NAXOS
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POETRY

3
Compact
Discs

William Shakespeare

Venus and Adonis
The Rape of Lucrece

THE COMPLETE TEXT
UNABRIDGED

Read by **Eve Best**, **Clare Corbett**, **David Burke** and cast



CD 1

Venus and Adonis

1	Even as the sun with purple...	5:07
2	Upon this promise did he raise his chin...	5:19
3	By this the love-sick queen began to sweat...	5:00
4	But lo! from forth a copse that neighbours by...	4:56
5	He sees her coming, and begins to glow...	4:32
6	'I know not love,' quoth he, 'nor will know it...'	4:25
7	The night of sorrow now is turn'd to day...	4:13
8	Now quick desire hath caught the yielding prey...	4:06
9	'Thou hadst been gone,' quoth she, 'sweet boy, ere this...'	5:15
10	'Lie quietly, and hear a little more...'	6:02
11	With this he breaketh from the sweet embrace...	3:25
12	This said, she hasteth to a myrtle grove...	5:27
13	Here overcome, as one full of despair...	4:39
14	As falcon to the lure, away she flies...	6:15
15	She looks upon his lips, and they are pale...	4:46

Total time on CD 1: 73:38

CD 2

The Rape of Lucrece

1	From the besieged Ardea all in post...	4:59
2	Now thinks he that her husband's shallow tongue...	5:46
3	Now stole upon the time the dead of night...	5:52
4	Thus, graceless, holds he disputation...	5:08
5	But all these poor forbiddings could not stay him...	3:47
6	O, had they in that darksome prison died...	4:49
7	Imagine her as one in dead of night...	3:56
8	This said, he shakes aloft his Roman blade...	4:37
9	Quoth she, 'Reward not hospitality...'	6:13
10	This said, he sets his foot upon the light...	4:01
11	Even in this thought through the dark night he stealeth...	4:38
12	'O night, thou furnace of foul-reeking smoke...'	5:03
13	'O Opportunity, thy guilt is great...'	3:49
14	'Why hath thy servant, Opportunity...'	3:56
15	'O Time, thou tutor both to good and bad...'	2:56

Total time on CD 2: 69:41

CD 3

1	This said, from her be-tumbled couch...	3:52
2	Thus cavils she with every thing she sees...	3:42
3	As the poor frighted deer, that stands at gaze...	4:09
4	This plot of death when sadly she had laid...	3:49
5	By this, mild Patience bid fair Lucrece speak...	4:10
6	Her letter now is seal'd, and on it writ...	5:42
7	For much imaginary work was there...	4:55
8	Here feelingly she weeps Troy's painted woes...	4:50
9	Here, all enrag'd, such passion her assails...	3:20
10	And now this pale swan in her watery nest...	3:25
11	Lo, here, the hopeless merchant of this loss...	4:19
12	Even here she sheathed in her harmless breast...	3:29
13	By this starts Collatine as from a dream...	5:11

Total time on CD 3: 55:02
Total time on CDs 1-3: 3:18:21

William Shakespeare
Venus and Adonis
The Rape of Lucrece

THE BACKGROUND

First and foremost William Shakespeare thought of himself as a poet. As a young man, to write poetry was his first instinct; to write drama his second. This was to change as he developed as a writer, and though always a poet, the power of the drama came to dominate. A comparison with the lyrical poetry of one of his earliest plays, *Romeo and Juliet,* and a later one, *King Lear* where the poetical imagery is dark and serves the dramatic conflict, clearly shows this progression.

But in 1593, the young writer of 29 was making his way in the world, and to be accepted as a poet was his main ambition, although he was already establishing himself as a playwright, with his *Henry VI* plays and *Titus Andronicus* proving to be popular successes. But the writing of plays was a precarious profession: theatre managers and the public could be fickle, and the drama was not considered to be worthy of the name of literature. Fame as a playwright could be very fleeting. Moreover, the theatres could be closed indefinitely by an outbreak of the Plague, with a consequent loss of income for the players and playwrights alike. This is what occurred in 1592, when a particularly virulent attack that August closed the theatres for nearly a year, and left Shakespeare temporarily unemployed. He saw it as a chance to further his reputation as a poet.

The two poems that resulted from this lull in theatrical activity, could not be more different in mood and style, though both show unmistakable signs of having been written by a dramatist; a man who knew his craft as a writer of dramatic situations full of character and could not prevent this dramatic sense co-mingling with his poetry. Drama and pure poetry struggle to dominate both these poems which made them such a huge success with the public. *Venus and Adonis*, first published in 1593, was re-printed eleven times before 1620 (four years

after Shakespeare's death), and *The Rape of Lucrece* first published in 1594, had five re-printings before 1616.

VENUS AND ADONIS

There can be no doubt that a large part of the success of this poem with the Elizabethan public was due to its eroticism. It is a potent mixture of wit, heightened poetic imagery and sex. The uncontrolled energy of youth races through this poem. Shakespeare tells the story with a lightness of touch and a humour which is delightful from beginning to end. He has taken the traditional story of the goddess Venus wooing the mortal Adonis from Ovid's collection of myths and classic tales, *Metamorphosis.* The story would have been well-known to his 16th century readers, but Shakespeare gives the tale a clever twist. The great goddess of Love, Venus, is hopelessly infatuated with the beautiful youth, Adonis, but all her powers of persuasion are in vain. Adonis is keener to be hunting deer than making love. Venus has to do the running, and in her attempts to interest Adonis is all woman, rather than goddess. The 'infinite variety' of Venus's approach recalls a later creation of Shakespeare's, the 'lass unparalleled' Cleopatra, as well as being the proto-type for such comic heroines as Rosalind and Beatrice.

Venus's lack of success with Adonis gives the poem its comic enjoyment. Adonis is amusingly frigid, while the forest around them teems with virility and sensual life.

Shakespeare invites his reader to be a voyeur at this essentially intimate encounter, with descriptions of moist flesh, sweating palms, panting breaths etc. This intimate invitation was unique for its time, though much influenced by Christopher Marlowe's unfinished *Hero and Leander*. Both Marlowe's and Shakespeare's poems are in the Italian tradition of sensuous story-telling, begun by Ovid, and later developed by Boccaccio in his *Decameron*. But the intimate detail in Shakespeare's poem is set against a wider backdrop of nature, flora and fauna and the vast night sky. It is suffused with a feeling of the English countryside and its rural sports, just as a play like *Twelfth Night* though set in mythical Illyria is really deep-rooted in Elizabethan England. Here is the young Shakespeare champing at the bit, like Adonis's horse, eager to experiment, trying out poetic ideas and techniques, many of which would mature in his later dramatic output.

We are in the world of his early dramatic

successes, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labours Lost* – a young man's world. The world of Romeo, Mercutio and Berowne. *Venus and Adonis* is full of the comic spirit we associate with his early comedies, a love of life, every-day language all mixed into the most romantic poetry. Even Adonis's death is turned into a positive event as his blood is transformed into a flower worn by Venus in her bosom, giving a romantic rather than a tragic end to the poem.

THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

The mood of *Venus and Adonis* evokes a bright summer's day; *The Rape of Lucrece* is wrapped in dark night. It is as sombre, as *Venus and Adonis* is light. Shakespeare seems to be deliberately striving for a contrast with his first success. He is in tragic mode and works hard to achieve his effects. As Dr Johnson noted; 'His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.'

The dramatist in Shakespeare is dominating the poet in this poem. But he is not yet the mature author of the later great tragedies of *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, but a fledgling playwright with only *Titus Andronicus* to his credit as a tragedian. *The Rape of Lucrece* belongs to the world of Titus where tragedy is spelt out in terms of physical outrage, pain and graphic violence which defined tragedy for the young Shakespeare in 1594. The subtlety of psychological torment leading to tragedy, as revealed in *Othello* or *Macbeth*, were a decade ahead.

Vivid emotions are displayed, as one would expect of a dramatist, and a dark mood sustained throughout this lengthy poem of 1800 lines. The verse has a pulse that beats on unswervingly, leading to the inevitable moment of rape. But perhaps Shakespeare's inexperience shows, for Lucrece's loquaciousness ultimately weakens our sympathy for her plight. She is perhaps over-dramatised. The descriptive passages describing her grief, rather than her own assessment, are among the most effective parts of the poem.

Yet the mood of sombre foreboding Shakespeare creates in this poem looks forward to *Macbeth*. Shakespeare might have been recalling his early poem, when Macbeth likens himself to the poem's villain:

'…with Tarquin's ravishing strides
towards his design,
moves like a ghost.'

SHAKESPEARE AND THE EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON

Shakespeare, burning with desire to be a success as a poet in 1593, could only achieve his ambition with the help of a wealthy aristocratic patron. How he first came into contact with the Earl of Southampton is not known, but it couldn't have been a more fortuitous connection. Southampton was ten tears younger than the poet and every inch a model of a Renaissance man, he was a soldier, a courtier and loved literature and the arts. That Southampton was famed as the Adonis of his age, and painted many times had no doubt not escaped Shakespeare in his choice of a possible patron. His dedication of *Venus and Adonis* is a lesson in humble supplication: ' I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burthen..' He describes *Venus and Adonis* as 'the first heir of my invention' – as a poet perhaps, but not as a playwright – and promises a work of 'graver labour' which critics believe is *The Rape of Lucrece* published a year later as *'Lucrece.'* With suitable sycophancy Shakespeare signs off with, 'Your honour's in all duty…'

The relationship between the Earl and the country-born playwright, who was intent on moving up in the world, has never been clearly defined. A friendship may have developed between them. The Sonnets, written throughout the 1590's were perhaps to Southampton, and *if* they are autobiographical, reveal a close and intimate association. It is not known whether Shakespeare ever received any financial support from Southampton at this difficult period of his life, but with the re-opening of the theatres in 1594, Shakespeare was able to buy shares in the Lord Chamberlain's Company, and he seems to have turned his back on poetry as a separate aesthetic medium, with the exception of the occasional sonnet, and used his poetic skills in the service of the drama. It was a wise, if not inevitable choice. Posterity has agreed with him for few today read these poems over which Shakespeare took such care, whilst his plays are familiar throughout the world.

SHAKESPEARE'S DEDICATIONS TO THE EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON

VENUS AND ADONIS
'Vilia miretur vulgus: mihi flavus Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua.'

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HENRY WRIOTHESLEY,
EARL OF SOUHAMPTON, AND BARON OF TICHFIELD.

RIGHT HONOURABLE,

I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burthen: only, if your honour seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised, and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour. But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest. I leave it to your honourable survey, and your honour to your heart's content; which I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation.

Your honour's in all duty,
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HENRY WRIOTHESLY,
EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON, AND BARON OF TITCHFIELD.

The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet, without beginning, is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship, to whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happiness.

Your Lordship's in all duty,
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

Notes by David Timson

Cover picture: courtesy of AKG Images

CAST

Venus and Adonis

David Burke	**Narrator**
Clare Corbett	**Venus**
Benjamin Soames	**Adonis**

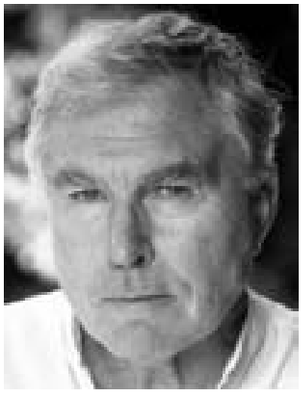
The Rape of Lucrece

Eve Best	**Lucrece**
David Burke	**Narrator**
Hugh Dickson	**Lucretius**
Oliver Le Sueur	**Tarquin**
Daniel Philpott	**Brutus**
Ruth Sillers	**Maid**
David Timson	**Collatine**

Directed by David Timson



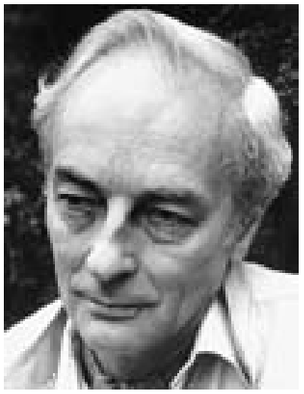
Eve Best graduated from RADA in 1999. Her theatre credits include *Hedda Gabler* for which she won Best Actress – Oliver Award and Critics' Circle Theatre Award in 2005, *Mourning Becomes Electra, Three Sisters, The Coast of Utopia, The Misanthrope, Macbeth, The Heiress, The Cherry Orchard* and *Tis A Pity She's A Whore*. She has also appeared regularly on TV in *Prime Suspect, Vital Signs, Inspector Lynley Mysteries, Waking the Dead* and *Shackleton.*



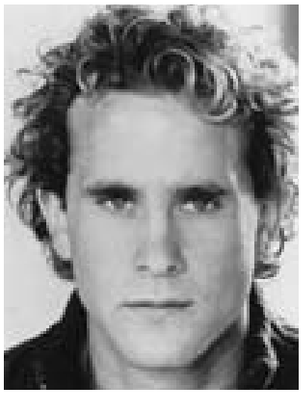
David Burke played Kent in the widely praised production by Richard Eyre at the Royal National Theatre. Among his many other theatrical credits was the extended London run of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*. He has also appeared in *Richard III* and *Coriolanus* for the Almeida Theatre at the Gainsborough Studios and on tour in Japan and the USA. He has been seen in numerous film and television productions. He also plays the part of Kent in *King Lear* and Gonzalo in *The Tempest* and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Clare Corbett was the Carleton Hobbs winner in 2000 and since then has been heard on BBC Radio Repertory and seen in regional theatres. She is a familiar face to television viewers having appeared in *The Bill, Fastnet, Spooks, Casualty* and *Final Demand.*



Hugh Dickson is a former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the BBC Radio Drama Company. He has specialised in verse-speaking, working with many leading poets on radio, platform and recordings. Stage appearances include Escalus in *Measure for Measure* and Prof Riley in *Shadowlands*. Radio work includes Camillo in *The Winter's Tale* and Guy Crouchback in *Sword of Honour*. He has also read the part of the Archbishop in *Henry V* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Oliver Le Sueur. Since leaving The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in 2002 Oliver Le Sueur has, amongst other theatre and television work, been a winner of the BBC Radio Drama Department's Carleton Hobbs Competition and appeared in a National Tour of *The Tempest* alongside Richard Briers. He performed the role of The Soldier in Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* with The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. He has also read the part of Kafka in *Kafka on the Shore* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Daniel Philpott trained at LAMDA and, after success in the prestigious Carleton Hobbs Award for Radio Drama, has been prolific in BBC Radio and the Spoken Word industry. His theatre work includes numerous productions on the London fringe. For Naxos AudioBooks he has recorded *A Life of Shakespeare, Famous People in History – 2, Dracula, Frankenstein*, *Pygmalion* and has narrated *Our Island Story*.

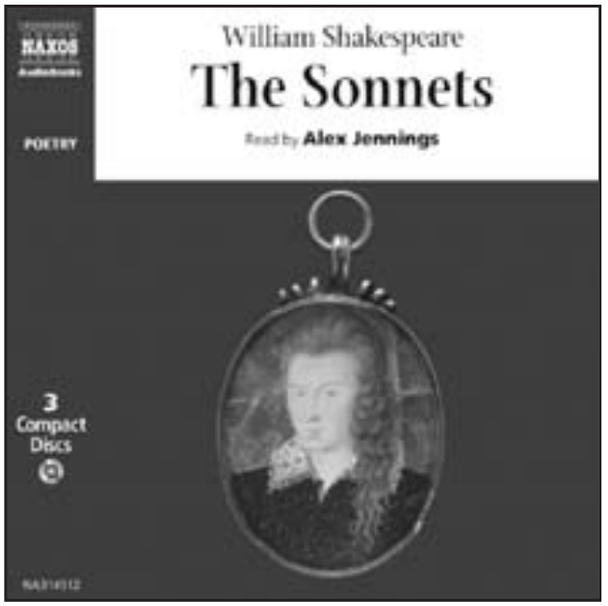


Ruth Sillers began her career with the National Youth Theatre. Theatre work includes productions for the Royal National Theatre Studio and the Donmar Warehouse. She has performed in several plays for BBC Radio Drama, including Noel Coward's *Easy Virtue* and *Medical Detectives*. She also reads regularly for Radio 4 and the BBC World Service and has read the part of Frederica Vernon in *Lady Susan* for Naxos AudioBooks.



David Timson has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. For Naxos AudioBooks he wrote *The History of the Theatre,* which won an award for most original production from the Spoken Word Publishers Association in 2001. He has also directed for Naxos AudioBooks four Shakespeare plays, including *King Richard III* (with Kenneth Branagh), which won Best Drama Award from the SWPA in 2001. In 2002 he won the Audio of the Year Award for his reading of *A Study in Scarlet.* He also reads *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes I, II, III, IV, V* and *VI* and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes I, II* and *III*.

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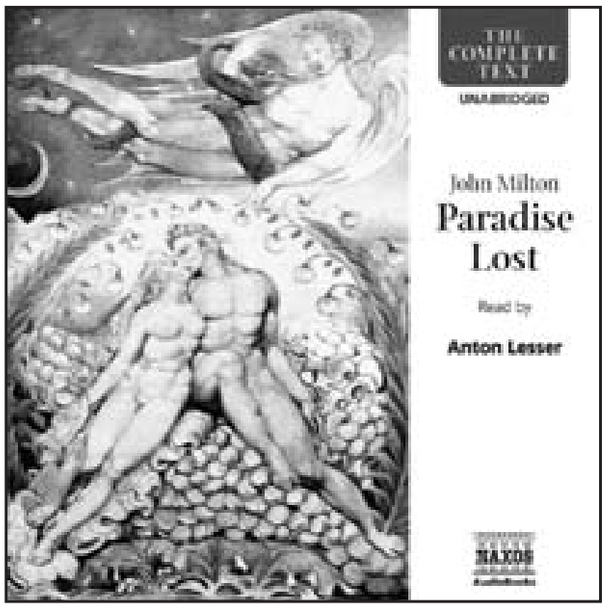
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The Rape of Lucrece

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Venus and Adonis
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THE COMPLETE CLASSICS

UNABRIDGED

Read by **Eve Best**, **Clare Corbett**, **David Burke** and cast

These two great poems date from Shakespeare's early years and are full of passion and invention. In *Venus and Adonis*, the goddess of love pleads with the beautiful boy to submit to her advances and become her lover – but he only wants to hunt boar. In the more serious *Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare draws on the Roman tale of Tarquin's desire for Lucrece and its tragic consequences. These poems give prominent parts to the two heroines, and Clare Corbett and Eve Best shine in these roles.

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