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Comus: A Masque

John Milton

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A
M A S K

Of the same

A U T H O R

P R E S E N T E D

At L U D L O W-Castle,

1 6 3 4.

Before

The Earl of B R I D G E W A T E R

Then Prclident of W A L E S.




Anno Dom. 1645.

Title page of *Comus*
from *Poems, &c. upon Several Occasions*, 1645.

To the Right Honourable,
J O H N Lord Vicount B R A C L Y,
Son and Heir apparent to the Earl
of *Bridgewater, &c.*

M Y L O R D,

 His Poem, which receiv'd its first occasion of Birth from your Self, and others of your Noble Family, and much honour from your own Person in the performance, now returns again to make a finall Dedication of it self to you. Although not openly acknowledg'd by the Author, yet it is a legitimate off-spring, so lovely, and so much desired, that the often Copying of it hath tir'd my Pen to give my severall friends

satisfaction, and brought me to a necessity of producing it to the publike view; and now to offer it up in all rightfull devotion to those fair Hopes, and rare Endowments of your much-promising Youth, which give a full assurance, to all that know you, of a future excellence. Live sweet Lord to be the honour of your Name, and receive this as your own, from the hands of him, who hath by many fauours been long oblig'd to your most honour'd Parents, and as in this representation your attendant Thyrsis, so now in all reall expression

Your faithful, and most
humble Servant

H. L A W E S.

The Copy of a Letter Writt'n
By Sir HENRY WOOTON,
To the Author, upon the
following Poem.

From the Colledge, this 13. of April, 1638.

S I R,

IT was a special favour, when you lately bestowed upon me here, the first taste of your acquaintance, though no longer then to make me know that I wanted more time to value it, and to enjoy it rightly; and in truth, if I could then have imagined your farther stay in these parts, which I understood afterwards by Mr. H., I would have been bold in our vulgar phrase to mend my draught (for you left me with an extreme thirst) and to have begged your conversation again, joyntly with your said learned Friend, at a poor meal or two, that we might have banded together som good Authors of the antient time: Among which, I observed you to have been familiar.

Since your going, you have charg'd me with new Obligations, both for a very kinde Letter from you dated the sixth of this Month, and for a dainty peece of entertainment which came therwith. Wherin I should much commend the Tragical part, if the Lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Dorique delicacy in your Songs and Odes, wherunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our Language: *ipsa mollities*. But I must not omit to tell you, that I now onely owe you thanks for intimating unto me (how modestly soever) the true Artificer. For the work it self, I had view'd som good while before, with singular delight, having receiv'd it from our common Friend Mr. R. in the very close of the late R's Poems, Printed at Oxford, wherunto it was added (as I now

suppose) that the Accessory might help out the Principal, according to the art of Stationers, and to leave the Reader *Con la bocca dolce*.

Now Sir, concerning your travels, wherin I may challenge a little more priviledge of Discours with you; I suppose you will not blanch Paris in your way; therefore I have been bold to trouble you with a few lines to Mr. M. B. whom you shall easily find attending the young Lord S. as his Governour, and you may surely receive from him good directions for the shaping of your farther journey into Italy, where he did reside by my choice som time for the King, after mine own recess from Venice.

I should think that your best Line will be thorow the whole length of France to Marseilles, and thence by sea to Genoa, whence the passage into Tuscany is as Diurnal as a Gravesend Barge: I hasten as you do to Florence, or Siena, the rather to tell you a short story from the interest you have given me in your safety.

At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Allerto Scipioni an old Roman Courtier in dangerous times, having bin Steward to the Duca di Pagliano, who with all his Family were strangled, save this onely man that escap'd by foresight of the Tempest: With him I had often much chat of those affairs; Into which he took pleasure to look back from his Native Harbour; and at my departure toward Rome (which had been the center of his experience) I had wonn confidence enough to beg his advice, how I might carry my self securely there, without offence of others, or of mine own conscience. *Signor Arrigo mio* (sayes he) *I pensieri stretti, & il viso sciolto* will go safely over the Whole World: Of which Delphian Oracle (for so I have found it) your judgement doth need no commentary; and therefore (Sir) I will commit you with it to the best of all securities, Gods dear love, remaining

Your Friend as much at command
as any of longer date
Henry Wootton.

Postscript.

SIR, *I have expressly sent this my Foot-boy to prevent your departure without som acknowledgement from me of the receipt of your obliging Letter, having my self through som busines, I know not how, neglected the ordinary conveyance. In any part where I shall understand you fixed, I shall be glad, and diligent to entertain you with Home-Novelties; even for som fomentation of our friendship, too soon interrupted in the Cradle.*

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*.

A

M A S K

PRESENTED

At L U D L O W-Castle,

1634. &c.

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 aerial Spirits live insphear'd
 In Regions milde of calm and serene Ayr,
 Above the smoak and stirr of this dim spot,
 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

10

After this mortal change, to her true Servants
 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 s[u]ch 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,

20

Took in by lot 'twixt high, and neather Jove,
 Imperial rule of all the Sea-girt Iles
 That like to rich, and various gemms inlay
 The unadorned boosom of the Deep,
 Which he to grace his tributary gods
 By course commits to severall government,
 And gives them leave to wear their Sapphire 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,

30

And all this tract that fronts the falling Sun
 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,
 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 wandring Passinger.

40

And here their tender age might suffer perill,
 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.

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,

50

On Circes Iland fell (who knows not Circe
 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,
 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,

60

Roaving the Celtick, and Iberian fields,
 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,
 To quench the drouth of Phoebus, which as they taste
 (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

70

Into som brutish form of Woolf, or Bear,
 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
 And all their friends, and native home forget
 To roule with pleasure in a sensual stie.
 Therfore when any favour'd of high Jove,
 Chances to passe through this adventrous glade,

80

Swift as the Sparkle of a glancing Star,
 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,
 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,

90

Likeliest, and neerest to the present ayd
 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 glistring, 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,
 His glowing Axle doth allay
 In the steep Atlantick stream,
 And the slope Sun his upward beam
 Shoots against the dusky Pole,

100

Pacing toward the other gole
 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
 Dropping odours, dropping Wine.
 Rigor now is gon to bed,

And Advice with scrupulous head,
 Strict Age, and sowre Severity,

110

With their grave Saws in slumber ly.
 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
 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,

120

The Wood-Nymphs dect with Daisies trim,
 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,
 '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

130

Of mid-night Torches burns; mysterious Dame
 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
 Us thy vow'd Priests, til utmost end
 Of all thy dues be done, and none left out,
 Ere the blabbing Eastern scout,
 The nice Morn on th' Indian steep

140

From her cabin'd loop hole peep,
 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,
 Of som chast footing neer about this ground.
 Run to your shrouds, within these Brakes and Trees,
 Our number may affright: Som Virgin sure
 (For so I can distinguish by mine Art)

150

Benighted in these Woods. Now to my charms,
 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 spongy ayr,
 Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
 Ada 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;

160

I under fair pretence of friendly ends,
 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,
 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.

170

This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,
 My best guide now, me thought it was the sound
 Of Riot, and ill manag'd Merriment,
 Such as the jocond Flute, or gamesom Pipe
 Stirs up among the loose unleter'd 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 loath

To meet the rudenesse, and swill'd insolence
Of such late Wassailers; yet O where els

180

Shall I inform my unacquainted feet
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
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

190

Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phoebus wain.
But where they are, and why they came not back,
Is now the labour of my thoughts, 'tis likeliest
They had ingag'd their wandring steps too far,
And envious darknes, e're they could return,
Had stole them from me, els O theevisch Night
Why shouldst thou, but for som felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the Stars,
That nature hung in Heav'n, and fill'd their Lamps
With everlasting to give due light

200

To the misled and lonely Travailer?
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
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.

210

These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The vertuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion Conscience.-----
O welcom pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope,
Thou hovering Angel girt with golden wings,
And thou unblemish't form of Chastity,
I see ye visibly, and now beleeve
That he, the Supreme good, t'whom all things ill

Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
 Would send a glistening Guardian if need were

220

To keep my life and honour unassail'd.
 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.
 I cannot hallow to my Brothers, but
 Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
 Ile venter, for my new enliv'nd spirits
 Prompt me; and they perhaps are not far off.

S O N G.

230

*Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph that livst unseen
 Within thy airy shell
 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.
 Canst thou not tell me of a gentle Pair
 That liketh thy Narcissus are?
 O if thou have
 Hid them in som flowry Cave,*

240

*Tell me but where
 Sweet Queen of Parly, Daughter of the Sphear,
 So maist thou be translated to the skies,
 And give resounding grace to all Heavns Harmonies.*

Com. Can any mortal mixture of Earths mould
 Breath such Divine enchanting ravishment?
 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

250

Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night

At every fall smoothing the Raven doune
 Of darknes till it smil'd: have oft heard
 My mother Circe with the Sirens three,
 Amid'st the flowry-kirtl'd Naiades
 Culling their Potent hearbs, and balefull drugs,
 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:

260

Yet they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
 And in sweet madness 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
 Whom certain these rough shades did never breed
 Unlesse the Goddes that in rurall shrine
 Dwell'st here with Pan, or Silvan, by blest Song
 Forbidding every bleak unkindly Fog

270

To touch the prosperous growth of this tall Wood.

La. Nay gentle Shepherd ill is lost that praise
 That is addrest 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
 To give me answer from her mossie Couch.

Co. What chance good Lady hath bereft you thus?

La. Dim darknes, and this leavy Labyrinth.

Co. Could that divide you from neer-ushering guides?

280

La. They left me weary on a grassie terf.

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.

La. How easie my misfortune is to hit!

Co. 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?

290

La. As smooth as Hebe's their unrazor'd lips.

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,
 Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots,
 Their port was more then human, as they stood;
 I took it for a faery vision
 Of som gay creatures of the element

300

That in the colours of the Rainbow live
 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?

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,

310

Without the sure guess of well-practiz'd feet.

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,
 Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
 Ere morrow wake, or the low roosted lark
 From her thatch't pallat rowse, if otherwise
 I can conduct you Lady to a low

320

But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
 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,
 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

330

To my proportion'd strength. Shepherd lead on.-

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 raings here
 In double night of darknes, and of shades;
 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

340

With thy long levell'd rule of streaming light,
 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,
 Or whistle from the Lodge, or village cock
 Count the night watches to his feathery Dames,
 'Twould be som solace yet, som little chearing
 In this close dungeon of innumeros bowes.

350

But O that haples virgin our lost sister
 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.
 What if in wild amazement, and affright,
 Or while we speak within the direfull grasp
 Of Savage hunger, or of Savage heat?

Eld. Bro. Peace brother, be not over-exquisite

360

To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;
 For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
 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?
 I do not think my sister so to seek,

Or so unprincipl'd in vertues book,
 And the sweet peace that goodnes bosoms ever,
 As that the single want of light and noise

370

(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)
 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
 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

380

Were all to ruffl'd, and somtimes impair'd.
 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.

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,

390

For who would rob a 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 uninchanted eye,
 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,

400

And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
 Danger will wink on Opportunity,
 And let a single helpless maiden pass
 Uninjur'd in this wilde surrounding wast.
 Of night, or lonelines it recks me not,
 I fear the dred events that dog them both,

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:

410

Yet where an equall poise of hope and fear
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
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:

420

'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity:
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,
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,

430

She may pass on with unblench't majesty,
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,
No goblin, or swart faery 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

440

To testifie the arms of Chastity?
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
 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,
 Wherewith she freez'd her foes to congeal'd stone?

450

But rigid looks of Chast austerity,
 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,
 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

460

Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
 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,
 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.

470

Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp
 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.

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,

480

Where no crude surfet rains. *Eld. Bro.* List, list, I hear
 Som far off hallow break the silent Air.

2. *Bro.* Me thought 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.

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.

490

That hallow I should know, what are you? speak;
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 father Shepherd sure.

Eld. Bro. Thyrsis? Whose artful strains have oft delaid
The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
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 straggl'ing weather the pen't flock forsook?

500

How couldst thou find this dark sequester'd nook?

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
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,

510

Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.

Spir. 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 Poets taught by th' heav'nly Muse,
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.

520

Within the navil of this hideous Wood,
 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,
 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
 Like stabl'd wolves, or tigers at their prey,
 Doing abhorred rites to Hecate
 In their obscured haunts of inmost bowres.
 Yet have they many baits, and guilefull spells
 To inveigle and invite th' unwary sense
 Of them that pass unweeting by the way.

540

This evening late by then the chewing flocks
 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
 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,

550

And fill'd the Air with barbarous dissonance,
 At which I ceas't, and listen'd them a while,
 Till an unusuall 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
 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

560

Still to be so displac't. I was all eare,
 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,
 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,

570

Till guided by mine ear I found the place
 Where that damn'd wisard hid in sly disguise
 (For so by certain signes I knew) had met
 Already, ere my best speed could praevent,
 The aidless innocent Lady his wish't prey,
 Who gently ask't if he had seen such two,
 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
 Into swift flight, till I had found you here,

580

But furder know I not. 2. *Bro.* O night and shades,
 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
 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,

590

Surpriz'd by unjust force, but not enthrall'd,
 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
 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.

600

Against th' opposing will and arm of Heav'n
 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 Hydras, or all the monstrous forms
 '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,

610

I love thy courage yet, and bold Emprise,
 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.

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

620

Of small regard to see to, yet well skill'd
 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 extasie,
 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,

630

But of divine effect, he cull'd me out;
 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,
And yet more med'cinal is it then that Moly
That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave;
He call'd it Haemony, and gave it me,
And bad me keep it as of sov'ran use

640

'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp
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,
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;

650

Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood,
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,
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 an enchanted 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,

660

Your nerves are all chain'd 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 minde
With all thy charms, although this corporal rinde

Thou haste immanacl'd, while Heav'n sees good.

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 youthfull thoughts,

670

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
With spirits of balm, and fragrant Syrops mixt.
Not that Nepenthes 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.
Why should you be so cruel to your self,

680

And to those dainty limms which nature lent
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
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!
Hence with thy brew'd enchantments, foul deceiver,
Hast thou betray'd my credulous innocence
With visor'd falshood, and base forgery,
And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here

700

With lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute?
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-govern'd and wise appetite.

Co. O foolishnes of men! that find their ears
To those budge doctors of the Stoick Furr,
And fetch their precepts from the Cynick Tub,
Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence.

710

Wherefore did Nature powre her bounties forth,
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-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

720

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 Freize,
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,
As a penurious niggard of his wealth,
And live like Natures bastards, not her sons,
Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,
And strangl'd with her waste fertility;

730

Th' earth cumber'd, and the wing'd air dark't with plumes,
The herds would over-multitude their Lords,
The Sea o'refraught would swell, and 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
To gaze upon the Sun with shameless brows.
List Lady be not coy, and be not cosen'd
With that same vaunted name Virginity,
Beauty is natures coyn, must not be hoarded,

740

But must be currant, and the good thereof
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
 In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities
 Where most may wonder at the workmanship;
 It is for homely features to keep home,
 They had their name thence; course complexions

750

And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
 The sampler, and to teize the huswifes wooll.
 What need a vermeil-tinctured 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.

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,
 Obruding false rules pranckt in reasons garb.

760

I hate when vice can bolt her arguments,
 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
 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

770

Of that which lewdly-pamper'd Luxury
 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,
 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?

780

Or have I said anough? To him that dares
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
 Against the Sun-clad power of Chastity,
 Fain would I somthing say, yet to what end?

Thou hast nor Eare, nor Soul to apprehend
 The sublime notion, and high mystery
 That must be utter'd to unfold the sage
 And serious doctrine of Virginitie,
 And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
 More happiness then this thy present lot.

790

Enjoy your deer Wit, and gay Rhetorick
 That hath so well been taught her dazling fence,
 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 of a flame of sacred vehemence,
 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 heaps o're thy false head.

800

Co. She fables not, I feel that I do fear
 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 Saturns crew. I must dissemble,
 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

810

And setlings of a melancholy blood;
 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
 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;

820

Yet stay, be not disturb'd, now I bethink me,
 Som other means I have which may be us'd,
 Which once of Meliboeus 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,
 Sabrina is her name, a Virgin pure,
 Whilom she was the daughter of Lochrine,
 That had the Scepter from his father Brute.
 The guiltless damsel flying the mad pursuit

830

Of her enraged stepdam Guendolen,
 Commended her innocence to the flood
 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,
 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

840

Dropt in Ambrosial Oils till she reviv'd,
 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
 That the shrewd medling Elfe delights to make,
 Which she with pretious viold liquors heals.
 For which the Shepherds at their festivals
 Carrol her goodnes lowd in rustick layes,

850

And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream
 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
 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.

S O N G.

Sabrina fair

860

*Listen where thou art sitting
 Under the glassie, cool, translucent wave,
 In twisted braids of Lillies knitting
 The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair,
 Listen for dear honour's sake,
 Goddess of the silver lake,
 Listen and save.*

Listen and appear to us
 In name of great Oceanus,
 By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,

870

And Tethys grave majestick pace,
 By hoary Nereus wrinckled look,
 And the Carpathian wisards hook,
 By scaly Tritons winding shell,
 And old sooth-saying Glaucus spell,
 By Leucothea's lovely hands,
 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,

880

And fair Ligea's golden comb,
 Wherwith 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
 From thy coral-pav'n bed,
 And bridle in thy headlong wave,
 Till thou our summons answered have.
 Listen and save.

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

890

*By the rushy-fringed bank,
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,
Whilst from off the waters fleet
Thus I set my printless feet
O're the Cowslips Velvet head,
That bends not as I tread,*

900

*Gentle swain at thy request
I am here.*

Spir. Goddess dear
We implore thy powerful hand
To undo the charmed band
Of true Virgin here distrest,
Through the force, and through the wile
Of unblest inchanter vile.
Sab. Shepherd 'tis my office best
To help insnared chastity;

910

Brightest Lady look on me,
Thus I sprinkle on thy brest
Drops that from my fountain pure,
I have kept of pretious cure,
Thrice upon thy fingers tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip,
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;

920

And I must haste ere morning hour
To wait in Amphitrite's bowr.

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

Spir. Virgin, daughter of Loctrine
Sprung of old Anchises line,
May thy brimmed waves for this
Their full tribute never miss
From a thousand petty rills,
That tumble down the snowy hills:
Summer drouth, or singed air
Never scorch thy tresses fair,

930

Nor wet Octobers torrent flood
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,
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,

940

Lest the Sorcerer us intice
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,
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Fathers residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate

950

His wish't presence, and beside
All the Swains that there abide,
With Jiggs, and rural dance resort,
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there

Will double all their mirth and chere;
 Come 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.*

S O N G.

*Spir. Back Shepherds, back, anough your play,
 Till next Sun-shine holiday,*

960

*Here be without duck or nod
 Other trippings to he trod
 Of lighter toes, and such Court guise
 As Mercury did first devise
 With the mincing Dryades
 On the Lawns, and on the Leas.*

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,*

970

*Heav'n hath timely tri'd 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're sensual Folly, and Intemperance.*

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:

980

There I suck the liquid ayr
 All amidst the Gardens fair
 Of Hesperus, and his daughters three
 That sing about the golden tree:
 Along the crisped shades and bowres
 Revels the spruce and jocond Spring,
 The Graces, and the rosie-boosom'd Howres,
 Thither all their bounties bring,
 That there eternal Summer dwels,
 And West winds, with musky wing

990

About the cedar'n alleys fling
 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,
 And drenches with Elysian dew
 (List mortals, if your ears be true)
 Beds of Hyacinth, and roses
 Where young Adonis oft reposes,

1000

Waxing well of his deep wound
 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
 After her wandring labours long,
 Till free consent the gods among
 Make her his eternal Bride,
 And from her fair unspotted side

1010

Two blissful twins are to be born,
 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,
 And from thence can soar as soon

To the corners of the Moon.
Mortals that would follow me,
Love vertue, she alone is free,

1020

She can teach ye how to clime
Higher then the Spheary chime;
Or if Vertue feeble were,
Heav'n it self would stoop to her.

The End.

See also the [Psalm Paraphrases](#), which followed Comus in the 1673 edition of *Poems, Etc. Upon Several Occasions*. This etext was typed by Judy Boss in Omaha, Nebraska. Front matter typed by R.S. Bear in Eugene, Oregon. Coded in HTML by R.S. Bear, December 1997.

