Anteros, being definable either as "love returned" or "the avenger of slighted love," is certainly a controversial figure, and as such he actually made his appearance in medieval literature (Merrill). But, Cicero's passage strongly suggests a contrast between Anteros' illegitimacy and the marital legitimacy of Venus-Vulcan, so much so that Eros, the rival figure of Anteros, can be easily construed as the legitimate son of Vucan and Venus. And this Eros or Cupido we find in medieval mythography (the "Vatican Mythographer" II. 35). It may be possible, then, to build a transformative model in which Venus' marriage with Vulcan and her subsequent adultery with Mars are translated into a binary opposition of two family-situations, the legitimate Vulcanian family with Cupid as its heir on the one hand and the illegitimate Martian family with Anteros as its offspring.

Now, using this transformative model, let us suppose that Vulcan and Mars be aligned with the differentiated Vulcanian functions, *ignis ingenii* and *ignis concupiscentiae*. The result would stand us in good stead in appreciating the role our myth is to play in Alan and Bernardus's mytho-allegory. It is their allegorical strategy to restore the legitimate (i.e., as ordained by Natura, God's vicegerent) family relationship, now lost since

the advent of the illegitimate family; but this restoration should be accomplished without extinguishing the vital forces inherent in the illegitimate act. Put differently, they are attempting an allegorical normalization of the "flows of the libido."

In Bernardus Silvestris' explication of the first six books of the *Aeneid*, the two antithetical families are thus introduced as a structural base. One is an ideal family, consisting of Anchises/Venus/Aeneas as husband /wife/their son, the other a degenerate family, comprising Vulcan /Venus/Iocus and Cupid as husband/wife/their children.

> Diversa nomina idem, quod estmultivocatio, veluti Iupiter et Anchises creatorem designat. Ubi ergo invenies Venerem uxorem Vulcani matrem Ioci et Cupidinis, intellige carnis voluptatem, quo naturali calori coniuncta est et iocum et coitum parit. Ubi vero leges Venerem et Anchisem Eneam filium habere, intellige per Venerem mundanam musicam, per Eneam humanam spiritum. (Jones & Jones 10)
> (Diverse names can signify the same thing [which is the definition of multivocation], as when both Jupiter and Anchises designate the Creator. Therefore, whenever you find Venus as wife of Vulcan, mother of Jocus and Cupid, interpret her as pleasure of flesh, which is joined with natural heat and causes pleasure and copulation. But whenever you read that Venus and Anchises have a son Aeneas, interpret this Venus as the harmony of the world and Aeneas as the human soul. [trans. mine])

Exactly in the same way, in which the "two Venuses" are differentiable into heavenly and earthly (in this instance into "the harmony of the world" and "the pleasure of flesh"), our Vulcan is differentiated into Anchises, a figure of "*ignis ingenii*," and the libidinous Vulcan, "*fervoris constrictio*" of mythographical tradition. If seems that Bernardus Silvestris envisaged an allegorical family reunion, which would gain cosmological significance in the whole quest of Aeneas (the human soul)—the quest culminating in his descent into the underworld where he and Anchises meet. In this quest and reunion the depraved forces of the degenerate family are to be purged and sublimated.

Similarly, the principle of reproof of a degenerate family and promotion of the natural ideal can be recognised as a pivotal structure in Alan's *De Planctu Naturae*. The mytho-allegorical families are as follows: what



can be called a pre-adulterous family consists of Venus, Hymenaeus, and Cupido, the other post-adulterous one comprises Venus, Antigenius (or Antigamus), and Jocus. The opening scene finds Natura complaining: her divinely-ordained order, embodied in the form of the family of Venus/Hymenaeus/their son Cupido, is now lost and devastated by the inordinate forces of the post-adulterous family:

> Ymenaeus namque uterine fraternitatis michi affinis confinio, quem excellentioris dignitatis extollit prospia, ex Venere sibi Cupidinem propagauit in filium. Antigamus [Antigenius] uero scurrilis, ignobilitatis genere deriuatus, adulterando adulterinum filium Iocum sibi ioculatorie parentauit. (Häring 849)
> (For Hymen, who is related to me [Natura] by the bond of brotherhood from the same mother, and who has produced a stock of excellent worth, begot to himself from Venus a son Cupid. But Antigamus [Antigenius], scurrilous and descended from a race of ignobiliy, by his adultery [with Venus] has lightly become the father of an illegitimate son, Jocus. [trans. mine].)

The pre-adulterous family, said to be entrusted by Natura (*vicari Dei et mater generationis*) with the maintenance of the sublunary world by the rightful use of procreation, may well invite a comparison with the prelapsarian golden world, and by the same token the post-adulterous family situation to the postlapsarian condition. This representational mode is typical of the so-called "Chartrian Christian humanism," which is distinguished by its "special awareness of a '*continuité ontologique*' between creation and redemption" (Wetherbee [1972] 125). Redemption is seen in terms not of linear providential history but of cosmic (i.e., spatial/harmonious) incarnation, namely, man's restoration to his proper place in the natural God-ordained order. In Alan's allegory such cosmic redemption is guided and accomplished by Genius, who at the request of Natura is going to pronounce a decree of excommunication on those renegades who fail to redeem themselves from the post-adulterous condition. Complex and versatile as he essentially is, [13] Genius here can be considered an authoritative version of the "ignis ingenii" of Vulcan.

13. Cf. Nietzsche.

To gain a survey of the myth of Vulcan/Venus/Mars complex in medieval literature we have yet to cover, at least, the *Roman de la Rose*, Dante, and Chaucer. [14] This task, however, requires another paper for sufficient treatment, and must be postponed until them.

14. Let me note that on these works and authors some studies have been done: on the *Roman de la Rose*, Wetherbee (1971), on Dante, Freccero ; and on Chaucer, Wood and Takada.



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