

A MASK

Represented before the Right Honourable the Earl of  
Bridgewater, Lord President of Wales, and the Right  
Honourable the Countess of Bridgewater

At Ludlow Castle the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 1634

The chief persons in the representation were

The Lord Brackley  
The Lady Alice Egerton  
Mr. Thomas Egerton

Author: John Milton

A MASK

*The first scene discovers a wild wood. Then a guardian spirit or  
Dæmon descends or enters.*

*Song*<sup>1</sup>

From the heav'ns now I fly,  
and those happy climes that lie  
where day never shuts his eye,  
up in the broad fields of the sky.  
There I suck the liquid air

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<sup>1</sup> Text in brackets was not set by Lawes. Emendations and significant variants from the Bridgewater MS are given in footnotes, with collation of the Trinity MS (TMS) and the 1637 edition of the Mask.

all amidst the gardens fair  
of Hesperus and his daughters three,  
that sing about the golden tree.

[There eternal Summer dwells  
and west winds with musky wing  
about the cedarn alleys fling  
nard and cassia's balmy smells.]  
Iris there with humid bow  
waters th' od'rous banks that blow  
flowers of more mingled hue  
than her purfléd scarf can show,  
[yellow, watchet, green and blue,  
and drenches oft with manna dew]  
beds of hyacinths and roses,  
where many a cherub soft reposes.

*Dem.* Before the starry threshold of Jove's court  
my mansion is, where those immortal shapes  
of bright aërial spirits live insphered  
in regions mild of calm and serene air,  
above the smoke and stir of this dim spot  
which men call Earth, and with<sup>2</sup> low-thoughted care,  
confined and pestered in this pinfold here,  
strive to keep up a frail and fev'rish being,  
unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,  
after this mortal change, to her true servants,

<sup>2</sup> with] w<sup>th</sup> TMS; with 1637; w<sup>ch</sup> BMS

amongst th'enthronéd gods on sainted seats.  
Yet some there be that with due steps aspire  
to lay their just hands on that golden key  
that opes the palace of eternity.

To such my errand is, and but for such  
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 nether Jove,  
imperial rule of all the sea-girt Isles  
that, like to rich and various gems, inlay  
the unadornéd bosom of the deep;  
which he, to grace his tributary gods,  
by course commits to several government,  
and gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns,  
and wield their little tridents. But this isle,  
the greatest and the best of all the main,  
he quarters to his blue-haired deities;  
and all this tract that fronts the falling sun,  
a noble peer of mickle trust and power  
has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide  
an old and haughty nation, proud in arms:  
Where his faire offspring, nursed in princely lore,<sup>3</sup>  
are coming to attend their father's state  
and new entrusted sceptre. But their way  
lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,  
the nodding horror of whose shady brows

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<sup>3</sup> lore] TMS, 1637; love BMS

threats the forlorn and wandering passenger;  
and here their tender age might suffer peril,  
but that, by quick command from sovereign Jove,  
I was dispatched for their defence and guard.  
And listen why, for I will tell you now  
what never yet was heard in tale or song  
from old or modern bard in hall or bower.

Bacchus, that first from out the purple grapes  
crushed the sweet poison of misuséd wine,  
after the Tuscan mariners<sup>4</sup> transformed,  
coasting the Tyrrhene shore as the winds listed,  
on Circe's island fell. (Who knows not Circe  
the daughter of the Sun, whose charméd cup  
whoever tasted lost his upright shape,  
and downward fell into a grovelling swine?)  
This nymph that gazed upon his clustering locks  
with ivy berries wreath'd, and his blithe youth,  
had by him, ere he parted thence, a son  
much like his father, but his mother more,  
which therefore she brought up, and Comus named:  
Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,  
roving the Celtic and Iberian fields,  
at last betakes him to this ominous wood,  
and, in thick shelter of black shades embowered,  
excels his mother at her mighty art,  
offering to every weary traveller  
his orient liquor in a crystal glass  
to quench the drought of Phoebus; which as they taste

<sup>4</sup> mariners] TMS, 1637; manners BMS

(for most do taste through fond intemp'rate thirst)  
soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,  
th'express resemblance of the gods, is changed  
into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,  
or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,  
all other parts remaining as they were.  
And they, so perfect is<sup>5</sup> their misery,  
not once perceive their foul disfigurement  
but boast themselves more comely than before,  
and all their friends and native home forget,  
to roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.  
Therefore, when any favoured of high Jove  
chances to pass through this advent'rous glade,  
swift as the sparkle of a glancing star  
I shoot from heaven to give him safe convóy,  
as now I do. But first I must put off  
these my sky webs<sup>6</sup> spun out of Iris' woof,  
and take the weeds and likeness of a swain  
that to the service of this house belongs,  
who with his soft pipe, and smooth-dittied song  
well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,  
and hush the waving woods; nor of less faith,  
and in this office of his mountain watch  
likeliest and nearest to the present aid  
of this occasion. But I hear the tread  
of hateful steps; I must be viewless now.  
*Exit*

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<sup>5</sup> is] in 1637

<sup>6</sup> webs] robes, 1637

*COMUS enters with a charming-rod in one hand and a glass of liquor in the other; with him a rout of monsters like men and women but headed like wild beasts, their apparel glistening. They come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands.*

*Co.* The star that bids the shepherd fold  
now the top of Heav'n doth hold,  
and the gilded car of day  
his glowing axle doth allay  
in the steep Atlantic stream,  
and the slope sun his upward beam  
shoots against the Northern<sup>7</sup> Pole,  
pacing toward the other goal  
of his chamber in the East.  
Meanwhile, welcome, joy and feast,  
midnight shout and revelry,  
tipsy dance and jollity:  
braid your locks with rosy twine,  
dropping odours, dropping wine.  
Rigour now is gone to bed,  
and Advice with scrupulous head,  
strict Age, and sour Severity,  
with their grave saws, in slumber lie.  
We that are of purer fire  
imitate the starry choir,  
who in their nightly watchful spheres  
lead in swift round the months and years.

<sup>7</sup> Northern] dusky, 1637

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,  
now to the moon in wav'ring morris 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, decked with daisies trim,  
their merry wakes and pastimes keep:  
What hath night to do with sleep?  
Night has better sweets to prove;  
Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.  
Come let us our rites begin  
'tis only daylight that makes sin,  
which these dun shades will ne'er report.  
Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport,  
dark-veiled Cotytto, [t']whom the secret flame  
of midnight torches burn; mysterious dame,  
that ne'er art called, but when the dragon womb  
of Stygian darkness spits<sup>8</sup> her thickest gloom  
and makes one blot of all the air.  
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,  
wherein thou rid'st with Hecat', and befriend  
us, thy vowed 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 cabined loop-hole peep,  
and to the tell-tale sun descry  
our concealed solemnity.

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<sup>8</sup> spits] 1637; spetts BMS

Come, knit hands, and beat the ground  
in a light fantastic round.

*The measure in a wild, rude, and wanton antick.*

Co. Break off, break off! I feel the different pace  
of some chaste footing near about this ground.  
Run to your shrouds within these brakes and trees:

*They all scatter.*

Our number may affright. Some virgin sure  
(for so I can distinguish by mine art)  
benighted in these woods! Now to my charms,  
and to my wily trains: I shall ere long  
be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed  
about my mother Circe. Thus I hurl  
my dazzling spells into the spongy air,  
of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion  
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  
and well-placed words of glozing<sup>9</sup> courtesy,  
baited with reasons not unplaussible,  
wind me into the easy-hearted man,  
and hug him into snares. When once her eye

<sup>9</sup> glozing] TMS, 1637; gloweing BMS

hath met the virtue of this magic dust,  
I shall appear some harmless villager  
whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.  
But here she comes; I fairly step aside  
and hearken, if I may, her business here.

*The Lady enters*

*La.* This way the noise was, if my ear be true,  
my best guide now. Methought it was the sound  
of riot and ill-managed merriment,  
such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe  
stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,  
when, for their teeming flocks and granges full,  
in wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,  
and thank the gods amiss. I should be loth  
to meet the rudeness and swilled insolence  
of such late wassailers; yet o! where else  
shall I inform my unacquainted feet  
in the blind mazes of this tangled wood?  
My brothers, when they saw me wearied out  
with this long way, resolving here to lodge  
under the spreading favour of these pines,  
stepped, as they said, to the next thicket side  
to bring me berries, or such cooling fruit  
as the kind hospitable woods provide.  
But where they are, and why they come not back  
is now the labour of my thoughts. 'Tis likeliest  
they had engaged their wandering steps too far,  
and envious darkness, ere they could return,

had stol'n them from me.  
I cannot hallo to my brothers, but  
such noise as I can make to be heard farthest  
I'll venture; for my new enlivened spirits  
prompt me, and they perhaps are not far hence.

*Song*

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen  
within thy airy shell  
by slow Meander's margent green  
and in the violet-embroider'd vale,  
where the lovelorn nightingale  
nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well.  
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair  
that liketh thy Narcissus are?  
O, if thou have  
hid them in some flowery cave,  
tell me but where,  
Sweet queen of parley, daughter to the sphere;  
So mayst thou be transplanted to the skies  
And hold a counterpoint to all heav'ns harmonies.

*COMUS looks in and speaks*

*Co.* Can any mortal mixture of Earth's mould  
breath such divine enchanting ravishment?  
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,  
and with these raptures moves the vocal air  
to testify his hidden residence.  
How sweetly did they float upon the wings

of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,  
at every fall smoothing the raven down  
of darkness till she smiled! I have oft heard  
my mother Circe with the Sirens three,  
amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,  
culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs,  
who, when they sung, would take the prisoned soul  
and lap it in Elysium: Scylla wept  
and chid her barking waves into attention,  
and fell Charybdis murmured soft applause.  
Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense,  
and in sweet madness robbed it of itself;  
but such a sacred and home-felt delight,  
such sober certainty of waking bliss,  
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,  
and she shall be my queen. – Hail, foreign wonder!  
whom certain these rough shades did never breed,  
unless the goddess that in rural shrine  
dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan, by blest song  
forbidding every bleak unkindly fog  
to touch the prospering<sup>10</sup> growth of this tall wood.

*La.* Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise  
that is addressed to unattending ears.  
Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift  
how to regain my severed company  
compelled me to awake the courteous Echo  
to give me answer from her mossy<sup>11</sup> couch.

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<sup>10</sup> prospering] **prosperous 1637**

<sup>11</sup> mossy] **TMS, 1637; massy BMS**

*Co.* What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?

*La.* Dim darkness and this leafy labyrinth.

*Co.* Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?

*La.* They left me weary on a grassy turf.

*Co.* By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why?

*La.* To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring.

*Co.* And left your fair side<sup>12</sup> all unguarded, Lady?

*La.* They were but twain, and purposed quick return.

*Co.* Perhaps forestalling night prevented them.

*La.* How easy my misfortune is to hit!

*Co.* Imports their loss, beside the present need?

*La.* No less than if I should my brothers lose.

*Co.* Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?

*La.* As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips.

<sup>12</sup> side] **side, BMS**

*Co.* Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox  
in his loose traces from the furrow came  
and the swinked hedger at his supper sat.  
I saw 'em under a green mantling vine,  
that crawls along the side of yon small hill,  
plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;  
Their port was more than human, as they stood.  
I took it for a fairy visiön  
of some gay creatures of the element  
that in the coolness of the rainbow live,  
and play i'th' plighted clouds; I was awestruck  
and as I passed, I worshipped. 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?

*Co.* Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

*La.* To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,  
in such a scant allowance of starlight,  
would overtask the best land-pilot's art,  
without the sure guess of well-practised feet.

*Co.* I know each lane, and every alley green,  
dingle, or bushy dell, of this wide wood,  
and every bosky bourn from side to side,  
my daily walks and ancient neighbourhood;

and, if your stray attendance be yet lodged  
or shroud within these limits, I shall know  
ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark  
from her thatched pallet rouse. If otherwise,  
I can conduct you, Lady, to a low  
but loyal cottage, where you may be safe  
till further quest.

*La.* Shepherd, I take thy word  
and trust thy honest-offered courtesy,  
which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds  
with smoky rafters than in tap'stry halls  
and courts of princes, where it first was named  
and yet is most pretended. In a place  
less warranted than this, or less secure,  
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.  
Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial  
to my proportioned strength! Shepherd, lead on.

*The Two Brothers [enter]*

*El. bro.* Unmuffle, ye faint stars -- and thou fair moon,  
that wont'st to love the traveller's benison,  
stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud  
and disinherit Chaos, that reigns here  
in double night of darkness and of shades;  
or, if your influence be quite dammed up  
with black usurping mists, some gentle taper  
though a rush-candle from the wicker hole  
of some clay habitation visit us

with thy long-levelled rule of streaming light,  
and thou shalt be our Star of Arcady  
or Tyrian Cynosure.

*2nd bro.* Or, if our eyes  
be barred that happiness, might we but hear  
the folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes,  
or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops,  
or whistle from the lodge, or village cock  
count the night-watches to his feathery dames,  
t'would be some solace yet, some little cheering  
in this lone dungeon of innumerable boughs.  
But, O that hapless virgin, our lost sister!  
Where may she wander now, whither betake her  
from the chill dew, amongst rude burrs and thistles?  
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,  
or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm  
leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears,  
or else in wild amazement and affright,  
so fares as did forsaken Proserpine  
when the big rolling flakes of pitchy clouds  
and darkness wound her in?

*El. bro.* Peace, brother, peace.  
I do not think my sister so to seek  
or so unprincipled in Virtue's book  
and the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever  
as that the single want of light and noise  
(not being in danger, as I hope she is not)  
could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,

and put them into misbecoming plight.  
Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
by her own radiant light though sun and moon  
were in the flat sea sunk, and Wisdom's self  
oft seeks to sweet retiréd solitude,  
where, with her best nurse Contemplatiön,  
she plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings  
that in the various bustle of resort  
were all to-ruffled and sometimes impaired.  
He that has light within his own clear breast  
may sit i'th' centre, and enjoy bright day;  
but he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts  
walks in black vapours, though the noontide brand  
blaze in the summer solstice.

*2nd bro.* 'Tis most true  
that musing meditation most affects  
the pensive secrecy of desert cell,  
far from the cheerful haunt of men or herds,  
and sits as safe as in a senate-house.  
For who would rob an hermit of his weeds,  
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 unenchanted eye  
to save her blossoms and defend her fruit  
from the rash hand of bold Incontinence.  
You may as well spread out the unsummed heaps  
of miser's treasures by an outlaw's den



and tell me it is safe as bid me hope  
danger will wink at opportunity,  
and she, a single helpless maiden, pass  
uninjured in this wide surrounding waste.  
Of night or loneliness, it recks me not:  
I fear the dread events that dog them both,  
lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person  
of our unowned sister.

*El. bro.* I do not, brother,  
infer as if I thought my sister's state  
secure without all doubt or question. No!  
I could be willing though now i'th' dark to try  
a tough encounter with the shaggiest ruffian  
that lurks by hedge or lane of this dead circuit  
to have her by my side, though I were sure  
she might be free from peril where she is;  
but where an equal poise of hope and fear  
does arbitrate th'event, my nature is  
that I incline to hope rather than fear,  
and gladly banish squint suspiciön.  
My sister is not so defenceless left  
as you imagine, brother. She has a hidden strength  
which you remember not.

*2nd bro.* What hidden strength?  
Unless the strength of heav'n, if you mean that?

*El. bro.* I mean that too; but yet a hidden strength,  
which, if heaven gave it, may be termed her own.

'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity.  
She that has that is clad in complete steel,  
and, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,  
may trace huge forests and unharboured heaths,  
infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds,  
where, through the sacred rays of chastity,  
no savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer  
will dare to soil her virgin purity.  
Yea, e'en where very desolation dwells,  
by grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades  
and yawning dens where glaring monsters house,  
she may pass on with unblenched majesty,  
be it not done in pride, or in presumption.  
Nay, more: no evil thing that walks by night,  
in fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,  
blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost  
that breaks his magic chains at curfew time,  
no goblin, or swart fairy of the mine,  
has hurtful power o'er true virginity.  
Do you believe me yet, or shall I call  
Antiquity from the old schools of Greece  
to testify the arms of Chastity?  
Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,  
fair silver-shafted queen, forever chaste,  
wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness  
and spotted mountain-pard but set at nought  
the frivolous bolt of Cupid; gods and men  
feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' th' woods.  
What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield  
the wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,

wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone,  
but rigid looks of chaste austerity,  
and noble grace that dashed brute violence  
with sudden adoration and blank awe?  
So dear to heav'n is saintly Chastity  
that when a soul is found sincerely so  
a thousand liveried angels lackey her,  
driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,  
and in clear dream and solemn vision  
tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,  
till oft converse with heavenly habitants  
begins to cast a beam on th'outward shape,  
the unpolluted temple of the mind,  
and turns it by degrees to the soul's essence  
till all be made immortal. But when lust,  
by unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,  
and most by lewd lascivious act of sin,  
lets in defilement to the inward parts,  
the soul grows clotted by contagiön,  
embodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose  
the divine property of her first being.  
Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp  
oft seen in charnel-vaults and sepulchres  
hov'ring and sitting by a new-made grave  
as loath to leave the body that it loved,  
**and linked, itself, by carnal sensuality**  
to a degenerate and degraded state.

*2nd bro.* How charming is divine philosophy!  
Not harsh and crabbéd, as dull fools suppose,  
but musical as is Apollo's lute,  
and a<sup>13</sup> perpetual feast of nectared sweets,  
where no crude surfeit reigns.

*El. bro.* List! List! I hear  
some far off hallo break the silent air.

*2nd bro.* Methought so too; what should it be?

*El. bro.* For certain,  
either someone, like us, night-foundered here,  
or else some neighbour woodman, or, at worst,  
some roving robber calling to his fellows.

*2nd bro.* Heav'n keep my sister! Again, again, and near!  
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.

*El. bro. I* I'll hallo!  
If he be friendly, he comes well; if not  
defence is a good cause -- and heav'n be for us!

*He hallos and is answered; the guardian Dæmon comes in,  
habited like a shepherd.*

*El. bro.* That hallo I should know. What are you? Speak.  
Come not too near; you fall on iron stakes else.

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<sup>13</sup> a] TMS, 1637; omit BMS

*Dem.* What voice is that? my young Lord? Speak again.

*2 bro.* O brother, 'tis my father's shepherd, sure.

*El. bro.* Thyrsis? whose artful strains have oft delayed  
the huddling brook to hear his madrigal,  
and sweetened every musk-rose of the dale!  
How camest here good shepherd? Hath any ram  
slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,  
or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?  
How could'st thou find this dark sequestered nook?

*Dem.* O my loved master's heir, and his next joy,  
I came not here on such a trivial toy  
as a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth  
of pilfering wolf; not all the fleecy wealth  
that doth enrich these downs is worth a thought  
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?

*El. bro.* To tell thee sadly, shepherd, without blame  
or our neglect, we lost her as we came.

*Dem.* Ay me unhappy! Then my fears are true.

*El. bro.* What fears, good Thyrsis? Prithee briefly show.

*Dem.* I'll tell you. 'Tis not vain or fabulous,

(though so esteemed by shallow ignorance)  
what the sage poets, taught by th' heav'nly Muse,  
storied of old in high immortal verse  
of dire Chimeras, and enchanted isles,  
and rifted rocks, whose entrance leads to Hell;  
for such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navel of this hideous wood,  
immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells,  
of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,  
deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries,  
and here to every thirsty wanderer  
by sly enticement gives his baneful cup,  
with many murmurs mixt, whose pleasing poison  
the visage quite transforms of him that drinks,  
and th' inglorious likeness of a beast  
fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage  
charactered in the face. This have I learnt  
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  
like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,  
doing abhorred rites to Hecate  
in their obscuréd haunts of inmost bowers.  
Yet have they many baits and guileful spells  
t' inveigle and invite th' unwary sense  
of them that pass unwitting by the way.  
This evening late -- by then the chewing flocks  
had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb  
of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold --  
I sat me down to watch upon a bank



Against the opposing will and arm of heav'n  
may never this just sword be lifted up.  
But for that damned magician, let him be girt  
with all the grisly legiöns that troop  
under the sooty flag of Acheron,  
Harpies, and Hydras, or all the monstrous bugs  
'twixt Africa and Ind -- I'll find him out,  
and force him to restore his purchase back,  
or drag him by the curls, and cleave his scalp  
down to the hips.

*Dem.* Alas, good venturous youth  
I love thy<sup>14</sup> courage yet, and bold emprise,  
but here thy sword can do thee little stead.  
Far other arms and other weapons must  
be those that quell the might of hellish charms.  
He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints  
and crumble all thy sinews.

*El. bro.* Why, prithee, shepherd --  
how durst thou then thyself<sup>15</sup> approach so near  
as to make this relation?

*Dem.* 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 skilled  
in every virtuous plant and healing herb  
that spreads her verdant leaf to th' morning ray.

He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing,  
which when I did, he on the tender grass  
would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,  
and in requital ope his leathern scrip,  
and show me simples of a thousand names,  
telling their strange and vigorous faculties.  
Amongst the rest, a small unsightly root,  
but of divine effect, he culled me out.  
The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it.  
He called it Hemony, and gave it me,  
and bad me keep it as of sov'reign use  
'gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp,  
or ghastly Furies' apparitiön.  
I pursed it up, but little reckoning made  
till now that this extremity compelled.  
But now I find it true, for by this means  
I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised,  
entered 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 necromancer's hall;  
where if he be, with dauntless hardihood  
and brandished blade rush on him, break his glass,  
and shed the luscious liquor on the ground;  
but seize his wand. Though he and his cursed crew  
fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,  
or like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke,  
yet will they soon retire if he but shrink.

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<sup>14</sup> thy] TMS, 1637; the BMS

<sup>15</sup> thyself] TMS, 1637; BMS omits

*El. bro.* Thyrsis lead on apace: I follow thee  
and some good angel bear a shield before us!

*The scene changes to a stately palace set out with all manner of deliciousness,<sup>16</sup> tables spread with all dainties. Comus appears with his rabble, and the Lady set in an enchanted chair, to whom he offers his glass, which she puts by, and goes about to rise.*

*Co.* Nay, Lady, sit. If I but wave this wand,  
your nerves are all chained up in alabaster,  
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 mind  
with all thy charms, although this corporal rind  
thou hast emmanacled, while heav'n sees good.

*Co.* Why are you vexed, Lady? Why do you frown?  
Here dwell no frowns, nor anger; from these gates  
sorrow flies far. See here be all the pleasures  
that fancy can beget on youthful thoughts  
when the fresh blood grows lively and returns  
brisk as the April buds in primrose season.  
And first behold this cordial julep here  
that flames and dances in his crystal bounds,

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<sup>16</sup> *soft music*, 1637

with spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed.  
Not that Nepénthes which the wife of Thone  
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.  
Poor Lady, thou hast need of some refreshing  
that hast been tired all day without repast;  
a<sup>17</sup> timely rest hast wanted. Here, fair Virgin,  
this will restore all soon.

*La.* 'Twill not, false traitor!  
'Twill not restore the truth and honesty  
that thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies.  
Was this the cottage and the safe abode  
thou told'st me of? What grim aspécts are these,  
these ugly headed monsters? Mercy guard me!  
Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver!  
Were it a draft for Juno when she banquets  
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 well-governed and wise appetite.

*Co:* O foolishness of men that lend their ears  
to those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,  
and fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,  
praising the lean and sallow Abstinence!  
Wherefore did nature pour her bounties forth

<sup>17</sup> a] and 1637

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  
that in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk  
to deck her sons? And, that no corner might  
be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins  
she hatched th'all-worshipped ore, and precious gems  
to store her children with. If all the world  
should, in a pet of temperance, feed on pulse,  
drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze  
th'All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,  
not half his riches known, and yet despised;  
and we should serve him as a grudging master,  
as a penurious niggard of his wealth,  
and live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,  
who would be quite surcharged with her own weight  
and strangled with her waste fertility,  
th'earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with plumes.  
The herds would over-multitude their lords,  
the sea o'er-fraught would swell, and th' unsought diamonds  
would so emblaze with stars that they below  
would grow inured to light, and come at last  
to gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.

*La.* I had not thought to have unlocked my lips  
in this unhallowed air, but that this juggler  
would think to charm my judgement as my eyes,  
obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.

I hate when vice can bolt her arguments  
and virtue has no tongue to check her pride.  
Imposter! do not charge most innocent Nature  
as if she would her children should be riotous  
with her abundance. She, good cateress,  
means her provision only to the good,  
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-pampered Luxury  
now heaps upon some few with vast excess,  
Nature's full blessing would be well dispensed  
in unsuperfl'ous even proportiön,  
and she no whit encumbered with her store;  
and then the Giver would be better thanked,  
His praise due paid: for swinish gluttony  
ne'er looks to heav'n amidst his gorgeous feasts,  
but with besotted base ingratitude  
crams, and blasphemes his Feeder.

*Co.* Come, no more!  
This is mere moral babble and direct  
against the canon laws of our foundation.  
I must not suffer this; yet 'tis but the lees  
and settling of a melancholy blood.  
But this will cure all straight, 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 of liquor out of his hand, and break it against the ground. His rout make sign of resistance but are all driven in. The Dæmon is to come in with the brothers.*

*Dem.* What! have **ye left the false** enchanter scape?  
O ye mistook! Ye should have snatched his wand  
and bound him fast. Without his rod reversed  
and backward mutters of dissevering power  
we cannot free the Lady that sits here  
in stony fetters fixed and motionless.  
Yet stay; be not disturbed, now I bethink me  
some other means I have that may be used,  
which once of Melibœus<sup>18</sup> old I learnt,  
the soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.

There is a gentle Nymph not far from hence  
that with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream:  
Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure;  
whilom she was the daughter of Loocrine  
who had the sceptre from his father Brute.  
She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit  
of her enragéd stepdame Gwendolen,  
commended her fair innocence to the flood  
that stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course.  
The water nymphs that in the bottom played  
held up their pearléd<sup>19</sup> wrists and took her in,  
bearing her straight to agéd Néreus' hall;  
who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head

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<sup>18</sup> **Melibœus**] 1637; Millebeus BMS

and gave her to his daughters to imbathe  
in nectared lavers strewed with asphodel,  
and through the porch and inlet of each sense  
dropped in ambrosial oils, till she revived  
and underwent a quick immortal change,  
made goddess of the river. Still she retains  
her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve  
visits the herds along the twilight meadows,  
helping all urchin blasts and ill-luck signs  
that the shrewd meddling elf delights to make:  
for which the shepherds at their festivals  
carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,  
and throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream  
of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.  
And, as the old swain said, she can unlock  
the clasping charm and thaw the numbing spell,  
if she be right invoked in warbled song:  
for maidenhood she loves, and will be swift  
to aid a Virgin, such as was herself,  
in hard besetting need. This will I try,  
and add the power of some adjuring verse.

### *Song*

Sabrina fair,  
Listen where thou art sitting  
under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
in twisted braids of lilies knitting  
the loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;

<sup>19</sup> pearléd] TMS, 1637; peackled BMS



Listen for dear honour's sake,  
Goddess of the silver lake,  
Listen and save.

*The verse to sing or not*

Listen and appear to us  
in name of great Océanus.  
By th' earth-shaking Neptune's mace,  
and Téthys' grave majestic pace.

*El. bro.* By hoary Néreus' wrinkled look,  
and the Carpathian wizard's hook.

*2nd bro.* By scaly Triton's winding shell,  
and old sooth-saying Glaucus' spell,

*El. bro.* By Leúcothéa's lovely hands,  
and her son that rules the strands.

*2nd bro.* By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,  
and the songs of Sirens sweet.

*El. bro.* By dead Parthénope's dear tomb,  
and fair Ligéa's golden comb,  
wherewith she sits on diamond rocks  
sleeking her soft alluring locks.

*Dem.* By all the Nymphs that<sup>20</sup> nightly dance

upon thy streams with wily glance.  
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head  
from thy coral-paven bed,  
and bridle ín thy headlong wave,  
till thou our summons answered have:  
Listen and save.

*Sabrina rises, attended by the water nymphs, and sings.*

By the rushy fringed bank,  
where grows the willow and the osier dank,  
my sliding chariot stays,  
thick set with agate, and the azured sheen  
of turquoise blue, and emerald green  
that in the channel strays,  
Whilst from off the waters fleet  
thus I rest my printless feet  
O'er the cowslip's velvet<sup>21</sup> head,  
that bends not as I tread.  
Gentle swain, at thy request  
I am here.

*Dem.* Goddess dear,  
We implore thy powerful hand  
to undo the charmed band  
of true virgin here distressed  
through the force and through the wile  
of unblest enchanters vile.

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<sup>20</sup> that] TMS, 1637; of BMS

<sup>21</sup> velvet] TMS, 1637; BMS omits

*Sab.* Shepherd, 'tis my office best  
to help ensnaréd chastity.  
Brightest Lady, look on me.  
Thus I sprinkle on this breast  
drops that from my fountain pure  
I have kept of precious cure:  
thrice upon thy finger's tip,  
thrice upon thy rubied lip.  
Next this marble venoméd seat,  
smeared with gums of glutinous heat,  
I touch with chaste palms, moist, and cold.  
Now the spell hath lost his hold;  
and I must haste ere morning hour  
to wait in Amphitrité's bower.

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

*Dem:* Virgin, daughter of Locrine,  
sprung of old Anchises' line,  
may thy brimméd waves for this  
their full tribute never miss  
from a thousand petty rills  
that tumble down the snowy hills.  
Summer drought or singéd air  
never scorch thy tresses fair,  
nor wet October's torrent flood  
thy molten crystal fill with mud.  
May thy billows roll ashore  
the beryl and the golden ore;

may thy lofty head be crowned  
with many a tower and terrace round,  
and, here and there thy banks upon,  
with groves of myrrh and cinnamon.

*Song ends*

*El. bro.* Come, sister, while heav'n lends us grace,  
Let us fly this curséd place,  
lest the sorcerer us entice  
with some other new device.  
Not a waste or needless sound  
till we come to holier ground.

*Dem:* I shall be your faithful guide  
through this gloomy covert wide,  
and not many furlongs thence  
is your father's residence,  
where this night are met in state  
many a friend to gratulate  
his wishéd presence, and beside  
all the swains that near abide  
with jigs and rural dance resort.  
We shall catch them at this sport,  
and our sudden coming there  
will double all their mirth and cheer.

*El. bro.* Come, let us haste; the stars are high,  
but night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

*The scene changes; then is presented Ludlow town and the President's castle; then come in country dances and the like, etc. Towards the end of these sports the Dæmon with the 2 brothers and the Lady come in.*

*The spirit sings.*

Back, shepherds, back, enough your play  
till next sunshine holiday.  
Here be, without duck or nod,  
other trippings to be trod  
of lighter toes, and such court guise  
as Mercury did first devise  
with the mincing Dryadés  
on the lawns and on the leas.

*2nd 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 tried their youth,  
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'er sensual folly and intemperance.

*They dance. The dances all ended, the Dæmon sings or says*

Now my task is smoothly done;  
I can fly or I can run  
quickly to the earth's green end  
where the bowed welkin slow doth bend,  
and from thence can soar as soon  
to the corners of the moon.  
Mortals that would follow me,  
love Virtue, she alone is free;  
she can teach you how to climb  
higher than the sphery chime,  
or if Virtue feeble were,  
Heav'n itself would stoop to her.

*FINIS*