

Comus (A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle)
John Milton (1634)

The Persons

The attendant Spirit afterwards in the habit of *Thyrsis*
Comus with his crew
The Lady
1. Brother
2. Brother
Sabrina, the Nymph

The cheif persons which presented, were

The Lord *Bracly*,
Mr. *Thomas Egerton*, his Brother,
The Lady *Alice Egerton*.

The first Scene discovers a wilde Wood.

The attendant Spirit descends or enters.

BEfore the starry threshold of *Joves* Court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aëreal Spirits live insphear'd
In Regions milde of calm and serene Ayr,
Above the smoak and stirr of this dim spot, [5]
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confin'd, and pester'd in this pin-fold here,
Strive to keep up a frail, and Feaverish being
Unmindfull of the crown that Vertue gives
After this mortal change, to her true Servants [10]
Amongst the enthron'd gods on Sainted seats.
Yet som there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that Golden Key
That ope's the Palace of Eternity:
To such my errand is, and but for such, [15]
I would not soil these pure Ambrosial weeds,
With the rank vapours of this Sin-worn mould.
But to my task. *Neptune* besides the sway
Of every salt Flood, and each ebbing Stream,
Took in by lot 'twixt high, and neather *Jove*, [20]
Imperial rule of all the Sea-girt Iles

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Attributed to: [Thomas H. Luxon]



That like to rich, and various gemms inlay
 The unadorned bosom of the Deep,
 Which he to grace his tributary gods
 By course commits to severall goverment, [25]
 And gives them leave to wear their Saphire crowns,
 And weild their little tridents, but this Ile
 The greatest, and the best of all the main
 He quarters to his blu-hair'd deities,
 And all this tract that fronts the falling Sun [30]
 A noble Peer of mickle trust, and power
 Has in his charge, with temper'd awe to guide
 An old, and haughty Nation proud in Arms:
 Where his fair off-spring nurs't in Princely lore,
 Are coming to attend their Fathers state, [35]
 And new-entrusted Scepter, but their way
 Lies through the perplex't paths of this drear Wood,
 The nodding horror of whose shady brows
 Threats the forlorn and wand'ring Passinger.
 And here their tender age might suffer perill, [40]
 But that by quick command from Soveran *Jove*
 I was dispatcht for their defence, and guard;
 And listen why, for I will tell ye now
 What never yet was heard in Tale or Song
 From old, or modern Bard in Hall, or Bowr. [45]
 Bacchus that first from out the purple Grape,
 Crush't the sweet poyson of mis-used Wine
 After the *Tuscan* Mariners transform'd
 Coasting the *Tyrrhene* shore, as the winds listed,
 On *Circes* Iland fell (who knows not *Circe* [50]
 The daughter of the Sun? Whose charmed Cup
 Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape,
 And downward fell into a groveling Swine)
 This Nymph that gaz'd upon his clustring locks,
 With Ivy berries wreath'd, and his blithe youth, [55]
 Had by him, ere he parted thence, a Son
 Much like his Father, but his Mother more,
 Whom therefore she brought up and *Comus* nam'd,
 Who ripe, and frolick of his full grown age,
 Roaving the *Celtick*, and *Iberian* fields, [60]
 At last betakes him to this ominous Wood,
 And in thick shelter of black shades imbowr'd,
 Excells his Mother at her mighty Art,
 Offring to every weary Travailer,
 His orient liquor in a Crystal Glasse, [65]
 To quench the drouth of *Phoebus*, which as they taste

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(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst)
 Soon as the Potion works, their human count'nance,
 Th' express resemblance of the gods, is chang'd
 Into some brutish form of Woolf, or Bear, [70]
 Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,
 All other parts remaining as they were,
 And they, so perfect is their misery,
 Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
 But boast themselves more comely then before [75]
 And all their friends, and native home forget
 To rouse with pleasure in a sensual sty.
 Therefore when any favour'd of high *Jove*,
 Chances to pass through this adventrous glade,
 Swift as the Sparkle of a glancing Star, [80]
 I shoot from Heav'n to give him safe convoy,
 As now I do: But first I must put off
 These my skie robes spun out of *Iris* Wooff,
 And take the Weeds and likenes of a Swain,
 That to the service of this house belongs, [85]
 Who with his soft Pipe, and smooth-dittied Song,
 Well knows to still the wilde winds when they roar,
 And hush the waving Woods, nor of lesse faith,
 And in this office of his Mountain watch,
 Likeliest, and neerest to the present ayd [90]
 Of this occasion. But I hear the tread
 Of hatefull steps, I must be viewless now.

Comus enters with a Charming Rod in one hand, his Glass in the other, with him a rout of Monsters headed like sundry sorts of wilde Beasts, but otherwise like Men and Women, their Apparel glistering, they com in making a riotous and unruly noise, with Torches in their hands.

Comus. The Star that bids the Shepherd fold,
 Now the top of Heav'n doth hold,
 And the gilded Car of Day, [95]
 His glowing Axle doth allay
 In the steep *Atlantick* stream,
 And the slope Sun his upward beam
 Shoots against the dusky Pole,
 Pacing toward the other gole [100]
 Of his Chamber in the East.
 Mean while welcom Joy, and Feast,
 Midnight shout, and revelry,
 Tipsie dance and Jollity.
 Braid your Locks with rosie Twine [105]

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Dropping odours, dropping Wine.
 Rigor now is gone to bed,
 And Advice with scrupulous head,
 Strict Age, and sowe Severity,
 With their grave Saws in slumber ly. [110]
 We that are of purer fire
 Imitate the Starry Quire,
 Who in their nightly watchfull Sphears,
 Lead in swift round the Months and Years.
 The Sounds, and Seas with all their finny drove [115]
 Now to the Moon in wavering Morrice move,
 And on the Tawny Sands and Shelves,
 Trip the pert Fairies and the dapper Elves;
 By dimpled Brook, and Fountain brim,
 The Wood-Nymphs dect with Daisies trim, [120]
 Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:
 What hath night to do with sleep?
 Night hath better sweets to prove,
Venus now wakes, and wak'ns Love.
 Com let us our rights begin, [125]
 Tis onely day-light that makes Sin,
 Which these dun shades will ne're report.
 Hail Goddess of Nocturnal sport
 Dark vaild *Cotytto*, t' whom the secret flame
 Of mid-night Torches burns; mysterious Dame [130]
 That ne're art call'd, but when the Dragon woom
 Of Stygian darknes spets her thickest gloom,
 And makes one blot of all the ayr,
 Stay thy cloudy Ebon chair,
 Wherin thou rid'st with *Hecat'*, and befriend [135]
 Us thy vow'd Priests, till utmost end
 Of all thy dues be done, and none left out,
 Ere the blabbing Eastern scout,
 The nice Morn on th' *Indian* steep
 From her cabin'd loop hole peep, [140]
 And to the tel-tale Sun discry
 Our conceal'd Solemnity.
 Com, knit hands, and beat the ground,
 In a light fantastick round.

The Measure.

Break off, break off, I feel the different pace, [145]
 Of som chast footing neer about this ground.
 Run to your shrouds, within these Brakes and Trees,

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Our number may affright: Som Virgin sure
(For so I can distinguish by mine Art)
Benighted in these Woods. Now to my charms, [150]
And to my wily trains, I shall e're long
Be well stock't with as fair a herd as graz'd
About my Mother *Circe*. Thus I hurl
My dazzling Spells into the spungy ayr,
Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion, [155]
And give it false presentments, lest the place
And my quaint habits breed astonishment,
And put the Damsel to suspicious flight,
Which must not be, for that's against my course;
I under fair pretence of friendly ends, [160]
And well-plac't words of glozing courtesie,
Baited with reasons not unplaussible
Wind me into the easie-hearted man,
And hugg him into snares. When once her eye
Hath met the vertue of this Magick dust, [165]
I shall appear som harmles Villager
Whom thrift keeps up about his Country gear,
But here she comes, I fairly step aside
And hearken, if I may, her busines here.

The Lady enters.

This way the noise was, if mine ear be true, [170]
My best guide now, me thought it was the sound
Of Riot, and ill-manag'd Merriment,
Such as the jocund Flute, or gamesom Pipe
Stirs up among the loose unleter'd Hinds,
When for their teeming Flocks, and granges full [175]
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous *Pan*,
And thank the gods amiss. I should be loath
To meet the rudeness, and swill'd insolence
Of such late Wassailers; yet O where els
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet [180]
In the blind mazes of this tangl'd Wood?
My Brothers when they saw me wearied out
With this long way, resolving here to lodge
Under the spreading favour of these Pines,
Stept as they se'd to the next Thicket side [185]
To bring me Berries, or such cooling fruit
As the kind hospitable Woods provide.
They left me then, when the gray-hooded Eev'n
Like a sad Votarist in Palmers weed

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Rose from the hindmost wheels of *Phoebus* wain. [190]
 But where they are, and why they came not back,
 Is now the labour of my thoughts; 'tis likeliest
 They had engag'd their wandring steps too far,
 And envious darknes, e're they could return,
 Had stole them from me, els O theevish Night [195]
 Why shouldst thou, but for som fellonious end,
 In thy dark lantern thus close up the Stars,
 That nature hung in Heav'n, and fill'd their Lamps
 With everlasting oil, to give due light
 To the misled and lonely Travailer? [200]
 This is the place, as well as I may guess,
 Whence eev'n now the tumult of loud Mirth
 Was rife, and perfet in my list'ning ear,
 Yet nought but single darknes do I find.
 What might this be? A thousand fantasies [205]
 Begin to throng into my memory
 Of calling shapes and beckning shadows dire,
 And airy tongues, that syllable mens names
 On Sands, and Shoars, and desert Wildernesses.
 These thoughts may startle well, but not astound [210]
 The vertuous mind, that ever walks attended
 By a strong siding champion Conscience.—
 O welcom pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope,
 Thou hov'ring Angel girt with golden wings,
 And thou unblemish't form of Chastity, [215]
 I see ye visibly, and now beleieve
 That he, the Supreme good, t' whom all things ill
 Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
 Would send a glistring Guardian if need were
 To keep my life and honour unassail'd. [220]
 Was I deceiv'd, or did a sable cloud
 Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
 I did not err, there does a sable cloud
 Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
 And casts a gleam over this tufted Grove. [225]
 I cannot hallo to my Brothers, but
 Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
 Ile venter, for my new enliv'n'd spirits
 Prompt me; and they perhaps are not far off.

SONG.

Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph that liv'st unseen [230]
Within thy airy shell

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*By slow Meander's margent green,
 And in the violet imbroider'd vale
 Where the love-lorn Nightingale
 Nightly to thee her sad Song mourneth well. [235]
 Canst thou not tell me of a gentle Pair
 That likest thy Narcissus are?
 O if thou have
 Hid them in some flowry Cave,
 Tell me but where [240]
 Sweet Queen of Parly, Daughter of the Sphear,
 So maist thou be translated to the skies,
 And give resounding grace to all Heav'ns Harmonies.*

Com. Can any mortal mixture of Earths mould
 Breath such Divine enchanting ravishment? [245]
 Sure something holy lodges in that brest,
 And with these raptures moves the vocal air
 To testifie his hidd'n residence;
 How sweetly did they float upon the wings
 Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night [250]
 At every fall smoothing the Raven doune
 Of darknes till it smil'd: I have oft heard
 My mother *Circe* with the Sirens three,
 Amidst the flowry-kirtl'd *Naiades*
 Culling their Potent hearbs, and balefull drugs, [255]
 Who as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,
 And lap it in *Elysium*, *Scylla* wept,
 And chid her barking waves into attention,
 And fell *Charybdis* murmur'd soft applause:
 Yet they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense, [260]
 And in sweet madnes rob'd it of it self,
 But such a sacred, and home-felt delight,
 Such sober certainty of waking bliss
 I never heard till now. Ile speak to her
 And she shall be my Queen. Hail forren wonder [265]
 Whom certain these rough shades did never breed
 Unlesse the Goddess that in rurall shrine
 Dwell'st here with *Pan*, or *Silvan*, by blest Song
 Forbidding every bleak unkindly Fog
 To touch the prosperous growth of this tall Wood. [270]

La. Nay gentle Shepherd ill is lost that praise
 That is address to unattending Ears,
 Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift
 How to regain my sever'd company

Compell'd me to awake the courteous Echo [275]
 To give me answer from her mossie Couch.
Co. What chance good Lady hath bereft you thus?
La. Dim darknes, and this heavy Labyrinth.
Co. Could that divide you from neer-usherings guides?
La. They left me weary on a grassie terf. [280]
Co. By falshood, or discourtesie, or why?
La. To seek i'th vally som cool friendly Spring.
Co. And left your fair side all unguarded, Lady?
La. They were but twain, and purpos'd quick return.
Co. Perhaps fore-stalling night prevented them. [285]
La. How easie my misfortune is to hit!
Com. Imports their loss, beside the present need?
La. No less then if I should my brothers loose.
Co. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?
La. As smooth as *Hebe's* their unrazor'd lips. [290]
Co. Two such I saw, what time the labour'd Oxe
 In his loose traces from the furrow came,
 And the swink't hedger at his Supper sate;
 I saw them under a green mantling vine
 That crawls along the side of yon small hill, [295]
 Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots,
 Their port was more then human, as they stood;
 I took it for a faëry vision
 Of som gay creatures of the element
 That in the colours of the Rainbow live [300]
 And play i'th plighted clouds. I was aw-strook,
 And as I past, I worshipt: if those you seek,
 It were a journey like the path to Heav'n
 To help you find them. *La.* Gentle villager
 What readiest way would bring me to that place? [305]
Co. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.
La. To find out that, good Shepherd, I suppose,
 In such a scant allowance of Star-light,
 Would overtask the best Land-Pilots art,
 Without the sure guess of well-practiz'd feet. [310]
Co. I know each lane, and every alley green
 Dingle or bushy dell of this wilde Wood,
 And every bosky bourn from side to side
 My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood,
 And if your stray attendance be yet lodg'd, [315]
 Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
 Ere morrow wake, or the low roosted lark
 From her thach't pallat rowse, if otherwise
 I can conduct you Lady to a low

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But loyal cottage, where you may be safe [320]
Till further quest'. *La.* Shepherd I take thy word,
And trust thy honest offer'd courtesie,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
With smoaky rafters, then in tapstry Halls
And Courts of Princes, where it first was nam'd, [325]
And yet is most pretended: In a place
Less warranted then this, or less secure
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it,
Eie me blest Providence, and square my triall
To my proportion'd strength. Shepherd lead on.— [330]

The two Brothers.

Eld. Bro. Unmuffle ye faint stars, and thou fair Moon
That wontst to love the travailers benizon,
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,
And disinherit *Chaos*, that rains here
In double night of darknes, and of shades; [335]
Or if your influence be quite damm'd up
With black usurping mists, som gentle taper
Though a rush Candle from the wicker hole
Of som clay habitation visit us
With thy long levell'd rule of streaming light, [340]
And thou shalt be our star of *Arcady*,
Or *Tyrian* Cynosure. *2 Bro.* Or if our eyes
Be barr'd that happines, might we but hear
The folded flocks pen'd in their watled cotes,
Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops, [345]
Or whistle from the Lodge, or village cock
Count the night watches to his feathery Dames,
T' would be som solace yet, som little chearing
In this close dungeon of innumeros bowes.
But O that haples virgin our lost sister [350]
Where may she wander now, whether betake her
From the chill dew, amongst rude burrs and thistles?
Perhaps som cold bank is her boulster now
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of som broad Elm
Leans her unpillow'd head fraught with sad fears. [355]
What if in wild amazement, and affright,
Or while we speak within the direful grasp
Of Savage hunger, or of Savage heat?
Eld. Bro. Peace brother, be not over-exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils; [360]
For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,

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What need a man forestall his date of grief,
 And run to meet what he would most avoid?
 Or if they be but false alarms of Fear,
 How bitter is such self-delusion? [365]
 I do not think my sister so to seek,
 Or so unprincip'l'd in vertue's book,
 And the sweet peace that goodnes boosoms ever,
 As that the single want of light and noise
 (Not being in danger, as I trust she is not) [370]
 Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,
 And put them into mis-becoming plight.
 Vertue could see to do what vertue would
 By her own radiant light, though Sun and Moon
 Were in the flat Sea sunk. And Wisdoms self [375]
 Oft seeks to sweet retired Solitude,
 Where with her best nurse Contemplation
 She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings
 That in the various bussle of resort
 Were all to ruffl'd, and sometimes impair'd. [380]
 He that has light within his own cleer brest
 May sit i'th center, and enjoy bright day,
 But he that hides a dark soul, and foul thoughts
 Benighted walks under the mid-day Sun;
 Himself is his own dungeon. [385]

2 Bro. Tis most true

That musing meditation most affects
 The Pensive secrecy of desert cell,
 Far from the cheerfull haunt of men, and herds,
 And sits as safe as in a Senat house,
 For who would rob a Hermit of his Weeds, [390]
 His few Books, or his Beads, or Maple Dish,
 Or do his gray hairs any violence?
 But beauty like the fair Hesperian Tree
 Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
 Of dragon watch with uninchanted eye, [395]
 To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit
 From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.
 You may as well spred out the unsun'd heaps
 Of Misers treasure by an out-laws den,
 And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope [400]
 Danger will wink on Opportunity,
 And let a single helpless maiden pass
 Uninjur'd in this wilde surrounding wast.
 Of night, or lonelines it reckes me not,
 I fear the dred events that dog them both, [405]

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Lest som ill greeting touch attempt the person
Of our unowned sister.

Eld. Bro. I do not brother,
Infer as if I thought my sisters state
Secure without all doubt, or controversie:
Yet where an equall poise of hope and fear [410]
Does arbitrate th' event, my nature is
That I encline to hope, rather then fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion.
My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine, she has a hidden strength [415]
Which you remember not.

2 Bro. What hidden strength,
Unless the strength of Heav'n, if you mean that?

Eld. Bro. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength
Which if Heav'n gave it, may be term'd her own:
'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity: [420]
She that has that, is clad in compleat steel,
And like a quiver'd Nymph with Arrows keen
May trace huge Forests, and unharbour'd Heaths,
Infamous Hills, and sandy perilous wildes,
Where through the sacred rayes of Chastity, [425]
No savage fierce, Bandite, or mountaneer
Will dare to soyl her Virgin purity,
Yea there, where very desolation dwels
By grots, and caverns shag'd with horrid shades,
She may pass on with unblench't majesty, [430]
Be it not don in pride, or in presumption.
Som say no evil thing that walks by night
In fog, or fire, by lake, or moorish fen,
Blew meager Hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,
That breaks his magick chains at *curfeu* time, [435]
No goblin or swart Faëry of the mine,
Hath hurtfull power o're true virginity.
Do ye beleeve me yet, or shall I call
Antiquity from the old Schools of Greece
To testifie the arms of Chastity? [440]
Hence had the huntress *Dian* her dred bow,
Fair silver-shafted Queen for ever chaste,
Wherwith she tam'd the brinded lioness
And spotted mountain pard, but set at nought
The frivolous bolt of *Cupid*, gods and men [445]
Fear'd her stern frown, and she was queen oth' Woods.
What was that snaky-headed *Gorgon* sheild
That wise *Minerva* wore, unconquer'd Virgin,

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Wherwith she freez'd her foes to congeal'd stone?
 But rigid looks of Chaste austerity [450]
 And noble grace that dash't brute violence
 With sudden adoration, and blank aw.
 So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity,
 That when a soul is found sincerely so,
 A thousand liveried Angels lacky her, [455]
 Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
 And in cleer dream, and solemn vision
 Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
 Till oft convers with heav'nly habitants
 Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape, [460]
 The unpolluted temple of the mind,
 And turns it by degrees to the souls essence,
 Till all be made immortal: but when lust
 By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
 But most by leud and lavish act of sin, [465]
 Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
 The soul grows clotted by contagion,
 Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite loose
 The divine property of her first being.
 Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp [470]
 Oft seen in Charnell vaults, and Sepulchers
 Lingerin, and sitting by a new made grave,
 As loath to leave the body that it lov'd,
 And link't it self by carnal sensuality
 To a degenerate and degraded state. [475]
 2 Bro. How charming is divine Philosophy!
 Not harsh, and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
 But musical as is *Apollo's* lute,
 And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
 Where no crude surfet rains. *Eld. Bro.* List, list, I hear [480]
 Som far off hallow break the silent Air.
 2 Bro. Methought so too; what should it be?
 Eld. Bro. For certain
 Either som one like us night-founder'd here,
 Or els som neighbour Wood-man, or at worst,
 Som roaving Robber calling to his fellows. [485]
 2 Bro. Heav'n keep my sister, agen agen and neer,
 Best draw, and stand upon our guard.
 Eld. Bro. Ile hallow,
 If he be friendly he comes well, if not,
 Defence is a good cause, and Heav'n be for us.

The attendant Spirit habited like a Shepherd.

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That hallow I should know, what are you? speak; [490]
Com not too neer, you fall on iron stakes else.

Spir. What voice is that, my young Lord? speak agen.

2 Bro. O brother, 'tis my fathers Shepherd sure.

Eld. Bro. Thyrsis? Whose artful strains have oft delaid

The huddling brook to hear his madrigal, [495]

And sweeten'd every muskrose of the dale,

How cam'st thou here good Swain? hath any ram

Slip't from the fold, or young Kid lost his dam,

Or straggling weather the pen't flock forsook?

How couldst thou find this dark sequester'd nook? [500]

Spir. O my lov'd masters heir, and his next joy,

I came not here on such a trivial toy

As a stray'd Ewe, or to pursue the stealth

Of pilfering Woolf, not all the fleecy wealth

That doth enrich these Downs, is worth a thought [505]

To this my errand, and the care it brought.

But O my Virgin Lady, where is she?

How chance she is not in your company?

Eld. Bro. To tell thee sadly Shepherd, without blame,
Or our neglect, we lost her as we came. [510]

Spirit. Ay me unhappy! then my fears are true.

Eld. Bro. What fears good *Thyrsis?* Prethee briefly shew.

Spir. Ile tell ye, 'tis not vain, or fabulous,

(Though so esteem'd by shallow ignorance)

What the sage Poëts taught by th' heav'nly Muse, [515]

Storied of old in high immortal vers

Of dire *Chimera's* and enchanted Iles,

And rifted Rocks whose entrance leads to hell,

For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navil of this hideous Wood, [520]

Immur'd in cypress shades a Sorcerer dwels

Of *Bacchus*, and of *Circe* born, great *Comus*,

Deep skill'd in all his mothers witcheries,

And here to every thirsty wanderer,

By sly enticement gives his banefull cup, [525]

With many murmurs mixt, whose pleasing poison

The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,

And the inglorious likenes of a beast

Fixes instead, unmoulding reasons mintage

Character'd in the face; this have I learn't [530]

Tending my flocks hard by i'th hilly crofts,

That brow this bottom glade, whence night by night

He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl

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Like stabl'd wolves, or tigers at their prey,
 Doing abhorred rites to *Hecate* [535]
 In their obscured haunts of inmost bowres.
 Yet have they many baits, and guileful spells
 To inveigle and invite th' unwary sense
 Of them that pass unweeting by the way.
 This evening late by then the chewing flocks [540]
 Had ta'n their supper on the savoury Herb
 Of Knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold,
 I sate me down to watch upon a bank
 With Ivy canopied, and interwove
 With flaunting Hony-suckle, and began [545]
 Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy
 To meditate my rural minstrelsie,
 Till fancy had her fill, but ere a close
 The wonted roar was up amidst the Woods,
 And fill'd the Air with barbarous dissonance, [550]
 At which I ceas't, and listen'd them a while,
 Till an unusual stop of sudden silence
 Gave respite to the drowsie frighted steeds
 That draw the litter of close-curtain'd sleep.
 At last a soft and solemn breathing sound [555]
 Rose like a steam of rich distill'd Perfumes,
 And stole upon the Air, that even Silence
 Was took e're she was ware, and wish't she might
 Deny her nature, and be never more
 Still to be so displac't. I was all eare, [560]
 And took in strains that might create a soul
 Under the ribs of Death; but O ere long
 Too well I did perceive it was the voice
 Of my most honour'd Lady, your dear sister.
 Amaz'd I stood, harrow'd with grief and fear, [565]
 And O poor hapless Nightingale thought I,
 How sweet thou sing'st, how neer the deadly snare!
 Then down the Lawns I ran with headlong hast
 Through paths, and turnings oft'n trod by day,
 Till guided by mine ear I found the place [570]
 Where that damn'd wisard hid in sly disguise
 (For so by certain signes I knew) had met
 Already, ere my best speed could prævent,
 The aidless innocent Lady his wish't prey,
 Who gently ask't if he had seen such two, [575]
 Supposing him som neighbour villager;
 Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guess't
 Ye were the two she mean't, with that I sprung

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Into swift flight, till I had found you here,
 But furdur know I not. 2 *Bro.* O night and shades, [580]
 How are ye joyn'd with hell in triple knot
 Against th' unarmed weakness of one Virgin
 Alone, and helpless! Is this the confidence
 You gave me Brother? *Eld. Bro.* Yes, and keep it still,
 Lean on it safely, not a period [555]
 Shall be unsaid for me: against the threats
 Of malice or of sorcery, or that power
 Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm;
 Vertue may be assail'd, but never hurt,
 Surpriz'd by unjust force, but not enthrall'd, [590]
 Yea even that which mischief meant most harm,
 Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
 But evil on it self shall back recoyl,
 And mix no more with goodness, when at last
 Gather'd like scum, and setl'd to it self [595]
 It shall be in eternal restless change
 Self-fed, and self-consum'd; if this fail,
 The pillar'd firmament is rott'nness,
 And earths base built on stubble. But com let's on.
 Against th' opposing will and arm of Heav'n [600]
 May never this just sword be lifted up,
 But for that damn'd magician, let him be girt
 With all the greisly legions that troop
 Under the sooty flag of *Acheron*,
Harpyies and *Hydra's*, or all the monstrous forms [605]
 'Twixt *Africa*, and *Inde*, Ile find him out,
 And force him to restore his purchase back,
 Or drag him by the curls, to a foul death,
 Curs'd as his life.

Spir. Alas good ventrous youth,
 I love thy courage yet and bold Emprise, [610]
 But here thy sword can do thee little stead;
 Farr other arms, and other weapons must
 Be those that quell the might of hellish charms,
 He with his bare wand can unthred thy joynts,
 And crumble all thy sinews. [615]

Eld. Bro. Why, prethee Shepherd
 How durst thou then thy self approach so neer
 As to make this relation?

Spir. Care and utmost shifts
 How to secure the Lady from surprisal,
 Brought to my mind a certain Shepherd Lad
 Of small regard to see to, yet well skill'd [620]

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In every vertuous plant and healing herb
 That spreads her verdant leaf to th' morning ray,
 He lov'd me well, and oft would beg me sing,
 Which when I did, he on the tender grass
 Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasie, [625]
 And in requitall ope his leather'n scrip,
 And shew me simples of a thousand names
 Telling their strange and vigorous faculties;
 Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
 But of divine effect, he cull'd me out; [630]
 The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,
 But in another Countrey, as he said,
 Bore a bright golden flowre, but not in this soyl:
 Unknown, and like esteem'd, and the dull swayn
 Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon, [635]
 And yet more med'cinal is it then that *Moly*
 That *Hermes* once to wise *Ulysses* gave;
 He call'd it *Hæmony*, and gave it me,
 And bade me keep it as of sovræn use
 'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp [640]
 Or gastly furies apparition;
 I purs't it up, but little reck'ning made,
 Till now that this extremity compell'd,
 But now I find it true; for by this means
 I knew the foul inchanter though disguis'd, [645]
 Enter'd the very lime-twigs of his spells,
 And yet came off: if you have this about you
 (As I will give you when we go) you may
 Boldly assault the necromancers hall;
 Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood, [650]
 And brandish't blade rush on him, break his glass,
 And shed the lushious liquor on the ground,
 But sease his wand; though he and his curst crew
 Feirce signe of battail make, and menace high,
 Or like the sons of *Vulcan* vomit smoak, [655]
 Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

Eld. Bro. Thyrsis lead on apace, Ile follow thee,
 And som good angel bear a sheild before us.

*The Scene changes to a stately Palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness;
 soft Musick, Tables spred with all dainties. Comus appears with his rabble, and
 the Lady set in aninchanterd Chair, to whom he offers his Glass, which she puts
 by, and goes about to rise.*

Comus. Nay Lady sit; if I but wave this wand,
Your nervs are all chain'd up in Alabaster, [660]
And you a statue; or as *Daphne* was
Root-bound, that fled *Apollo*,

La. Fool do not boast,
Thou canst not touch the freedom of my minde
With all thy charms, although this corporal rinde
Thou haste immanacl'd, while Heav'n sees good. [665]

Co. Why are you vext, Lady? why do you frown?
Here dwell no frowns, nor anger, from these gates
Sorrow flies farr: See here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns [670]
Brisk as the *April* buds in Primrose-season.

And first behold this cordial Julep here
That flames, and dances in his crystal bounds
With spirits of balm, and fragrant Syrops mixt.
Not that *Nepenthes* which the wife of *Thone*, [675]

In *Egypt* gave to *Jove*-born *Helena*
Is of such power to stir up joy as this,
To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst.
Why should you be so cruel to your self,
And to those dainty limms which nature lent [680]
For gentle usage, and soft delicacy?
But you invert the cov'nants of her trust,
And harshly deal like an ill borrower
With that which you receiv'd on other terms,
Scorning the unexempt condition [685]
By which all mortal frailty must subsist,
Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,
That have been tir'd all day without repast,
And timely rest have wanted, but fair *Virgin*
This will restore all soon. [690]

La. 'Twill not, false traitor,
'Twill not restore the truth and honesty
That thou hast banish't from thy tongue with lies,
Was this the cottage, and the safe abode
Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,
These oughly-headed Monsters? Mercy guard me! [695]
Hence with thy brew'd inchantments, foul deceiver,
Hast thou betrai'd my credulous innocence
With visor'd falshood and base forgery,
And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here
With lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute? [700]
Were it a draft for *Juno* when she banquets,

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I would not taste thy treasonous offer; none
 But such as are good men can give good things,
 And that which is not good, is not delicious
 To a wel-govern'd and wise appetite. [705]
 Co. O foolishness of men! that lend their ears
 To those budge doctors of the *Stoick* Furr,
 And fetch their precepts from the *Cynick* Tub,
 Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence.
 Wherefore did Nature powre her bounties forth, [710]
 With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
 Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,
 Thronging the Seas with spawn innumerable,
 But all to please, and sate the curious taste?
 And set to work millions of spinning Worms, [715]
 That in their green shops weave the smooth-hair'd silk
 To deck her Sons; and that no corner might
 Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loyns
 She hutch't th' all-worshipt ore and precious gems
 To store her children with; if all the world [720]
 Should in a pet of temperance feed on Pulse,
 Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but Frieze,
 Th' all-giver would be unthank't, would be unprais'd,
 Not half his riches known, and yet despis'd,
 And we should serve him as a grudging master, [725]
 As a penurious niggard of his wealth,
 And live like Natures bastards, not her sons,
 Who would be quite surcharg'd with her own weight,
 And strangl'd with her waste fertility;
 Th' earth cumber'd, and the wing'd air dark't with plumes, [730]
 The herds would over-multitude their Lords,
 The Sea o'refraught would swell, & th' unsought diamonds
 Would so emblaze the forehead of the Deep,
 And so bestudd with Stars, that they below
 Would grow inur'd to light, and com at last [735]
 To gaze upon the Sun with shameless brows.
 List Lady be not coy, and be not cosen'd
 With that same vaunted name Virginitie,
 Beauty is nature's coyn, must not be hoorded,
 But must be currant, and the good thereof [740]
 Consists in mutual and partak'n bliss,
 Unsavoury in th' injoyment of it self.
 If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
 It withers on the stalk with languish't head.
 Beauty is natures brag, and must be shown [745]
 In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities

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Where most may wonder at the workmanship;
It is for homely features to keep home,
They had their name thence; course complexions
And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply [750]
The sampler, and to teize the huswifes wooll.
What need a vermeil-tinctur'd lip for that
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the Morn?
There was another meaning in these gifts,
Think what, and be adviz'd, you are but young yet. [755]

La. I had not thought to have unlockt my lips
In this unhallow'd air, but that this Jugler
Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranckt in reasons garb.
I hate when vice can bolt her arguments, [760]
And vertue has no tongue to check her pride:
Impostor do not charge most innocent nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance, she good cateress
Means her provision onely to the good [765]
That live according to her sober laws,
And holy dictate of spare Temperance:
If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pamper'd Luxury [770]
Now heaps upon som few with vast excess,
Natures full blessings would be well dispenc't
In unsuperfluous eeven proportion,
And she no whit encomber'd with her store,
And then the giver would be better thank't, [775]
His praise due paid, for swinish gluttony
Ne're looks to Heav'n amidst his gorgeous feast,
But with besotted base ingratitude
Cramms, and blasphemes his feeder. Shall I go on?
Or have I said enough? To him that dares [780]
Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
Against the Sun-clad power of Chastity,
Fain would I something say, yet to what end?
Thou hast nor Eare nor Soul to apprehend
The sublime notion, and high mystery [785]
That must be utter'd to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of Virginity,
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
More happines then this thy present lot.
Enjoy your deer Wit, and gay Rhetorick [790]
That hath so well been taught her dazling fence,

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Thou art not fit to hear thy self convinc't;
Yet should I try, the uncontrouled worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rap't spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence, [795]
That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
Till all thy magick structures rear'd so high,
Were shatter'd into heaps o're thy false head.

Co. She fables not, I feel that I do fear [800]
Her words set off by som superior power;
And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddring dew
Dips me all o're, as when the wrath of *Jove*
Speaks thunder, and the chains of *Erebus*
To som of *Saturn's* crew. I must dissemble, [805]
And try her yet more strongly. Com, no more,
This is meer moral babble, and direct
Against the canon laws of our foundation;
I must not suffer this, yet 'tis but the lees
And setlings of a melancholy blood; [810]
But this will cure all streight, one sip of this
Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight
Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.

The Brothers rush in with Swords drawn, wrest his Glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground; his rout make signe of resistance, but are all driven in; The attendant Spirit comes in.

Spir. What, have you let the false enchanter scape?
O ye mistook, ye should have snatcht his wand [815]
And bound him fast; without his rod revers't,
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixt and motionless;
Yet stay, be not disturb'd, now I bethink me, [820]
Som other means I have which may be us'd,
Which once of *Melibæus* old I learnt
The soothest Shepherd that ere pip't on plains.

There is a gentle Nymph not farr from hence,
That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream, [825]
Sabrina is her name, a Virgin pure,
Whilom she was the daughter of *Lochrine*,
That had the Scepter from his father *Brute*.
The guiltless damsell flying the mad pursuit
Of her enraged stepdam *Guendolen*, [830]
Commended her innocence to the flood

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That stay'd her flight with his cross-flowing course,
The water Nymphs that in the bottom plaid,
Held up their pearled wrists and took her in,
Bearing her straight to aged *Nereus* Hall, [835]
Who piteous of her woes, rear'd her lank head,
And gave her to his daughters to imbathe
In nectar'd lavers strew'd with *Asphodil*,
And through the porch and inlet of each sense
Dropt in Ambrosial Oils till she reviv'd, [840]
And underwent a quick immortal change
Made Goddess of the River; still she retains
Her maid'n gentlenes, and oft at Eeve
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill luck signes [845]
That the shrewd meddling Elf delights to make,
Which she with pretious viold liquors heals.
For which the Shepherds at their festivals
Carrol her goodnes loud in rustick layes,
And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream [850]
Of pancies, pinks, and gaudy *Daffadils*.
And, as the old Swain said, she can unlock
The clasping charm, and thaw the numming spell,
If she be right invok't in warbled Song,
For maid'nhood she loves, and will be swift [855]
To aid a Virgin, such as was her self
In hard besetting need, this will I try
And adde the power of som adjuring verse.

SONG.

Sabrina fair
Listen where thou art sitting [860]
Under the glassie, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of Lillies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair,
Listen for dear honours sake,
Goddess of the silver lake, [865]
Listen and save.

Listen and appear to us
In name of great *Oceanus*,
By the earth-shaking *Neptune's* mace,
And *Tethys* grave majestick pace, [870]
By hoary *Nereus* wrinckled look,
And the *Carpathian* wisard's hook,

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By scaly *Tritons* winding shell,
And old sooth-saying *Glaucus* spell,
By *Leucothea's* lovely hands, [875]
And her son that rules the strands,
By *Thetis* tinsel-slipper'd feet,
And the Songs of *Sirens* sweet,
By dead *Parthenope's* dear tomb,
And
fair *Ligea's* http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/comus/notes.shtml -
ligeagolden comb, [880]
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks
Sleeking her soft alluring locks,
By all the *Nymphs* that nightly dance
Upon thy streams with wily glance,
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosie head [885]
From thy coral-pav'n bed,
And bridle in thy headlong wave,
Till thou our summons answer'd have.
Listen and save.

Sabrina rises, attended by water-Nymphes, and sings.

*By the rushy-fringed bank, [890]
Where grows the Willow and the Osier dank,
My sliding Chariot stayes,
Thick set with Agat and the azurn sheen
Of Turkis blew, and Emrauld green
That in the channell strayes, [895]
Whilst from off the waters fleet
Thus I set my printless feet
O're the Cowslips Velvet head,
That bends not as I tread,
Gentle swain at thy request [900]
I am here.*

Spir. Goddess dear
We implore thy powerful hand
To undoe the charmed band
Of true Virgin here distrest, [905]
Through the force, and through the wile
Of unblest inchanter vile.

Sab. Shepherd 'tis my office best
To help insnared chastity;
Brightest Lady look on me, [910]
Thus I sprinkle on thy brest

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Drops that from my fountain pure,
I have kept of pretious cure,
Thrice upon thy fingers tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip, [915]
Next this marble venom'd seat
Smear'd with gumms of glutenous heat
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold,
Now the spell hath lost his hold;
And I must haste ere morning hour [920]
To wait in *Amphitrite's* bow'r.

Sabrina descends, and the Lady rises out of her seat.

Spir. Virgin, daughter of *Lochrine*
Sprung of old *Anchises* line,
May thy brimmed waves for this
Their full tribute never miss [925]
From a thousand petty rills,
That tumble down the snowy hills:
Summer drouth, or singed air
Never scorch thy tresses fair,
Nor wet *Octobers* torrent flood [930]
Thy molten crystal fill with mudd;
May thy billows rowl ashoar
The beryl, and the golden ore,
May thy lofty head be crown'd
With many a tower and terrass round, [935]
And here and there thy banks upon
With Groves of myrrhe, and cinnamon.

Com Lady while Heaven lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursed place,
Lest the Sorcerer us intice [940]
With som other new device.
Not a waste, or needless sound
Till we com to holier ground,
I shall be your faithfull guide
Through this gloomy covert wide, [945]
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Fathers residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wish't presence, and beside [950]
All the Swains that there abide,
With Jiggs, and rural dance resort,

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We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and chere; [955]
Com let us haste, the Stars grow high,
But night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

*The Scene changes presenting Ludlow Town and the Presidents Castle,
then com in Countrey-Dancers, after them the attendant Spirit, with the two
Brothers and the Lady.*

SONG.

*Spir. Back Shepherds, back, anough your play,
Till next Sun-shine holiday,
Here be without duck or nod [960]
Other trippings to be trod
Of lighter toes, and such Court guise
As Mercury did first devise
With the mincing Dryades
On the Lawns, and on the Leas. [965]*

This second Song presents them to their
father and mother.

*Noble Lord, and Lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight,
Here behold so goodly grown
Three fair branches of your own,
Heav'n hath timely tri'd their youth, [970]
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
And sent them here through hard assays
With a crown of deathless Praise,
To triumph in victorious dance
O're sensual Folly, and Intemperance. [975]*

The dances ended, the Spirit Epiloguizes.

*Spir. To the Ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that ly
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky:
There I suck the liquid ayr [980]
All amidst the Gardens fair
Of *Hesperus*, and his daughters three
That sing about the golden tree:
Along the crisped shades and bowres*

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Revels the spruce and jocond Spring, [985]
 The Graces, and the rosie-boosom'd Howres,
 Thither all their bounties bring,
 That there eternal Summer dwels,
 And West winds with musky wing
 About the cedar'n alleys fling [990]
Nard, and *Cassia's* balmy smels.
Iris there with humid bow,
 Waters the odorous banks that blow
 Flowers of more mingled hew
 Then her purfl'd scarf can shew, [995]
 And drenches with *Elysian* dew
 (List mortals, if your ears be true)
 Beds of *Hyacinth* and roses
 Where young *Adonis* oft reposes,
 Waxing well of his deep wound [1000]
 In slumber soft, and on the ground
 Sadly sits th' *Assyrian* Queen;
 But far above in spangled sheen
 Celestial *Cupid* her fam'd son advanc't,
 Holds his dear *Psyche* sweet intranc't [1005]
 After her wandring labours long,
 Till free consent the gods among
 Make her his eternal Bride,
 And from her fair unspotted side
 Two blissful twins are to be born, [1010]
 Youth and Joy; so *Jove* hath sworn.
 But now my task is smoothly don,
 I can fly, or I can run
 Quickly to the green earths end,
 Where the bow'd welkin slow doth bend, [1015]
 And from thence can soar as soon
 To the corners of the Moon.
 Mortals that would follow me,
 Love vertue, she alone is free,
 She can teach ye how to clime [1020]
 Higher then the Speary chime;
 Or if Vertue feeble were,
 Heav'n it self would stoop to her.

The End

Notes

A Mask. Masks (better known as masques) "were created as introductions to masked balls. After the aristocrats entered from a scenic setting on a stage and stepped down from the stage into the middle of a hall, they engaged in one or more allegorical dances in a central carpeted area. The dances were performed directly before and around the king and queen, or some members of the nobility" (Demaray 11). See also the article on masques in Norton Topics Online.

presented. That is, represented characters in the drama; see the BMS title. Or, as Flanagan suggests, "in the sense that they came before an aristocratic audience" (see *OED2*).

Lord BRACLY. The Earl of Bridgewater was also Viscount Brackley. His eldest son had, by 1645, inherited his father's title and was now Lord Brackley. He performed the part of the Elder Brother; his brother, Thomas, the Second Brother, and their sister, Alice, the Lady.

attendant Spirit. The Trinity MS (TMS) calls him a "Guardian spirit, or Dæmon" and uses the speech preface "Dæ" for most of his speeches; the Bridgewater MS (BMS) calls him "demon." Most likely, Milton's sense of a dæmon follows Socrates' (or Diotima's) from Plato's *Symposium* 202d-203a, where Socrates teaches that Love is not a god but a "great spirit" or dæmon.

discovers. Reveals, uncovers.

Opening lines. The BMS has twenty-three additional opening lines before "Before." "Descends" implies some of the stage machinery familiar to masques of the period; "enters" does not, and may suggest a simpler or an outdoor performance.

Jove. As was common in masques of the period, the period setting was assumed to be vaguely classical and therefore pre-Christian, where "Jove" is a thinly-veiled stand-in for the Christian God. The good characters are understood to be such upright pagans that they are virtually Christians, since the presumption is that all true virtue, especially chastity, is, at the end of the day, Christian. Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* presents Jupiter in a similar manner.

mansion. Dwelling or home; see the same usage in the Authorised Version (1611) of John 14:2.

Line 4. The TMS shows about 15 lines inserted after this line and crossed out with a large X.

Line 7. See TMS.

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pinfold. Literally a cattle pen; an enclosure for livestock.

mortal change. The Attendant Spirit speaks of earthly (mortal) life as nearly bestial, at least compared to his life in "Jove's Court." The imagery also suggests that to be a mortal is to already have undergone something like the metamorphosis effected by Circe, because the body acts as the bestial prison of the soul (Kerrigan 31).

tributary gods. That is, the lesser bodies of water, and rivers (tributaries) that are spoken of as lesser rulers or "tributary" lords.

main. Ocean.

blu-hair'd deities. Refers to the Tritons, Neptune's children whom Ovid describes as blue-roofed ("tectum/ caeruleum"); see *Metamorphoses* 1.332-333.

this tract. Wales and the bordering English counties which were part of the jurisdiction of the Earl of Bridgewater as Lord President of Wales.

mickle. Great or much. Spenser uses the term frequently and it survives in Scots to this day, sometimes as "muckle".

proud in Arms. Popular (if caricatured) examples of the legendary Welsh pride in arms are Shakespeare's Owen Glendower in *1 Henry IV* and Fluellan in *Henry V*.

drear Wood. Recalls the *selva oscura* of Dante's *Inferno* 1.2, and the opening of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in which the wood ("Errours den") is symbolic of error.

never yet was heard. An echo of Ariosto's "unattempted" in *Orlando Furioso*; see also *Paradise Lost* 1.16.

Bacchus. The Roman god of wine, same as the Greek god Dionysus. Milton imagines Comus as the son of Bacchus and Circe. For more on Bacchus, see the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysius* 7 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.517-691. See also Caravaggio's *Bacchus* (1597) and Rubens' *Bacchus* (1638-40).

Mariners transform'd. After Bacchus was captured by Tuscan pirates, he turned his turned captors into dolphins. See *Metamorphoses* 3.650-91.

Tyrrhene shore. The Italian coast north of Sicily, opposite Sardinia and Corsica.
Circes Iland. Known as Aeaea, the island is somewhere in the Tyrrhenian Sea off the Circean Promontory on the southwest coast of Italy.
(See *Odyssey* 10.208 and following.)

The daughter of the Sun. Circe, whose father was Helios the sun god.

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groveling Swine. Refers to Circe's transformation of Odysseus' men into swine (See *Odyssey* 10.238). This is also the subject of William Browne's *Inner Temple Masque* (1615), and Aurelian Townshend's and Inigo Jones's masque *Tempe Restored* (1632) with which Milton was familiar. (Orgel & Goldberg 760).

orient. Bright or shining like pearls from the orient.

drouth of Phoebus. A thirst caused by the sun.

Ounce. Lynx.

perfect. Complete.

Iris Wooff. Rainbow.

weeds. Garments.

the service. That is, like the shepherd who serves the Earl of Bridgewater. But the Attendant Spirit also suggests that the swain has powers like those of Orpheus to tame nature with his music. See Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10

mould. Earth or primal clay.

sway. Rule.

nether Jove. According to ancient legends, when the Olympian gods defeated the Titans, the three sons of Chronos and Rhea -- Jove (Zeus) and his brothers, Neptune (Poseidon) and Pluto (Hades) -- divided the universe amongst themselves by lots. Jove won the heavens, Neptune the waters and islands, and Pluto ("nether" or lower Jove) the underworld. See Homer's *Iliad* 15.187-193.

Line 90. TMS shows some interesting differences.

hatefull. TMS has: "~~virgin~~" and "hatefull" supplied here.

Comus. See TMS lines at this point.

Line 93. Hesperus or Venus (in Ovid's Latin, *Vesper*), the evening star signalled (on a clear day) that it was time to pen the sheep into a fold; see Virgil's *Eclogues* 6.85-86.

dusky. TMS started with "northren," then tried "dusky" in the margin, but underscored "northren"; BMS has "Northerne." Somehow "duskie" made it into 1637 and "dusky" into 1645.

Jollity. Compare these lines to *L'Allegro* 25-56.

Saws. Maxims or serious sayings; sententious wisdom.

finny drove. Verbatim from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* 3.8.29.

Morrice. Morris-dance; a lively group dance typical of May festivals.

merry wakes. "The local annual festival of an English (now chiefly rural) parish, observed (originally on the feast of the patron saint of the church, but now usually on some particular Sunday and the two or three days following) as an occasion for making holiday, entertainment of friends, and often for village sports, dancing, and other amusements" (*OED2*). On the political implications of "merry wakes and pastimes" in Caroline England, see Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth. rights*. Rites.

Cotytto. Cotys, a Thracian fertility goddess worshipped in orgiastic rites.

Line 132. TMS is heavy with revisions here.

Stay. Hold, stop.

Ebon chair. Black chariot.

The Measure. Denotes a rhythmical performance; in this masque it would include both dance and music. Both TMS and BMS further specify the Measure "in a wild, rude, & wanton *Antick*."

feel. TMS has "heare", crossed out and replaced by "feele." Unlike most commentators, I think this indicates that Comus relies more on the sense of touch, a sense he has highly developed, than those of hearing and sight.
trains. The bait used for luring wild animals into a trap.

quaint habits. Strange garments. Comus is being sarcastic here. He and his crew are dressed to the nines in courtly costumes.

glozing. Flattering or insinuating. Comus plans to make sin appear rational and delightful; see *Areopagitica* on the "seeming pleasures" of vice.

here. *Poems* 1673 prints this line exactly as it appears here and in 1645 (our copytext), but the Errata in 1673, opposite page 1, instructs readers to remove the comma after "may" and change "here" to "hear." The resulting line would read: "And hearken, if I may her busines hear." This would still makes sense, although a somewhat different sense from the line as it appears in 1645.

unletter'd Hinds. Uneducated farm laborers.

Pan. Pan, in Greek mythology, is a "fertility deity, more or less bestial in form" (*Britannica Online*). He was associated by the Romans with Faunus and often appeared as a patron god of shepherds. See also the "Nativity Ode" 89.

Wassailers. Revellers and drinkers of wassail, usually an alcoholic drink.

sad Votarist. Solemn pilgrim.

Palmer's weed. A Palmer was a pilgrim who carried a palm leaf as a souvenir of his or her visit to the Holy Land.

Phoebus wain. The chariot of the sun spoken of as a farm wagon.

perfet. Full, complete.

single. Singular, that is, unusally dark.

Chastity. Faith, Hope, and Charity are the familiar triad of Christian virtues (I Corinthians 13:13); the Lady invokes Faith and Hope (213), but then closes with Chastity (215) instead of Charity as most readers would expect. This may imply an identification between Charity (love) and Chastity.

visibly. TMS is interesting here.

Echo. For the story of Echo, the nymph changed into a disembodied voice, see *Metamorphoses* 3.351-401.

Meander's. A river in Phrygia along which Echo wandered in despair for love of Narcissus. (See note on Echo)

Nightingale. For the story of the rape of Philomela and her transformation into a nightingale, see *Metamorphoses* 6.440.

translated. See TMS on the following lines.

ravishment. Compare to Satan's temporary ravishment at his first sight of Eve alone in *Paradise Lost* 9.459-462.

doune. Down, feathers.

Sirens. Beautiful sea nymphs who drew sailors to destruction on rocky islands by the power of their songs. See *Odyssey* 12.39-72.

Naiades. Nymphs of streams and springs. In Ovid, Circe's attendants are Nereids, or sea nymphs (*Metamorphoses* 14.261-267).

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Scylla. A nymph who was changed by her rival in love, Circe, into a monster with ferocious dogs sprouting from her lower body. Ultimately, she changed into a dangerous, rocky island off the coast of Sicily. See *Metamorphoses* 14.8-74.

Charybdis. A violent whirlpool opposite the island of Scylla.

Hail forren wonder. Compare to Satan's opening address to Eve in *Paradise Lost* 9.532-537.

Unless the Goddess. That is, "unless you are the Goddess"; the suggestion recalls Aeneas's reaction to seeing Venus after the Trojan shipwreck, "O dea certe"; see *Aenied* 1.328). Also, Ferdinand's response to his first sight of Miranda: "Most sure the goddess/On whom these airs attend" in Shakespeare's *Tempest* 1.2.489-90.

Silvan. Sylvanus, god of the woods; another name for Pan.

Lines 277-90. Classical stichomythia, a type of dialogue in alternating lines of verse, is used here in imitation of ancient Greek and neo-classic Italian drama. (Orgel & Goldberg 764)

hit. Discover.

lips. Hebe, daughter of Zeus and Hera, personified youthful beauty, in this case the youthful beauty of a young man who had yet to require a razor for his beard.

traces. Harnesses.

swink't. Swinked, wearied from toil.

port. Department.

the element. The air; the home of the spirits. See *Paradise Regain'd* 2.122 and *Il Penseroso* 93-99.

plighted. Pleated, folded.

Dingle. Woodland hollow.

bosky bourn. A stream bordered by shrubs or woods.

low roosted lark. Larks, traditionally associated with dawn, roost in low nests — thatched pallets — on the ground. Comus works fairly hard at sounding like a rustic swain, peppering his speech with what he takes to be the lexicon of such country folk, but he may also sound rather foolish to the Lady.

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square. Adjust, adapt.

benizon. Blessing. (See *Faerie Queene* 3.1.43.5-6)

wont'st. Are accustomed to.

your influence. The precious influence of the stars that is referred to in *Paradise Lost* 9.107.

star of Arcady. The North Star. Arcas, the prince of Arcadia, was transformed by Zeus into a star to prevent him from killing his mother Callisto. Callisto was transformed from the form of a bear into the constellation Ursa Major, and Arcas became the constellation Ursa Minor. See *Metamorphoses* 2.401-507.

Tyrian Cynosure. This refers to the Tyrian (Phoenician) sailors' use of the North Star as a navigational guide. The North Star, known as the Cynosure, was found in the tail of the constellation Ursa Minor.

wattled cotes. Sheds constructed of woven twigs.

Line 354. TMS has some interesting bits here.

Line 373. This echoes Redcross's encouragement of Una in the wood of error in *Faerie Queene* 1.1.12.9 stating "Vertue giues her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade."

the various bussle of resort. "In the hustle and bustle of society."

center. The center of the earth. See *Paradise Lost* 1.686

his own dungeon. Compare to *Samson* 155-156.

Beads. Rosary beads.

Hesperian Tree. This refers to the goddess Hera's tree that bore golden apples and was guarded by a dragon. Hera planted this tree in the garden of the Hesperides, who were the daughters of the evening star Hesperus. Milton may be indirectly using the Hesperian garden as a symbol of paradise, with its forbidden tree guarded by a serpent (Hughes 99). Stealing the golden apples from this tree was one of the tasks assigned to Hercules.

unenchanted eye. In stealing golden apples from Hera's Hesperian Tree, Hercules charmed the guardian dragon to sleep.

Incontinence. Uncontrolled sexual passion. But for a more precise Aristotelian definition of continence or self-restraint, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145a-1145b.

unowned. Unmarried, and apart from her father.

Line 408. See TMS for cancelled lines here.

quiver'd Nymph. Appearing like Diana, the chaste goddess of the moon and the hunt.

unblench't. Not dismayed or bothered.

Lines 432-437. These lines almost echo Marcellus' speech in *Hamlet* 1.1.158-64, detailing popular beliefs about the limitations of supernatural evil.

swart Faëry. Black, underground fairy or demon. See *Il Penseroso* 93-4.

the arms of Chastity. That is, its lineage traced from ancient Greece. Just what ancient teaching Milton has in mind is hard to say, but Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* teaches how a man should deal with pleasures of the body: 1152a-1154b.

brinded. Tawny and streaked or spotted.

pard. Panther or leopard.

Gorgon sheild. Minerva/Diana carried on her shield the snake-haired head of Medusa, which turned those who looked at it to stone.

lacky. Attend, as an aristocrat would be attendended by lackeys.

temple of the mind. See John 2:21.

all be made immortal. Lines 459-63 anticipate Raphael's assurance to Adam that if he is obedient, he may ultimately be refined into pure spirit; see *Paradise Lost* 5.497-503.

she. Milton refers to the soul here as feminine. This may be largely a grammatical matter, as the Latin word for soul, *anima*, is feminine. Oddly, the human body was also often considered feminine in relation to a masculine soul, and Milton here is talking about the imbruting and hyper-embodying of the soul that results from the sin of lust.

Charnell vaults. Burial houses or vaults for paupers' bodies.

sitting by a new made grave. See a similar image in Plato's *Phaedo* 81d.

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Line 476. It is difficult to avoid hearing sarcasm here.

Line 493. 1645 has simply "father," but both TMS and BMS have "fathers."

Thyrsis. A singer and shepherd in Theocritus' *Idyll* 1 and Virgil's *Eclogues* 7.

Lines 495-512. The shift to couplets in Thyrsis' speech "recalls the language of the pastoral eclogue, and its poetic debates" (Orgel & Goldberg 768).

madrigal. Technically a part of a song for three or more voices. Milton may be alluding to the simple, pastoral music of shepherds.

weather. Castrated sheep.

me unhappy. Milton may be imitating the familiar Latin refrain *me miserum*. See *Paradise Lost* 4.73.

Chimeras. A monster having three heads; one lion, one goat, and one dragon. See Hesiod, *Theogony* 319-325; and Homer's *Iliad* 6.179-182; and *Aeneid* 6.288. Also see *Paradise Lost* 2.628.

enchanted Isles. Like Circe's or Calypso's in *Odyssey* 10 and 5, or Alcina's in Ariosto's *Orlando* 6.34-38.

murmurs. Ritual incantations.

crofts. Enclosed fields.

Hecate. Queen of the underworld, patroness of sorcerers. She was invoked by Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (See *Metamorphoses* 7.194). She was also the "Mistress of the witches" in *Macbeth* (See *Macbeth* 3.5.10). On popular witch cults, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*.

frighted. TMS has "drousie flighted," but BMS, 1637 and 1645 all have "frighted." How steeds can be drowsy and frightened at the same time is a problem. Since "drousie flighted steeds" makes only marginally better sense, I have left it alone. *the deadly snare!* Milton alludes to the story of Philomela, her rape by her brother-in-law, and her transformation to a nightingale; see Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6

period. Sentence or sentence-like phrase.

Eastern scout. Aurora, the dawn.

th'Indian steep. The Himalayas.

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unweeting. Not knowing or unwittingly.

Lines 591-593. See Romans 8:28. See also *Paradise Lost* 4.17-18.

if this fail. If my claim is incorrect.

Acheron. One of the four rivers of the underworld; a path to Hell.

Harpies. Harpies attacked Aeneas and his men and destroyed their food. See *Aeneid* 3.225-8.

Hydras. A many-headed poisonous serpent killed by Hercules.

purchase. Prey or plunder; literally, the pursuit of game in hunting.

by the curls. Most editors suppose this indicates Milton imagined Comus with curly hair on his head. See also the TMS lines here.

Emprise. Chivalric enterprise.

clouted shoon. Shoes patched or studded with iron nails.

Moly. Hermes gave Odysseus the magic herb moly to protect him against the charms of Circe. Moly was often allegorized in the Renaissance as temperance or prudence (Orgel & Goldberg, 769). See *Odyssey* 10.287-303.

Hæmony. A word derived from any of the following roots; the traditional home of witchcraft Haemonia, from the Greek *haimon* meaning sinful, or from *haimonios* meaning blood-red (Orgel & Goldberg 770).

mildew blast. When sheep eat mildewed hay, they are poisoned; in the seventeenth-century they were said to be blasted by mildew. Simple country folk often claimed such livestock deaths were the work of witches or fairies.

lime-twigs. Snares made of twigs coated with bird-lime, a sticky goo made from the bark of the holm oak; small birds would adhere to the coated sticks and could not fly away.

brandish't blade. This echoes to Hermes' warning to Odysseus that he should approach Circe with his sword drawn. See *Odyssey* 10.294-5.

Vulcan. The god of fire who tended the forges of the gods. He and his associated underground spirits were believed responsible for volcanic eruptions, especially eruptions of Mount Etna.

Daphne. Daphne was a nymph pursued by Apollo. In answer to her prayers, the gods changed her into a laurel, saving her from the clutches of Apollo. See *Metamorphoses* 1.547-52.

corporal rinde. Her body.

Julep. A "cordial" or reputedly medicinal distillation.

Nepenthes. A legendary drug that makes one forget painful truths. See *Odyssey* 4.219-32.

Jove-born Helena. Helen was the child of Jove by Leda.

lickerish. Tempting, delicious, or lecherous.

Lines 703-704. The Son makes a similar argument in *Paradise Regain'd*; Satan challenges it and Jesus responds; see *Paradise Regain'd* 2.320 and forward.

budge doctors. Stodgy or pompous teachers.

Stoick Furr. Refers to the academic costume allegedly worn by Stoics.

Cynic Tub. Diogenes made a tub his home in an effort to live the ideals of Cynic philosophy that encouraged a life of poverty and renunciation of pleasure.

to please. To please whom did Nature create the Lady's beauty?

pet. An ill-humored fit; the notion of an ill-humored fit of temperance is oxymoronic.

Pulse. Legume seeds, sometimes the prescribed diet of monks and hermits.

Frieze. Rough wool.

cumber'd. Overwhelmed or blocked up.

forhead of the Deep. The part of the earth's crust closest to the surface. Although "Deep" usually signifies the ocean, this context suggests that it may mean the depths of the earth, because diamonds are found in the earth not the sea.

cosen'd. Deceived.

currant. Circulating freely, current.

vermeil. Vermilion, bright red.

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this Jugler. Since the Lady speaks of Comus in the third person, and she would hardly waste her rhetoric on Comus's beastly crew, we might imagine that she is directly addressing the audience.

bolt. To sift, in order to separate the attractive bits from the unattractive.

Line 762. Compare this to Raphael's rebuke of Adam in *Paradise Lost* 8.561.

Line 767. "To partake or not partake, that is *not* the question, but when, with whom, how much, what, and in what attitude. In this way the Lady extricates herself from the blunt either/or of the question of chastity" (Kerrigan 27). See also Aristotle on temperance in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118a.

Lines 767-72. "The critical sting in this passage takes its force from the traditional ideal of aristocratic paternalism and its corollary, the reciprocal obligations of a moral community in which those of high station acknowledge responsibility for the welfare of its poorer and weaker members" (Zagorin 28).

giver. God... see "His" in the following line.

nor Eare. This echoes Jesus in Matthew 11:15.

brute Earth. See Horace's *bruta tellus* of *Odes* 1.34.9-12.

Speaks thunder. See 1 Samuel 7:10.

Erebus. Primeval darkness of the underworld. Erebus was the son of Chaos according to Hesiod's *Theogony* 617-721.

Saturns crew. The giants and Titans; lead by Saturn they made war on Saturn's son Jove who defeated and imprisoned them.

canon laws. Fundamental principles, foundational laws. Also usually means church laws; Milton insinuates here what he argues more openly as an anti-prelatical pamphleteer.

revers't. Like Circe's charms, the effects of Comus' wand can only be undone by reversing his wand. See *Metamorphoses* 14.300.

Meliboeus. An old shepherd poet in Virgil's *Eclogue* 1 and *Eclogue* 7. This may also allude to the Sabrina story in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. See *Faerie Queene* 2.10.17-19.

soothest. Wisest.

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Line 825. "With watery power controls"; a curb is the leash or reins used to control an animal.

Sabrina. The Latin name of the River Severn. The story of the death of a girl who was turned into a river nymph, was probably taken from Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (See *Faerie Queene* 2.10.17-19).

Whilom. A Spenserian archaism meaning formerly or once.

Brute. Brutus was the great-grandson of Aeneas and legendary founder of Britain. For a version of the story that follows, see Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* 2.6.

Nereus. A wise and generous sea-god, mentioned as the "old man of the sea" by Homer. (See *Iliad* 18.141).

lank. Drooping or languid.

daughters. The Nereids were the daughters of Nereus who treated a wounded mortal with balms and nectars as medicines in their underwater home. See *Faerie Queene* 3.4.40.

Asphodil. Asphodel, an immortal flower found in the Elysian Fields where Ulysses met the famous dead. See *Odyssey* 11.538.

urchin blasts. Wounds or illnesses caused by goblins. Goblins are referred to as urchins, because they were thought to assume the shape of a hedgehog commonly known as an urchin. (Orgel & Goldberg 773).

layes. Songs.

Oceanus. One of the Titans who was the father of the rivers and progenitor of the Olympian gods. See *Iliad* 14.201.

Tethys. Goddess of the rivers and oceans; wife of Oceanus.

Carpathian wizard's hook. Proteus lived in the Carpathian Sea with a seer and used his shepherd's crook to herd Neptune's flock of sea-lions. See *Georgics* 4.387-95.

Triton. Neptune's herald who played a conch shell.

Glaucus. Boeotian fisherman who was transformed into a sea god by eating a magic herb that endowed him with the power of prophecy.

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See *Metamorphoses* 13.904-68. See also Spenser's *Faerie Queene* 4.11.13. *Leucothea*. In an effort to save her from the wrath of Juno, Neptune turned Ino into the sea deity Leucothea. She gave Odysseus her magic scarf to save him from drowning. See *Odyssey* 5.333.

her son. Ino's son Melicertes was changed into the sea god Paleamon who was guardian of ports and harbors. See *Metamorphoses* 4.416-542.

Thetis. One of the sea-dwelling Nereids, she was the mother of Achilles. See *Iliad* 18.127

Parthenope. One of the Sirens, she drowned herself after Odysseus escaped the danger of the sirens' song and her body washed up on the shore of Naples where a monument was erected in her honor; see Virgil's *Georgics* 4.564.

Ligea. A Siren and river nymph remarkable for her lustrous hair. (See *Georgics* 4.336).

Turkis. Turquoise.

printless feet. See Shakespeare's *Tempest* 5.1.34.

Amphitrite. One of the sea-dwelling daughters of Nereus who broke a vow of celibacy to marry Neptune and bore his son, Triton. She was reputed to have power to calm raging seas. See Hesiod's *Theogony* 254.

Anchises. Father of Aeneas and ancestor of Locrine and Sabrina.

beryl. A group of greenish and blue-green precious stones including emeralds and aquamarines.

in state. In full state occasion and dress.

trippings. Dances.

Mercury. Mercury was the inventor of the lyre and a renowned choreographer among the gods.

Dryades. Wood nymphs.

crisped. A poetic word meaning curled, crinkled, or puckered.

Howres. According to Hesiod, the Horae were the children of Zeus, the king of the gods, and Themis, a Titaness, and their names (Eunomia, Dike, Eirene--that is, Good Order, Justice, Peace) indicate the extension of their functions from

nature to the events of human life. At Athens they were apparently two in number: Thallo and Carpo, the goddesses of the flowers of spring and of the fruits of summer. Their yearly festival was the Horaea. In later mythology the Horae became the four seasons, daughters of the sun god, Helios, and the moon goddess, Selene, each represented with the conventional attributes. (See *Paradise Lost* 4.267)

That. Both the 1645 and 1673 *Poems* print this line as it appears here, but the Errata in 1673 instructs readers to elide the word "That" from this line.

Nard and Cassia. A root and bark respectively, they were known to be aromatic plants.

Iris. Goddess of the rainbow.

purfl'd. Multi-colored.

Elysian. Heavenly; from Elysium, the fields where the spirits of the blessed live after death.

Adonis. Lover of Venus who was killed by a boar and restored to immortal life in the Garden of Adonis. See *Faerie Queene* 3.6.46-50 and 2.3.982-83. See also Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. See also *Paradise Lost* 9.439-40.

Assyrian Queen. Venus, who was first worshipped in Assyria.

Lines 1004-8. Psyche was a mortal woman so beautiful that Venus sent Cupid to make her fall in love with someone loathsome, so as not to be outdone by this mortal woman. Cupid fell in love with her, but forbade her to see him and hid his identity by visiting her only at night. Psyche disobeyed Cupid's wishes by looking upon him one night while he was sleeping. For this transgression she was punished with trials and wanderings, but was finally saved by Jove who allowed her to marry Cupid and live among the immortals. See Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* 4.28-6.24.

bow'd welkin. Arch of the sky.

Spheary chime. Above the music of the spheres; to the highest heaven.