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ABIGAIL DEBORAH RICHARDS

“Tis consent that makes a perfect slave”: Circean Poetry and Christian Liberty  
in Early Modern English Literature

PhD

Department of English Studies

University of Durham

2018



## Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines representations of Circe in early modern English literature, from her appearances in Jacobean and Stuart English masques, including Browne's *Inner Temple Masque* (1615), Townshend's *Tempe Restored* (1632) and Milton's *Maske at Ludlow Castle* (1634), through to the epic poetry of Spenser and Milton; *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and *Paradise Lost* (1674). In these texts, I argue, Circe is a vector for the writers' interrogation of the prevailing, allegorically inflected relationship between poetry and Reformed moral philosophy that emerges in contemporary literature. In the Christian age, Circe is most frequently depicted as a *clarissima meretrix* or renowned prostitute who captivates men with her beauty and siren-like song, and tempts them to drink her *pharmakon kakon* ("evil drug"). Thereafter her victims are transformed into beasts, a state which appropriately reflects their capitulation to base desire and appetite. The works that I examine are noteworthy for their departure from this tradition, and for their sensitivity to an essential ambivalence at the heart of Circean mythology: the Homeric Circe uses her voice to seduce but also to prophesy and instruct. As I show, in Spenser and Milton's works, Circean indeterminacy is brought to bear upon questions of law, hermeneutics, and spiritual and moral discernment. In Milton in particular, Circe is invoked to support a belief in the necessity of trial and choice for spiritual and moral growth, and for the very possibility of Christian liberty. This view has profound epistemological and theological implications and culminates, I argue, in Milton's daring portrait of the Circean chaos of *Paradise Lost*.

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### Statement of copyright

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## Introduction

The primary focus of this thesis is an examination of Circean representations in the works of John Milton and Edmund Spenser (circa 1590-1674). In these texts, I argue, Circe is a vector for the writers' interrogation of the prevailing, allegorically inflected relationship between poetics and Reformed moral philosophy popularised by contemporary literature. As Yarnall's monograph has shown, Circe begins life as a powerful "nature" goddess, the sole inhabitant of the island of Aeaëa, where she intercepts Odysseus and his men on their way home from Troy.<sup>1</sup> Those who drink from her *pharmakon kakon* or "evil drug" are transformed into pigs, but Odysseus, with the aid of the moly plant given to him by Hermes, escapes this fate and persuades her to restore his men to their former shapes. From the beginning, there is an essential ambivalence at the heart of Circean mythology. In the *Odyssey*, Circe is described as δεινὴ θεὸς ἀυδῆεσσα, "dread goddess of human speech,"<sup>2</sup> an epithet which, as Watkins notes, "underscores an uncanny crossing of the boundary between human and non-human experience,"<sup>3</sup> and which, as we will see, would in a later period encourage Circe's identification with the Sirens as figures for the dangers of poetic pleasure. The Homeric Circe uses her voice to seduce but also to prophesy and instruct, and it is only by heeding her guidance that Odysseus is able to successfully navigate the dangers of Scylla and Charybdis and continue on to the next stage of his journey back to Ithaca.

Circe's dual nature, however, is largely ignored by the two most famous Latin writers of epic poetry, Virgil and Ovid,<sup>4</sup> and stands again at some distance from the popular, allegorical conceptions of the Goddess as a *clarissima meretrix* or most renowned prostitute that emerge in the following

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, The Loeb Classical Library L104-L105 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.136. All further references are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> John Watkins, "'A Goddess Among the Gods': Virgil, Milton and the Woman of Immortal Voice," in *Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same: New Essays on Poetry and Poetics, Renaissance to Modern*, ed. Jennifer Lewin (New Haven, Conn: University Press of New England, 2002), 13.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the Virgilian Circe, see Charles Segal, "Circean Temptations: Homer, Vergil, Ovid," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 99 (1968): 419–42. For the difference between the Homeric and Ovidian accounts, and their respective popularity in the Renaissance, see Judith E. Browning, "Sin, Eve, and Circe: *Paradise Lost* and the Ovidian Circe Tradition," *Milton Studies* 26 (1990): 135–57. Browning argues that the Renaissance mythographic tradition speaks to the "victory of Ovid's interpretation of the myth over Homer's: the Circe myth became a story of the conflict between virtue and sensuality resulting in seduction, metamorphosis, or death" (Browning, "Sin, Eve and Circe," 138).



centuries.<sup>5</sup> This latter tradition relies upon a moralistic opposition of reason and sense that features in allegorical treatments of Circe from the time of Antisthenes onwards,<sup>6</sup> but became particularly prevalent in the Christian age, which saw Circe widely depicted as a witch or sorceress who charms men with her beauty and siren-like song, and persuades them to drink her *pharmakon kakon*. Thereafter her victims are transformed into beasts, a state which appropriately reflects their capitulation to base desire and appetite. In the extended allegory, Circe's "defeat" by the hero Odysseus who is in possession of the moly plant, a *pharmakon esthlon* ("good drug") gifted to him by Hermes, celebrates the rational, and divine jurisdiction by which man's "lower" nature ought to be governed. The popularity of this interpretation, as indeed, with the sustained interest in Circean mythology more generally, owes much to the notion of the *scala naturae*, a chain of being in which all creation is ordered hierarchically along the same continuum, from the immutable perfection of God at the highest point, down through to the stations occupied by the angels, man, the animals, plants, and to the insensible elements of the natural world at its lowest. Medieval anthropology held that man occupied a middle place in this ontological schema, and that his "mixed" nature – a composite of higher and lower capacities that aligned him, simultaneously, with both ends of the *scala* – rendered him a microcosm of the universe itself.<sup>7</sup>

It was on the basis of this tradition, of course, that humanist writers such as Pico Della Mirandola founded their ideas of man's dignity and glory, of his unique liberty to choose how to shape his own nature. Thus, Pico asserts that God has declared to man, "Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine."<sup>8</sup> Christian teaching about man's nature and potential, however, tended to be rather less generous. With the Fall, it was held, Adam and Eve lost the easy command of the passions they had enjoyed in Eden, and human reason became

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<sup>5</sup> See Servius, *Servii Grammatici Qui Feruntur in Vergili Carmina Comentarii*, ed. George Thilo, trans. Phyllis Stanley, vol. 2 (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1883), 3.309–13.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Vredeveld, "'Deaf as Ulysses to the Siren's Song': The Story of a Forgotten Topos," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 856.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, "General Introduction," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Cassirer et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 18-19.

<sup>8</sup> Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 225.

locked thereafter in perpetual conflict with the flesh, in which our first parents' sin and our inherited depravity was indelibly inscribed. The Fall, of course, also marked the end of humankind's dominion over nature: in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, before she gives in to the serpent's temptation, the animals who surround Eve in the garden of Eden are said to be ". . . more duteous at her call, / Than at Circean call the herd disguised."<sup>9</sup> As Harrison has found, "Patristic exegetes were quick to explore the rich symbolic connection between the exterior and interior domains suggested by the Genesis narrative. The loss of dominion over nature was linked to the domination of reason by bestial and carnal affections, and the beasts themselves were identified with individual passions."<sup>10</sup> In Sandys' commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, published two years before Milton's *Maske at Ludlow Castle* was performed, the significance of Circean metamorphosis is presented in these very terms:

Lust . . . naturally incites to luxury; and getting the dominion, deforms our soules with all bestial vices; alluring some to inordinate *Venus*; others to anger, cruelty, and every excesse of passion: the Swines, the Lyons, and the Wolves, produced by her sensuall charmes.<sup>11</sup>

Yet as I have suggested, this reading does not exhaust the significance of Circe's character, particularly in Homer's fuller version of the story of her encounter with Odysseus, which George Chapman had translated into English in 1614. In Homer, after their transformation, Odysseus's men are said to be made "younger than they were before, and far handsomer and taller to look upon" (*Od.* 10.396-98), an indication, perhaps of a kind of upward metamorphosis, which for Yarnall suggests that Circe "offers both debasement and deliverance, a new life in the flesh."<sup>12</sup> Something of this idea does, in fact survive in continental literature of this period influenced by neo-Platonic and Pythagorean currents. In his popular *Mythologiae*, a work from which several of the writers I deal

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<sup>9</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1999), 9.521-22. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Harrison, "Reading the Passions: The Fall, the Passions, and Dominion over Nature," in *The Soft Underbelly of Reason: The Passions in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Stephen Gaukroger (London: Routledge, 1998), 50.

<sup>11</sup> George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd and Represented in Figures* (Oxford: Iohn Lichfield, 1632), 654.

<sup>12</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 7.

with here draw, Conti envisions Circe as a figure who presides over the mixing of elements and the generation of new forms, facilitating that perpetual, cosmic change that brings about the seasons and time, and forms the material basis for life itself.<sup>13</sup> Yarnall has argued that Conti “sees nothing sublime in this process and never refers to . . . [Circe] as *dea*. To him the natural and the divine are antithetical. And so she represents ‘the worthless force of nature’ which is unable to corrupt the ‘divine affable reason’ and ‘immortal soul’ of Odysseus.” Yet it is clear that the mythographer invests in Circe here a metaphysical importance seemingly absent from the more typical depictions of the goddess we find in contemporary allegorical literature.<sup>14</sup>

The focus of this thesis, however, is English literature, and I would contest that the single biggest contributing factor to the re-evaluation of the moral and didactic value of Circean lore in the English poetry of Milton and Spenser is the Reformation. Like Circe’s *pharmakon* itself – etymologically, both poison and cure – the impact of Reformation culture on humanist representations of Circe is double-sided. From the mid-fifteenth century on, iconographic and literary identifications of Circe with the “whorish” church of Rome, her victims slavish communicants in a kind of unholy mass, begin to proliferate. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, there is some evidence that writers were turning to Circean mythology to address problems within the Reformed tradition itself, which saw a new emphasis on the corruption of man’s higher, rational faculties, as well as his lower appetites, by consequence of the Fall. Together with the fatalist leanings of Reformed soteriology, this development threatened to seriously undermine the possibility for meaningful moral choice and ethical action in this life. In the works of Milton and Spenser, this question of human potential intersects hermeneutic, and ultimately epistemic concerns about the virtue of literary engagement. There is some precedence in the humanist tradition for the application of Circean metaphor in this area, as Plutarch’s adoption of Odysseus’s ability to hear, yet withstand the song of the Homeric sirens as an allegory for “right reading” might suggest.<sup>15</sup> Gough’s thesis and

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<sup>13</sup> Natale Conti, *Mythologiae sive Explicationum Fabularum Libri* (Venice: 1581), 380.

<sup>14</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 109.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch, "How the Young Man Should Study Poetry," in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 1, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, The Loeb classical library 197 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), 79.

later publications have drawn valuable attention to this history,<sup>16</sup> yet she leaves unexamined its legacy – and, I would suggest, its apogee – in the seventeenth-century Miltonic imagination.

### Structure and Argument

My thesis is comprised of four main chapters. The first chapter, “A Circean Renaissance: Reading the English Masque tradition, 1600-1634,” examines the representation of Circe in Baltasar de Beaujoyeux’s *Balet Comique de la Royne* (1581). As I will discuss, this production enjoyed a significant afterlife in several seventeenth-century English court masques which cast Circe as a central character, and thus extends its influence through to John Milton’s *Circean Maske at Ludlow Castle* (1634), the subject of my third chapter. The *Balet* is a product of the French Academy, and speaks therefore to the Neoplatonic interests of this group, as well as to the European, humanist tradition more widely. The influence of a Neoplatonic metaphysics may also be detected in the Circean allegories of the mythographer Natale Conti, which make up a lengthy appendix to the printed edition of the *Balet*. There, we learn that “the person of this goddess is described as being extraordinarily lovely, endowed with everything attractive, her voice sweet and clear. This represents what may arouse desire, either by sight or hearing – desire to love virtue or its contrary; for desire for some people is an instrument of salvation, for others the instrument of perdition or ruin,”<sup>17</sup> an idea which is not readily compatible with the moral allegories of Circe that proliferate elsewhere, and, indeed, within the *Balet*’s own *allegoria*. The polarised oppositions between virtue and vice, reason and passion that characterise moral allegory more easily cohere with the panegyric demands of courtly entertainments of this period, and, as I suggest, Beaujoyeux’s mixed allegories point to an interesting, discursive tension between the formal and political demands of the *Balet* and its Circean content. A comprehensive study of the Neoplatonic reception of Circe in the Renaissance would demand a thesis

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<sup>16</sup> Melinda J. Gough, “Daughters of Circe: Effeminacy and Poetic Efficacy in Renaissance Epic and Theatre” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1996), 72–90.

<sup>17</sup> Baltasar de Beaujoyeux, *Le Ballet Comique de La Royne*, ed. and trans. Carol MacClintock and Lander MacClintock, *Musicological Studies and Documents* 25 (New York: American Institute of Musicology, 1971), 101–2.

of its own, and I do not seek to attempt anything of this nature here. The *Balet* is important, however, for the instability and ambivalence it might be seen to introduce to the Jacobean and Stuart masques which it helped inspire – amongst them, William Browne’s *Inner Temple Masque* (1615) and Aurelian Townshend’s *Tempe Restored* (1632), from which latter work the quotation in the title of my thesis derives. These masques are non-identical in terms of either their project or their audience, yet both attest, I argue, to a continued fascination with Circean ambivalence or slipperiness. Such slipperiness is eventually anathema to allegory, and thus proves germane to my later analysis of the Circean preoccupations of Milton and Spenser, writers who grapple with the problem of interpretative freedom as they inflect their poetic treatments of Circe with Reformed, theological concerns about the liberty of the human will.

My second chapter moves across genres to investigate Circean instability (as opposed to allegorical determinacy) in an important instance of early modern epic poetry: Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590). It has been well observed that Sir Guyon’s ruthless destruction of Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss in canto 12 of Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, the “Book of Temperance,” raises questions about the ethical, and indeed spiritual status of Spenser’s faerie knight. An appraisal of Sir Guyon’s interpretations and actions as he approaches, and then enters the Bower, however, also exposes the vexed relationship between Spenser’s Circean enchantress Acrasia and the Aristotelian notion of *akrasia*, commonly glossed as incontinence. In this chapter, I argue that in Book 2 of his epic poem Spenser eliminates any real possibility that Guyon might engage in *akratic* action. He secures this through the commands and prohibitions of the Palmer who accompanies Guyon as his guide, rather than through any disposition to temperance that the knight himself could be seen to possess, or to develop, across the course of the canto. A study of the “mini-odyssey” that Spenser writes into the end of Book 2 as Sir Guyon journeys towards the Bower reveals, however, several missed opportunities when Guyon might have exercised judgement and choice, responsibility which is at these moments instead outsourced to the Palmer. Spenser’s narrative here draws on a long-standing association of Circean temptation with hermeneutic crisis: as Gough has explored, Odysseus, who escaped Circean enchantment and withstood the sirens’ song, is allegorised as the exemplary wise man or reader. Although this is a constant theme of the Italian romances from which Spenser drew inspiration for

Acrasia, in the *Faerie Queene* the Palmer's interventions severely hamper Guyon's capacity for interpretative choice and determination.

Ultimately, I agree with Cefalu that Spenser's Book of Temperance illustrates the difficulty of reconciling Aristotelian accounts of virtue-formation with the demands of a Reformed theology and soteriology that "has trouble imagining that ethical agents develop their imparted characters according to any additive or developmental regimen of ethical conditioning."<sup>18</sup> In place of this, Cefalu suggests, Protestant writers often appealed to Mosaic Law: thus, "There is no other thing but the law of nature, printed in the hart of man, in the beginning: now made patent by the mouth of god to man, to utter his sin, and make his corrupted nature more patent to himself. And so is the lawe of nature, and the lawe of Moses, joyned together in a knot, which is a doctrine, teaching all men a perfite rule, to know what he should do."<sup>19</sup> For several critics, indeed, the legalistic attributes of the Nymph of the Well – whose waters at the beginning of Book 2 fail to wash Ruddymane's hands of his mother's blood, and catalyse, in effect, the killing curse that Acrasia had placed on his father Mordant – have suggested Spenser's awareness of the limitations of Law, and of the unanswered questions his narrative therefore poses. I argue further, however, that the latent scepticism that informs Spenser's presentation of his narrative of Mordant and Guyon's dealings with Acrasia has an important legacy. Via an examination of the legalistic role of the Palmer in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* and an analysis of Milton's seemingly erroneous reference to this character in his *Areopagitica* (1644), I begin to forge links between the later writer's estimation of Circean temptation, and the questions raised by his "sage and serious" predecessor Spenser about the ethics of an allegorical hermeneutic that restricts interpretive independence and choice.

My third chapter, "Milton's Circean *Maske at Ludlow Castle*," takes up this theme as I see it developed in Milton's masque of 1634. This chapter builds on my briefer discussion in chapter 1 of the formal interest and innovations of this work by interrogating the philosophical and theological implications of the Circean temptation it stages. In the *Maske*, I argue, Milton's sets up a dialectical relationship between the figures of the enchanter Comus, his absent mother Circe, and the Lady

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Balvanes, *The Confession of Faith* (London: 1548), 57–58.

whose chastity is to be tested. Milton thereby establishes *akrasia* as a driving principle of the work's dramatic and philosophical engagement, and in doing so presents a vision of man's moral capacity and ethical responsibility that the Reformed doctrine of total depravity would seem to disallow. It is through, and not in spite of, the Lady's confrontation of her own akratic potential as it manifests in the Circean Comus that the *potentia* or possibility vital to her own spiritual (as well as the masque's theatrical) progression is activated. This same potentiality, dependent, like Milton's poetry itself (if we read the *Areopagitica* rightly) upon man's freedom to experience yet transcend an akratic state, enables the Lady's eventual consent and accession to grace. Against Spenser's prohibitive Palmer, and the life-denying, legalistic waters of the Nymph of the Well, Milton therefore offers Sabrina – a figure with Circean attributes of her own, who

. . .can unlock

The clasp'ing charm, and thaw the numbing spell,

If she be right invoked in warbled song.<sup>20</sup>

(852-54)

My fourth and final chapter explores the significance of the Circean allusions and tropes deployed by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. While Browning and Brodwin in particular have contributed valuably to our understanding of Milton's engagement with Circean mythology in his epic poem, their accounts presuppose a more or less total identification of the figure with the effects of spiritual degradation.<sup>21</sup> Milton's only direct allusion to Circe in the poem appears, it is true, at a particularly inauspicious moment in the narrative: leading up to the Fall, a comparison between Eve and Circe is made as Satan observes her amongst the animals in the garden, who are said to be “. . .more duteous at her call, / Than at Circean call the herd disguised” (9.521-22). As Giamatti finds, “of all the analogies by which to imply the harmony and innocence of the creatures in the garden before the Fall,

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<sup>20</sup> John Milton, “A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle,” in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), 168–229. All further references are to line number of this edition.

<sup>21</sup> Browning, “Sin, Eve, and Circe”; Leonora Brodwin, “Milton and the Renaissance Circe,” *Milton Studies* 6 (1975): 21–84.

the comparison of Eve to Circe's power is, to say the very least, the most ambiguous."<sup>22</sup> The problem, however, is partly one of perspective. Myth, of course, is a product of the Fallen world, and at this moment in the poem's narrative time, Eve has yet to Fall, although both the reader and Satan – with whose voyeuristic gaze we are aligned – are already exiled from her "happy state" (1.29). We might note that Satan, in fact, had furthered his own downwards metamorphoses by taking on the form of the serpent in order to beguile Eve, and that the other distinctly negative Circean event in the poem – the generation of the Scylla-like Sin – occurs again at Satan's instigation. As I discuss, Milton's story of Sin's creation bears a perverse resemblance to that of Eve's, yet a crucial distinction between the two characters is maintained. Eve is born of God's love for Adam and is the future "mother of human race" (4.475), whilst Sin, the product of Satan's narcissistic self-desire, can generate only death. Equating Eve's Circean "charm" with Adam's passion, and Adam's passion with his fatal disobedience of God's commandment proves, moreover, inconsistent with Milton's understanding of what it means to be made "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (3.99) in a human world where "reason also is choice" (3.108). Ultimately, I suggest that the Circean potential so important to the exploration of Christian liberty in the *Maske* is granted enhanced providential importance in this, Milton's most famous work. It is the primacy of choice in Milton's theology, I suggest, which conditions the metaphysical attributes of his Chaos in *Paradise Lost* as a space of pure potential, and the cosmic heart of Circean desire.

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<sup>22</sup> A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (New York: Norton, 1989), 329.



A Circean Renaissance: Reading the English Masque Tradition, 1600-1634

This chapter investigates Circean representations in the French *Balet Comique de la Royne* (1581) and three English masques of the early seventeenth century: Browne's *Inner Temple Masque* (1615), Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618) and Townshend's *Tempe Restored* (1632). Attention to these works will serve to contextualise my discussion in chapter 3 of Milton's *Maske at Ludlow Castle* (1634), a work in turn indebted to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the subject of chapter 2. The aspects of the masque tradition that I treat here, therefore, are those that I believe will provide the necessary background to this study, and substantiate my later claims about Milton and Spenser. The second half of my title for this chapter, "Reading the English masque tradition," acknowledges from the outset the necessary qualifier to my argument: masques, by nature and by design, are richly textured, ephemeral productions. Any assertions I make here, therefore, rely on the literary afterlives of the courtly entertainments I discuss – contemporary printed editions of the works and commemorative materials which often have political or poetic agendas of their own. Masques, moreover, were always collaborative affairs, and as scholars of these works have long noted, music, dance, set design and costume are perhaps even more key to their overall effect than the spoken word.<sup>1</sup> Although the writers and producers of the masques I discuss do sometimes take great pains to record the extra-literary aspects of their works through musical scores, illustrations and careful description, much of it, inevitably, has been lost to time.<sup>2</sup>

My account in the pages below of representations of Circe in the *Balet* of 1581, through to the English masques of Jonson, Browne, Townshend and Milton, is therefore self-consciously partial. Against this, if the geographical and chronological parameters of the texts I have selected for discussion will appear rather more generous than those of my later chapters, which each primarily

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance John Peacock, *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones: The European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque: Dance, Costume, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque 1604-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> The dearth of surviving choreographies for English court masques is discussed by Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 16.

examine a single, English work, the “softer” focus here is intended to capture something of the broader humanist traditions to which the more canonical works I treat in this thesis are indebted. In the masques I examine, the conflicts and confrontations that play out between the allegorical Circe of the European mythographers and the political and theological needs of writers in post-Reformation England expose the scope but also the limitations of the masque genre, and illustrate, perhaps, why Milton and Spenser’s most serious engagements with Circean myth take place instead through the medium of epic poetry.

### *Le Balet Comique de la Royne* and the English court masque

There are several reasons why a chapter which examines representations of Circe in the English masque tradition might open with a discussion of the French *Balet Comique de la Royne*. Although as Yarnall notes, “at least ten musical entertainments in which . . . [Circe] was a main character, as well as many others that featured her mythological descendants, Alcina and Armida, were produced in France, Italy, and Belgium during the seventeenth century,” of all these performances, it is the *Balet* which has the greatest claim to influence over the developments of the English art form in the early seventeenth-century.<sup>3</sup> The *Balet*, which features extensive appearances by Circe, was presented by Queen Louise de Lorraine, and performed for the court of King Henri III in the “grande salle de Bourbon” in Paris in 1581.<sup>4</sup> This lavish state occasion, commissioned as part of a two-week long period of festivities to mark the wedding of the Duc de Joyeuse, the King’s favourite, to Mlle. de Vaudemont, the Queen’s half-sister,<sup>5</sup> is of scholarly importance in its own right. High significance has been attributed to the *Balet* by historians of music and dance, as well as theatre: it has been suggested that these elements, together with verse, came together in performance to create a uniquely composite

<sup>3</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 146. Yarnall’s claim relies on Jean Rousset, *La Littérature de l’âge Baroque En France: Circé et Le Paon* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1953), 255-57.

<sup>4</sup> Baltasar de Beaujoyeux, *Le Balet Comique*, ed. Margaret M. McGowan, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, v. 6 (Binghampton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghampton, 1982), A3v. Citations of the French text are to page number of this facsimile edition. Citations in English, again by page number, rely on MacClintock’s translation.

<sup>5</sup> Beaujoyeux, *Le Balet Comique de La Royne*, trans. MacClintock, 25.

art form which would lead eventually to the development of opera.<sup>6</sup> More immediately, however, the publication by Baltasar de Beaujoyeux of a print edition of the *Balet*'s verse and score spread news of the performance across Europe. Sir Henry Cobham, English ambassador to Paris, was present at the event, and purchased a copy of the printed edition of the work.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps more significantly, another copy of the *Balet* made its way into Ben Jonson's library – the title page of this book, held now at the New York Public Library, features notations in the English court poet's own hand.<sup>8</sup> The strongest evidence for the influence of the *Balet* on the English court masque, however, arrives with Aurelian Townshend and Inigo Jones's masque of 1632, *Tempe Restored*. As Veevers notes, "Jones and Townshend worked allusively from the text of the *Balet comique*, but closely enough to suggest the original to those who possessed a copy . . . or who had access to the copy used by Jones."<sup>9</sup> Milton's *Maske at Ludlow Castle* of 1634 in turn has a number of important thematic and performative connections to Townshend's masque, and both performances are preceded by William Browne's *Inner Temple Masque* of 1615, a work in which critics have detected further echoes of the *Balet*.<sup>10</sup>

The *Balet*'s presentation of Circe, then, anticipates her (re)appearance in successive Jacobean and Stuart court masques, and we might not unreasonably seek to establish the significance of these later figures by examining the function of their predecessor in the French performance. As this work may be less familiar, I summarise below its main narrative events. In brief, the *Balet* opens with the escape of the "fugitive gentleman" (41) from Circe's garden at the far end of the hall. The gentleman

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<sup>6</sup> See McGowan, "Introduction," in *Le Balet Comique*, by Baltasar de Beaujoyeux, ed. McGowan, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1947), 239. My discussion of the *Balet* throughout this chapter is indebted to Yates' seminal study of the text. Her contextualisation of the performance within the political and cultural milieu of the court of King Henri III, and her exposition of the relationship between the French Académie de Poésie et de Musique and the *ballet de cour* tradition, remain invaluable.

<sup>8</sup> Baltasar de Beaujoyeux, *Balet Comique de La Royne* (Paris, 1582), New York Public Library Lincoln Center Collection, Drexel 5995.

<sup>9</sup> Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 194. On this point see also John G. Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968); Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 264.

<sup>10</sup> The likely involvement of the composer of the *Maske*'s songs, Henry Lawes, in *Tempe Restored* is detailed by Demaray. Two of the Egerton children, Lady Katherine Egerton and Lady Alice Egerton had also appeared in Townshend's performance. See Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition*, 83-5. For a discussion of the narrative and scenic parallels between the *Balet* and Browne's masque, see Anne Daye, "The Role of *Le Balet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque: Part 1 The Jacobean Initiative," *Dance Research* 32, no. 2 (2014): 202.

approaches the King, the *Balet's* chief spectator, and begs for his assistance to defeat “la sorciere” (C1r) who had at one time transformed him into a lion, and has now

. . . va de loin les nymphes espier  
 Afin de les charmer par magique cautelle  
 Et les garder de voir ce Roy, qui les appelle  
 Dendans un temple en France, avec les autres dieux  
 Qui le siècle doré font retourner des cieux.

(C1r)

gone to spy upon the nymphs from afar so as to prevent them by a magic spell from seeing that King who is summoning them to a temple in France, together with other gods who are bringing the Golden Age down from heaven (42).

As the gentleman kneels before the king, Circe enters in pursuit and laments his loss, before returning to her garden. Three Sirens and a Triton then enter the hall on a float, singing the praise of the French King, followed by a magnificent and ornately decorated fountain, which holds on its upper-most basin twelve naiads seated on twelve golden chairs, Queen Louise amongst them. Glaucus and Tethys accompany the naiads in chairs at the base of the fountain, which is followed on to the stage by the Sirens. Following a song of the Tritons, a dialogue between Glaucus and Tethys takes place, in which Glaucus begs Tethys for help against “Circe, jalousie Circe, indigne qui te nommes / Fille du Dieu” (F1v) (“jealous Circe, unworthy to be the daughter of the god” (54)). The stage is cleared, and then the nymphs re-enter the hall, followed by the twelve naiads, and all begin to dance. As the tune “la Clochette” (F2v) begins to play in the last passage of the music, Circe leaves her garden in anger and touches all of the nymphs and musicians with her wand, rendering them motionless. She returns to the garden, and Mercury descends in a cloud, sent by Jupiter “pour . . . deliurer les Naiades de son echantement, avec le ius de la racine du Moly” (F3r) (“to break the enchantment of Circe with a piece of the Moly root” (59)). He sings, and then uses a golden flask to sprinkle the juice of the moly root

over the heads of the nymphs and musicians, who are instantly reanimated. This provokes Circe's anger, and she leaves her garden again. After a speech in which she aligns herself with "Destiny" and "change" against the water nymphs who would "faire reuenir / En France l'age d'or" (G2r) ("bring the Golden Age back to France" (63)), she declares her intention to keep the messenger God "vaincu dans ma tour enferm " (G2v) ("vanquished and imprisoned in my tower" (62-3)), and arrests Mercury, as well as the dancers and musicians once again with her wand.

Seven flautists and one vocalist then enter as Satyrs, again celebrating the virtue of the King, to be joined by four Dryads. All twelve then approach the Royal party, and the nymph Opis declares her intention to ask Pan to intervene against Circe. Pan promises to help, and the "four Virtues" (72) enter to sing before the King, followed by the goddess Minerva in "un fort beau, riche & magnifique chariot, qui estoit train  par un grand serpent" (L4r) ("a very beautiful, rich and magnificent chariot drawn by a great serpent" (73)). Minerva addresses the King, and then appeals to Jupiter to descend from heaven and lend his aid against Circe, a request to which the God acquiesces. Pan then leads his eight Satyrs to assail Circe's castle, until eventually the enchantress's wand is rendered defunct "under the influence of Minerva" (89). Finally, Jupiter strikes Circe with a thunderbolt, and Minerva captures her and parades her around the hall, presenting both the enchantress and her wand to the King. The performance ends with a Grand Ballet, after which the queen presented an emblem to the King, and "following the Queen's example, all the other Princesses, ladies and maidens went according to their rank and degree to choose a Prince, a Lord, or a Gentleman," to whom "they presented a medal with their symbols" (98). Circe is one of this party, and we are told she "gave M. le Cardinal de Bourbon a book" (98) with the inscription *Fatorum arcana resignat* (T1v): "it opens the secrets of the fates."

These, then, were the *Balet's* main events. Reading between the lines and through the lens of her historical knowledge of the contemporary anxieties and preoccupations of Henry III's court, Yates has stressed the *Balet's* importance as an expression of the strength and power of the French state

during a period of prolonged religious conflict between the Huguenots and their Catholic opponents.<sup>11</sup> Circe, she observes, in part represents the threat of imminent religious and civil war, which Henry III and his mother Catherine de Medici struggled to forestall. Indeed, in prefatory material affixed to the printed text of the *Balet*, Minerva is related allegorically to the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici, whose “wise counsels” and “sound remedies” are praised for bringing peace back to France after the bloody violence of the conflicts that had gripped France (30; 28). Something of this may account for the preoccupation with Circean mythology evident in the English masques: although nothing like the French wars occurred on English soil during the period in question, religious disputes continued throughout the reign of James I and became even more pronounced with the marriage of his successor Charles I to a Catholic consort, Henrietta Maria, in 1625.<sup>12</sup> As we will see, the *Book of Sports* controversy over which both James I and Charles I presided has been seen by some critics as an important context for Milton’s presentation of the Circean, yet courtly Comus in his *Maske*, while anxieties about the undue influence Henrietta Maria’s Catholicism was feared to exert over Charles and his court appear to have had some bearing on the Circean interest of Townshend’s *Tempe Restored*.

Beyond its demonstration of the usefulness of Circe as a figure for dissent and civil disorder, however, the French *Balet*’s greatest influence on the English masque tradition would appear to lie in the work’s formal innovations, bearing out Chibnall’s argument that “the true relationship of the masque to history is in its form, not merely in its content.”<sup>13</sup> Yates’ important study traces the *Balet*’s artistic genesis to the literary and musical activities of the sixteenth-century Académie de Poésie et de Musique, a group presided over by Jean-Antoine de Baïf which was itself an outgrowth of a wider humanist movement with strong links to the Neoplatonic philosophy of the original Florentine

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<sup>11</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 250–62. For more on the French Wars of Religion and the bearing of the ongoing conflict between Huguenots and the Catholic League on the policies of Henry III in the 1570s and 1580s, see R. J. Knecht, *The French Religious Wars, 1562-1598* (Oxford: Osprey, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Throughout his reign, Charles resisted considerable pressure to support the Protestant cause in Europe in military action against the Catholic powers Austria and Spain. Veevers argues that “the emphasis in court culture of the thirties on Arcadian peace, harmony, and love has polemical insistence that cannot be divorced from religion,” and suggests even that France of 1582, where Catherine de Medici struggled to appease both the Huguenots and the Catholic League, “had many similarities in religion and politics with the 1630s in England” (*Images of Love and Religion*, 184; 191).

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Chibnall, “‘To That Secure Fix’d State’: The Function of the Caroline Masque,” in *The Court Masque*, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 85.

Academy. The French Academy enjoyed the patronage of both Henry III and the Duc de Joyeuse, and the *Balet* itself seems to speak to a marriage of academic and political interests: as Yates observes, across the performance as a whole, “the political aim of harmonising the religious problems of the age through the use of court amusements is related to the philosophical aim of revealing the universal harmony through the power of ‘ancient’ poetry, music, and dancing.”<sup>14</sup> Beaujoyeux’s text itself draws attention to this goal in its careful exposition of key musical and choreographic events: the *musique mesurée*, for instance, which sounded from the *voûte dorée* (golden vault) at key junctures of the *Balet*, is “la vraye harmonie du ciel, de laquelle toutes les choses qui sont en estre, sont conservées et maintenues” (B1v) (“the true harmony of heaven, by which all living things are conserved and maintained” (38)).<sup>15</sup> Tellingly, the first direct paraphrase of Beaujoyeux’s text in an English masque appears in relation to this idea. Jonson’s preface to the third dance of his *Masque of Queens* (1609) asserts that “Wherein, beside that principal grace of perspicuity, the motions were so even and apt, and their expression so just; as if Mathematicians had lost Proportion, they might there have found it.”<sup>16</sup>

This is suggestively close to Beaujoyeux’s description of the geometrical figures that formed the Grand Ballet at the end of the French performance, “si bien l’ordre y estoit gardé, & si dextrement chacun s’estudioit à observer son rang & cadence: de manière qu’Archimède n’eust peu mieux

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<sup>14</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 270. Following Yates, Veevers suggests that Catherine de Medici’s “programme for religious toleration amounted to a Royalist Counter-Reformation, in which the arts were used in an attempt to soothe the natures of those around her and to influence the course of events, particularly towards an agreement between moderates on the Catholic and Protestant sides” (*Images of Love and Religion*, 19).

<sup>15</sup> MacClintock notes that the *musique mesurée*, “associated exclusively with Baif’s Academy, was the result of an attempt on the part of Baif and his *confrères* to reproduce, in French, classical prosody based on quantity – *vers mesurés à l’antique*, or metered verse in the ancient manner – sung to music whose rhythms would correspond exactly to those of the poetry” (Carol MacClintock, “Introduction,” in *Le Ballet Comique de La Royne*, by Baltasar de Beaujoyeux, ed. and trans. MacClintock, 19). See also Milton’s poem to Henry Lawes, in which he praises

Harry whose tuneful and well-measured song  
First taught our English music how to span  
Words with just note and accent...

(John Milton, “Sonnet XIII. To Mr H. Lawes, on His Airs,” in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. and trans. John Carey, lines 1-3).

<sup>16</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queenes*, ed. David Lindley, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, eds. Martin Butler, David Gants, et al., Cambridge University Press and King’s College London, lines 622-5, accessed 15 September, 2018.

<http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/queens/facing#>. All further references will be to this edition, cited parenthetically by line number.

entendre les proportions Geometriques, que ses princesses & dames les pratiquoyent en ce ballet” (56r) (“. . . so well was order kept, and so cleverly did everybody keep his place and his cadence [that] the spectators thought that Archimedes could not have understood geometric proportions any better than the princesses and the ladies observed in this Ballet” (91)),<sup>17</sup> lines which prompt Yates to remark that “the Pythagorean-Platonic core of the Academy – that all things are related to number, both in the outer world of nature and in the inner world of man’s soul – perhaps found in the marvellous accuracy of this measured dancing one of its most perfect artistic expressions.”<sup>18</sup> Demaray’s description of the typical seventeenth-century English court masque as “an attempt to unify the arts through a masked ball depicting an ideal society in an ideal universe,”<sup>19</sup> moreover, suggests that in this respect at least, the *Balet*’s more esoteric philosophical underpinnings were readily compatible with the ideological and political motivations of writers placed at some remove from the French Academy.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, in both the *Balet* and several of the English masques I discuss, allegory serves as the vehicle through which these aspirations are bridged with the theatrical, musical and choreographic phenomena of the performance itself.

In the printed version of the *Balet* an allegorical frame of reference is immediately established in the service of royal panegyric. Prefatory dedications identify King Henri III with Jupiter, as well, as we have seen, as his mother Catherine de Medici with Minerva, figures who assume pivotal roles in the performance as the engineers of Circe’s defeat (28-9). No less than four allegories derived from Conti’s *Mythologiae* showing the significance of Circe’s character, moreover, are appended to the

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<sup>17</sup> As close as Jonson’s lines appear to be to the French text, it is not cited. Daye notes that “Jonson’s annotations tended to advertise classical sources rather than more recent ones, and were not a complete set of references” (“The Role of *Le Ballet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque,” 187). Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 18, notes that “the Continental influence on English court masques has long been established. . . . ensemble choreographies consisting of geometric figures were performed in the Escorial, the Louvre, Whitehall, Vienna’s Hofburg, Neapolitan Jesuit seminaries, and Roman *palazzi*.”

<sup>18</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 248. Meagher notes further that “the metaphorical implications of the dance, as formed in antiquity, greatly resembled those of music: both were primarily suggestive of the harmony and order of the cosmos. The Renaissance, of course, picked up these associations” (John C. Meagher, *Method and Meaning in Jonson’s Masques* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 85).

<sup>19</sup> Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Rygg notes that in England, “a Pythagorean doctrine preaching the ascent of fallen human beings to the divine through their own endeavour, possibly even through repeated lives on earth, by necessity appeared as profoundly heretical to a Protestant church in which humans were understood to be totally dependent on God’s grace and forgiveness,” yet such ideas had strong imaginative appeal for this very reason. As Rygg acknowledges, “the power of the Puritans had its limits” (Kristin Rygg, *Masqued Mysteries Unmasked: Early Modern Music Theater and Its Pythagorean Subtext* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000), 174).



text. The first allegory, or “natural” allegory, presents Circe as “la mistion des elemens” (“the composite of the elements”), since she was born of Apollo and Perseis, and “toutes choses sont creés de chaleur & d’humidité.” Drawing a Platonic distinction between the mutable and destructible body and the immortal soul, the allegory further explains that “on dit qu’elle changeoit les hommes en formes monstreuses & diuerses: pour ce que la corruption d’une chose, est la generation de l’autre qui reiaist, mais non pas en sa premier forme” (“it is said that she changed men into monstrous and divers shapes, because the corruption of one thing is the generation of another thing formed from it, but not in the first shape”). Ulysses escapes this fate because “l’ame de l’homme est immortelle & diuine, le corps perissable & terrestre” (“Ulysses was preserved by the gods because the human soul is immortal and divine, the body perishable and earthly” (T2r; 99)).

The second allegory, attributed to the Sieur de la Chesnaye, expands Circe’s metaphysical influence: “Circe est la circuition de l’annee par la course reuoluë du Soleil” (“Circe is the revolving of the year, following the revolution of the Sun”), Ulysses is “le temps qui ne s’arreste, allant tousiours” (“time which never stops, always continuing”), and his men who are transformed are the past and the present (T2r; 100).<sup>21</sup> The third allegory, “l’allegorie morale,” repeats the first allegory’s notion that Ulysses represents the soul, but further specifies that this is “l’ame capable de raison” (“that part of the soul capable of reasoning”), whereas “les compagnons d’Vllsse signifient & puissances & facultez de l’ame, qui conspirent & accordant avec less affections des sens qui n’obeissent plus à la raison” (“Ulysses’ companions mean both the powers and qualities of the soul which work with and are in agreement with the affections of the senses which no longer obey the Reason”) (T2; 100). This idea may recall the common deployment of Circe as a warning against intemperate sensual enjoyment outlined in my introduction: the *Balet*’s moral allegory thus argues against Conti’s “natural” allegory that Circe’s parentage in fact indicates that “le desir & concupiscence pouiennent aux animaux de chaleur & d’humidité” (“desire and lust come to animals from heart and dampness”). The bestial transformations of those who drink from the enchantress’s

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<sup>21</sup> Yates emphasises the fatalism of the *Balet*’s allegorical association of Circe with temporal law: “Circe is not only the power of natural law binding man to change and decay with the four elements; she is also the power of temporal law, binding man to inevitable historical processes and carrying him helplessly onward from the cradle to the grave as the seasons pass” (*The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 244).

cup signify the dangers of allowing one's higher, rational capacities to be enslaved to base passion: Circe is that desire which, if overindulged, "nous incite à la volupté nous maistrise, il nous pousse aux vices, qui nous sont semblables aux bestes: soit paillardise, yurongnerie, cruauté & autres mauuaises qualitez: mais celui qui est accompagné de raison, est assuré contre ces poisons" ("urges us to those vices which make us resemble animals, that is to say, lechery, drunkenness, cruelty and certain other vices. But the man who is endowed with Reason is protected against these poisons") (T2r-v; 100).

The fourth, and longest allegory elaborates and broadens the message of its predecessors. The encyclopaedic ambition of the allegory, however, which notes at the outset that "toutes les allegories des fictions poetiques en general, se referent ou à la morale, ou à la supernaturelle & diuine, ou à une meslange de l'vne & de l'autre" ("all allegory of poetical fictions in general is based on natural philosophy, or on morality, or on the supernatural and divine, or on a mixture of one and the other") (T2v; 100), extends Circe's significance beyond the terrestrial sphere: Circe we are told, "selon Homere est deesse, & partant immortelle" ("according to Homer, is a goddess and therefore immortal"), and that "il ne fera pas hors de raison de prendre la Circé pour le desire n general qui regne & domine sure tout ce qui a vie & est meslé de la diuinité & du sensible" ("it seems not unreasonable to take Circe for that desire in general which rules and dominates all things and is a mingling of the divine and sensual") (T2v; 101). We will return to the significance of this claim later. It is interesting that, as Meagher notes, the allegory was provided by one "Sieur Gordon," who "is without question to be identified with John Gordon, D.D., a man of notable learning . . . [who] preached frequently before King James."<sup>22</sup> Allegory proves similarly indispensable to the seventeenth-century English court masque, and Butler has written astutely about "the complex entanglements of politics and hermeneutics which the masques involve."<sup>23</sup> While the use of allegory in English court entertainments certainly predates the *Balet*,<sup>24</sup> Meagher has argued that

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<sup>22</sup> Meagher, *Method and Meaning in Jonson's Masques*, 30. For further details of the Gordon family's ties to the court, see Daye, "The Role of *Le Balet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque" 187.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Butler, "The Politics of the Caroline Masque Form," in *Theatre and Government Under the Early Stuarts*, ed. J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 124.

<sup>24</sup> Allegory is a staple of Tudor masques and pageants, as well as medieval mystery and morality plays: Schelling has argued that "the allegorical nature of the masque . . . comes direct from the time-honoured practices of the morality" (Felix E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642* (New York: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1908), 214). There were, of course other influences, as Daye's argument that "both the English

“Beaujoyeux’s use of the classical gods of music and dance, of allegory, of the king, can all be found paralleled in Jonson’s work in a way that apparently never occurred in earlier English masques.”<sup>25</sup> Meagher’s claim that “it is illuminating to look at Jonson’s masques with the *Balet Comique* in mind; it is perhaps more pertinent to the background of Jonson’s masques than any of his English predecessors,” should remind us, moreover, that if the thematic and formal preoccupations of the later Circean masques I treat hearken back to the French *Balet*, they are likely to do so through a Jonsonian lens.<sup>26</sup>

### Formal developments: Ben Jonson

Jonson’s *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, in fact, might be understood as a significant intertext between the *Balet* and Milton’s Circean *Maske* of 1634.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen, the *Balet*’s “moral” allegory stipulates that “Ulysses means that part of the soul capable of reason . . . Ulysses’ companions are the powers and qualities of the soul which work with and are in agreement with the affections of the senses which no longer obey the Reason” (100). The dualistic opposition of reason to sense and of souls to bodies evident here, together with the further opposition of permanence to impermanence established by the *Balet*’s first allegory (“Ulysses was preserved by the gods because the human soul is immortal and divine, the body perishable and earthly,” 99) relies on a Platonic schema that is similarly reflected in Jonson’s allegorical conception of the form and function of the masque itself, and which can also be seen to condition the metaphysical and moral landscape of Jonson’s *Pleasure*.<sup>28</sup>

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masque and the French ballet were based on the Italian model of the *mascaraed*,” or *intermedio*, should remind us (Daye, “The Role of *Le Ballet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque,” 192). For more on this background, see Henry Prunières, *Le Ballet de Cour En France Avant Benserade et Lully* (Paris: H. Laurens, 1914).

<sup>25</sup> Meagher, *Method and Meaning in Jonson’s Masques*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Pleasure* first appears in print in the second folio collection of Jonson’s works, published in 1640. A manuscript of *Pleasure* from the year of the masque’s performance also exists, and it is to this version that my discussion refers. On the variants between the two texts, see Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, eds. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 475-78.

<sup>28</sup> In the preface to *Hymenaei* (1606), Jonson explains that whereas bodies and sense impressions are transient but necessary ephemera which serve to delight and entertain, the “inward parts” of the masque, “grounded upon antiquity, and solid learnings . . . should always lay hold on more removed mysteries.” (11-13) Ben Jonson, “Hymenaei,” *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, ed. David Lindley, lines 11-13,

An indication of the importance of moral allegory to the form and content of *Pleasure* is given by its title, which derives from Xenophon's account of Hercules' fabled choice between the paths of virtue and vice, represented respectively in the masque by the personified figures of Virtue and Pleasure.<sup>29</sup> Orgel notes that for early modern allegorists, this legend "was considered the most significant part of the story of Hercules," and documents the appearance of the encounter "as a fable illustrating the moral life" in contemporary emblem books which render "the active hero a rational soul subject to persuasion."<sup>30</sup>

This interpretation would suggest some degree of symbolic or discursive overlap between Renaissance renditions of Xenophon's legend and moral allegories of Circean temptation, a hunch which might be confirmed by the "argument" of Sandy's 1632 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where we are informed that those "who forsake that faire Intelligence, / To follow Passion, and voluptuous Sense; / That shun the Path and Toyles of Hercules;" are "Such, charm'd by Circe's luxurie, and ease, / [that] Themselves deforme."<sup>31</sup> Milton, furthermore, would elide the two scenarios in his tract *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), where the reader is directed to "the divine volumes of Plato, and his equal Xenophon: where, if I should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love, I mean that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only virtue, which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy; (the rest are cheated with a thick intoxicating potion, which a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name, carries about)."<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, in Jonson's masque, it is Hercules' "abused" cup that Comus's "bowl-bearer" audaciously carries with him, "to fill the drunken Orgies up."<sup>33</sup> In fact, although Circe never appears as a character in her own right in a masque of Jonson's creation, an

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accessed September 15, 2018,

<http://universitypublishingonline.org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/hymenaei/facing/#>.

<sup>29</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.21-34. Xenophon derives the story from the Sophist Prodicus.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 151.

<sup>31</sup> Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, trans. Sandys, A1r.

<sup>32</sup> John Milton, "An Apology against a Pamphlet Call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions of the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus," in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Patterson et al., vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 305. All further references to Milton's prose works are to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Jonson, "Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue," ed. Martin Butler, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, lines 78-80, accessed September 15, 2018,

<http://universitypublishingonline.org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/pleasure/facing/#>. All further references are to this edition, cited parenthetically by line number. In the mythological accounts, by contrast, an admiring Sol awards Hercules the cup so that he may sail in it to the island of Erythia where he completes his heroic tenth labour – as Jonson puts it, the cup was "the crowned reward / Of thirsty heroes, after labour hard" (*Pleasure*, 78-80)

important genealogical relationship between Circe and Comus, the infamous “belly” of *Pleasure*, is set up in Milton’s 1634 *Maske at Ludlow Castle*, where Comus is introduced as the son of Circe and Bacchus, “like his father but his mother more” (57).<sup>34</sup> The figure of Comus was celebrated by the ancients as the god of banquets and revels, and is associated with Bacchus by the Renaissance mythographer Cartari: “Since wine has a warming effect, the usual image of Bacchus was supposed to be of a beardless young man, happy and carefree. Comus, who was the god of feasts for the ancients, bore a close resemblance to this image.”<sup>35</sup> In the sixteenth century, a further association of the figure with excess and gluttony is notable in the texts of French writers and moralists, and Comus is sketched briefly to this effect in works by several English playwrights which date both before and after Jonson’s *Pleasure*.<sup>36</sup>

Like Circe, then, Comus is associated with crude and intemperate sensual enjoyment. Jonson’s Comus, however, is awarded additional Circean significance: in *Pleasure*, his rout of revellers is described as having “wallowed” in the “sty / Of Vice” (83-4), recalling the bestial transformation of the men who drink from Circe’s cup in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and precipitating the Attendant Spirit’s description in the *Maske* of Comus’s victims, who “roll in pleasure in a sensual sty” (77). In *Pleasure*, this nod to Circean mythology serves to cement Comus’s moral significance within a wider allegorical framework that is established spatially, as well as verbally, with the aid of “the mountain Atlas” (1), a set piece around which the masque’s action unfolds. As Kogan has noted, “Jonson identifies the base of his mountain with an antimasque of man’s lower appetites, while the top becomes a metaphor of the soul’s upward journey,” so that “the entire stage device . . . represents man’s upward movement from sense to understanding”: Atlas, we are told, “the heavens upbear[s]”

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<sup>34</sup> Critics have argued convincingly for the debt this performance owes to Jonson’s earlier work – Jonson’s masque was not published until 1640, but Milton may have seen it in manuscript. See Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 108–27.

<sup>35</sup> Vincenzo Cartari, *Vincenzo Cartari’s Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Italian Mythography*, trans. John Mulryan, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, v. 396 (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 326.

<sup>36</sup> See Pierre Viret, *The Christian Disputations*, trans. John Brooke (London: Thomas East, 1579), 140v; Jean Taffin, *The Amendment of Life Comprised in Fower Bookes*, trans. unknown (London: John Windet, 1595), 230; Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Horne-Booke* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1609), 4; Thomas Middleton, *Honorable Entertainments* (London: George Eld, 1621), C4r.

(146).<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of the masque, after Comus has been “Beat from his grove, and that defaced” (153), the twelve masquers emerge from the mountain under the watchful gaze of Hesperus, “the glory of the West” (159), from whose “bright race” (172), it is suggested, James I is descended. Hesperus is flanked by Justice, Wisdom, Beauty and Love, and commands Virtue, who “brings forth” (169) the twelve Princes or maskers from the mountain to perform the dances endowed with “sacred harmony” by “Dedalus the wise,” “a guide that gives them laws to all their motions” (204-6). Ultimately, however, it is the King himself as the earthly agent of heavenly powers who embodies the “more removed mysteries” of the masque, and thus lends *Pleasure* its final meaning.<sup>38</sup>

This ending recalls the closing movements of the *Balet*, where the four Virtues, Fortitude, Justice, Temperance, and Prudence parade in front of the Royal party, and together with Minerva and the musicians of the *voûte dorée* sing to the King, praising the princes of France and “leurs loix / Qui banniront d’icy les vices & la guerre” (N3r). Rygg notes that “because the king possesses these virtues, he has the capacity to conquer Circe,” and indeed, it is the entrance of the virtues, together with Minerva’s appeal, that precipitates the descent of Jupiter – a figure, as we have seen, for King Henri III – to bring about Circe’s defeat.<sup>39</sup> As in *Pleasure*, the oppositional relationship between Circe and the King was stressed visually throughout the *Balet*: Henri III and his mother, Catherine de Medici, sat facing their adversary for the duration of the performance (30). This ongoing, confrontational relationship edges into crisis as Circe secures a temporary victory, managing to immobilise both the Queen’s dancing naiads and Mercury, who had attempted to free them with the aid of the moly plant. Thereafter, she is seen “deuant la porte de son chasteau assise en sa maiesté” (“seated majestically at the gate of her castle”) (G2v; 63), the figure of Mercury lying prone at her feet. This revision of the classical myths, where conversely, Mercury is successful in securing Odysseus’s immunity to Circe’s charms, may initially strengthen our impression of Circe’s power. Ultimately, however, it serves to simplify and strengthen the polarisation between Circe and sovereign rule upon which the *Balet*’s dramatic and political interest depends: where Circe’s “fugitive favourite”

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King: Wisdom and Idolatry in the Seventeenth-Century Masque* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), 88.

<sup>38</sup> Jonson, *Hymenaei*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Rygg, *Masqued Mysteries Unmasked*, 163.

rests at the King's feet, Mercury lies at Circe's. Inversely, at the *Balet's* close, Circe herself is captured and led in triumph around the hall, a prelude of sorts to the performance of the forty geometric dance figures of the final ballet, which, we are told, were "disposez de telle facon, qu'à la fin du passage toutes turnoient toujours la face vers le Roy" ("arranged in such a way that at the end of each figure all the ladies turned to face the King") (O3v; 90). In their exact and ordered fashioning, these dances present an image of peace, harmony and hierarchy, that signifies the restoration of business as usual to a court briefly perturbed by Circean misrule.

This juxtaposition of order and disorder is seen again in Jonson's *Masque of Queenes*, where suggestive parallels to the French *Balet* emerge through the sequence of musical, choreographic and narrative counter-moves used to defeat a group of eleven hags and their Dame.<sup>40</sup> In the *Balet*, the dancing naiads who are paralysed by Circe and whom Mercury attempts to free are represented by the Queen's Ladies in waiting and presided over, as we have seen, by Queen Louise herself. An analogue for the tiered fountain on which these figures are drawn spectacularly into the hall may be found in the *Masque of Queenes'* discovery of the House of Fame, which seated eleven Queens headed by Bel-Anna, Queen of the Ocean, an "arch-naiad" played by James I's consort, Queen Anne of Denmark.<sup>41</sup> After their defeat, the hags are bound, like Circe in the *Balet*, and dragged through the hall by chariots. Yet in *Queenes*, the mere presence of the House of Fame is sufficient to secure the defeat of the hags, just as in *Pleasure*, Hercules's command "sink grove" (95) effectively dispels Comus and his drunken crew. In the *Balet*, as we have seen, the victory of the court against Circe, if no less absolute, is rather more hard won.

It would be remiss to discuss these differences without recourse to Jonson's famous prefatory remarks, appended to the printed masque text of *Queenes*, which introduce the notion of an "antimasque," a "foil, or false masque" (9) that precedes the masque proper and presents "a spectacle of strangeness, producing multiplicity of gesture, and not unaptly sorting with the current, and whole fall of the device" (13-14). One function of the antimasque, of course, is to further polarise the masque form, entrenching its moral allegory to accord with the Jonsonian edict that virtue is 'more

<sup>40</sup> Circe does not appear in *Queenes*, although she is listed as one of the "witches" of the "ancients," of whose power the Dame boasts (180-81).

<sup>41</sup> Daye, "The Role of *Le Balet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque," 194.



seen, more known, when vice stands by” (*Pleasure* 295),<sup>42</sup> whilst simultaneously confining, or attenuating, the conflict generated by such internal oppositions so that “the disorders of the antimasque are [able to be ] repressed by the masque itself in a recuperative move of containment.”<sup>43</sup> This might explain why Jonson’s *Comus* in *Pleasure* inhabits a discrete part of the entertainment, while the *Balet’s* Circe, who is not aligned with an antimasque, ranges far more freely between her palace and garden at one end of the hall, and the Royal party, stationed at the other.<sup>44</sup> A variation of this idea of containment, the “carnival” thesis, views the disordered, topsy-turvy world of the antimasque as ultimately non-threatening to monarchical authority in the early seventeenth century, since “festival freedom was seen as a sign of submission to Royal power.”<sup>45</sup> Marcus and others find support for this “paradox of state” in James I’s advocacy of public mirth in the *Book of Sports* (1618), an act which forbade the suppression by “precise persons” of “any lawful recreation, such as dancing, either men or women; archery for men, leaping, vaulting, or any other such harmless recreation . . . May-games, Whitsun-ales, and Morris-dances; and the setting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used.”<sup>46</sup> In courtly entertainments of this period, however, any apparent toleration of irreverent festivity is invariably qualified. In addition to Jonson’s segregation of the antimasque from the masque itself, at the end of *Pleasure*, if Hesperus’s (and, implicitly, James I’s) intention is to establish peace between “Virtue and her noted opposite, / Pleasure” (157-58), personified figures who sit above the musicians at the base of the mountain, it may be observed that this is a very “top down” reconciliation and that the pleasure to which virtue is aligned is effectively scourged of any association with *Comus’s* revels. Indeed, there is only an oblique reference to the disorder and disruption of the “Belly’s” (78) celebrations, once he has been banished: Dedalus’s warning that “. . . what is noble should be sweet, / But not dissolved in wantonness” (266-67).

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<sup>42</sup> Meagher (*Method and Meaning in Jonson’s Masques*, 54) suggests the latter point. Sophie Tomlinson argues that in *Queenes*, “the masque thus becomes a vehicle for discriminating between two types of female actor: the malefic and the martial; the witch and the heroine” (Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31).

<sup>43</sup> Hugh Craig, “Jonson, the Antimasque and the ‘Rules of Flattery,’” in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, ed. David M. Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178.

<sup>44</sup> MacClintock suggests this may be a direct consequence of Beaujoyeulx’s novel adaption of the Italian *intermedio* to function “as part of the action, not merely as a diversion between scenes or acts,” establishing thereby a new kind of continuity (“Introduction,” 16).

<sup>45</sup> Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 9; *The King’s Majesty’s Declaration to his Subjects Concerning Lawful Sports to be Used*, 1618, 9 James I.



A similar notion of temperate, licit pleasure seems to have informed the *Balet*: Beaujoyeux's prefatory address to the King praises Henri III for having "attaint les deux points de la perfection de toute humaine action, l'utile & l'agreable" ("achieved the two points of perfection of all human action – the practical and the pleasant"), and for having "sceu temperer ceste Martiale inclination, de plaisirs honnestes, de passetemps exquis, de recreation esmerueillable en sa varieté" ("known how to temper this martial inclination with honest pleasures, delightful pastimes, recreation marvellous in variety, inimitable in beauty, incomparable in its delightful novelty") (a2r; p27). Yet if signs of the *Balet*'s influence may be detected in both *Queenes* and *Pleasure*, there is still a significant difference between the French performance and the Jonsonian masques. Despite some of the parallels I have noted between Jonson's depiction of Comus in *Pleasure* and allegorical treatments of Circe, Jonson's works are not, in the final instance, reliant on Circean mythology. Of the English masques treated in this chapter which do feature Circe as a character in her own right, moreover, none have a clearly defined antimasque-to-masque structure. Milton's *Maske*, in fact, self-consciously subverts these conventions to dramatic effect. While the sorcerer Comus first encounters the Lady in the suitably inauspicious setting of an "ominous wood" (61), her temptation continues in "a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness: soft music, tables spread with all dainties" (657, s.d. 1-2). As Lewalski finds, "in formal terms, this scene would surprise a masque audience, who would expect the court scene to be the main masque after the antimasque in the dark wood with its antic dances of Comus's rout. Instead, Milton presents the court as another antimasque: it is not the locus of virtue and grace but is Comus's own residence . . . The reversal of the usual politics of masquing could not be more complete."<sup>47</sup>

Intriguingly, Craig has used the term "Circean" to describe those masques with greater formal flexibility, masques where the remit of characters typically associated with the antimasque is expanded to produce "an uninhibited and uncouth violence that unleashes wildness close to the seat of

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<sup>47</sup> Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton's *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing," in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, ed. David M. Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 309.

majesty.”<sup>48</sup> In a sense, this is unsurprising: it might seem difficult to find a figure more suitable for the traditional antimasque role than Circe. The common, allegorical understanding of her character’s moral significance is clearly compatible with the typical teleology of the Jacobean and Caroline court masque, which, as Demaray has summarised, sees “the triumph of virtue, associated with rational restraint and order, over vice, associated with excessive passion and disorder.”<sup>49</sup> Yet if Craig is correct, a certain interplay between form and content is responsible for this development: as in Homer’s tale, in the new “Circean masques,” he suggests, “we characteristically find not strange savages but civilized fellow-humans who are for the moment imprisoned, metamorphosed or disguised in degraded forms as though by enchantment.”<sup>50</sup> This integration and dispersion of antimasque elements into the masque itself does little to tame them, effecting instead “a marked change in the balance of authority and substance between the masque and antimasque.”<sup>51</sup> Given the existence of several English masques which feature a plot based on Circean allegory and mythology, masques that are Circean in terms of content, as well – we might begin to think – as concept, and given, as we have noted, that these masques are not easily divisible into regimented antimasque and masque components, it would seem useful to examine whether a closer relationship still might exist between the changing nature of the masque form and Circean lore.

At the end of the *Balet*, in fact, a great effort to subject Circe to the monarch and transfer her powers to his court authority is evident, a fact that bears interestingly on Craig’s argument that in the English tradition, “the antimasquers are interlopers in the masque that are nonetheless required by the very form of the entertainment.”<sup>52</sup> After Circe was captured, we are told, “Minerue estant en la presence du Roy luy fit present de la verge d’or & de Circé: laquelle comme vaincue & despouillee de sa force, se vint asseoir au bas du lieu où estoyent les Princes” (“Minerva, having entered into the presence of the King, presented him with the golden wand and with Circe, who, as if vanquished and

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<sup>48</sup> Craig, “Jonson, the Antimasque and the ‘Rules of Flattery,’” 182; 177. Craig lists Jonson’s *Lovers Made Men* (1617) and *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621) as examples of such “Circean” masques which do not conform to the earlier structure (*ibid.*, 183).

<sup>49</sup> Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition*, 91. Yarnall argues that “Circe’s uncouth menagerie had obvious potential as antimasquers and it is probably for this reason above all that her myth was adapted to the form” (*Transformations of Circe*, 146).

<sup>50</sup> Craig, “Jonson, the Antimasque and the ‘Rules of Flattery,’” 182.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

deprived of her power, came to sit below the place where the Princes were” (O3r; 89)). This would seem to suggest that Circe has been incorporated into, rather than banished from, the hierarchy of the court, a notion that receives further confirmation from her inclusion in the gift-giving ceremony Beaujoyeux documents at the end of the *Balet*. Similarly, in *Tempe Restored*, Circe willingly transfers her power to King Charles and his consort Henrietta Maria, designating “This Machles Payre” her “Heire.”<sup>53</sup> As we will see, the cruxes that accompany this pronounced need for incorporation or assimilation – cruxes which, I argue, speak to a dissonance already manifest in the allegorical apparatus of Beaujoyeux’s *Balet* – problematise any alignment of Circe with a traditional antimasque role, and lead towards Milton’s extraordinary portrayal of Comus, who is “(unlike other antimasque figures) neither conquered, nor transformed, nor contained, nor reconciled.”<sup>54</sup>

### Allegorical dissonance in the *Balet*

One aspect of Circe’s classical characterisation that proves difficult to reconcile with the *Balet*’s monocratic political claims is her semi-divine status. As Warner notes, in the *Odyssey*, Circe and her “avatars” are “intermediate figures in the pantheon, divine, but not Olympians.”<sup>55</sup> Most obviously, this is reflected by Homer’s description of Circe as δεινὴ θεὸς ἀδδήεσσα, “dread goddess of human speech” (*Od.* 10.136), an epithet which, as Watkins suggests, “underscores an uncanny crossing of the

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<sup>53</sup> Aurelian Townshend, “Tempe Restored,” in *Aurelian Townshend’s Poem and Masks*, ed. E.K. Chambers (London: Clarendon Press, 1912), 95, lines 19-20. All further references appear parenthetically by page and line number of this edition, unless otherwise stated. Gossett and Tomlinson have argued that Townshend’s departures from the *Balet* at the ending of *Tempe Restored* in fact endow his Circe with greater agency. For Gossett, this arises through Townshend’s deliberate manipulation of conventional, gendered casting practices: the “man-maide Pallas,” instrumental to Circe’s defeat in the *Balet*, is the only significant character in Townshend’s masque to be played by an actor whose sex does not match his role. Gossett notes that “though Jones’ allegory requires that Circe ‘voluntarily deliver her golden rod to Minerva,’ in Townshend’s verses this does not happen. Pallas, like Circe, is corrected (Jupiter says, ‘Dear daughter, cease!’), and Cupid and Jupiter debate who has brought Circe to resign. Male and masculine Pallas is transcended in the final reconciliation” (Suzanne Gossett, “‘Man-maid, begone!’: Women in Masques,” *English Literary Renaissance* 18, no. 1 (1988): 110). See also Sophie Tomlinson, “Theatrical Vibrancy on the Caroline Court Stage: *Tempe Restored* and *The Shepherds’ Paradise*,” in *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. C. McManus (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 186-203, and Tomlinson, *Women on Stage*, 52-58.

<sup>54</sup> Lewalski, “Milton’s *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing,” 309.

<sup>55</sup> Marina Warner, “The Enchantments of Circe,” *Raritan* 17, no. 1 (1997): 13.

boundary between human and non-human experience.”<sup>56</sup> While many contemporary treatments of Circe gloss over this point, it is admitted into the allegorical material derived from Conti’s *Mythologiae* that frames the *Balet’s* text. In the fourth allegory, as we have seen, Lord Gordon notes that “Circe, according to Homer, is a goddess and therefore immortal,” and that “it seems not unreasonable to take Circe for that desire in general which rules and dominates all things and is a mingling of the divine and sensual” (101), an interpretation which touches upon the notion, associated with the Platonic doctrine of a world soul, that divinity is immanent in the natural world.<sup>57</sup> The allegory goes on to explain that “la personne de ceste deesse est descrite d’vne beauté extraordinaire, & ornee de tout ce qui est amiable: sa voix belle & Claire, qui represente ce qui peut esmouuoir le desir, soit par la veue, soi par l’ouye, à aimer ou la vertu, ou son contraire. Car le desir aux vns este l’instrument de salut: & aux autres l’instrument de perdition & ruine” (“the person of this goddess is descried as being extraordinarily lovely, endowed with everything attractive, her voice sweet and clear. This represents what may arouse desire, either by sight or hearing – desire to love virtue or its contrary; for desire for some people is an instrument of salvation, for others the instrument of perdition or ruin”) (T3r; 101-2). This allusion to the redemptive potential of desire draws most immediately on Neoplatonic, Pythagorean influences of the kind popularised by Ficino,<sup>58</sup> but as my thesis will discuss, it may also draw on an essential ambivalence at the heart of Circean mythology: the Homeric Circe uses her voice to seduce but also to prophesy and instruct.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, as Lord Gordon continues, “l’exercice & occupation de ceste Circé est à chanter, & faire des ourages

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<sup>56</sup> Watkins, ““A Goddess Among the Gods,”” 13.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 34b10-35b1.

<sup>58</sup> As Jayne summarises, for Ficino

The cosmos consists of a hierarchy of being extending from God (unity) to the physical world (multiplicity). In this hierarchy every level evolves from the level above it in a descending emanation from God and desires to rise to the level above it in an ascending return to God. This desire to return to one’s source is called love, and the quality in the source which attracts this desire is called beauty. The human soul, as part of the hierarchy of being, is involved in this same process of descent from God and return to love; in human beings the desire to procreate inferior beings is called earthly love, and the desire to rise to higher levels of being is called heavenly love. Human love is therefore a good thing because in both of its phases, descending and ascending, it is part of a natural cosmic process in which all creatures share.

(Sears Jayne, “Introduction,” in *Commentaries on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, by Marsilio Ficino, ed. and trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 7).

<sup>59</sup> See *Od.* 10.487-541; 12.22-144.

immortels, semblables à ceux qui sont les deesses: le chant signifie l'eloquence diuine, & discours de la verité" ("the practice and occupation of this Circe is to sing and to create immortal works like those made by the goddesses. Her singing signifies divine eloquence and discourses") (T3r; 102).

Interestingly, in the *Balet* itself Circe does not sing, and any allusion to her "divine" nature is mitigated by attempts to humanise her character. According to the dryad Opis, the enchantress is "filled with pride, sorrow and scorn" (71), and Circe herself is even made to lament,

En vain à tes captifs des charmes tu appliques  
 Tu les changes en vain par murmurs magiques  
 Puis que tu es muable, & puis que la pitié  
 Etrigueur ont de toy chacun une moitié;

(C1v)

In vain do you use your spells on your captives. In vain do you change them by magical words, since you are changeable and since pity and ruthlessness each possess a half of you.  
 (43)

Any threat Circe poses is seemingly further diluted by the suggestion that her rage upon losing the "fugitive gentleman" is fuelled by jealousy and frustrated lust. This characterisation, which recalls Ovid's declaration that *at Circe neque enim flammis habet aptius ulla talibus ingenium* ("for no one has a heart more susceptible to such flames than Circe"),<sup>60</sup> renders her as susceptible to desire as the men upon whom she inflicts her bestial transformations.<sup>61</sup> In the classical texts, Circe's propensity for desire might also be seen to lend her a kind of equality with the predatory male gods. Jupiter, in particular, is renowned for inflicting animal forms on his lovers, and in the *Balet*, of course, Jupiter is a figure for the French King. Any subversive significance of this is suppressed, however, by the

<sup>60</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, The Loeb Classical Library 143 (1984), 14.25-26. Unless otherwise specified, all further references to the *Met.* are to book and line number of this edition.

<sup>61</sup> See also Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, 263-88. On this aspect of Circe's character in Virgil's *Aeneid*, see Viola G. Stephens, "Like a Wolf on the Fold: Animal Imagery in Vergil," *Illinois Classical Studies* 15, no. 1 (1990): 108-13.

*Balet*'s encomiastic celebration of Henri III's divinely sanctioned rule, which might be seen to adhere to a "traditional Renaissance distinction between the 'divided and distinguished' worlds of permanence and mutability, the standard line of division between heaven and earth in the cosmology of the time,"<sup>62</sup> a distinction which would also inform Jonson's division of the antimasque from the masque proper.<sup>63</sup>

In the *Balet*, Circe tells us that she herself is the only cause of cosmic change, which occurs "de rang en rang, de moment en moment" (G1v), an idea supported by the second allegory appended to Beaujoyeulx's text which proclaims that "Circé est la circuition de l'annee par la course reuoluë du Soleil" ("Circe is the revolving of the year, following the revolution of the Sun" (T2v; 100)), and by the fourth allegory, which finds that "Le nom de sa mere est Perse . . . qui signifie passer d'outré en outré: ce qui conuient bien à la mer, laquelle passe & repasse d'une motion perpetuelle les riuës & costs de la terre, & par ceste motion se conserue de pourriture & infection" ("The name of her mother is Perseis . . . which means 'passing beyond,' which is very suitable to the Sea, which ebbs and flows in perpetual motion from the banks and coasts of the earth, and by this movement preserves itself from dirt and infection" (T2v; 101)). In the *Balet* proper, Circe's transformation of the naiads and musicians into statues, and her subsequent freezing of Mercury, who tries to intervene by sprinkling moly juice over them, is followed by her fatalistic declaration that

. . . du nom de vertus on apelle les moeurs  
 Et les façons des vieux, qu'on estime meilleurs.  
 Comme si les saisons & les siecles muables  
 N'estoyent en changement l'un l'autre semblables

(G1r-v)

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<sup>62</sup> Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King*, 49. As Browne would put it in his *Religio Medici* (1642), "Thus is Man that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not onely like other creatures in diuers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds" (Sir Thomas Browne, "Religio Medici," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), 41).

<sup>63</sup> As Orgel observes, Jonson's antimasque, in principle at least, "is a world of particularity," while that of the masque is "the world of essence, ideal and unchanging" (*The Jonsonian Masque*, 73).

People call “virtues” the way of living of our ancestors, which is supposed to be better, just as if the changing seasons and centuries were not, as they change each exactly like the other.

(62)

This is a response, we learn, to the endeavours of the Queen’s water nymphs to bring the golden age back to France and rebuild a temple dedicated to justice. For Yates, therefore, the water nymphs represent an alternative belief “in the virtue of ancient times which they wish to restore; for them Justice is an absolute value, not an amoral historical process.”<sup>64</sup> This idea runs counter to the fatalistic notion of perpetual change voiced by Circe in the *Balet*, and with which the first, second and fourth allegories are concerned.<sup>65</sup> The nymphs’ position, by contrast, relies on a providential, purposeful and teleological view of history which also informs the *Balet*’s allegorical presentation of the King as Jupiter: under the auspices of Henri’s Jovian sovereignty, it is suggested, the golden age of justice will be restored, and peace will return (73).

Unlike the fugitive gentleman, the water nymphs and even Mercury himself, the King and the royal party, together with the virtues they represent, would seem to be held exempt from Circean mutability. The issue is complicated, however, by the *Balet*’s simultaneous effort to render Circean power unto the King. Thus, the fourth allegory relates the diverse nature of desire, which leads “some men to virtue, others to vice,” to “the nymphs, who are partly divine,” and the “brute animals,” who represent “vice and sensuality” (101). Importantly, in the *Balet* Circe commands only the “brute animals,” and does not have the nymphs at her disposal – they are servants of the Queen. Yet if Yates’s analysis is correct, the nymphs’ dance in the Grand Ballet, which closes the performance, is deeply Circean: “On the one hand the figures of the dance, constantly forming, breaking, and reforming in a new figure, are the endless succession of birth and death in the transmutation of the

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<sup>64</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 244.

<sup>65</sup>See Jeanneret on the proliferation of ideas expressed in Circe’s speech in Louis Le Roy’s *De la Vicissitude ou variété des choses en l’univers* (1575) and elsewhere in French literature of this period. Jeanneret cites this trend as evidence, of “a correlation between protean man . . . and a contemporary perception of historic upheaval,” and points out that “though the law of unstable equilibrium sustains anxiety, it also legitimates a degree of confidence because it ensures renewal and the survival of vital potential. . . . Order is the offspring of disorder: the fragile beauty of the world is at this cost” (Michel Jeanneret, *Perpetual Motion: Transforming Shapes in the Renaissance from Da Vinci to Montaigne* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 166; 69).

elements and the passage of the seasons. On the other hand these geometrical figures stand for the eternal truths, reached by the spiritual side of man through moral choice and the right direction of desire.”<sup>66</sup> As my thesis will argue, Circe, for Milton, is a figure who enables both moral choice and spiritual renovation, a reading which may draw inspiration from Homer’s assertion that Odysseus’s crew, after Circe had released them from their animal state, “became men again, younger than they were before, and far handsomer and taller to look upon” (*Od.* 10.396-98).

In the *Balet*, the lines given to Jupiter after he descends at Pallas’s request can be seen to co-opt this ameliorating, transformative function. In a speech that appears to merge this Homeric event with Plato’s notion of the flight of the imprisoned soul in the *Phaedo* (62b), the *Balet*’s regal Jupiter, “lawgiver to all the world,” claims that

Tout ce qui vit de corps & sentiment  
 Suiet tousiours à diuers changement,  
 En un estat durable ne demeure:  
 La liaison s’en corrompt & desfait  
 Et sans perir par apres se refait,  
 Et prent de moy une uie meilleure.

Tant de mortels en mostres enchantez,  
 Nymphes & Dieux que Circe a surmontez,  
 Doiuent reprendre une forme plus belle  
 Quand ils auront retrouué la raison,  
 Sans craindre plus d’une indigne prison  
 Les durs liens, ny qu’on les ensorcelle;

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<sup>66</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 249. See also Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 81: “the dance never really stopped: while one group rested, the other provided action. The effect would have been that of a kaleidoscope in which certain formations had already settled while others still moved.” On the possibly “apotropaic” function of the geometric shapes the choreographic movements resolved into, bringing order from disorder, see Thomas M. Greene, “Labyrinth Dances in the French and English Renaissance,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2001): 1403-66.



(N4r)

“Nothing which has a living body and feelings, subject to many changes, remains in a permanent state. The connections grow corrupt and come unbound, and then later, without dying, are remade and take on from me a better existence. Many mortal men enchanted into monsters, nymphs and gods whom Circe has conquered, will take on a more beautiful shape when they recover their reason. They need fear no more a sordid prison, harsh bonds, nor being enchanted again.” (86)

While there is a tacit recognition here of the Goddess’s part in man’s spiritual journey, Jupiter himself lays claim only to the upward aspects of Circean metamorphosis.<sup>67</sup> In the *Balet*, of course, the enchantress’s submission and final act of obeisance to the court in the device-giving ceremony would seem to mark her mutability as both subordinate to, and complicit in, the performance’s final expression of the divinely conferred triumph and power of the French court. Yet in Beaujoyeux’s printed text, the metaphysical *aporia* evident in the *Balet*’s assimilation and adaptation of Circean myth are magnified, rather than disguised, by the several allegorical prisms that compete to explain the character’s significance.

Against the latent dissonance that Beaujoyeux’s elaborate appendix implies, Jonson’s satirical reduction of Circean circularity to Comus’s self-serving, appetitive desire in *Pleasure* relies – rather sensibly – on a more straightforward metaphysical dualism. The bowl-bearer’s declaration that “I am all for the Belly, the truest clock i’the world to go by” (64-5) is undermined by Hercules’ unequivocal assertion of the degenerative, and dehumanising consequences of this ethos:

Go, reel and fall under the load you make,

Till your swollen bowels burst with what they take.

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<sup>67</sup> The latter part of Jupiter’s speech is also evocative of the tripartite process of spiritual ascent in Neoplatonic philosophy, whereby *Nempe summus ille auctor primo singula creat, secundo rapit, tertio perficit* (“the supreme author first creates all things, second, attracts them to Himself, and third, perfects them.”). See Ficino, *De amore*, 2.1, in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, trans. Jayne, 45.

Can this be pleasure, to extinguish man,  
Or so quite change him in his figure?

(86-9)

Only downwards metamorphosis is possible here, an idea that we will meet again in the Elder Brother's strictly polarised models of divine and Circean metamorphosis which Milton includes (without necessarily endorsing) in his *Maske*:

So dear to heaven is saintly chastity,  
That when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried Angels lackey her,  
.....  
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants  
Begin to cast a beam on the 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,  
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,  
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,  
The soul grows clotted by contagion,  
Embodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose  
The divine property of her first being  
.....  
And linked itself by carnal sensuality  
To a degenerate and degraded state.

(452-74)

Without chastity – a “saintly” virtue which for the Elder Brother, if not Milton, requires the “temple of the mind,” to remain cloistered and “unpolluted,” and which Circean temptation, with its appeal to “carnal sensuality” would thereby necessarily impeach – only degradation and degeneration is possible.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the harmonising promise of the title *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, something similar to the Elder Brother’s philosophy conditions the metaphysical structure of Jonson’s masque. In the *Balet*, as we have seen, it is only *after* having undergone a Circean metamorphosis, according to Jupiter, that “many mortal men enchanted into monsters, nymphs and gods . . . will take on a more beautiful shape when they recover their reason” (86). In Jonson’s *Pleasure*, by contrast, an unbridgeable gulf between the self-debasing men-turned-bottles who accompany Comus, and those who follow the path of virtue and spiritual ascent represented by Atlas, inspires Hercules’ panegyric prophecy of the apotheosis of

. . . one . . . whom  
 Of the bright race of Hesperus is come,  
 Who shall in time, the same that he is be,  
 And now is only less light then he.

(171-4)

This vision, of course, refers to James I, who presides over the totality of the night’s entertainment. In Jonson’s earlier masque, *Queenes*, dance and music are employed to enforce even sharper moral distinctions. The hags or witches make their entrance to “a kind of hollow and infernal music” (19), fitting to their nature, and later, “with a strange, and sudden music” (313), perform a “magical dance, full of preposterous change, and gesticulation” (314).<sup>69</sup> This choreography, Jonson adds, is “most

<sup>68</sup> John Milton, “Areopagitica,” in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson et al., vol. 4 (New York: Columbia U. P., 1932), 311. All further references are to page number of this edition.

<sup>69</sup> In *Queenes*, Walls has argued, “the musical contrasts . . . became stronger and clearer once the full-blown antimasque had evolved.” In between the hags’ entrance and their “magical dance,” he suggests, “the witches’ chanted charms are, in effect, unmusical songs. . . . Short lines, strong rhythms, and bald rhymes are the essence

applying to their property; who at their meetings, do all things contrary to the custom of men, dancing back to back, and hip to hip, their hands joined, and making their circles backward, to the left, with strange fantastic motions of their heads, and bodies” (14-17). Dance and music, then, come together to produce an antimasque of ungodly perversity, against which the balanced and elegant “grace” of the masque proper must have appeared to even greater effect.<sup>70</sup> Far from inviting ambivalence, sound and movement work in tandem to entrench the oppositions of the masque’s moral allegory. Despite the likely influence of Beaujoyeulx’s text on Jonson’s praise of the geometric figures that made up the final dance of *Queenes*, this marks a clear formal departure from the *Balet*,<sup>71</sup> where, as McGowan notes, the musicians stationed in the *voûte dorée* “intervene in every part of the drama, they sing with the sirens, the tritons, Glaucus and Thetys; with Mercury, Pan and the virtues; with Minerva and Jupiter,” thereby linking particularity to essence and representing the “lines of communication between earth and heaven, disorder and order, injustice and justice, vice and virtue.”<sup>72</sup>

### The Inner Temple Masque

Circe’s song, as we have observed, is however conspicuously absent from the *Balet*’s score – a silencing that exiles her not only from the *Balet*’s music, but also, and more problematically, from its underlying metaphysics. As I have suggested, the notion of a “mixed” Circe who participates in divinity is entertained only in the *Balet*’s allegorical appendices, where it exposes a degree of tension between the work’s moral and political claims and the wider, Neoplatonic interest of its theme. The

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of this kind of incantation and they are calculated to produce a sinister effect” (Peter Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque 1604-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 78.

<sup>70</sup> Dance offers further opportunities for discrimination in Milton’s *Maske*, where the revels of Comus and his rout are cast into relief by the “jigs” (951) of the “Country Dancers” (956, s.d. 2) or shepherds in the grounds of Ludlow Castle, and these in turn by the “trippings . . . / Of lighter toes” (960-61), as the aristocratic dancers take the stage at the end of the *Maske*.

<sup>71</sup> See Meagher, *Method and Meaning in Jonson’s Masques*, 74. Daye discusses “the disturbed measures of the witches’ two dances, as preserved in the surviving musical scores, in which short snatches of changing dance metre are mixed with long notes lacking rhythm,” and argues that this “fragmented dance music was a fresh innovation in England as no exemplars exist in French ballet music of the early seventeenth century” (“The Role of *Le Balet Comique* in Forging the Stuart Masque,” 196). See also the “barbarous dissonance” of Comus’s rout (*Maske* 449), a phrase recycled by Milton in *Paradise Lost* as he differentiates the “celestial song” (7.13) of his muse Urania from the noise of “Bacchus and his revellers” (7.32).

<sup>72</sup> McGowan, “Introduction,” 32.

formal developments of Jonson's masques, with their separate antimasque and masque components and uncompromising moral allegories go some way towards circumventing these difficulties. In those masques similarly indebted to the *Balet* which do not conform to a dualistic structure, however, conflicting elements of the French performance may be seen to resurface. Browne's *Inner Temple Masque*, performed by the "gentlemen" of the Inns of Court in 1615,<sup>73</sup> is generally regarded as something of an outlier in the masque genre: the masque's lack of "moral instruction" is discussed by Wright,<sup>74</sup> and Hill has commented on its unusual structure whereby "the anti-masque is so neatly integrated – the animals are thought to be some of Ulysses's companions and the cause of his grief – that it forms a part rather than an interruption of the masque action."<sup>75</sup> This formal fluidity, in combination with Browne's eclectic range of classical source material and the masque's absence of overt moral allegory,<sup>76</sup> produces a work of a very different order to Jonson's *Pleasure* and *Queens*. By consequence, however, Browne's *Inner Temple Masque* is valuably suggestive of the ideological work performed by the framing it lacks. As I will argue, in Browne's masque a relaxation of the allegorical constraints, usually attendant upon staged adaptations of the Circe myth, expands the figure's range of signification to encompass aspects of her character that it would seem in the masque genre's best interest to suppress.

The *Inner Temple Masque* opens with an exchange on a cliff-face between a Siren, who serves Circe, and Triton, a messenger of Tethys who relays his superior's "command" (line 40) that the Goddess should not to delay Ulysses any further on his journey back to Ithaca. The Siren retorts that

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<sup>73</sup> William Browne, "The Masque of the Inner Temple (Ulysses and Circe)," in *A Book of Masques in Honour of Allardyce Nicoll*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer, Stanley Wells, and R.F. Hill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 186. All further references to the *Inner Temple Masque* are to page or line number of this edition.

<sup>74</sup> Gillian Wright, "Giving Them But Their Own: Circe, Ulysses, and William Browne of Tavistock," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 12 (1999): 196.

<sup>75</sup> R. F. Hill, "Introduction," in *A Book of Masques*, by William Browne, 184. This observation should recall Craig's notion of the "Circean" masque, in which "we characteristically find not strange savages but civilized fellow-humans who are for the moment imprisoned, metamorphosed or disguised in degraded forms as though by enchantment" ("Jonson, the Antimasque and the 'Rules of Flattery,'" 182).

<sup>76</sup> The masque's epigraph is taken from the *Laus Pisonis*, which Browne renders as "Ovid. Ad Pisonem" (186). Lines from Virgil's *Aeneid*, *Iamque adeo scopulos Syrenum advecta subibat / Difficiles quondam multorumque ossibus albos* (lines 14-15; *Aeneid* 5.864-5), furnish the "description of the first scene" (line 11), while Triton's appearance is said to be "in all parts as Apollonius, lib. 4 *Argonautica*, shows him" (lines 34-35). The nymphs and nereids of the second antimasque, clothed in green and white like their predecessors in the *Balet*, "are by Ovid affirmed to help . . . Circe in their collections" (lines 371-2). Discussion of potential sources for Browne's characterisation of Circe will be found in the main body of this chapter.

'tis not Tethys, nor a greater power,  
 Cynthia that rules the waves: scarce he, each hour,  
 That wields the thunderbolts, can things begun  
 By mighty Circe, daughter to the sun,  
 Check or control.

(54-58)

Triton exits, the Siren sings, and Circe is revealed “upon the rock,” from which she explains that the Greek ships have “cast their hook’d anchors on Aeaea’s strand,” and that in “a curious arbour” on her island, “Ulysses near his mates, by my strong charms / Lie[s] . . . till my return in sleep’s soft arms” (line 94; 104; 118; 123-4). The second scene takes place in the arbour, where “Ulysses was seen lying as asleepe under the covert of a fair tree” (lines 154-5), a setting which may owe something to Homer’s tale of Odysseus’s encounter with Nausicaa and her maids in Book 6 of the *Odyssey*. In contrast to the *Balet*’s attempt to play down Circe’s divine heritage, in Browne’s masque, upon waking, Ulysses addresses the enchantress as “Thou more than mortal maid” (line 184), an epithet which recalls Aeneas’s greeting of his disguised mother Venus, *O dea certe*, before the tragic events of his encounter with Dido unfold in Virgil’s poem.<sup>77</sup> This allusion to a more powerful Circe figure is daring, given that Browne’s masque also emphasises “Aeaea’s queen[’s]” expert knowledge of the transformative powers of the natural world, a knowledge, furthermore, that is dangerously gendered.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (1999), 1.329. All further references are to this edition. Watkins, in fact, has suggested that this moment in the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas wonders at the strange mix of divine and human attributes of the female figure before him, *o—quam te memorem, virgo? namque haud tibi vultus mortalis, nec vox hominem sonat; o dea certe!* (“but by what name should I call you, maiden? for your face is not mortal nor has your voice a human ring; O goddess surely!” (1.327-8)), derives from Homer’s account of the meeting between Odysseus and Circe, “the dread goddess of human speech” (*Od.* 10.136), whose seemingly hybrid nature invokes both wonder and fear in the Greeks (Watkins, “A Goddess Among the Gods,” 15).

<sup>78</sup> Line 333. Stephens notes that in Book 3 of the *Aeneid*, where Circe is called “Aeaeian Circe” (3.386), “the adjective alludes not only to her present Italian location but to her Homeric association with Colchis and Medea, as Aeetes’ sister (*Od.* 10. 135). Dido throughout Book 4 evokes Medea, especially in the preparation of her funeral pyre (4.465, 474, 484-85)” (Stephens, “Like a Wolf on the Fold: Animal Imagery in Vergil,” 110).

The metaphysical and political subservience of the Goddess to a more powerful masculine authority that is suggested by Circe's moniker, "daughter to the Sun" (line 57), is directly challenged by her assertion that should Phoebus dare to "pry" (line 119) in her arbour,

I would benight him ere he get his inn,  
 Or turn his steeds awry, so draw him on  
 To burn all lands but this like Phaeton.<sup>79</sup>

(120-22)

Yet Browne's Circe does not only claim to hold sway over the Sun her father. According to the Siren who boasts of her mistress's prowess to Triton at the beginning of the masque, Circe can charm fish out of water, walk on water as if it were land, manipulate the clouds and moon to make day as night and night as day, reverse the course of rivers and uproot trees, bring dead men back to life, and invert the seasons so that "the winter solstice bringe / All Flora's dainties" – a veritable litany of powers which merges Ovid's portrayals of Medea and Circe into an image of a singular, all-powerful nature goddess.<sup>80</sup> Browne's Circe, furthermore, is also seen to be in full command of the nymphs who gather her "simples" (line 368), which in Lord Gordon's allegory figure "the *virtue* and *knowledge* through which the minds of men are prepared and disposed for good" (102).<sup>81</sup> Thus, in the last lines of

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<sup>79</sup> Homer tells us that Circe's parents were Helios, god of the sun, and Perse, an Oceanid nymph (*Od.* 10.135). The well-educated audience of Browne's masque would be further aware that in Platonic discourse, the sun is a metaphor for the illuminating idea of "goodness" that is essential to the generation of knowledge and truth (*Republic* 507b–509). In contemporary literature, furthermore, the sun was a common symbol for sovereign power – see for instance Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* (1605).

<sup>80</sup> Lines 58-71; 72-73. See Ovid, *Met.* 7.179-233; 14.368-71. For a discussion of the relationship between Medea and Circe in the Renaissance, where "the two are often found paired as a dual archetype of witches or enchantresses," see Tania Demetriou, "'Essentially Circe': Spenser, Homer, and the Homeric Tradition," *Translation and Literature* 15, no. 2 (2006): 168.

<sup>81</sup> While as Watkins notes, the meeting between Aeneas and Venus was read by commentators like Badius as "an allegory about the dangers of lust" ("A Goddess Among the Gods," 17; Jodocus Badius Ascensius, *P. Virgili Maronis Aeneida Commentarium* in Virgil, *Opera* (Venice: Lucantonio Giunta, 1544), 176v.), Landino draws a distinction between the *Venus coelestis*, with whom he identifies Virgil's deity as one who draws men from contemplation of earthly to celestial things, and the *Venus naturalis* who elicits troublesome sexual desire (Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, ed. Peter Lohe (Florence: Sansoni, 1980), 120–27). Watkins observes that "humanist editors typically invited readers to weigh the merits of these competing interpretations by including them in the glosses annotating their editions of Virgil's poem" ("A Goddess Among the Gods," 17). In her discussion of another echo of Virgil's famous line, Ferdinand's exclamation "most sure the goddess / On whom these airs attend" when he first sees Miranda in *The Tempest*, Hamilton argues that "in linking

Browne's first scene – lines which may also bring to mind the Neoplatonic vision, perhaps best known from Botticelli's painting, of the attributes of Venus unfolded in the three graces – Circe's sirens declare that "What all the elements do owe to thee / In their obedience, is perform'd in me."<sup>82</sup>

Again, however, the significance of Browne's departure from the Circean representations more typical of this period must be weighed against his depiction of the Goddess's helplessness in the face of her own passion and desire, as Echo's call to the nymphs in a song commissioned by Circe to "please" (line 337) Ulysses, would suggest:

No longer stay, except it be to bring  
 A med'cine for love's sting;  
 That would excuse you, and be held more dear  
 Than wit or magic, for both they are here.

(357-60)

Proving herself as susceptible to flattery as she is desire, Circe ultimately passes her wand to Ulysses to release the Greeks from their enchantment so that as she is promised, they in turn "May in a dance strive how to pleasure thee, / Either with skill or with variety" (lines 391-2).<sup>83</sup> The scope for complexity and depth that the masque's eclectic influences lend Circe's character is thus suppressed, or bathetically diminished, by Browne's emphasis on her voluntary, love-lorn submission to Ulysses. At the end of the performance, moreover, the significant feminine power that Circe wields over the

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Miranda to Venus . . . Shakespeare enhances Miranda's double function of being the one who arouses Ferdinand's passion and also leads him to knowledge of divine things" (Donna B. Hamilton, *Virgil and The Tempest: The Politics of Imitation* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 95).

<sup>82</sup> Lines 127-8. Dempsey suggests that the costumes Venus and the Graces wear in Botticelli's paintings are modelled on those worn in contemporary masques. See Charles Dempsey, "Portraits and Masks in the Art of Lorenzo de Medici, Botticelli, and Politians Stanze per La Giostra," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (1999): 1–42. Ficino calls the graces by the names of *Pulchritudo*, *Amor*, and *Voluptas: Circulus . . . prout in Deo incipit et allicit, pulchritude: prout in mundum transiens ipsum rapit, amor; prout in auctorem remeans ipsi suum opus coniungit, voluptas. Amor igitur in voluptatem a pulchritudine destinat* ("The same circle . . . begins in God and attracts to Him, it is Beauty; inasmuch as emanating to the world it captivates it, we call it Love; inasmuch as it returns to its source and with Him joins His work to Him, it is called Pleasure. Love, therefore, beginning from Beauty, ends in Pleasure"). See Ficino, *De amore*, 2.2, in Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium of Love*, trans. Jayne, 46.

<sup>83</sup> On the "considerable musical variety" of Browne's *Inner Temple Masque*, see Walls, *Music in the English Courty Masque*, 264-65.



natural world is belatedly, yet aggressively counterbalanced by the song which accompanies the first dance:

Earth doth think, as elsewhere  
 Do some women she doth bear.  
 Those wives whose husbands only threaten,  
 Are not lov'd like those are beaten:  
 Then with your feet to suffering move her,  
 For whilst you beat earth thus, you love her.<sup>84</sup>

(440-45)

There is, however, a certain moral ambiguity that emerges through Browne's portrayal of the relationship between the two main protagonists of the masque, Circe and Ulysses, which this ending does not resolve. As we have seen, Circean "time" is associated by Triton at the beginning of the masque with the delays faced by Ulysses on his journey back to Ithaca, and consequently, drawing perhaps on the "enervating idleness" that Brodwin identifies as one of Circe's three main temptations in the *Odyssey*, is figured as an impediment to virtue.<sup>85</sup> In due course, this would appear to be confirmed by Ulysses's inertia "in sleep's soft arms" under the influence of Circe's "charms" (lines 124; 123), a state of stupefaction that may recall Circe's paralysis of the dancing nymphs in the *Balet*. Yet Browne offers more than one perspective on the sleeping Greek hero. Circe's allusion to the devastation the Greeks wreaked at Troy,

Now Ithacus,  
 Ajax would offer hecatombs to us,  
 And Ilium's ravish'd wives, and childless sires,

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<sup>84</sup> As Ravelhofer notes, the dancing floor used for masque performances "usually consisted of a timber platform slightly raised above the actual floor. . . . dancers could use the floor as acoustic instrument by stamping, as a wooden surface resonates" (*Early Stuart Masque*, 84).

<sup>85</sup> Brodwin, "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," 21.

With incense dim the bright aetherial fires,  
 To have thee bound in chains of sleep as here;

(157-61)

is a timely reminder that history tends to be written by the victors. There is a degree of irony, moreover, in the fact that as Wright notes, in the masque, “when Ulysses himself appears he is passive, acquiescent and subordinate, and does not fulfil the promise of his reputation.”<sup>86</sup> If these characteristics prove consistent with Brodwin’s argument that the Homeric Circe’s real threat resides in the effeminate attitude her charms can provoke in men, it is also possible that the “passive” and “acquiescent” traits Wright identifies in Browne’s Ulysses are in fact cunning and strategic interventions deployed by the Greek to soften and flatter the Goddess.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Ulysses’ hyperbolic praise of the first antimasque, followed by his sympathetic response to Circe’s claim that she is a victim of envy and slander – “Aeaea’s queene and great Hyperions pride, / Pardon misdoubts; and we are satisfied” (lines 333-4) – precipitates the pivotal redress of the masque’s power balance that occurs when Circe at the end of the second scene hands over her wand to Ulysses to free his sleeping crew. Browne’s Ulysses thus recalls that of the Latin poets, who present the *graeculus* as deceitful and cunning, an extension perhaps of Homer’s description of Odysseus as *πολύτροπον* or *polytropos* (“of many turns,” *Od.* 1.1) or *πολύμητις* (*polymetis*, “of many ruses,” *Od.* 2.173).

### Siren song and poetic pleasures

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus himself is warned by Hermes about Circe’s *ὀλοφώια δήνεα* (“deadly guiles,” 10.289), leading Gough to argue that “the similarity between Odysseus’ ruses and Circe’s, his duplicity and hers . . . undoes any neat distinction between the enchantress, on the one hand, and the

<sup>86</sup> Wright, “Giving Them But Their Own,” 208.

<sup>87</sup> Brodwin, “Milton and the Renaissance Circe,” 21.

hero on the other.”<sup>88</sup> In Browne’s masque, the Sirenic abilities Circe attributes to Ulysses as she tells in her first speech how “the music of Ulysses’ tongue” drew a hundred dolphins to the Greeks’ ships (lines 99-101) serve as a reminder of this point. Importantly, as Yates has found, in medieval and early modern allegory sirens were commonly used to represent the “temptations of the flesh,” their song, which was linked both to intemperate sensual indulgence and flattery, often mentioned in the same breath as the dangers of Circe’s *pharmakon*.<sup>89</sup> Thus, Whitney’s Circe emblem, “Homines voluptatibus transformatur,” is accompanied by the lines “Oh stoppe your ears, and shutte your eies, of *Circes* cuppe beware,”<sup>90</sup> and at the beginning of the first scene of Browne’s masque, the Sirens that serve Circe are said to sing a song “as lascivious proper to them.”<sup>91</sup> Yates, however, also documents a tradition in which the sirens were thought to be the daughters of a Muse, noting “their confusion with those sirens who, according to Plato, guided the celestial spheres emitting notes of music which formed the heavenly harmony.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, Cartari records that for Xenophon,

the Sirens were pleasant and virtuous. For when he reports on the words and deeds of Socrates, he writes that the Sirens only sang the true praises of those who deserved to be praised, praises that focused on their virtues. Thus in Homer, the Sirens sing that Ulysses deserves the very highest praise, because he was such a shining example to all of the Greeks. For these were the enchantments and sweet melodies that the Sirens used to lure virtuous men into their presence. For once these men hear virtue (which they love so much) being praised, they keep trying to get as close as they can to that sound. So in a very free and easy way, they head straight for the sweet song of the praiser.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 20.

<sup>89</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 241.

<sup>90</sup> Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes*, ed. Henry Green (1586; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 82.

<sup>91</sup> Lines 19-20. For further instances of allegorical elisions following Horace’s example in *Epistles* 1.2.17-2 of the dangers posed by Circe and the sirens respectively, see Vredeveld, ““Deaf as Ulysses to the Siren’s Song””: 846-82.

<sup>92</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 240. See for instance *Quaestiones convivales*, 14 774E, in Plutarch, *Moralia. Table Talk*, vol. 9, Loeb Classical Library 425 (1969), 281.

<sup>93</sup> Cartari, *Vincenzo Cartari’s Images of the Gods of the Ancients*, 194. See also Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.6.11-12.

For Yates, “this is evidently the meaning of the sirens of the *Ballet comique*, who sing the praises of Henry III.”<sup>94</sup> Their song, she observes, “is replied to by the music from the *voûte dorée* which, we are expressly told, represented the true harmony of heaven. Thus the song of these sirens is related both to the heavenly harmony and to the moral and political harmony which should reign in France under the leadership of her pious kings.”<sup>95</sup> The creators of the *Balet*, then, perhaps in an effort to streamline the moral and political message of the production, would seem to exorcise the Circean associations of siren song from its performance.

The central indeterminacy this suppresses, however – an indeterminacy which, this thesis argues, is intrinsic to the Homeric myth of the Goddess– re-emerges in Townshend’s *Tempe Restored*, where Circe’s beautiful singing voice features prominently, and again in Milton’s *Masque*, where the chaste Lady’s singing reminds the sorcerer of “My mother Circe with the Sirens three” (252).<sup>96</sup> The presence of Circe’s voice in these later performances takes on additional significance when we consider Watkins’ observation that “the question of whether she is a goddess or a woman intersects the question of whether her human sounding voice is an illusion to ensnare her listeners or a foreshadowing of her later benevolence” as a “protectress” of the Greeks.<sup>97</sup> The notion that Circe’s charms are illusory has a long history in allegorical interpretations of the myth, and in Christian allegory owes much to Augustine’s denouncement of Circe, *illa maga famosissima*, as a demon who is able to change appearances, but not reality.<sup>98</sup> In *De civitate Dei*, therefore, we are told that

*Nec sane daemones naturas creant, si aliquid tale faciunt, de qualibus factis ista vertitur  
quaestio; sed specie tenus, quae a vero Deo sunt creata, commutant, ut videantur esse quod  
non sunt. Non itaque solum animum, sed ne corpus quidem ulla ratione crediderim*

<sup>94</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 241.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Walls has discussed the close link between the theories of *musica speculativa* and what he describes as “the music of the king’s peace” in the English masque tradition: see Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque*, 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> The significance of this line will be discussed in more depth at a later point in my thesis.

<sup>97</sup> Watkins, ““A Goddess Among the Gods”: Virgil, Milton and the Woman of Immortal Voice,” 15.

<sup>98</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. George E. McCracken, vol. 5, Loeb Classical Library 415 (1957), 18.17. All further references are to this edition. For a discussion of the influence of Augustinian thought on this point on early modern philosophical scepticism, see Jonathan Ellis, “The Figure of Circe and the Power of Knowledge: Competing Philosophies in Calderón’s *El Mayor Encanto, Amor*,” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 87, no. 2 (2010): 147–62.

*daemonum arte vel potestate in membra et liniamenta bestialia veraciter posse converti, sed phantasticum hominis, quod etiam cogitando sive somniando per rerum innumerabilia genera variatur et, cum corpus non sit, corporum tamen similes mira celeritate formas capit, sopitis aut oppressis corporeis hominis sensibus ad aliorum sensum nescio quo ineffabili modo figura corporea posse perduci; ita ut corpora ipsa hominum alicubi iaceant, viventia quidem, sed multo gravius atque vehementius quam somno suis sensibus obseratis.*

Certainly demons do not create actual beings, if they do anything of the sort here under discussion. It is merely in appearance that they change beings that are created by the true God, so that they seem to be what they are not. Therefore I should by no means believe that the soul, or even the body, can be really changed by the craft or power of demons into the members and features of beasts. I hold instead that a man's phantom – which also in his thoughts and dreams is changed by the countless variety of objects it receives, and though it is not a body, still with astonishing swiftness receives shapes that are like material bodies – this phantom, I hold, can in some inexplicable way present itself to the senses of others in bodily form, when their physical senses are dulled or blocked out. (18.18)

Illusion, however, need not only apply to strictly supernatural or demonic phenomena. As Gough notes, an allegorical tradition stretching back to Horace and Plutarch “emphasizes the important role the enchantress plays, in Homer and Ovid in particular, as a figure for specifically rhetorical and poetic seductions” – she finds, furthermore, “a persistent doubling of poet and temptress” that extends through the Renaissance.<sup>99</sup> In the *Balet*, this trope, which may draw ultimately on a Platonic worry about the morality of art, informs the fugitive gentleman's complaint of Circe's deceptive appearance:

ce n'estoit vne femme: vne qui l'air respire

N'a point tant de beauté, & si n'a point tant d'ire.

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<sup>99</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 72; 149. We will have further recourse to Gough's work, which explores the significance of Odysseus's escape from the dangers of Circe and the Sirens as an allegory for “right reading,” in the next chapter.

.....

Mais sous tant de beauté la poison estoit close  
 Du miel, qui de sa bouche en paroles couloit  
 Pour amorcer le Coeur de ceux qu'elle vouloit;

(B4r)

no breathing being has so much beauty and so much evil . . . . But beneath such beauty poison was hidden, which flowed from her mouth in honeyed words to trap the hearts she desired.<sup>100</sup> (41)

An association of Circean illusion with rhetorical sophistry might also account for the moly plant's puzzling inefficacy against Circe's charms in the *Balet*, a departure from Homeric, Ovidian and Virgilian mythology for which it is difficult to find precedent. In the *Balet*, moly is deployed by Mercury, in place of Odysseus, in an attempt to free the musicians and dancers who have been rendered "motionless as a statue" (55) by Circe's golden wand. The root, the messenger God asserts, will "cure a mind deprived of its reason, which, when it is tired of virtue, has been charmed by pleasure" (60), a claim which draws on both the classical conception of the enervating effects of Circe's spell and the later, allegorical interpretation of moly as *logos* or right reason, the possession of which differentiates men from beasts. The moly root, the *Balet's* Mercury explains, has been "distilled into a water of forgetfulness" so that it may counter Circe's ability to make those she has transformed forget their former shapes, and thereby "expose the illusions of her art" (61). The endeavour proves initially successful, restoring movement to the musicians and dancers who together carry the symbolic weight of the King's virtuous and harmonious rule. Yet Circe is not so easily defeated, and arrests the figures a second time with a touch of her wand. The reason for Mercury's ultimate failure is given by Circe herself:

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<sup>100</sup> Ovid's emphasis on the deceptive nature of Circe's evil drugs is greater than Homer's: In the *Metamorphoses* we are told that while concocting her *pharmakon*, Circe *quique sub hac lateant furtim dulcedine, sucos / adicit* ("in this sweet drink, where they might lie unnoticed, she slyly squeezed some of her baleful juices" (*Met* 14.275-6)).

Mercure vagabond, muable & insensé,  
 De soudain mouuement deça delà poussé,  
 Sans chois & sans conseil est foible et sans puissance,  
 Si Pallas ne luy donne aduis & assurance;

(G2r)

Mercury, volatile, changeable and foolish, urged first one way then another by caprice, without decision and without counsel, Mercury alone is weak and without power, unless Pallas gives him advice and assurance. (63)

This criticism, we might note, is couched in similar terms to that of Augustine's description of "man's phantom – which also in his thoughts and dreams is changed by the countless variety of objects it receives, and though it is not a body, still with astonishing swiftness receives shapes that are like material bodies" (*City of God* 18.18). Indeed, in the speech the goddess makes to the King upon her first appearance in the *Balet*, Minerva informs us that when Jupiter granted her jurisdiction over man's understanding, Mercury was similarly entrusted with the senses. These are

Freres ailez au dos, plus legers que les vents,  
 Incertains comme luy, muables & volages,  
 Qui poussent çà & là le desir des courages,  
 D'imagination menant la volonté  
 Tantost à la virtue, tantost à volupté;

(M3v)

winged brothers lighter than air, changeable as it is, and flighty, which shift now here, now there; the desire for courage, leading the will by imagination, at one time to virtue, at another time to idle pleasure. (79)<sup>101</sup>

Specifically, we learn from Pallas, what Mercury, who is well endowed with “eloquence” (60) lacks is reason. As Yates has argued, if “misuse of desire” has caused the bestial transformation of the men that parade before Circe, Mercury’s own helplessness suggests that “even man’s god-like gift of intelligence by which he learns his eloquence and his skill in all the arts and sciences – becomes under the influence of fatalistic philosophies a more terrible instrument for his enslavement than the animal passions,” a point which bears importantly on the ethical problems Spenser and Milton, writing within a Reformed theological tradition, will be seen to grapple with in my later chapters.<sup>102</sup> In the *Balet*, moly too, then, might be counted among those “false shews and suppositions” symptomatic of the “false and corrupt imagination” from which vice proceeds.<sup>103</sup>

In the *Inner Temple Masque*, Browne’s emphasis on Circe’s slavish love to Ulysses might seem to endow the Goddess’s direction of desire with a Mercurian flighty arbitrariness. Yet across the

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<sup>101</sup> My discussion throughout this chapter assumes some knowledge of contemporary faculty psychology, which was heavily grounded in Aristotle’s explication of the mental faculties in *De Anima*. Rossky’s summary is useful here:

In a definite hierarchical order of communication, knowledge travels from the so-called “outer” senses (the five primary senses), to the “inner” (Common Sense, Imagination and/or Fantasy, Sensible Reason, and Memory, which occupy cells in the brain), and thus to the highest rational, incorporeal powers (the Intellect or Wit or Understanding, and the Will). More specifically, the general course of communication runs from the perception of the outward senses to common sense, or directly to imagination, which unites the various reports of the senses into impressions that are in turn submitted to the examination of a rational power and then passed to memory which retains the impressions and reflects them back to the Imagination and Sensible Reason, should they turn to it to recall past incidents. Beyond these faculties and functions lies the overseeing and judging power of the highest Understanding, which in turn informs the Will.

(William Rossky, “Imagination in the English Renaissance: Psychology and Poetic,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 5 (1958): 50).

<sup>102</sup> Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, 244. Le Roy’s metaphysical approach is in an important sense different to Circe’s in the *Balet* – Jeanneret argues that “the universal principle of vicissitudes, far from inspiring skepticism or resignation, leads Le Roy to a dynamically optimistic vision: it makes sense to ride the wave, guide it in a positive direction, try one’s best to give it a favourable orientation. This willingness to accept change and go with the times underlies a theory of progress; since things are flexible we are invited to intervene to perfect them and bring to maturity the promises of change” (*Perpetual Motion*, 169).

<sup>103</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (1621; rpt. New York: Tudor Pub., 1938), 221. In the *Balet*, the inefficacy of moly serves moreover to provide additional panegyric opportunity: in Beaujoyeux’s preface, Pallas, as we have seen is related allegorically to the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici.



masque as a whole, aspects of a rather different goddess emerge. Against the *Balet's* emphasis on the evil forgetfulness that Circe inspires in those who fall victim to her charms, Browne's Goddess exclaims "Circe drinks not of Lethe" (line 129). This assertion, which appends a flurry of rhetorical activity by which the magical qualities of her speech manifest,<sup>104</sup> could hardly have been contested by the masque's spectators. In fact, given the broader, cultural memory that her comments on the Trojan war suggest she possesses, Browne's Circe bears some affinity to the powerful, eponymous mage of Bruno's *Cantus Circaeus* (1582). As Yates notes, "by using magical or talismanic images as memory-images, the Magus hoped to acquire universal knowledge, and also powers, obtaining through the magical organisation of the imagination a magically powerful personality, tuned in, as it were, to the powers of the cosmos."<sup>105</sup> In this guise, Circe's magic "can be used benevolently or malevolently," but her transformations also induce "some kind of moral reform."<sup>106</sup>

The first allegory of the *Balet*, as we have seen, tempers the possibility for Circean knowledge to be seen as virtuous by stressing that in the mythological narratives, "the four nymphs, who served her and gathered the herbs for her potions, are the elements *over which she has no power*, because the corruption, generation and mutation of the elements is perpetual" (99, my emphasis). While Circe is associated with the incessant interchange of nature's elements, the allegory thus denied her any active role or agency in this process. In comparison, Browne's portrayal of a Circe with knowledge not only of "Poppy and Mandragoras" but also of "moly" – used here by the goddess to wake Ulysses from sleep – might be viewed as a subversive rewriting of the Homeric narrative, that boosts our sense of the enchantress's power and endows her with virtuous potential.<sup>107</sup> Together with

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<sup>104</sup> The second scene opens with the following description: "While Circe was speaking her first speech, and at these words, 'Yon stands a hill, etc.,' a traverse was drawn at the lower end of the hall, and gave way to the discovery of an artificial wood so near imitating nature that I think, had there been a grove like it in the open plain birds would have been faster drawn to that than to Zeuxis' grapes" (lines 132-6).

<sup>105</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 192.

<sup>106</sup> Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 202. Yates finds this claim on several unusual features of the Circe of Bruno's *Cantus*, who "asks where is Astraea, the justice of the Golden Age, threatens evil-doers, calls on the gods to restore virtue. As a result of her magic, men are turned into beasts, and this (quite contrary to the usual interpretation of the Circe story) is a good thing because wicked men are less harmful in their true animal forms." See Giordano Bruno, "Cantus Circaeus," in *Opere Latine*, ed. F. Fiorentino et al., vol. 2(i) (Naples, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: F. Frommann-G. Holzboog, 1879), 186–94.

<sup>107</sup> Browne, *Inner Temple Masque*, lines 171; 178.

her later release of Ulysses' men, Circe's possession of the moly plant recalls the claim of the *Balet's* fourth allegory, which somewhat contradicts the first, that

Circe with one drink converted men into beasts, and with another remedy restored to them to their real shape and human form. By this the poets, first inventors of all philosophy, meant to convey to us that desire when it is used for luxury and vice, makes us more brutish than the beasts themselves, but if it is by divine help imbued with precepts of virtue, it renders to men their true form and delivers them from the bestial servitude of vice and lust. (102)

### Circean stagecraft

In addition to Browne's restoration of the goddess's dual nature, and in contrast to the retarding, destructive effects of her power in the *Balet*, in the *Inner Temple Masque* Circe is constructively engaged with the formal ambitions of the work in which she appears. Whereas the *Balet's* Circe is able only to arrest movement, in Browne's masque Circe is seen to commission both the dance and music of the antimasque, through which she claims to control the audience's very experience of time itself: "music, thy voice, / . . . Appear; and in a dance 'gin that delight / Which with the minutes shall grow infinite" (lines 213-7). Responding to Ulysses' dissatisfaction with the "antic measure," Circe's powers of stagecraft are exemplified further as she directs the course of the performance thereafter to better suit his taste: "since what's past doth not Ulysses please, / Call to a dance the fair Nereides" (lines 261; 337-8). Neither is her influence confined to the antimasque part of the production (if indeed, given Hill's remarks on its lack of distinction from the masque proper, it may even be referred to as such). Just as she had woken Ulysses with drops of the moly plant, Circe enables the Greek to draw his "companions," the masquers, from their slumber:

Circe is pleased. Ulysses take my wand  
And from their eyes each child of sleep command;

Whilst my choice maids with their harmonious voices,  
 Whereat each bird and dancing spring rejoices,  
 Charming the winds when they contrary meet,  
 Shall make their spirits as nimble as their feet.

(393-8)

The final dances of the masque, which denote the usual return of peace, harmony and ordered rule are therefore conducted under her blessing.

It might be argued that the ending of Browne's masque, which does, after all, include a verse that endorses wife-beating, represents simply another instance of Circean submission and assimilation to a patriarchal status-quo. The extent of Circe's powers in the masque, however, is amplified by their forecast longevity: the penultimate verse, sung by the chorus, promises the lawyers and their lady partners that

. . . if it lay in Circe's power,  
 Your bliss might so persevere,  
 That these you choose but for an hour  
 You should enjoy for ever.

(455-8)

While we should not overlook the qualifier "if" in the chorus's claim, Browne's continued stress on the constructive force of Circe's desire may give the impression that the masque in its entirety is in fact governed by a figure usually deployed as a foil to its ideological concerns. To understand the exponential growth of Circe's theatrical, and indeed metatheatrical powers in Browne's work – an admittedly unusual example of the Circean masque, since it was neither commissioned by, nor performed for the King or Queen– we need, I would suggest, to look beyond the masque genre to

contemporary, polemical reactions to the public stage.<sup>108</sup> As Gough has found, at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century “the trope of the stage as a Siren or Circe pervades the English antitheatricalist debate . . . . In such rhetoric against the stage, the enchantress embodies not only the sensual pleasures of poetry but also the more dangerous because more rhetorically effective appeals that plays make to the eyes and ears of their audiences.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, in Gosson’s *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), the “vanitie,” “wantonnesse,” “follie” and deception of “the visard that Poets maske in” are said to be “the Cuppes of *Circes*, that turne reasonable creatures into brute Beastes.”<sup>110</sup> This theme would be revisited by Prynne fifty years later in his *Histriomastix*, a tract which denounces all “prophane, and poysonous stage-playes; the common idole, and preuailing euill of our dissolute, and degenerous age,” and compares “Play-haunters” to those who, in a suggestively Circean manner, “drinke downe poyson in a sugered cup.”<sup>111</sup>

As Gough points out, the target of such works tends to be the public theatre, since “for writers such as . . . Gosson, and Prynne, it is not only the additional sensual power of spectacle that makes the stage an even sweeter and thus even more dangerous Siren than poetry; it is also the illiterate, uneducated audience attending the new commercial playhouses that makes the plays performed there so capable of witchcraft.”<sup>112</sup> The more sophisticated audience of the court masque, safe in the knowledge of its own intellectual and moral superiority, is nominally exempt from this danger. Thus, in *Queenes*, Jonson signals a move away from heavy-handed allegory of the kind evident in Beaujoyeux’s paratextual explications of the *Balet*, as well, indeed, as in his own early masques. In

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<sup>108</sup> Wright notes that “Browne’s masque has neither the obligation nor the ability to gesture outside the performance space towards the king or queen. It identifies no figure of authority outside the fiction of the masque itself. The result is a masque which is unusually self-enclosed” (“Giving Them But Their Own,” 199).

<sup>109</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 210.

<sup>110</sup> Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), 2v.

<sup>111</sup> William Prynne, *Histriomastix* (London: E.A and W.I for Michael Sparke, 1633), 2; 958. In *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), Milton, by contrast, presents a more positive view of the use of such sugaring, which he suggests can favour a “well tempered” civil and political discourse “shewing how good, how gainfull, how happy it must needs be to live according to honesty and justice.” Such exhortations, he argues, “being utter’d with those native colours and graces of speech, as true eloquence the daughter of vertue can best bestow upon her mothers praises, would so incite, and in a manner, charme the multitude into the love of that which is really good, as to imbrace it ever after, not of custome and awe, which most men do, but of choice and purpose, with true and constant delight” (Milton, “The Reason of Church-Government,” in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Patterson et al., vol. 3 (Columbia, 1932), 181. All further references are to this edition).

<sup>112</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 226.

*Queenes*, Jonson defends his decision not to make all of his figures “their own decipherers” by claiming that

To have made . . . each one to have told upon their entrance what they were and whither they would, had been a most piteous hearing, and utterly unworthy every quality of a poem: wherein a writer should trust somewhat to the capacity of the spectator, especially in these spectacles; where men, beside inquiring eyes, are understood to bring quick ears, and not those sluggish ones of porters and mechanics, that must be bored through with narrations.<sup>113</sup>  
(*Queenes* 82-7)

Schelling argues that this statement is intended to ensure interpretative exclusivity for an elite audience, since “hidden significance, and the force of subtle similitude are plain to the cultivated gentleman, an intimate in the charmed circle of the court, but a blank to ignorance and outside impertinence.”<sup>114</sup> We might think here of Harrington’s remarks in the preface to his translation of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (1591) that “deepe mysteries of learning” ought to be concealed by “the vaile of fables” so “that they might not be rashly abused by prophane wits, in who science is corrupted, like good wine in a bad vessel.”<sup>115</sup>

Harrington’s “vaile of fables” is an Anglicisation of Macrobius’s notion of the *narratio fabulosa* or *integumentum*, a concept which gained considerable traction in humanist literature from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.<sup>116</sup> For Harrington, a key function of the “vaile of fables” is to render different levels of meaning available to different readers,

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<sup>113</sup> We may think here of Quince’s comically laborious prologues to the rude mechanicals’ performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe” in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1595-6).

<sup>114</sup> Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, 125.

<sup>115</sup> Sir John Harrington, “A Preface, Or Rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie,” in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 203.

<sup>116</sup> As Hume notes, “the fourteenth book of Boccaccio’s *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* was profoundly influential in this context” (Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 163). The idea of poetry as an *integumentum* or veil for higher truths is revisited in my more extensive discussion of allegory in the next chapter.

. . . to be able with one kinde of meate and one dish (as I may so call it) to feed diuers tastes. For the weaker capacities will feede themselues with the pleasantnes of the historie and sweetnes of the verse, some that haue stronger stomackes will as it were take a further taste of the Morall sence, a third sort, more high conceited then they, will digest the Allegorie: so as indeed it hath bene thought by men of verie good iudgement.<sup>117</sup>

It might be observed that Beaujoyeux's text, with its generous range of allegorical appendages, fits this bill rather more closely than any of Jonson's masques. Jonson's appeal to exclusivity, however, may also serve a defensive function. As Orgel and others have outlined, the court masque, as a political production, "presents the triumph of an aristocratic community; at its center is a belief in the hierarchy and a faith in the power of idealization."<sup>118</sup> The masque, perhaps more so than any other form of entertainment, relies on its audience to furnish its ultimate meaning: increasingly, during the Jacobean and Stuart periods, the Royal party can be seen to act as participants, as well as spectators in the productions they commissioned. Yet even where professional actors were used for the performance itself, courtiers were called to dance in the "revels" with which the masque typically concludes, so that "the spectators . . . became a mirror image of the spectacle."<sup>119</sup>

In the *Balet*, as we have seen, this early modern collapsing of the fourth wall extends through to the device-giving ceremony at the performance's close, where the allegorical expression and the hierarchical, political reality of the court are symbolically merged. Yet if the essentially self-reflective nature of the masque form encourages "the breakdown of the barrier between stage and spectator,"<sup>120</sup> the genre – in theory, at least – could work to criticise, as well as glorify its audience.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, as Gatti reminds us, "the particular characteristics of the masque form, with its codified moves and messages, and elaborate, spectacular rituals . . . could be, and sometimes were, stretched at the seams

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<sup>117</sup> Harrington, "A Preface, Or Rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie," 203.

<sup>118</sup> Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 40.

<sup>119</sup> Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King*, 28.

<sup>120</sup> Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 26.

<sup>121</sup> See e.g. Scott, "Wee see sometimes Kings are content in Playes and Maskes to be admonished of diuers things" (Thomas Scott, *Vox Regis* (Utrecht: A. van Herwijck, 1624), 34–35). On the relationship between the masque as a forum for potential counsel and the humanist concept of *laudando praecipere*, see Butler, "The Politics of the Caroline Masque Form," 120–21.

to include indications and variants strangely at odds with the necessary celebration of monarchical power.”<sup>122</sup> Jonson has been seen to tread a fine line in this regard,<sup>123</sup> and if we suspect his appeal to “the capacity of the spectator” to be grounded upon an ultimately self-serving desire for plausible deniability, this must be balanced against the satirical drive of many of his antimasques and his Horatian claim that masques “ought always to carry a mixture of profit with them no less than delight.”<sup>124</sup>

I have suggested that a discursive relationship between Circe and the stage informs Browne’s presentation of the Goddess as a consummate director and stage-manager. If this claim bears out, it remains unclear to what end Browne subverts contemporary anti-theatrical polemic through his celebration of Circean authority – as he states in his prefatory letter, “it was done to please ourselves in private.”<sup>125</sup> In *Pleasure*, a masque performed not for lawyers, but for the rather more lofty audience of the King and his court, Jonson is less daring. While his lesser Circe figure, Comus, is also granted a degree of theatrical prowess as the leader of the first antimasque, Jonson’s character is far more obviously aligned with vice than Browne’s Circe, and his powers of illusion, limited to the antimasque, are subject to greater formal restriction and easily dispelled. In contrast to the *Balet* producers’ toleration of a certain degree of ambiguity within the epistemological (if not political) framing of the performance, moreover, Jonson’s portrayal of the “God of cheer” (4) is from the outset bathetic and satirical. The reference to Comus’s divine status in the description of the entrances for the first scene of the masque is immediately, and ironically qualified by Comus’s followers’ irreverent “hymn,”<sup>126</sup> a song which celebrates the “belly-god[’s]” (37) invention of a list of devices that serve primarily to aid and abet his gluttony: “eating and drinking until thou dost nod, / Thou break’st all thy girdles, and break’st forth a god” (30-31). In the carnival world of the antimasque Comus indeed rules

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<sup>122</sup> Hilary Gatti, “Giordano Bruno and the Stuart Court Masques,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1995): 812.

<sup>123</sup> David M. Bevington and Peter Holbrook, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, ed. Bevington and Holbrook, 5–13.

<sup>124</sup> Ben Jonson, “Love’s Triumph through Callipolis,” in *Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford and Simpson, lines 6-7.

<sup>125</sup> Browne, *Inner Temple Masque*, line 9.

<sup>126</sup> “Hymn” appears as a variant of the manuscript’s “song” in the 1640 folio edition of *Pleasure*. Butler suggests that “it is possible that ‘song’ was substituted by Ralph Crane when he wrote out the manuscript . . . . Perhaps Jonson wished to position the praise of Comus as a religious ritual, answered by the ‘hymns’ (246) sung to virtue in the main masque” (*Pleasure* note 7).

supreme, yet any divinity the figure lays claim to vanishes together with the grove that hosts him as soon as Hercules issues his command.

It is telling, however, that the kinds of pleasure in which Jonson's Circean figure participates were of particular topical significance to a court which had recently come under fire for the King's excessive expenditure on feasting and revelry: this context, in fact, may well be pertinent to Jonson's careful separation of James I from the riotous party before him on stage, which the King never shares with the revellers.<sup>127</sup> As several critics have speculated, however, Jonson may not have been careful enough. Busino's eyewitness account captures the King's apparent *displeasure* at the ending of *Pleasure*:

Finally they danced the Spanish dance once more with their ladies and because they were tired began to lag; and the King, who is by nature choleric, grew impatient and shouted loudly, "Why don't they dance? What did you make me come here for? Devil take all of you, dance!" At once the Marquis of Buckingham, his majesty's favourite minion, sprang forward, and danced a number of high and very tiny capers with such grace and lightness that he made everyone love him, and also managed to calm the rage of his angry lord.<sup>128</sup>

Suggestively, in Jonson's revised version of the masque, *For the Honour of Wales* (February 1618), Comus's gluttonous crew are replaced by a band of buffoonish Welshmen – a safer target for satire, perhaps.<sup>129</sup>

During the Caroline period, traditional oppositions between Circean excess and Kingly reason are seen to undergo an even greater collapse, exacerbated no doubt by the political and religious

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<sup>127</sup> For contemporary criticism of the court's fiscal irresponsibility, see Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*, 121. Although a clear separation of antimasque from masque proper is characteristic of Jonson's early works, spatial politics can be seen to play out variously across different masques even within these parameters. In Jonson's *Queenes*, for instance, while the hags are banished from the stage before the appearance of the House of Fame, any interlude is brief: the twelve masquers the house conveys are swift to descend into their reclaimed performance space.

<sup>128</sup> Orazio Busino quoted in Michael Leapman, *Inigo: The Life of Inigo Jones, Architect of the English Renaissance* (London: Review, 2003), 179–80. Contemporary responses to the performance reveal that it was generally ill-received: see *Ben Jonson*, ed. Hereford, Simpson and Simpson, vol.10, 575-7.

<sup>129</sup> For possible contemporary contexts of the masque, see See A. L. Dodds, *Studies in Stuart Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952); G. Dyfnallt Owen, *Wales in the Reign of James I* (London: The Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1988).



controversies of Charles I's years of personal rule. The King's decision in 1633 to re-publish the *Book of Sports* proved particularly divisive: the *Book's* promotion of festivities was linked by contemporary critics to the Catholicising agenda of the Royalist Laudian party, to the extent, Marcus has argued, that "by the Caroline period, the advocacy of public mirth was linked to the monarchy in most literate people's minds."<sup>130</sup> Scholars have argued that Milton's 1634 *Maske at Ludlow Castle* should be read as a response to the conflicts engendered by the publication of the *Book of Sports*, and while this point is debatable, the historicist studies of Marcus, Lewalski and others do demonstrate a sustained triangulation of Circean myth, monarchy and the court masque genre during the Caroline period. If Jonson's "Belly-god" (*Pleasure* 37) is arguably reducible to "appetite without intelligence,"<sup>131</sup> when Comus next appears as Milton's Circean sorcerer, he is endowed with powers of oratory and cunning far beyond anything possessed by Jonson's "Father of Farts" (49). For Lewalski in fact, Milton's "Comus is the court masquer: he wields 'dazzling spells' and marvellous spectacles but they only 'cheat the eye with blear illusion,'" and he leads the Lady "to a decadent court with an elaborate banquet and a beast-headed entourage – a none-too-subtle allusion to the licentious Cavaliers."<sup>132</sup>

Lewalski interprets Comus's "rabble" as the "happy oblivion idealised by Catholicizing Laudians," his "decadent court" and "elaborate banquet" as inspired parodies of the increasingly castigated indulgences of Charles' court. As such, she embraces Norbrook and Craig's notion of the "reformed masque," which "follows the usual courtly unmasking with a more searching revelation in which the King and the court are seen as mere idols when compared with transcendent reality."<sup>133</sup> In this vein, Comus's invocation of "the starry choir . . . / In their nightly watchful sphere" (112-3), as he summons the antimasque, might be taken as a satirical comment on the way in which the Caroline masques exploited the "more remov'd mysteries" (*Hymenaei* 13) to legitimise their own worldly abuses.<sup>134</sup> True virtue, the Attendant Spirit explains in his final lines of the performance version of

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<sup>130</sup> Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*, 14.

<sup>131</sup> Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 160.

<sup>132</sup> Lewalski, "Milton's *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing," 309.

<sup>133</sup> Craig, "Jonson, the Antimasque and the 'Rules of Flattery,'" 178. An example of a "reformed" masque, according to Craig, is Samuel Daniel's *Tethys Festival* (1610), a masque where "King and court are all reminded of their final nothingness in the true perspective of Time" (*ibid.*).

<sup>134</sup> Yarnall, who argues that the splendour of Queen Henrietta's costuming as Divine Beauty in *Tempe Restored* speaks to an exploitation of "philosophy . . . to rationalize the squandering of the nation's wealth," would also

Milton's *Maske*, "can teach ye how to climb / Higher than the sphery chime" (1019-20). It is important to note that, as with Browne's masque, the situation of Milton's audience beyond the court may have a great deal to do with the degree of license the poet risks.<sup>135</sup> But it is apparent that by the 1630s, even Royally-commissioned entertainments were forced to negotiate new shades of meaning attendant upon the Circean imagery they employed. With this in mind, we will return to Beaujoyeulx's edition of the *Balet* – or more specifically, to its final allegory provided by Lord Gordon, which posits Circe as "that desire in general . . . leading some men to virtue, others to vice" (101). There may be something of the idea that Circe represents "desire in general" in Jonson's masque, where Hercules' cup, once "the crowned reward / Of thirsty heroes, after labour hard" (*Pleasure*, 78-79), in the different hands of Comus's bacchic crew serves profanely to "fill the drunken Orgies up" (80). It is not until the reign of Charles I, however, that the idea that Circean desire might be both vicious and virtuous appears to have been given serious attention in productions staged at court.

The premise of Townshend's *Tempe Restored* of 1632 is derivative of the *Balet*: like the *Balet*, the masque opens with the complaint of a "fugitive favourite" (84), one of Circe's captured lovers who had been transformed by the enchantress into a lion before his escape. An allegory "invented" by Inigo Jones but which in fact incorporates a number of claims translated from Lord Gordon's text, is furthermore appended to the printed edition of Townshend's masque.<sup>136</sup> Importantly, however, Queen Henrietta Maria was the preeminent masquer of *Tempe Restored* and, as "Divine Beautie" (92, 1), precipitated Circe's defeat by descending from the heavens on a golden chariot with her Ladies in attendance. This presents a marked contrast to the *Balet*, where it is the flight of Jupiter, sitting atop "a great eagle of burnished gold" (85), that comprises the *deus ex machina* through which Circe is finally vanquished. As the qualifier "divine" in the name of the Queen's character in *Tempe*

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appear to subscribe to this view (*Transformations of Circe*, 149). Walls' argument that amidst a climate of religious anxiety and fears about the threat of idolatry posed by Arminian theology, "in the Caroline masques of the 1630s it may have seemed that the King appeared as an image of himself to be reverd and worshipped," might equally well apply to Henrietta Maria (*The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones*, 36).

<sup>135</sup> Milton's *Maske* was commissioned to celebrate the installation of John Egerton, Earl of Bridgewater as Lord President of Wales, and performed at the Bridgewater family home, Ludlow Castle, situated on the Welsh border.

<sup>136</sup> Aurelian Townshend, *Tempe Restored* (London: Printed by A. M. for Robert Allet and George Baker, 1632), 19. All references to scene descriptions or the ending allegory of *Tempe Restored* are to this edition.

*Restored* might suggest, the Neoplatonic schema that forms the basis for the masque's philosophical ideas encompasses a continuum of earthly and celestial desire,<sup>137</sup> a spectrum, in which, as we have seen, Circe comes to occupy an important position. A number of suggestive parallels between the Queen and Circe are evident, in fact, in Jones's allegorical appendix, making comparisons between these two figures seemingly inevitable. As Kogan notes, the allegory's use of Circe's "inchaunted Palace, glistening with gold, and Precious Ornaments" to exemplify the idea that "desire cannot be moved without apparence of *Beauty*, either true or false,"<sup>138</sup> links the enchantress to the queen, "who is a visible expression of spiritual beauty."<sup>139</sup> Taking his cue perhaps from the oppositional relationship between Circe and the court in the *Balet*, Townshend belabours Circe's pretensions to Royalty in the masque itself: the fugitive favourite refers to her "Chayre of State" (85, 18), and his escape from her palace elicits the hysterical response "Leade me abroad! Let me my subiects view!" (87, 14). The element of parody – even pantomime – evident here serves to differentiate the Queen from the enchantress, whose affinity with her appetite-driven victims is stressed through her lament for the lover she had previously transformed into a lion, "T'was not for nothing, thou hadst teeth and claws, / For thou hast made a cruell prey of me" (86, 3-4).

The bathos of this portrayal, however, contends with the effect of Townshend's most important revision to the *Balet*: his restoration of Circe's enchanting voice, which together with her beauty, "shewes that desire is moved either by sight or hearing, to loue *Vertue*, or the contrary."<sup>140</sup> To mitigate against the suggestion that Circean beauty may itself prompt virtue, Townshend might have had recourse to the last part of Lord Gordon's allegory, which notes that the *Balet*'s Naiads, represented by the Queen and her ladies, embody the notion that "il ne faut point desirer ce qui est beau & reluisant exterieurement, mais beaucoup plus la beauté interieure & moins apparence" ("one must not desire what is beautiful and shining on the outside, but should desire interior and less

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<sup>138</sup> Townshend, *Tempe Restored*, 1632, 17.

<sup>139</sup> Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King*, 155.

<sup>140</sup> Townshend, *Tempe Restored*, 1632, 17. In *Tempe Restored*, Tomlinson observes, it "is 'the Song of Circe' which, together with its attendant action, makes audible and visible Circe's power of enchantment" ("Theatrical Vibrancy," 188).

apparent beauty”) (T3v; 103).<sup>141</sup> Interestingly, however, he does not. Instead, we are told, “Corporeall Beauty, consisting in simetry colour, and certaine unexpressable Graces, shining in the Queenes Maiestie, may draw us to the contemplation of the Beauty of the soule, unto which it hath Analogy.”<sup>142</sup> The implications of this are spelled out by Butler, who observes that the masque’s “meaning may have been intellectual, but the language and performance were sensual. As Jones said, Divine Beauty appealed to the mind but the body and affections were essential ‘instruments.’ There was, then, no fundamental contradiction between Circe’s physical appeals and the Queen’s spiritual tutoring. They were differently placed rungs on the ladder to the divine, and in some respects mirrored one another.”<sup>143</sup>

In fact, as Butler and several other critics have found, a discursive association of Charles’s Queen with Circe may well have pre-dated the masque: the Queen’s public devotion to Roman Catholicism, together with the eroticised iconography that celebrated her marriage to Charles as a fertile bedrock for the state, aggravated anxieties that she unduly influenced her husband’s religious and foreign policies.<sup>144</sup> In the public imagination, Butler suggests, “Henrietta Maria had affinities with . . . [Circe], insofar as she wielded dazzling enchantments to which Charles was no more immune than the fugitive favourite was to Circe’s.”<sup>145</sup> Given this potential for an association of the Queen with Circe, Kogan suggests that where the *Balet* had portrayed the enchantress as the crown’s inimical foe,

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<sup>141</sup> As Jeanneret notes, “Marsilio Ficino and his disciples taught that only the mind can contemplate the ideal forms in their perfection; the human eye can only perceive vestiges of true beauty because, in the imperfect world of bodies and death, we can only indirectly apprehend the intelligible models. . . . But the soul does not give in to resignation; it aspires to pierce the veil and discover the clarity of essence behind the opacity of things” (*Perpetual Motion*, 267).

<sup>142</sup> Townshend, *Tempe Restored*, 1632, 19. In his analysis of Jones’ perspective drawings for *Tempe Restored*, Peacock has observed that the architecture of the masque conforms with this philosophy through its adherence to the Renaissance Vitruvian tradition: “each scene is discernibly constructed on the same kind of ideal Platonic grid, as if in some underlying sense each were the *same* scene This kind of relationship between appearances and reality points to . . . the idea that architecture could express the underlying harmony of the universe” (*The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones*, 89)

<sup>143</sup> Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 159. Butler cites Townshend, *Tempe Restored*, 1632, 19. Tomlinson goes further, arguing that “the masque’s moral project, the triumph of Divine Beauty and Heroic Virtue . . . is conceivably undermined by Circe’s theatrical vibrancy” (“Theatrical Vibrancy,” 189).

<sup>144</sup> On the subject of Caroline iconography which sought to “absorb Henrietta Maria’s national and gender difference into celebration of Charles’s heroic potency,” see Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 72.

<sup>145</sup> Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*, 160. The rhetoric and philosophy of the Caroline masques could have done little to assuage these fears: in another of Townshend’s masques of 1632, *Albion’s Triumph*, the beauty of Alba (Henrietta) has such a tempering influence on the heroic militancy of Albanactus (Charles) that when the pair are joined, the King is said to be “subdu’d by Alba’s eyes” (Aurelian Townshend, “Albion’s Triumph,” in *Aurelian Townshend’s Poem and Masks*, ed. Chambers, 71, line 17).

Charles's "court took the innovative step of softening her viciousness and linking her to goodness."<sup>146</sup> It is possible, then, that one of the aims of Townshend's masque was to diffuse the "Circean" threat of Henrietta's foreign and Catholicising influence over her husband by emphasising the virtuous aspects of desire which Circe hands on to the couple as her "heir." Yet as Butler has argued, if "*Tempe Restored* thus legitimated the Caroline marriage as the model of the state," it also "played out the sexual politics of that model with uncomfortable clarity . . . The monarch's virtuous self-restraint took strength from, but also depended on, his susceptibility to desire."<sup>147</sup> This ambiguity may in part may explain Circe's jibe at the "man-maide" (95, 14) Pallas in the masque. This is, of course, a topical reference to theatrical transvestism which would have played to great comic effect, but the phrase, which further serves to remind the audience of the traditional gender norms and distinctions upon which contemporary social and political hierarchies relied, may also betray an anxiety about the threat of Circean effeminacy.<sup>148</sup>

At the end of *Tempe Restored*, Pallas and Circe – representatives of wisdom and desire respectively – depart together with the chorus into the wood, revisiting the idea posited by Jonson's masque more than a decade earlier that under the Royal gaze, pleasure might finally be reconciled to virtue. In the last analysis, however, it would seem that the task Townshend and Jones set themselves – to assimilate the *Balet's* competing hermeneutic claims into a cerebral yet sensual, aspirational yet exclusionary vision of monarchy – had become a game of impossibly high stakes. As I have suggested throughout this chapter, the mythographical complexity of Circe's character ensures that an internal conflict, between the allegories that try to constrain her within clear moral bounds and the sum total of

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<sup>146</sup> Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King*, 198.

<sup>147</sup> Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*, 160.

<sup>148</sup> Tomlinson notes that "*Tempe Restored* juxtaposes a male and a female singer, each of whom represents a female role. The audience is thus offered the chance to compare a naturalistic and an illusionistic performance of gender" ("Theatrical Vibrancy on the Caroline Court Stage," 187). Her argument suggests that the "true" female compares favourably, and stresses the importance of this for the status of women's performance at court. See also Gossett, "'Man-maid, begone!'" and note 53 above. Against this, Butler argues that "Henrietta Maria was typically associated with the hermaphrodite, which expressed her unity with Charles but brought danger by its suggestion of emasculation" (ibid., 155). Although *Tempe Restored* has excited critics as "the first English stage performance in which the performers' gender exactly matched their roles, and the first masque for which female performers other than the masquers are named, the text identifying Circe as 'Madame Coniacke' and Harmony as 'Mistress Shepherd'" (ibid., 156), Britland, drawing on Shell, cautions that "the privilege accorded to the female figure in *Tempe Restored* is . . . less a proto-feminist engagement with injunctions against female speech, than a means of promoting women as the instigators of social harmony conceived along Catholic lines" (*Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria*, 110). See Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 150–58.

her actual meaning, is present to a greater or lesser degree in all of the English masques in which she features. This tension may serve as a barometer for the declining fortunes of the genre itself: Circe, perhaps, is a vector for contemporary political and social dissatisfactions which would ultimately see the end of the English court masque's "golden period."<sup>149</sup> As I will argue in my third chapter, in his *Maske* Milton openly grapples with these difficulties. In particular, I suggest, he interrogates an aspect of Circe that is truly present only in Homer's *Odyssey*: Circe's moral ambivalence. If strands of this ambivalence can be detected in some of the preceding masques I have discussed, it generally proves ill-suited to the stark, allegorical oppositions demanded by the genre: the Goddess's duality, as we have seen, is rarely entertained without some attempt at suppression.

Within the conservative parameters of the masque form, however, it is also possible to detect the emergence of a more radical understanding of the ethical significance of Circean encounters. Something of this informs the curious moment in Browne's masque where Circe claims she has had no part in the transformation of Ulysses' men:

. . . careless of themselves, they here and there  
 Fed on strange fruits, invenoming their bloods,  
 And now like monsters range about the woods.  
 If those thy mates were, yet is Circe free  
 For their misfortunes have not birth from me.<sup>150</sup>

(324-8)

Browne here picks up on another strand of Circean signification that Milton would more fully explore in his *Maske* – man's responsibility for his own ethical conduct, and the trial and choice that are formative of his moral and spiritual disposition. The novelty of this idea within the masque genre will

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<sup>149</sup> Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition: The Early Poems, "Arcades," & Comus*, 3.

<sup>150</sup> In Homer it is Eurylochus, not Odysseus, who suggests the tamed beasts the Greeks encounter on Circe's island were transformed by the Goddess from men (*Od.* 10.432-33). In Virgil, by contrast, this is presented more straightforwardly as fact: *quos hominum ex facie dea saeva potentibus herbis / induerat Circe in vultus ac terga ferarum* ("These were they whom, robbing them of their human form with potent herbs, Circe, cruel goddess, had clothed in the features and frames of beasts," *Aeneid* 7.19-20).

become clearer if we look back to the more orthodox preoccupations of the *Balet*, where the juice of the moly plant which should “cure a mind deprived of its reason” (60), is unsuccessfully wielded by Mercury to free the nymphs who have been enchanted by Circe. In the final analysis, the introduction of this plot device seems intended rather to safeguard the hierarchical power structures of Henri’s court than to suggest the dedication of either the dancers or Mercury himself to a vicious life. In the *Balet*’s opening scene, furthermore, while the “gentilhomme fugitif” admits that he allowed himself to be seduced by Circe since “il n’est de plus puissant lien / Que l’apprehension des plaisirs & du bien;” “there is no stronger attraction than the anticipation of pleasure and well being” (B4v; 42), his transformation into the form of a lion and the subsequent reversal of this enchantment is attributed solely to the sorceress’s capricious will. Indeed, Circe herself claims that she can “deprive men of their will” (42). In Jonson’s *Pleasure*, by contrast, the personal responsibility of the belly-god’s followers who “transform *themselves* . . . to bottles, or tuns” (59-60, my emphasis) is stressed, leading Orgel to argue that this emphasis on the will is *Comus*’s strongest debt to Jonson’s masque.<sup>151</sup>

As Demaray has noted, this idea is also present at the beginning of *Tempe Restored*, where by choosing “to be govern’d by Reason, and not rul’d by Sense” (85, 9), electing to be human rather than a beast, “Circe’s escaped prisoner has achieved an inner freedom that the feeble magic of Circe is powerless to destroy.”<sup>152</sup> In perhaps the most memorable lines of the masque, the fugitive favourite observes that

Tis not her Rod, her Philters, nor her Herbes,  
 (Though strong in Magicke) that can bound mens minds;  
 And make them Prisoners, where there is no wall.  
 It is consent that makes a perfect Slave.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 169.

<sup>152</sup> Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition: The Early Poems, “Arcades,” & Comus*, 252.

<sup>153</sup> This emphasis on the necessity of the assenting, or consenting will is seen again in Davenant’s *The Temple of Love* (1635), which ends with “*Sunesis* and *Thelema* (which intimate the understanding and the will) joyning together” in marriage, before “the true Temple appears” (William Davenant, *The Temple of Love* (London: Thomas Walkley, 1635), A2v). The wedding of will and reason thus augurs the fulfilment of the prophecy of the masque’s “argument,” which stipulates that “by influence” of the “beauty” of “*Indamora*, *Queene of Narsinga*,” a character danced, of course, by Henrietta Maria, “the Temple of Chast Love should be re-established in this

(85, 19-22)

Yet in neither Townshend's or Jonson's masque, where there is no sense of Hercules being presented by a real test in Xenophon's sense, nor indeed in the *Balet*, is the audience privy to the debate or struggle that would make this aspect of the narrative as prominent as it is in Milton's *Maske*. For Milton, as we will see, the Jonsonian dictum that virtue is "more seene, more knowne, when Vice stands by" (*Pleasure* 259) is insufficient – virtue itself must be interrogated via a more than merely passive exposure to vice. Both the *Balet* and *Tempe Restored* play down, however unsuccessfully, the central ambivalence of Lord Gordon's allegory, and even Browne's Circe is ultimately suspect: as Wright argues, "in view of the persistent emphasis on her authority over everything on the island and even the surrounding sea, her denial of responsibility for what has happened to Ulysses' men certainly seems specious."<sup>154</sup> The doubt that remains, however, speaks to a fraying of the ties between allegorical representation and the sovereign's epistemological prerogative, a shift that would arguably signal the death knell for the court masque as it had been known. As Butler observes of the line added to the Attendant Spirit's final song in the 1637 text of the *Maske*, "(List, mortals, if your ears be true)" (996), "Milton's 'if', with its separation between those who have ears to hear and those who merely belong to the world, marked a gulf between ritual affirmation and the private obligations of the individual that called into question all the usual assumptions underpinning festive forms. It was a gulf down which, as events accelerated, the whole festival tradition would eventually disappear."<sup>155</sup>

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Island" (*Temple of Love* A2r). Shell detects vestiges of Catholic interest here: Thelema, who wears "a robe of changeable silke" (*Temple of Love* C4v) represents "the theological implications of alternative both in her dress and her name . . . [she] stands as a reproach to predestinarians, as well as an iconographical realization of the beauty of changing one's mind. Her marriage to Sunesis epitomises how the understanding should ally itself to human free will – in effect, to a notion of the theology of grace which is interpretable in a Laudian manner, but also in a Catholic" (Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination*, 149).

Space will not permit a more extensive discussion of this point here, although I would suggest it merits further investigation. It might be observed that like *Tempe Restored*, *The Temple of Love* relies on Circean motifs to express its distinctions: we learn that the "Temple being long sought for by certaine Magicians (enemies to chaste Love) intending to use it to their intemperate ends, was by *Divine Poesie* hidden in mists and clouds; so as the Magicians being frustrate of their hopes, sought by enchantments to hinder all others from finding it" (*Temple of Love* A2r). This reference to "Divine Poesie" alludes to the idea of poetry an *integumentum* that veils divine truth. The relationship between allegoresis and Circean mythology will be explored further in my next chapter.

<sup>154</sup> Wright, "Giving Them But Their Own," 209.

<sup>155</sup> Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture*, 357.



“All our drift despise”: Acrasia, Amavia and the Ethics of Allegory in Spenser’s

*The Faerie Queene*

I turn now to an English, poetic representation of Circe more contemporaneous to the *Balet*: Spenser’s Circean Acrasia in *The Faerie Queene* (1590). Acrasia’s Circean roots have been well established by modern scholarship on *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the overdetermined Circe of the *Balet*, however, Spenser’s portrayal of Acrasia in Book 2 of his romance-epic might seem fairly straightforward.<sup>2</sup> Acrasia’s forebears in the Italian Romance tradition include Ariosto’s Alcina, Trissino’s Acratia and Tasso’s Armida, sorceresses in gardens who deceive through illusion and “change men’s shapes and wills,” until they are conquered, enslaved or converted by a male protagonist.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, these figures all prove to be allegorical, hyperbolic extensions of the Homeric Circe, resurrected to showcase the virtuosity of the (Christianised) epic hero in the face of great temptation to abandon his quest.<sup>4</sup> Spenser’s Acrasia, then, who dwells on an island populated by beasts, “Whylome her louers, which her lustes did feed,”<sup>5</sup> on one level typifies little more than the traditional allegorical representation of Circe as a *clarissima meretrix* who intercepts the unworthy to reveal their baser nature, and serves more generally as a poetic shorthand for the dangers of the flesh. Yet while her genealogy betrays less manifest contradiction than that of the *Balet*’s Circe, with her extensive allegorical gloss, Acrasia is deployed by Spenser in such a way that competing, and conflicting aspects of the poem’s wider ideological commitments are brought to the fore. This portrayal, I argue, speaks like the *Balet* to the difficulty of reconciling Circean mythology with allegory – moral or divine – that eventually transcends the bounds of genre.

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<sup>1</sup> See Merritt Y. Hughes, “Spenser’s Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4, no. 4 (1943): 381–99; John E. Hankins, “Acrasia,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Albert Charles Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the genre of Spenser’s poem, see Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise*, 185.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki, and A.C. Hamilton (Harlow: Longman, 2007), 2.12.85.3. All further citations of *FQ* are to book, canto, verse and line number in this edition.

More specifically, as we will see, Spenser's presentation of Acrasia in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, the book of "temperaunce,"<sup>6</sup> problematizes the relationship between Aristotelian virtue ethics and Reformed soteriology that is pivotal to the defence of the work put forward by the poet in his letter to Raleigh. In the first part of this chapter, the difficulties raised by Guyon's "intemperate" behaviour in Acrasia's Bower will be discussed in light of the long-standing, and seemingly interminable critical debate about the fairy knight's conduct. I will pay particular attention to how Spenser presents the relationship between incontinence (*akrasia*), continence and temperance in Book 2 as a whole, since this forms a major crux of any attempt to reconcile Aristotelian and Christian concepts of virtue formation and has an important bearing on the nature of the temptation that Spenser's Acrasia can be seen to present. Ultimately, I suggest that the relationship of Spenser's Circean Acrasia to the philosophical idea of *akrasia* is vexed.<sup>7</sup> Sir Guyon's destruction of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* can be seen to enact a violent glossing of the conflicts inherent in Spenser's attempted synthesis of Reformed Christian and Aristotelian virtue ethics, just as it exposes the difficulties of reconciling the Circean slipperiness of artistic freedom – implicit, as we will see in contemporary defences of poetry – with the allegorical overlay invoked to legitimize this same liberty.

The second part of this chapter proposes that the interaction between Guyon, the Palmer and Acrasia in the Bower is anticipated by Spenser from the beginning of Book 2 in his portrayal of moments of crisis that require discernment and decision making. These scenes, I suggest, inform Milton's famous "misreading" of another episode of Book 2, Guyon's passage through Mammon's cave. In his *Areopagitica*, Milton's rewriting of Spenser, I argue, is a rhetorical strategy that draws attention to his predecessor's heavy reliance on the trope of legalism in this part of the *Faerie Queene*, and perhaps more importantly, to the relationship between the Palmer's legal, moral and spiritual judgments, and the traditional, biblio-classical hermeneutics that inform the Circean content of

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<sup>6</sup> Spenser, "A Letter of the Authors," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Hiroshi Yamashita et al., line 43. All further references to the letter will appear parenthetically in-text as "Letter to Raleigh," followed by line numbers.

<sup>7</sup> Recent discussions of this relationship can be found in Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 37–74; Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 79–110.

Spenser's text. In the final pages of my discussion, I explore the significance of the tale of Amavia, Ruddymane and Mordant that introduces Guyon's quest, and suggest that the failure of the Nymph of the Well to wash the bloodstains from Ruddymane's hands is a lesson on the limitations of Mosaic law that Guyon and the Palmer fail to learn. In his *Maske*, Milton will revisit this problem and offer a solution through the figure of Sabrina, who relieves, where the Nymph of the Well can only exacerbate, the law's petrifying grip on fallen mankind. A better understanding of what is at stake in Milton's divergence from Spenser on this point will encourage, I hope—, a more sophisticated understanding of his reception of the work of his “sage and serious” predecessor and of the nature of Spenserian influence across his corpus as a whole.

#### Aristotelian *akrasia* and *The Faerie Queene*

Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* is the book of “temperance,” the second of the “twelve private morall vertues” that Spenser proposes to show “perfected” in his work (“Letter to Raleigh” 43; 19). Following the pattern established in Book 1, where Spenser had related the trials and tribulations of the Redcrosse Knight, “Patrone of true Holinesse” (1.1), in the second book of the *Faerie Queene* we can expect Sir Guyon to encounter obstacles and temptations against which his possession of the virtue of temperance might be tested and proved. One such obstacle is Acrasia, “a false enchaunteresse, / That many errant knightes hath fowle fordonne” (2.1.51.3-4). Acrasia's name brings into focus the interaction between the philosophical notion of *akrasia* (ἀκρασία) and Circean mythography. Since the time of Chrysippus,<sup>8</sup> the phenomenon of *akrasia*, often glossed as weakness of the will or incontinence, was commonly illustrated by a classical paradigm: Medea's declaration in Book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that *aliudque cupido, mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* (“Affection this, discretion that, perswades. / I see the better, I approve it too: / The

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<sup>8</sup> Risto Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

worse I follow”).<sup>9</sup> Mythographically, a strong affinity exists between Medea and Circe, and the two are often invoked in tandem by Renaissance writers as figures synonymous with witchcraft and moral depravity<sup>10</sup> – indeed, scenes from the story of Jason and Medea, are “ywritt” (2.12.44.4), we are told, on the gate to the entrance of Acrasia’s Bower.

Spenser, however, stresses the importance of Aristotle’s virtue ethics to the structure and thematic interest of his work in the letter to Raleigh that prefaces his 1590 edition of the *Faerie Queene*.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Stoic or Augustinian conceptions, Aristotelian *akrasia* does not rely upon the idea of an assenting will, and might thus have proved particularly attractive to a sixteenth century poet writing in a Reformed Christian culture which (as we will see) was particularly sensitive to controversy on this point. In Aristotle’s intellectualist account, *akrasia* comes about through an error in the practical syllogism, whereby a major premise or universal, a value that identifies something as good, is related to a minor premise about the particulars of a given situation. Thus, the notion that “Everything sweet is pleasant,” related to the perception that “this [particular object] is sweet,” leads to an indulgence of appetite (1147a31-30).<sup>12</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle invokes drunkenness as one of a number of possible states of passion, usually related to an appetitive drive for pleasure, which can render perceptual knowledge of particulars incomplete and lead to a state of *akrasia* (NE 1147a10-19). At the beginning of Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser signals Acrasia’s link with the inebriating effects of passion through Amavia’s description of the enchantress: “Her blis is all in pleasure and delight, / Wherewith she makes her louers dronken mad” (1.52.1-2). At the threshold of Acrasia’s Bower, the figure of Excesse is emblematic of such an assault on the senses that could lead towards an akratic state:

In her left hand a Cup of gold she held,

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<sup>9</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 7.19-21; *Ovid’s Metamorphosis Englished*, trans. Sandys, 232.

<sup>10</sup> Tania Demetriou, “‘Essentially Circe,’” 168.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the availability of Aristotle’s works at this time and the circulation of commentaries and Latin translations of the *Ethics*, see Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Gill Kraye, “Moral Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 303–86.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. C. J. Rowe and Sarah Broadie, trans. C. J. Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1147a31–30. All references will be to this edition, cited parenthetically as *NE* hereafter.

And with her right the riper fruit did reach,  
 Whose sappy liquor, that with fulnesse sweld,  
 Into her cup she scruzd, with daintie breach  
 Of her fine fingers, without fowle empeach,  
 That so faire winepresse made the wine more sweet:  
 Thereof she vsd to giue to drinke to each,  
 Whom passing by she happened to meet:  
 It was her guise, all Straungers goodly so to greet.

(2.12.56)

The attention given here to each separate sensory aspect of the experience, as it is revealed through lines that build climatically to their end rhyme with an easy musicality, brings the reader tantalizingly close to tasting with Guyon the “sappy liquor” of Excesse’s Circean cup. Yet all is not as it seems. The word “guise” hints at the deceptiveness of Excesse’s sweetness, a suggestion of the hidden perils of her hospitality embedded in Spenser’s strategic alliteration throughout the stanza. “Faire” raises the spectre of “fowle” despite the narrator’s denial of this “empeach,” signalling perhaps that a moral knowledge overtly denied by the text is nonetheless available to the discerning reader. The scene for akratic action, then, is set.<sup>13</sup>

As we have seen, in Aristotle’s practical syllogism correct discernment is of central importance to the possibility of proper action. Neither is this the first time this theme has emerged in the *Faerie Queene*: Excesse’s cup-bearing predecessors in Book 1 include Duessa, who holds a Circean “golden cup”

. . . replete with magick artes;

Death and despeyre did many thereof sup,

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<sup>13</sup> Hume remarks generally of Spenser’s poetic technique that “a single stanza or pair of stanzas forms a unit which opens attractively but gradually exposes sinister occupations and purposes” (*Edmund Spenser*, 82).

And secret poyson through their inner partes,  
Th'eternall bale of heauie wounded harts;

(8.14.1-5)

yet also the virginal Fidelia, whose own “cup of gold” contains a serpent of manifest “horror” (10.13.2; 5) that is nonetheless Christological.<sup>14</sup> Kaske has written at length about the proliferation in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* of repeated images *in bono* and *in malo*, a technique which derives from exegetical commentaries on the “bipolarity” of certain images in the Bible that are used in both “an honorific and a derogatory sense.”<sup>15</sup> Just as a successful interpretation of such images demands “right” reading with “an eye for internal differences,”<sup>16</sup> Prescott argues that the “doubleness” of Spenser’s text makes “a hero’s moral or spiritual dilemma . . . less a matter of choice and will than of epistemology and perception.”<sup>17</sup> In the episode in question, Guyon discerns correctly and passes the test that Excesse presents: “taking it out of her tender hond, / The cup to ground [he] did violently cast” (2.12.57.2-3). This is an important moment in Spenser’s narrative relation of the moral progress of Guyon’s character, but it also bears metapoetic significance. Via the trope of *akrasia*, Spenser’s tableau of Excesse speaks to contemporary aesthetic, as well as ethical concerns. As my previous chapter has indicated, *Phantasia*, established as a distinct mental capacity in Aristotle’s *De Anima*, was understood in contemporary faculty psychology to mediate between perception and belief,<sup>18</sup> and had been held suspect since the Classical period for its ability to work in conjunction with passion to distort the “true” images of nature delivered by the senses. Augustine, furthermore, held man’s

<sup>14</sup> Carol V. Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Cornell University Press, 1999), 47.

<sup>15</sup> Kaske observes that “when a word was repeated in such a bipolar way, exegetes said that it was to be understood *in bono [sensu] et in malo* or *in meliorem et peiorem partem*.” She suggests that “Spenser distinguishes images more frequently in *bono et in malo* than in other ways” (*Spenser and Biblical Poetics*, 23; 24).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Lake Prescott, “Complicating the Allegory: Spenser and Religion in Recent Scholarship,” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 25, no. 4 (2001): 11. Milton’s *Maske* is also concerned with the necessity of perceptual discrimination between vice and virtue – an extended discussion of which may be found in Astrid Giugni, “The ‘Holy Dictate of Spare Temperance’: Virtue and Politics in Milton’s *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45, no. 2 (2015): 395 – yet as I will argue in my next chapter this theme is inextricable, and ultimately subordinate, to his greater preoccupation with “choice and will.”

<sup>18</sup> John Guillory (*Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (Columbia University Press, 1983), 2) notes that in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon refers to the imagination as *nuncius* (messenger).

imagination – *phantasticum hominis* – to be vulnerable to demonic manipulation: as Goya would have it, the sleep of reason produces monsters.

Yet the imagination was also, traditionally, closely aligned with poetry. A fear that the poet's privileged access to the imaginative realm could give rise to abuses, leading to the production of immoral images that would corrupt the uneducated, inexperienced or mentally weak, had persisted at least since Plato's call to expel certain poets – those who imitate or produce mimetic representations of all things, regardless of whether they are good or bad – from the *polis* in his *Republic*.<sup>19</sup> Against this, as Rossky notes, in early modern defences of literature, “criticism of the excessive emotional power of the imaginative activity is defended by the doctrine of persuasion to good.”<sup>20</sup> This idea that poetry might wield a corrective influence over the wayward faculty of the imagination is a cornerstone of Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (1595). In his *Apologie*, Sidney invokes the Horatian rule that poetry ought to be at once *utile* and *dulce* to argue that controlled poetic “feigning” harnesses the imagination to reason, producing exemplary imitations of life that are both persuasive and morally instructive.<sup>21</sup> Coupling “the generall notion with particuler example,”<sup>22</sup> the poet could thus lay claim to Aristotle's model of the practical syllogism, escaping the censure reserved elsewhere for those who “giveth sweete Syrropes to make his poison goe downe the smoother”, writers whose works are like “the cuppes of Circes, that turne reasonable creatures into brute beastes.”<sup>23</sup> Turning this image on its head, Sidney insists that the true poet “doth intende the winning of the mind from wickednesse to vertue: even as the childe is often brought to take most wholsom things, by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant tast.”<sup>24</sup> It is in relation to this aim that we should understand Spenser's assertion, in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh appended to the 1590 edition of the *Faerie Queene*, that “the generall end” of the work “is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (7-8),

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<sup>19</sup> See Plato, *Republic* 378d-e: Socrates warns that Homer's tales “must not be accepted in the city, whether they are made with a hidden sense or without a hidden sense. A young thing can't judge what is hidden sense and what is not; but what he takes into his opinions at that age has a tendency to become hard to eradicate and unchangeable. Perhaps it's for this reason that we must do everything to ensure that what they hear first, with respect to virtue, be the finest told tales for them to hear” (*The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom, 2nd ed (New York: Basic Books, 1991)).

<sup>20</sup> William Rossky, “Imagination in the English Renaissance,” 72.

<sup>21</sup> Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 343.

<sup>22</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London: Henry Olney, 1595), D3v.

<sup>23</sup> Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*, A2v; A2r.

<sup>24</sup> Sidney, *Apologie for Poetrie*, E4r.

and his suggestion that if his “Methode will seeme displeasaunt, [to those] which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly . . . then thus clowdily enwrapped in Allegoricall devises. . . . such, me seeme, should be satisfide with the use of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their showes, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to commune sence” (22-25).

In this same statement, Spenser sets out his intention in the *Faerie Queene* to portray “the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelue priuate morall vertues, as Aristotle hath deuised” (“Letter to Raleigh” 19). As we have noted, Book 2 of the text, featuring Guyon’s travails in the Bower of Bliss, is designated by Spenser as the Book of Temperance. From Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, we learn that a person possessed of the virtue of sophrosyne (σωφροσύνη) or temperance enjoys total freedom from struggle with the passions, unlike the merely enkratic or continent individual, who experiences appetitive desire but is able to enlist reason and refrain from succumbing. Naturally, the temperate man gravitates towards a golden mean between indulgence and deficiency: he “has appetite for the things one should, in the way one should and when” (*NE* 1119b17-18). By toppling Excesse, then, Spenser’s Guyon might be understood to fulfil or part-fulfil the criteria for temperance, just as his destruction of the “ouerwrought” (2.12.60.6) artifice of Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss in canto 12 might be interpreted as a victory for the virtuous, as opposed to the vicious imagination.<sup>25</sup> Yet as scholars have observed, there is something rather strange about Spenser’s association of temperance with the violence of both of these acts. True temperance, it has been suggested, connotes an innate proportionality of desire, an idea which seems foreign to Guyon’s total and unconditional repudiation of all that greets him in the Bower. Wadowski puts it nicely: in Guyon’s interaction with Acrasia’s gatekeeper, “Excesse is answered with excess.”<sup>26</sup> Some stanzas later, the champion of temperance tears down Acrasia’s “pleasaunt bowres and Pallace brave / . . . with rigour pittillesse;” in a “tempest of . . . wrathfulnesse” (12.83.1-2; 4) – a singular failure, in Jonsonian terms, to effect any reconciliation between virtue and pleasure, and decidedly un-Homeric.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For this argument, see C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Wadowski, “Spenser, Tasso, and the Ethics of Allegory,” *Modern Philology* 111, no. 3 (2014): 382.

<sup>27</sup> Odysseus accepts Circe’s invitation to “mount our bed, so that we may mingle in lovemaking / and trust each other in friendship” in Homer’s text (*Od.* 10.334-35). In contrast to Guyon’s “pittillesse” destruction of Acrasia’s



To an extent, the seeming incongruity of Spenser's presentation of Guyon's behaviour in the Bower with the virtue the fairy knight is supposed to exemplify may be explained by changes wrought historically to the notion of temperance as it was appropriated by Christianity. Weatherby has studied how medieval and early modern translators of the New Testament into Latin – amongst them, Erasmus<sup>28</sup> – tended to render *enkrateia* (ἐγκράτεια) as *temperantia* or temperance, rather than *continentia* or continence where the Greek term did not seem to indicate solely an abstention from sexual temptation. Temperance is therefore not viewed as a “fuller” virtue than continence, but describes rather any continent action that is not restricted to the realm of sexual conduct: a quantitative, rather than qualitative distinction that imbues temperance itself with connotations of refusal and negation.<sup>29</sup> For Weatherby, this semantic change results ultimately from the Greek church fathers' prioritization of *enkrateia* over Aristotelian *sophrosyne* in line with ascetic views on passion and sensuality,<sup>30</sup> views which Spenser in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* would largely appear to uphold. In this part of the poem, continence is indeed presented as a virtue of abstention, exemplified by the virginal Belphebe and by Sir Guyon's resistance of the “naked Damzelles” (2.12.63.6) in Acrasia's Bower.

A case might also be made, however, for the importance to this shift in emphasis of the *facere-perficere* distinction invoked by Augustine in the *Contra Julianum* to explain Paul's lament in Romans 7:15, 22, “that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I,” a key passage for Christian understanding of akratic or incontinent action.<sup>31</sup> While in his earlier work Augustine had held the speaker of Romans 7 to be the akratic Paul under the law, by the time of his writing of the *Contra Julianum* he had come to view the passage as relating to *Paulus Christianus*, an enkratic person no longer bound by the law yet still subject to sinful desire.<sup>32</sup> Augustine's commentary on this passage relies upon a belief, “more or less presupposed in the medieval

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Bower, moreover, after Circe restores Odysseus's men and witnesses their reunion with their leader, we are told that “the goddess herself took pity” (*Od.* 10.399).

<sup>28</sup> Harold L. Weatherby, “Spenser's Legend of Ἐγκράτεια,” *Studies in Philology* 93, no. 2 (1996): 214.

<sup>29</sup> Weatherby, “Spenser's Legend of Ἐγκράτεια,” 213–17.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, “Contra Iulianum Opus Imperfectum,” in *Opera Omnia. Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, vol. 45, 47 vols. (Paris: Lutetiae Parisiorum, 1844), 3, 26, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 25.

discussion on Aristotle's Ethics,"<sup>33</sup> that as a punishment for his disobedience in the Fall, man's will was permanently divided along the battle-lines of "rational desire" and "sinful concupiscence."<sup>34</sup> Given his ever-present concupiscence, man can do good (*facere bonum*), but he can never do so completely (*perficere*). In the sixteenth century, this would inform Luther's notion of man as *simul iustus et peccator*: the justified sinner may perform good deeds, but in the presence of perpetual concupiscence he is unable to achieve a state of perfect virtue.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, as Tilmouth has suggested, for Spenser it may be that "the maintenance of continence . . . is all that man can hope to achieve."<sup>36</sup>

Given, however, the attention paid to Aristotle in Spenser's "Letter," it seems unlikely that the poet was unaware of an alternative ethical model. Medieval commentators such as Aquinas did indeed understand Aristotle's *enkrateia* or continence to be an "underdeveloped" form of the full virtue of *sophrosyne* or temperance,<sup>37</sup> and the Aristotelian hierarchy is preserved in more contemporary literature.<sup>38</sup> The idea of a developmental relationship existing between continence and temperance fits, moreover, with the model of moral and spiritual progress mapped onto the epic genre by early modern writers of a more contemporary period. Landino, for instance, directly invokes the terms *continentia* and *temperantia* in a hierarchical fashion in his allegorical interpretation of Aeneas's sea-voyage as a passage to virtue,<sup>39</sup> a reading which is particularly suggestive in light of the mini-Odyssey that Spenser writes into the beginning of Book 2, and the metaphoric description of his poetic enterprise as a "feeble barke" sailing to "her iourneyes end" that appears at the end of Book 1 (12.1.8;7).<sup>40</sup> I would suggest, then, that Guyon's ostensibly intemperate behaviour in Acrasia's Bower

<sup>33</sup> Risto Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought: From Augustine to Buridan* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 85.

<sup>34</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought*, 27. Augustine did not know *EN VII*, and thus does not comment on Aristotle's problem, but his writings on Romans 7 were superimposed onto discussions of Aristotelian *akrasia* by later expositors: see Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, *Martin Luthers Werke*, vol. 56, 127 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883), 343, 18-19.

<sup>36</sup> Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> "To sum up, continence is to temperance as the unripe to the fully mature": Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. John Patrick Reid (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 2-2, q. 155, a. 4.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse and Drayton Henderson, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (London: J. M. Dent, 1928), 269.

<sup>39</sup> Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Moss notes that Spenser's allegorical interpretation of mythology, and "Spenser's interpretation of Homer in particular" was justified by Aristotle, who "regarded the poets as moral and political teachers. In fact he drew

does not result from an aversion to or misunderstanding of Aristotle's paradigm. It is revealing rather of the difficulties engendered by Spenser's imaginative engagement with a Christian ethics that retained the classical terms of continence and temperance, yet stripped them of their Aristotelian technicality.<sup>41</sup>

Since as we have discussed, Guyon's status as the knight of temperance is strongly tied to his abstemious, continent action, Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* would seem to advertise the progressive potential of this "negative" type of chastity. If this is indeed Spenser's endeavour, it is not entirely successful. Although as I have discussed temperance is largely understood as quantitatively, rather than qualitatively different from continence in the Christian tradition, the Aristotelian framework of *The Faerie Queene* inevitably lends it another sense, that of moderation. Consequently, the suggestion of a qualitative disjunction between the two states or virtues is latent in the text, raising the question of whether human agency can play any real part in spiritual or moral improvement. It is interesting to speculate whether Spenser himself might have been alert to the problems incurred by his pairing of a chastity nourished by denial with a temperance that nominally, at least, heralds Aristotle's golden mean. For Spenser, like Calvin, chastity could pertain either to virginity or to monogamous marital love,<sup>42</sup> and Kaske has suggested that Guyon's defeat by Britomart, who will later be married, "demonstrates the difference between negative and positive chastity, showing a slight preference for the latter."<sup>43</sup> This problematizes Weatherby's otherwise compelling argument that Spenser's ultimate stance on the passions in *The Faerie Queene* is closely modelled on the views of Patristic writers like Chrysostom, who "interprets the chief theological virtue, charity, as being identical with practice of a

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his conceptions in the Ethics and Politics largely from the Greek poets, especially from Homer." (William Fenn De Moss, *The Influence of Aristotle's Politics and Ethics on Spenser* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 5). See for instance NE 1109a 30, where Aristotle uses Circe's warning to Odysseus to steer clear of both Scylla and Charybdis but further from the more dangerous, Charybdis, to illustrate the idea of the golden mean. That Aristotle drew his ideas in the *Ethics and Politics* "largely" from the Greek poets, is, of course debatable.

<sup>41</sup> Something of this, I suspect, is reflected in critical disagreement about whether Acrasia's character, or even her name, is sufficiently compatible with *akrasia*. Scodel argues that "The Bower of Bliss's Acrasia derives from the Aristotelian term for the half vice of 'incontinence,' but *akrasia* is literally translatable as 'distemper' in the sense of an unbalanced mixture" (*Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature*, 85). Berger suggests that Spenser's Acrasia stands in opposition to both *krasis* (κράσις), proper blending or tempering, and *kratos* (κράτος), power or power over oneself, and is thus simultaneously akratic and intemperate (Harry Berger, Jr., *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's "Faerie Queene,"* vol. 137, Yale Studies in English (US: Archon Books, 1967), 66.

<sup>42</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1843), 4.12.28.

<sup>43</sup> Carol V. Kaske, "Chastity," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton, 377.

mortifying, and deifying, asceticism. When Saint Paul says that charity ‘is not easily provoked,’ Chrysostom understands him to mean that the charitable man is beyond perturbation of passion.”<sup>44</sup>

### Milton’s Spenser: the *Areopagitica*

There is evidence that Spenser’s treatment of temperance in the *Faerie Queene* preoccupied contemporary, as well as more recent readers and scholars. Critics who notice Spenserian influence in Milton’s *Maske* often invoke his laudatory appeal to “our sage and serious poet Spenser” in the *Areopagitica* as proof of the enduring importance of the earlier writer to Milton’s perception of his own literary project.<sup>45</sup> The relationship between Spenser and Milton suggested by the tract as a whole, however, is far from straightforward. In the *Areopagitica*, Milton argues that a “cloister’d virtue, unexercis’d & and unbreath’d” which “knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure.” This is the reason, he suggests, that Spenser, “whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse, that he might see and know, and yet abstain” (311). There is a curious inaccuracy here. In Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, Guyon in fact ventures unaccompanied into Mammon’s cave, a point which, as Butler notes, Spenser “belabors” in his narrative.<sup>46</sup> Critics have tried to account for Milton’s “astonishing mistake” in a number of ways.<sup>47</sup> Typically, however, these endeavours share a tendency to attempt to prove that Milton’s reading either supports Spenser’s depiction of Guyon as a true knight of temperance, or revises the text so that the character’s possession of this virtue, as Milton understood it, is made to seem more thoroughly established. To my mind, neither of these explanations prove satisfactory.

<sup>44</sup> Harold L. Weatherby, *Mirrors of Celestial Grace: Patristic Theology in Spenser’s Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 101.

<sup>45</sup> See for instance Guillory, *Poetic Authority*, 131.

<sup>46</sup> George F. Butler, “Milton’s ‘Sage and Serious Poet Spenser’: Error and Imitation in *The Faerie Queene* and *Areopagitica*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49, no. 2 (2007): 103.

<sup>47</sup> See Butler, “Milton’s ‘Sage and Serious Poet Spenser,’” 102 for this history and reasons for believing Milton’s error was deliberate.

The crux of the matter lies, I would suggest, in the role that the Palmer plays in the *Faerie Queene*. It is widely held that the Palmer represents the “objectification of Guyon’s ‘rational principle’” as he faces the various tests of his virtue in Book 2.<sup>48</sup> This grants the Palmer symbolic compatibility with both the “intellectualist” account of *akrasia* that emerges from Aristotle, and with a still prevalent medieval anthropology which located fallen man’s depravity in his sensual appetite or flesh, and emphasised in Augustinian or Thomistic terms a divided human will over which reason, man’s “erected wit,”<sup>49</sup> might still reign.<sup>50</sup> The latter accounts for the ethical paradigm applied to Alma’s palace, the “dwelling place” of “Temperance” at the beginning of canto 11:

What warre so cruel, or what siege so sore,  
 As that, which strong affections doe apply  
 Against the forte of reason euermore,  
 To bring the sowle into captiuity:  
 Their force is fiercer through infirmity  
 Of the fraile flesh, relenting to their rage,  
 And exercise most bitter tyranny  
 Vpon the partes, brought into their bondage:  
 No wretchednesse is like to sinfull vellenage.<sup>51</sup>

(2.11.1)

A difficulty emerges, however, if we try to align Guyon’s innate, inborn rationality with the reformed theological leanings of Spenser’s text,<sup>52</sup> where the “monstruous” minds of Acrasia’s transformed “louers” point to the poet’s departure from Homer, and his revision of the common allegorical reading of the Circe myth to align with the doctrine that if man’s flesh is utterly corrupt, the contagion of

<sup>48</sup> Ernest Sirluck, “Milton Revises ‘The Faerie Queene,’” *Modern Philology* 48, no. 2 (1950): 92.

<sup>49</sup> Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie*, C2r.

<sup>50</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> As Hamilton (*FQ* n. 2.11.1.9) notes, Spenser’s “sinfull vellenage” (“vellenage” takes its root from the Latin *velle*) suggests the “bondage of the flesh to sin through the corrupt will.”

<sup>52</sup> See Prescott, “Complicating the Allegory” for a sensitive analysis of the *Faerie Queene*’s relationship to Reformation tropes and ideals, and Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, on the question of Spenser’s religious affiliations.

original sin has also debased that part of him most like to God – his mind. With the Fall, as Calvin observes, “the Image of God” in man was “so corrupted, that all that remaineth, is but ugly deformity”; “our reason is overwhelmed with deceptions in so many forms, is obnoxious to so many errors, stumbles at so many impediments, and is embarrassed in so many difficulties, that it is very far from being a certain guide.”<sup>53</sup> Reason alone therefore should not be enough to secure virtuous action, and indeed, in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* man’s natural proclivity for good – regardless, indeed, of whether we consider Guyon himself to be a “natural” man or otherwise<sup>54</sup> – often plays second fiddle to the supernatural and practical wisdom provided by external spiritual guides. Guillory has argued that it is on these grounds that Milton revises Spenser’s account of Guyon’s journey through Mammon’s cave. Milton, he suggests, writes the Palmer into the episode because he believes that Guyon’s self-reliance threatens to endanger the reader’s notion of Spenser’s virtue, as well as that of the fictions he creates: it is Milton, after all, who wrote that “he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy.”<sup>55</sup> According to Guillory, wishing to “decrease the distance between himself and Spenser,” Milton thus bolsters the moral authority of the *Faerie Queene* in order to boost his own.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of the overarching polemic of the *Areopagitica* itself, however, a different picture emerges. Milton’s tract defends the liberty of the press against the extensive censorship commissioned by the Parliamentary Licensing Law of 1643.<sup>57</sup> To this end, Milton expands the

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<sup>53</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1574), 1.15.4; 2.2.25.

<sup>54</sup> Woodhouse’s theory that Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene* pertains to the “order of grace,” and Book 2 to the “order of nature,” so that “what touches the Redcross Knight bears primarily upon revealed religion, or belongs to the order of grace, whatever touches Guyon bears upon natural ethics, or belongs to the order of nature,” is well known (A. S. P. Woodhouse, “Nature and Grace in the Faerie Queene,” *English Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1949): 204). As this chapter progresses, it will become evident that I do not uphold Woodhouse’s claim. While Guyon’s exact spiritual status is contested, passages at 2.1.27, 2.1.32 and 2.1.59 clearly indicate his Christianity. On the problems with Woodhouse’s argument, see Robert Hoopes, ““God Guide Thee, Guyon’: Nature and Grace Reconciled in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II,” *The Review of English Studies* 5, no. 17 (1954): 14–24; Hume, *Edmund Spenser*.

<sup>55</sup> Milton, *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, 303.

<sup>56</sup> Guillory, *Poetic Authority*, 132.

<sup>57</sup> The act gave “orders . . . for suppressing the great late abuses and frequent disorders in Printing many false, forged, scandalous, seditious, libellous, and unlicensed Papers, Pamphlets, and Books to the great defamation of

Horatian argument that art should both instruct and delight to encompass a claim that the virtue of any literary pursuit lies in the individual reader's act of discernment. The ability to read rightly can only be developed through a confrontation of both the good and evil of the world as it manifests (for instance) in literature, like to "those confused seeds which were impos'd on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder" (310). It is only through such a process that man, moreover, may achieve "true temperance," a virtue that is threatened therefore by the licenser's heavy hand.<sup>58</sup> The possible implications of this for Milton's reading of Spenser are implicit in Cefalu's discussion of the "ethical quandaries" at stake in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>59</sup> Against Woodhouse's taxonomy of two orders as operative in Spenser's epic, the order of nature and the order of grace, Cefalu posits a third order of Mosaic law, a frequent resort, he suggests, of Protestant theologians who struggled to theorize a model of practical morality compatible with Reformed doctrines of justification and sanctification. In the *Faerie Queene*, this law is embodied by the Palmer, who "affects Guyon in the Bower by the brute force of example rather than by a nuanced pedagogy."<sup>60</sup>

This assertion, I would argue, is borne out by the interactions between Guyon and the Palmer in Book 2 before they reach the Bower. When we first encounter the Palmer in Spenser's narrative, he supports himself with a "staffe" which "his feeble steps did stire, / Least his long way his aged limbes should tire" (2.1.7.4-5). It soon becomes clear, however, that this is no ordinary crutch. The staff provides both physical and moral support: the Palmer guides Guyon

. . . ouer dale and hill,

And with his steedy staffe did point his way:

His race with reason, and with words his will,

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Religion and Government." See "June 1643: An Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S10. Rait (London: HMSO, 1911), pp. 184-186. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp184-186> [accessed 25 August 2018].

<sup>58</sup> Kolbrener suggests that there is a broader, political statement in all of this: "the *Areopagitica*, in its very form – the five-part structure of the classical deliberative oration – argues implicitly for the creation of a diffused, inclusive, and corporate authority." Such a view, he argues, is commensurate with Milton's "emergent republicanism" (William Kolbrener, "'Plainly Partial': The Liberal *Areopagitica*," *English Literary History* 60, no. 1 (1993): 62).

<sup>59</sup> Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern English Literature*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

From fowle intemperaunce he ofte did stay,  
 And suffred not in wrath his hasty steps to stray.

(1.34.5-9)

In Canto 12, the staff accrues further significance as its magical, indeed, miraculous power is revealed. On the shores of the island that houses Acrasia's Bower, Guyon and the Palmer are met by the

. . . hideous bellowing  
 Of many beasts, that roard outrageously,  
 As if that hungers poynt, or Venus sting  
 Had them enraged with fell surquedry.

(12.39.1-4)

The references to "hunger" and "Venus sting" indicate that the beasts represent the "deadly threat" (40.1) that untrammelled appetite and concupiscence pose to man's moral and spiritual life, a common allegorical interpretation, as we have seen, of Circe's metamorphosis of Odysseus's men. Spenser reveals that the Palmer's staff has the unique ability to subdue these beasts and the passions they represent:

The Palmer ouer them his staffe vpheld,  
 His mighty staffe, that could all charmes defeat:  
 Eftsoones their stubborne corages were queld,  
 And high aduaunced crests downe meekely feld,  
 Instead of fraying, they them selues did feare,  
 And trembled, as them passing they beheld:  
 Such wondrous powre did in that staffe appeare,  
 All monsters to subdew to him, that did it beare.



(12.40.2-9)

The word “charmes” hints at Circean involvement in the condition of these creatures, although the reader will have to wait until the end of the canto for confirmation that “These seeming beasts are men indeed” (85.1). The Circean trope is extended through the next stanza, however, as Spenser provides further interpretative guidance in the form of a potted history of the origins of the Palmer’s staff: we learn that

Of that same wood it fram’d was cunningly,  
Of which Caduceus whilome was made,  
Caduceus the rod of *Mercury*.

(41.1-3)

Within the Circean parameters of Spenser’s allegory, this suggestion of the Mercurial attributes of the Palmer’s staff aligns its interventionist powers most neatly with those of the moly plant, which as we have seen, in the *Odyssey* is given by Hermes to Odysseus as protection against Circe’s charms, and was commonly held to represent *logos* or right reason.

In Homer’s myth, however, Circe herself is in possession of a wand or *rhabdos* (*Od.* 10.238), which she uses to drive the men-turned-pigs into their sty. As my previous chapter has suggested, in masques of this period the wand becomes a site of contested power, and tends to be either taken from Circe or freely given away by the goddess as she faces defeat.<sup>61</sup> Intriguingly, however, the beasts that oppose Guyon and the Palmer are not the lions and wolves that the Homeric Circe renders unnaturally tame — the monsters or *pelora* which so trouble Odysseus’s men with their unnatural behaviour as they approach Circe’s palace — but wild beasts

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<sup>61</sup> Yarnall notes that Circe’s “transformative magic seems to reside in the drug rather than the rod, which may well be an ordinary driver’s stick. Yet because . . . [Circe’s raising of her wand] illustrates more clearly than any other female dominance over the male, the *rhabdos* has come to seem potent, a symbol of phallic powers improperly assumed“ (*Transformations of Circe*, 12).

Who all attonce, gaping full greedily,  
 And rearing fercely their vpstarting crests,  
 Ran towards, to deuoure those vnexpected guests.

(12.39.7-9)

In using his staff at this point in the narrative to subdue the beasts without restoring their human shapes, the Palmer's behaviour might appear suspiciously Circean. The reason Spenser takes this risk, I would suggest, is that the staff's miraculous effect here underscores another force that is central to Book 2's allegorical concerns: the force, or rule, of law.

A suggestion that the Palmer's rod is an instrument of legal arbitration is given with the reference to the buckling of the beasts' "high aduaunced crests" (40.5) in the presence of his staff. Earlier in Book 2, Medina – whose name denotes her close connection to the idea of temperance, or the Aristotelian mean – intervenes in a skirmish between Sir Guyon, Sir Huddibras and Sans-loy. After the knights have

. . . lett their cruell weapons fall,  
 And lowly did abase their lofty crests  
 To her faire presence, and discrete behests.  
 Then she began a treaty to procure,  
 And stablish termes betwixt both their requests,  
 That *as a law for euer* should endure;  
 Which to obserue in word of knights they did assure.

(2.32.3-9. My emphasis)

If an invocation of law is explicit here, implicit too, in the wider narrative of Medina and her sisters Elissa (too little) and Perissa (too much), are the law's limitations. Between a defective elder sister and an excessive younger sister, Spenser posits Medina as an important tempering force: "With equall measure she did moderate / The strong extremities of their outrage" (38.3-4). Yet as Stambler notes,

the respective position of each sister proves ultimately intractable, so that “one of the lessons (for the reader) of Medina’s house is that while Medina can admonish and temporarily deter her half-sisters and their lovers from intemperate behaviour, she cannot instill in them a temperate disposition.”<sup>62</sup> The sisters’ conduct may be moderated, but they remain inwardly unreformed.

In order to confirm the suspicion that Spenser’s portrayal of the Palmer’s staff embraces this same, imperfect trope of legalism, we need to look again to canto 12. Earlier in this canto, during their sea passage towards Acrasia’s Bower, Guyon and the Palmer escape one danger, the “Whirlepoole of decay,” (12.20.2) to be met almost immediately by another: “an hideous hoast . . . / Of huge Sea monsters” (12.22.8-9) which “Came rushing in the fomy waues enrold” (12.25.4), threatening to capsize their vessel. While the monsters “appall” Sir Guyon (25.6), the Palmer springs to action — first through a motion of discernment which diagnoses “these fearefull shapes disguiz’d” as proceeding from Acrasia “to worke vs dread, / And draw from on this iourney to proceede” (26.3-5), and then through a practical application of this knowledge:

. . . lifting vp his vertuous staffe on hye,  
 He smote the sea, which calmed was with speed,  
 And all that dreadfull Armie fast gan flye  
 Into great Tethys bosome, where they hidden lye.

(26.7-9)

As commentators have observed, this verse is highly allusive to parts of Exodus, where Moses’s “virtuous staffe” is wielded to similarly astounding effect. Importantly, as Cefalu reminds us, “Reformed theology . . . specifically connected Moses’s rod to divine law.”<sup>63</sup> In the scenario above, the Palmer is responsible for both judgement and action. Guyon does not engage with the practical syllogism at all, ostensibly because he is crippled by fear — the paradox being that, as Cefalu has

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<sup>62</sup> Peter D. Stambler, “The Development of Guyon’s Christian Temperance,” *English Literary Renaissance* 7, no. 1 (1977): 58.

<sup>63</sup> Cefalu, *Moral Identity*, 73.

discussed, for Reformation exegetes Old Testament Law was often synonymous with the “servile fear experienced by the depraved upon confronting an absolutist God.”<sup>64</sup>

Following their escape from the sea monsters, Guyon and the Palmer encounter two further dangers which should hypothetically afford Guyon two more opportunities to put virtue into action, yet in both instances it is the Palmer who evaluates the situation and prescribes the appropriate course of conduct. Sailing onwards to Acrasia’s Bower, Guyon and the Palmer “heard a ruefull cry / Of one, that wayld and pittifully wept” (27.2-3). As they draw closer, they see an island, and it becomes clear that the source of these “resounding plaints” is

A seemely Maiden, sitting by the shore,  
That with great sorrow and sad agony,  
Seemed some great misfortune to deplore,  
And lowd to them for succour called euermore.

(27.6-9)

Upon hearing the maiden’s cries, Guyon, like every good knight who spies a damsel in distress, feels compelled to go to her aid: he

. . . streight his Palmer bad,  
To stere the bote towards that dolefull Mayd,  
That he might know, and ease her sorrow sad.

(28.1-3)

The Palmer refuses to allow this, however, on the (by now familiar) grounds that the “seemely” maiden is not what she seems. In the *Areopagitica*, an ironic echo of Guyon’s hope that he “might know, and . . .” sounds in Milton’s claim that the Palmer’s presence in Mammon’s cave ensures that Guyon “might see and know, and yet abstain.” Admittedly, Guyon’s desire to visit the maiden’s

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 74.

island so that he might “ease her sorrow sad” is not a course for abstinence. Yet the opportunity for Guyon to know, appraise the situation in full, and determine appropriate action based on lived experience – a principle, as we will see, of the utmost importance to Milton – is also curtailed by the Palmer’s “unassailable commands and speech-acts.”<sup>65</sup>

Neither does the Palmer’s approach appear to have any real didactic advantages. Leaving the maiden behind them, the pair sail towards their next obstacle, the bay of mermaids. Five siren-like creatures here begin to ply Guyon with “pleasaunt tunes” that praise him as the

. . . fayre sonne of gentle Faery,  
That art in mighty armes most magnifyde  
Aboue all knights, that euer batteill tryde.

(32.2-5)

This is a direct appeal to Guyon’s pride in his martial prowess and knightly conquests, accomplishments which the Knight is prone to value excessively, as the preference he had expressed to Mammon for “riches” fit for the “high heroicke spright,” “crownes and kingdoms . . . / Faire shields, gay steedes, bright armes” (2.7.10.9; 6-8) earlier in Book 2 might suggest. Coupled with the quintessentially Circean temptation of respite from heroic labour – “This is the Port of rest from troublous toyle, / The worldes sweet In, from paine and wearisome turmoyle” (12.32.8-9) – Guyon needs little further persuasion: his senses are “ticked” or lulled by the “straunge kinde of harmony” he finds in the mermaids’ song (33.7; 6).<sup>66</sup> This misapprehension is fuelled by Guyon’s mortal weakness, his susceptibility to sinful pride and the allure of rest after strenuous effort. Yet one wonders if his inability to correctly “heare” the mermaids’ “rare melody” (33.9) in part also derives

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>66</sup> It seems likely that Spenser is parodying here the Neoplatonic myth of the sirens of the spheres, whose singing, as we have seen in the *Balet comique*, was believed to maintain cosmic harmony. Guyon, who hears in the ominous crashing of the waves against the rocks only a “solemne Meane” (33.4) befitting of his status as the Knight of Temperance, clearly fails to distinguish these mermaids or sirens *in malo* from their ethereal cousins *in bono*. Such interpretative difficulty will only increase as Guyon and the Palmer venture into Acrasia’s Bower, where “Right hard it was, for wight, which did it heare, / To read, what manner musicke that mote bee” (12.70.5-6), and where the danger of confusing the sacred and the profane becomes even greater in the presence of “Angelicall soft trembling voyces” which make “To th’instruments diuine response meet” (71.3-4).

from his inexperience. The danger of death that awaits Guyon, should he attend too long to the mermaids' song is explicitly foretold by the narrator. By contrast, we only have the Palmer's word that the "dolefull mayd" Guyon is prevented from encountering a few stanzas previously would work his "ruine" (29.4). Deprived of the opportunity to discern and confront this arguably lesser danger, it is little wonder that in the face of the mermaids' mystical charm offensive, the knight fails to "see and know, and yet abstain."

There is cause, then, to wonder whether Milton's retrospective addition of the Palmer to Spenser's Mammon episode might thus work to draw attention to, and implicitly criticize, the domineering aspect of this Moses-like figure throughout Book 2, to suggest the Palmer's continued presence in both Guyon's and the reader's mind despite the momentary narrative exclusion of his character. On one level, Milton's moralistic misreading – if we accept it as such – of Guyon's journey through the cave of Mammon might be accounted for as a performative justification of his own rhetoric in the *Areopagitica*,<sup>67</sup> where overall, the treatment of historic individuals charged with imposing and enforcing moral codes in the tract is far from uncritical, and where for Kolbrener, Milton's often simultaneous assertion and subversion of the necessity of such mediatory figures is "one of the central paradoxes of the tract."<sup>68</sup> Yet there is evidence to suggest that Milton's revision of the *Faerie Queene* was not a purely self-reflexive exercise. The coincidence of the *Areopagitica*'s bearing upon Milton's ongoing feud with his contemporary, the Puritan clergyman Herbert Palmer, and Milton's allusion in the same tract to Spenser's fictional Palmer, seems to have escaped critical attention. It seems likely, however, that Milton's selective appropriation of this character, from this

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<sup>67</sup> A further layer of ambiguity emerges when we consider the complexity of the relationship between the *Areopagitica*'s formal attributes and the Miltonic voice's authoritative claims in the tract. Butler observes that

Beginning with the title page of his pamphlet, Milton deliberately misleads the reader. By proclaiming *Areopagitica* a speech, he gives an early signal that the text that follows may not completely be what it seems. And by calling his pamphlet a speech, Milton introduces the character of a fictional speaker, a common citizen who, like any other citizen, is capable of making mistakes. And so the "mistakes" that occur in *Areopagitica* are not the failings of Milton; they are, rather, the errors of Milton's persona, the 'Mr. John Milton' who makes a speech to Parliament. ("Milton's 'Sage and Serious Poet Spenser,'" 107)

This reading, however, fails to take into account the seriousness of the claims Milton makes in the tract, which as my thesis will demonstrate, populate his wider corpus. Butler's argument is for this reason finally unconvincing.

<sup>68</sup> Kolbrener, "'Plainly Partial,'" 67.

particular episode of Spenser's text, was conditioned by something more than chance. Herbert Palmer had attacked Milton's *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) in a sermon, "The glasse of Gods providence towards his faithfull ones," which appeared in the Stationers Register on 7th November 1644, deploring the work as a "wicked booke [which] is abroad and *uncensured*; though *deserving to be burnt*, whose *Author* hath been so *impudent* as to *set his Name* to it."<sup>69</sup> In his address to parliament at the beginning of the *Tetrachordon* (1645), Milton issues a scathing response to Palmer's complaint, demanding to know "why I should be subject, in such a notorious and illegal manner, to the intemperancies of this mans preaching choler."<sup>70</sup> Milton takes particular umbrage at Palmer's accusation of the "impudence" of his admission of authorship, given that "the late Discourse of Scripture and Reason" – a treatise co-authored by Palmer, which argued that citizens had the right to arm themselves to defend their liberties – was itself "publisht without a name, out of base fear, and the sly avoidance of what might follow to his detriment, if the party at Court should hap to reach him" (67-8). As this imputation of "base fear" begins to suggest, Milton in turn finds Palmer guilty of a hypocritical legalism. It is only fitting, therefore, that in the *Tetrachordon* he threatens to send the offending "impudence" back to his accuser "for a phylactery to stitch upon his arrogance" (68).

A phylactery, if not literally the letter of the law,<sup>71</sup> has strong textural and scriptural connotations. Although the word may more broadly signify an amulet or charm, in seventeenth-century literature it very often refers to verses from the Torah carried by Jewish men in small boxes (tefillin) and attached to the body of the bearer by leather straps.<sup>72</sup> The commandment to wear tefillin is given in Deuteronomy 6:8: "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes."<sup>73</sup> In his study of Milton's pejorative deployment of phylacteries in

<sup>69</sup> Herbert Palmer, *The Glasse of Gods Providence towards His Faithfull Ones* (London: G.M. for Th. Underhill, 1644), 57.

<sup>70</sup> Milton, "Tetrachordon," in *Works* (Columbia), 67.

<sup>71</sup> In the seventeenth century, as Magarik has found, "the mistaken belief that Jewish phylacteries contained the Decalogue was widespread." See Raphael Magarik, "Milton's Phylacteries: Textual Idolatry and Beginnings of Critical Exegesis," *Milton Studies* 57 (2016): 39.

<sup>72</sup> Given the particularly literary nature of Milton's quarrel with Palmer, and the textual preoccupations of the *Areopagitica* itself, I would suggest that the latter meaning is more applicable here. As Magarik has discussed, "beginning in the seventeenth century, Christian Hebraism made the more specific, Jewish tephillin available as a meaning for phylacteries, and the Reformation elevation of the biblical text made this meaning attractive" ("Milton's Phylacteries," 40).

<sup>73</sup> Three other Biblical passages have been interpreted by Rabbis as referring to tefillin: Exodus 6:9 and 6:13 and Deuteronomy 11:18. See *ibid.*, p34.

the *Tetrachordon* and other works, Magarik suggests that “since phylacteries are worn as signs . . . the metaphorical use of ‘phylactery’ is a sign about signs. It thus seems plausible that when Milton used the image of phylacteries, he intended to draw the reader’s attention to the process of interpretation, to the work required to travel from signifier to signified.”<sup>74</sup> More specifically, Magarik has argued, phylacteries in Milton’s texts are often deployed *in malo* as signs of “textual idolatry,”<sup>75</sup> a legalistic method of reading whereby the letter of scripture is celebrated above, or confused with, its spirit.<sup>76</sup> Such reading, for Milton, is implicated in the religious abuses committed by figures of suspect authority – figures, perhaps, like Herbert Palmer, whose cry to burn Milton’s books would, for the latter author, strike at the very heart of Christian liberty.

Milton’s invocation of a Palmer in the *Areopagitica* – a tract explicitly concerned with refuting censorship, published soon after Palmer’s complaint on 23rd November 1644 – is, then, extremely suggestive. Milton’s fury against Herbert Palmer for writing himself out of his own work, while censoring others more courageous in shouldering the responsibility and blame of authorship, could well account for his annexation of the clergyman’s name to a portrait of textual authority that, to the discerning reader, eventually proves less than flattering. The idea that in the *Areopagitica*, Milton forges a connection between Herbert Palmer and Spenser’s fictional Palmer gains additional credence when we consider that the Palmer’s wisdom and authority is seriously circumscribed by Spenser himself at least once in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queen*. In canto 1, after Guyon and the Palmer are led by Archimago to the Redcrosse knight, the Palmer praises Redcrosse for

. . . late most hard atchieu’ment by you donne,  
 For which enrolled is your glorious name  
 In heauenly Regesters aboute the Sunne,  
 Where you a Saint with Saints your seat haue wonne.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>76</sup> Magarik argues that such “idolatry” was an ironic by-product of the Reformers’ emphasis on the doctrine of *sola scriptura*: “As the spirit calcifies into the letter, the devotional Bible reading that began as an alternative to Catholic idolatry becomes its own impediment to true Christianity” (ibid., 43). Milton’s attitude towards biblical hermeneutics, sacraments and idolatry will be explored further in my next chapter.



(32.2-5)

The Redcrosse Knight responds to this exhortation with a lesson in theology: the Palmer is reminded by the knight that any glory he finds in his conduct belongs properly to God's prevenient grace:

Palmer, him answered the Redcrosse knight  
 His be the praise, that this atchieu'ment wrought,  
 Who made my hand the organ of his might;  
 More then goodwill to me attribute nought:  
 For all I did, I did but as I ought.<sup>77</sup>

(33.1-5)

Given what appears to be the Palmer's limited understanding of the operation of grace, it should not be surprising that the machinery of Spenser's narrative at times casts aspersions on the ethical or spiritual soundness of the judgments that the character is seen to make. This manifests particularly in the Palmer's inconsistent treatment of the morally dubious characters he encounters with Guyon on their journey towards the Bower. In canto 5, for instance, the Palmer refuses to help the beleaguered knight Pyrochles, since

He that his sorow sought through wilfulnesse,  
 And his foe fettred would release agayne,  
 Deserues to tast his follies fruit, repented payne.

(24.7-9)

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<sup>77</sup> This reiterates the narrator's warning at 1.10.6-9:

Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,  
 That thorough grace hath gained victory.  
 If any strength we haue, it is to ill,  
 But all the good is Gods, both power and eke will.

Pyrochles, lately defeated by Guyon, is at this moment being attacked by Furor, who in turn has been “inflam’d” (21.7) by Occasion – a figure held captive by Guyon, but lately released from her chains at Pyrochles’ request. This latter wrathful knight, who delights in “bloud and spoile” (4.42.4) and actively seeks Occasion for “strife and cruell fight” (42.7), is clearly within the grip of an intractable intemperance, characterised by an affinity for discord beyond that which ordinarily attends the continent man’s life of struggle.<sup>78</sup> As the narrative voice warns at the beginning of canto 5,

Who euer doth to temperaunce apply  
 His stedfast life, and all his actions frame,  
 Trust me, shal find no greater enemy,  
 Then stubborne perturbation, to the same;  
 To which right wel the wise doe giue that name,  
 For it the goodly peace of staid mindes  
 Does ouerthrow, and troublous warre proclame:  
 His owne woes authour, who so bound it findes,  
 As did Pirrhocles, and it wilfully vnbindes.

(5.1)

The Palmer’s decision not to intervene would on this occasion, then, appear to be justified.

As Book 2 progresses, however, the Palmer’s allocation of assistance comes to seem rather arbitrary. At the end of canto 12, as Guyon and the Palmer are leaving Acrasia’s Bower, they meet for a second time with the “wilde beasts” (39.6) the Palmer had earlier pacified with his staff. The Palmer now sees fit to explain their origin:

Sayd he, These seeming beasts are men indeed,  
 Whom this Enchauntresse hath transformed thus,

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<sup>78</sup> As Kane observes, Calvin “acknowledged strife as the inevitable and continuous expression of the battle with sin” (Sean Kane, *Spenser’s Moral Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 54).

Why lome her louers, which her lustes did feed,  
 Now turned into figures hideous,  
 According to their mindes like monstrous.  
 Sad end (quoth he) of life intemperate.

(85.1-6)

Despite the men's monstrosity and their intemperance, which the Palmer suggests has led to their transformation by Acrasia, at Guyon's request to "Let them returned be vnto their former state" (85.9), "Streight way he with his vertuous staffe them strooke, /And streight of beasts they comely men became" (86.1-20). In a sense, Spenser is simply following Homer here. In the *Odyssey*, as we have seen, Circe does restore the human forms of Odysseus's men. In Homer's text, however, they are also said to be made more beautiful at this second metamorphosis (*Od.*10.396). By contrast, when Spenser's "seeming beasts" are restored by the Palmer's Mosaic rod,

Yet being men they did vnmanly looke,  
 And stared ghastly, some for inward shame,  
 And some for wrath, to see their captiue Dame.

(86.3-5)

This outcome speaks both to the limitations of the law, which, as we have seen with Medina, addresses the outward appearance of sin (the letter), but not man's inner condition (the spirit),<sup>79</sup> and the dangerously capricious nature of its application: those of the beasts-turned men who are "wrath, to see their captiue Dame" would seem just as incurably vicious as Pyrochles. The failure of the Palmer's staff to work a true reformation of the monstrous minds of Acrasia's herd, moreover, marks the stick out as a kind of phylactery, both in terms of the legalistic, Mosaic nature of its application by the Palmer and its mythical association with Pagan magic (it is made of the same wood, we

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<sup>79</sup> See also Milton's *Areopagitica*: "A man may be a heretick in the truth; and if he beleeeve things only because his Pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determins, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie." (333).

remember, as Mercury's Caduceus).<sup>80</sup> As I have suggested, in Reformation discourse, phylacteries were used as a trope for idolatry, threatening a confusion, rather than infusion, of letter with spirit, appearance with essence. The importance of the semi-idolatrous rod in Book 2 as an instrument of both arbitration and retribution raises serious questions, therefore, about the moral and spiritual education Guyon obtains under the Palmer's tutelage.

The letter of the Palmer's law remains with Guyon throughout his travails in Mammon's cave, albeit somewhat transmuted or distorted: the prohibiting command is delivered rather by the "feend" (2.7.26.7) who, under the "Stygian lawes" will "rend [Guyon] in peeces with his rauenous pawes" (27.9; 8)

If euer couetous hand, or lustfull eye,  
Or lips he layd on thing that likte him best  
Or euer sleepe his eiestrings did vntye

(27.2-4)

Guyon's adherence to this injunction clearly protects him from the most immediate moral or spiritual danger of temptation, yet it also has a detrimental bearing on the degree of true temperance we might award the knight – a temperance which, in the last analysis, may amount to little more than "an insulated and unavailing relation to the self and the World's good."<sup>81</sup> Indeed, in theological terms, Book 2 does not evidence any particular moral or spiritual development within the Faerie Knight's own nature beyond that which the work of justification has already achieved.<sup>82</sup> This seems to speak to the difficulty of locating a coherent account of virtue-formation within the fatalistic parameters of

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<sup>80</sup> Magarik notes that the connection between phylacteries and pagan objects "goes back as early as John Chrysostom, who linked Jewish phylacteries with magical amulets" ("Milton's Phylacteries," 38). Interestingly, in his commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Sandys uses the detail of Circe's rod to present her as a kind of anti-Moses: she "could turne men into beasts (as here Vlisses mates into Swine) among her other miracles by making them drink of her charmed cup, and wauing her rod ouer them. Wherein the deuill perhaps aped that rod of Moses wherewith hee performed such wonders; or deriued from the Aegyptian Sorcerers, as now in vse among those of that profession" (*Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished*, 479).

<sup>81</sup> Carl Robinson Sonn, "Sir Guyon in the Cave of Mammon," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 1, no. 1 (1961): 27.

<sup>82</sup> See Cefalu, *Moral Identity*, 58, on the distinction between justification and sanctification in reformed theology. Broadly speaking, as a stage in the *ordo salutis* "sanctifying righteousness describes the moral outworking of justified grace" (*ibid.*, 64).

Reformed theology, a difficulty with which Milton, as I will argue in my next chapter, seems to have particularly struggled.

As Cefalu has found,

Sanctification theoretically promotes a renovation of moral character, yet it has trouble imagining that ethical agents develop their imparted characters according to any additive or developmental regimen of ethical conditioning. To the extent that every moral confrontation is a novel challenge, and the moral agent cannot draw on an experiential store of moral expertise and wisdom, every action reestablishes the regenerate as a moral apprentice whose ethical resources are not his or her own.<sup>83</sup>

For Milton, in the presence of a moral code enforced through legalistic prohibition, such “ethical resources” are even harder to locate within the conscience of the individual Christian man.<sup>84</sup> Leading up to his (mis)citation of Spenser in the *Areopagitica*, Milton declares that

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excrementall whitenesse. (311)

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 71

<sup>84</sup> Sirluck, and, more recently, Fallon and Giugni find no enthusiasm for Aristotelian habit (ἥθος), on which the *Ethics*' notion of virtue formation vitally depends, in Milton's work (Sirluck, “Milton Revises ‘*The Faerie Queen*’”; Stephen M. Fallon, “Milton and Literary Virtue,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42, 1 (2012): 181–200; Giugni, “The ‘Holy Dictate of Spare Temperance’”). Hampton, who draws attention to Milton's use of “the language of causality” in his discussion of the relationship between habit and the virtue in *De Doctrina Christiana*, disagrees (Bryan Adams Hampton, *Fleshly Tabernacles: Milton and the Incarnational Poetics of Revolutionary England* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2012), 173–74). Fallon argues that while Milton “intermittently endorses something very like Aristotle's understanding of the role of habituation in virtue, the ethical scene in his poetry repeatedly comes down to strenuous, heroic choice in the moment, not the operation of gradually acquired and settled virtue” (“Milton and Literary Virtue,” 191).

Although Guyon's meeting with Mammon is signalled by Spenser as a temptation, the character, arguably, is never tempted to the extent that we could deem the episode a true "trial" in the Miltonic sense. As Berger notes, during his descent into the cave, "Guyon displays one touch of fear when Mammon's goldsmiths look at him . . . Otherwise he seems impervious to the horror of the place; he followed Mammon 'evermore/ Ne darknesse him, ne daunger might dismay' (7.26). Therefore if the hero thinks he is undergoing an ordeal – a bona fide ordeal – he is deceived. His chief activity consists in muscle flexing – moral as well as physical."<sup>85</sup> The same might be concluded of Guyon's destruction of both the Circean "bowle" (12.49.3) of Genius, "Pleasures porter" (48.8) to the Bower, and Excesse's Circean cup, when the knight is finally entrusted by the Palmer to do the work of the practical syllogism himself. In Homer's tale, Odysseus is protected from the metamorphic effects of the Goddess's drug by the moly plant gifted to him by Hermes, which has the power to counteract Circe's *pharmakon kakon*. This does not, however, mean that he refuses to drink: as Yarnall notes, Odysseus "is fully receptive to Circe's power, unhesitatingly draining her cup. Yet he does not fall victim to her regressive pull."<sup>86</sup> The Greek's engagement with Circe in this manner, moreover, leads on to the Goddess's invitation for him to share her *perikalles* bed,<sup>87</sup> an offer which Odysseus, again following the advice of Hermes, gladly accepts. It is evident, then, that Odysseus's success on Circe's island is not dependent on the renunciation of pleasure – such pleasure, in fact, as Yarnall argues, becomes the pair's "grounds of trust."<sup>88</sup>

In the *Faerie Queene*, Guyon's abstinence in the Bower, as indeed in the Mammon episode, does serve to establish that the knight is not intemperate or vicious. Following the example of Pyrochles, Spenser's introduction of Gryll at the end of canto 12, a Homeric figure who resists the Palmer's attempt to restore his human form, serves to demonstrate what true intemperance looks like. Gryll, one of Acrasia's transformed lovers who "chooseth, with vile difference, / To be a beast, and lacke intelligence" (87.4-5), is shown to deliberately, unapologetically and persistently pursue vice: he

<sup>85</sup> Berger, *The Allegorical Temper*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 21.

<sup>87</sup> The adjective *περικαλλής*, used elsewhere by Homer as Yarnall (*ibid.*, 14) finds to describe that which is most beautiful in nature, may find its Spenserian echo in Acrasia's luscious bower.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

is determined to the last to preserve his “hoggish mind” (87.8). Guyon is clearly innocent of viciousness of this sort, and with the help of the Palmer, as I have discussed, remains continent throughout Book 2. Beyond this, however, as I have also shown, there is little moral or spiritual development to which he might aspire. Neither is this state of moral stasis necessarily presented as benign. Spenser’s description of Guyon’s conduct in Mammon’s Cave following the Palmer’s departure seems to suggest that a kind of atrophy occurs when the character is left to his own hubristic devices:

So Guyon hauing lost his trustie guyde,  
 Late left behind that Ydle lake, proceedes  
 Yet on his way, of none accompanyde;  
 And euermore himselfe with comfort feedes,  
 Of his owne vertues, and praise-worthie deedes.

(7.2.1-5)

This self-congratulatory self-consumption, which I would suggest results from the knight’s deprivation of external sources of moral or spiritual sustenance, culminates in the “deadly fit” which attacks his “enfeebled spright” (7.66.9; 5) at the end of canto seven. The significance of Guyon’s faint here has been subject to endless critical disputation, yet at the very least, as Hume notes, it is “irrefutable evidence of his condition as ‘fraile flesh and earthly wight,’ a condition he had forgotten when he savoured the thought of ‘his owne vertues,’ and boasted to Mammon about his ‘high heroicke spright.’”<sup>89</sup> As the first verse of the next canto makes clear, despite Guyon’s putative status as the Knight of Temperance – a virtue which in its full Aristotelian sense is foreign, as we have seen, to the Reformed Christian understanding of fallen man – only “th’exceeding grace / Of highest God” can succour such “creatures bace” (2.8.1.5-6; 2).

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<sup>89</sup> Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 115.

Allegory and *akrasia*, Law and death

If temperance has no real place in Reformed theology, neither does an Aristotelian, or intellectualist notion of *akrasia*. As *Paulus Christianus* exemplifies, man's intractable concupiscence renders even the devout man susceptible to sin, yet Luther insists that

We must not think that the Apostle wants to be understood as saying that he does evil which he hates, and does not do the good which he wants to do, in a moral or metaphysical sense, as if he did nothing good but only evil; for in common parlance this might seem to be the meaning of his words. But he is trying to say [Rom. 7:15-16] that he does not do the good as often as much and with as much ease as he would like. For he wants to act in a completely pure, free, and joyful manner, without being troubled by his rebellious flesh, and this he cannot accomplish.<sup>90</sup>

As Saarinen has outlined, Luther's adherence to Augustine's interpretation of Romans 7 is qualified by a denial that two opposing appetitive drives are present in man in any profound, metaphysical sense. Thus, he speaks of *vulnus totius hominis*, the wound of the whole man, and introduces the notion of compulsion to explain why the apostle may still have sinful thoughts or commit himself to wrong action. For Luther, "all voluntary sins stem from consent, which in turn reflects the dynamic unity of mind and flesh in the 'carnal' person. . . . Contrary to this, the spiritual actions of the individual reflect the situation of double inclination. Such actions are either continent actions or involuntary sins which occur without consent. Involuntary sins are compelled, rather than akratic. The category of incontinent action is thus effectively denied."<sup>91</sup>

Close attention to the trope of legalism embedded in Spenser's narrative in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, from Guyon's meeting of Amavia and Ruddymane in canto 1 through to his destruction of Acrasia's Bower at the book's close, reinforces the sense that a true confrontation

<sup>90</sup> Luther, *Martin Luthers Werke*, 56, 341, 27–33, trans. Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 117.

<sup>91</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 120.



between Guyon and *akrasia* proper never takes place. In canto 12, Guyon's encounter with the "Two naked Damzelles" wrestling "wantonly" (12.63.6; 8) in a fountain near Acrasia's Bower would seem to suggest a moment teasingly pregnant with akratic possibility. "When Guyon saw," we learn,

. . . he drew him neare,  
 And somewhat gan relent his earnest pace  
 His stubborne brest gan secret pleasaunce to embrace.

(12.65.10-12)

Wadowski notes that "Guyon stops and spends five stanzas frozen in place, watching and evidently enjoying the sight without comment," and argues that "it is the first time in the entire poem that this knight purposefully delays his pursuit of temperance."<sup>92</sup> Yet he is (of course) prevented from turning passion to action by the Palmer, who "much rebukt those wandring eyes of his, / And, counseld well, him forward thence did draw" (69.2-3). This episode seems particularly revealing given that contemporary discourse, drawing from Augustine and Calvin, often figured wrestling as an emblem for the Christian struggle.<sup>93</sup> In the context of the wider moral framework of Book 2 of the *Faerie*

<sup>92</sup> Wadowski, "Spenser, Tasso, and the Ethics of Allegory," 378.

<sup>93</sup> See John Calvin, "Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Romanos; Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli Ad Corinthios I.," in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 49, Corpus Reformatorum (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1863), 133:

*Hic ergo vides qualis sit in piis animis divisio, ex qua oritur illa concertatio spiritus et carnis, quam Augustinus alicubi eleganter vocat luctam christianam. Lex Dei ad iustitiae rectitudinem hominem vocat: iniquitas, quae est velut lex tyrannica Satanae, ad nequitiam instigat. Ad divinae legis obedientiam fert spiritus: caro in contrariam partem retrahit. Homo ita variis voluntatibus distractus iam quodammodo duplex est: sed quoniam principatum debet tenere spiritus, illa praecipue sese parte censet ac aestimat. Ideo Paulus ait, se captivum a carne sua vinciri: quia, quod titillatur adhuc pravis concupiscentiis et commovetur, id coactio est respectu spiritualis desiderii, quod prorsus resistit.*

Trans. Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 172:

Here [Rom 7:22–3] then you see what sort of division there is in pious souls, from which arises that contest between the spirit and the flesh, which Augustine in some place elegantly calls the Christian wrestling. The law calls man to the rule of righteousness; iniquity, which is, as it were, the tyrannical law of Satan, instigates him to wickedness: the Spirit leads him to render obedience to the divine law; the flesh draws him back to what is of an opposite character. Man, thus impelled by contrary desires, is now in a manner a twofold being; but as the Spirit ought to possess the sovereignty, he deems and judges himself to be especially on that side. Paul says that he was bound a captive by his flesh for this reason, because as he was still tempted and incited by evil lusts, he deemed this a coercion with respect to the spiritual desire, which was wholly opposed to them.

*Queene*, it is only at the point after Guyon, obeying the Palmer's command, has turned from any active participation in the Damzelles' sport – forestalling the possibility of akratic action – that the Palmer advises his charge they are to encounter “Acrasia, whom we must surprise, / Els she will slip away, and all our drift despise” (12.69.8-9). Indeed, a few stanzas on, Guyon and the Palmer successfully deploy “A subtile net” to prevent the escape of “The faire Enchauntresse” (12.81.4; 8).

For Wadowski and others, the use of the net, together with the destruction of Acrasia's Bower, marks the culmination not only of Guyon's quest but of the poetic meta-narrative that frames Book 2: its allegory. As I have discussed, Circe's *pharmakon*, the cup sweetened with honey, is implicated in Sidney's Horatian defence of poetic pleasures as a sweetener necessary for “the winning of the mind from wickednesse to virtue.”<sup>94</sup> Circean mythography, however, also informs a “commonplace” allegorical tradition, most clearly expressed in the writings of Plutarch, that offers Odysseus's ability to hear, yet withstand the captivating song of the Homeric sirens – a temptation recapitulated, as we have seen, in Spenser's tale of the bay of mermaids – as an exemplum for the kind of “right reading” that can keep the reader from vicious participation in the text.<sup>95</sup> In Homer's tale, Odysseus ensures the safety of his crew by ordering his men to block their ears with wax, before binding their leader to the mast of the ship. Consequently, the men are deaf to the Sirens' deadly chant and Odysseus, physically restrained by the binding from following his ears to a watery grave, can listen without danger as they row onwards. These details are central to Plutarch's argument against the Platonic charge that poetry corrupts the minds of the young and undiscerning through its overwhelming appeal to their senses. In his treatise “How the Young Man Should Study Poetry,” a tract which Gough suggests was “crucially important to Renaissance epic-Romance and for the poetic theory of Tasso and Sidney,”<sup>96</sup> Plutarch asks

Shall we then stop the ears of the young, as those of the Ithacans were stopped, with a hard and unyielding wax, and force them to put to sea in the Epicurean boat, and avoid poetry and steer their course clear of it; or rather shall we set them against some upright standard of

<sup>94</sup> Sidney, *Apologie for Poetrie*, E4r.

<sup>95</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 72–90.

<sup>96</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 77.

reason and there bind them fast, guiding and guarding their judgement, that it may not be carried away from the course by pleasure towards what will do them hurt?<sup>97</sup>

Binding here becomes synonymous with the operation of allegory: with the necessary hermeneutic safeguards in place, it is implied, the young need not forgo poetry altogether.

Spenser's intention to adhere to a cogent allegorical schema in the *Faerie Queene* is signalled by his description of the poem in his letter to Raleigh as a "continued allegory, or darke conceit" (4), and on one level, the events of Book 2 might be interpreted as a Plutarchian defence of allegory writ large. As we have seen, over the course of the Book, the Palmer and his prohibitions serve Guyon rather like Odysseus's mast, guiding his judgment and binding the knight to a course of continence when his baser impulses threaten to lead him astray. For Wadowski, therefore, the Palmer functions in part as "an allegory of allegorical reading."<sup>98</sup> Analogously, Acrasia's Bower, ostentatious in its artifice and "goodly workmanship," is the ultimate "dangerous text" that he and his charge must sanitise and mediate, their destruction of the Bower providing a "narrative account of allegory in action."<sup>99</sup> This account, however, is not wholly uncritical: as Wadowski suggests, it is in canto 12 of Book 2, when Guyon and the Palmer finally meet Acrasia, that the ethical implications of allegorical representation are most acutely raised. "Allegorical reading," in a general sense, might be surmised as a mode of textual interpretation that prioritizes meaning derived from moral abstraction over and above the shifting instabilities of language that underpin literary figuration: as Puttenham had put it, "we speake one thing and thinke another . . . our wordes and our meanings meete not."<sup>100</sup> In this vein, Wadowski argues that in the Palmer and Guyon's binding of Acrasia, "the net's status as a made object forces us to acknowledge that what the Palmer projects into the world is a bit of artifice; like

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<sup>97</sup> Plutarch, "How the Young Man Should Study Poetry," 79. See also Vredeveld, "Deaf as Ulysses to the Siren's Song," on an interesting counter-tradition whereby certain Renaissance moralists, who rewrite Homer's text to render Odysseus closer to the exemplary Stoic or Christian wiseman, insist that Odysseus, too, had wax in his ears.

<sup>98</sup> Wadowski, "Spenser, Tasso, and the Ethics of Allegory," 380.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 366. Following C. S. Lewis's reading of Spenser's Bower as an emblem for immoral art that deceives in order to ensnare (*The Allegory of Love*, 321–33), Kaske argues that "art is condemned in the Bower of Bliss by the gold ivy with green paint over it, the grapes made out of jewels, and the nonfunctional ivory gate with verisimilar scenes from the life of Medea. Art would seem to be merely a seductive illusion" (*Spenser and Biblical Poetics*, 86).

<sup>100</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 155.

the Bower it confronts, his allegorical reading of this space is a fictional ideal struggling to cope with ambiguities that challenge its unitary promise.”<sup>101</sup>

The net may also be significant, however, in a more specific, exegetical sense. As Gough has discussed, following Jerome and Boccaccio’s commentaries on the captive woman of Deuteronomy 21, writers such as Tasso, to whom Spenser’s portrayal of Acrasia’s Bower is deeply indebted,<sup>102</sup> invoked the notion of the bound woman as “a metaphor for allegoresis, a way to ‘convert’ pagan literature and rhetoric for Christian ends rather than censoring or abandoning it.”<sup>103</sup> In his own allegory of allegory – his allegoresis – Jerome had explicitly conflated the realm of the textual with that of the bound female body: “If you love a captive woman, that is, worldly wisdom, and if no beauty but hers attracts you, make her bald and cut off her alluring hair, that is to say, the graces of style, and pair away her dead nails. Wash her of the nitre of which the prophet speaks, and then take your ease with her. . . . Then shall the captive bring to you many children; from a Moabite she shall become an Israelitish woman.”<sup>104</sup> The gendered violence this would seem to embed at the heart of the allegorical project coheres with Teskey’s theory that “Allegory oscillates between a project of reference and a project of capture”; “Allegory operates above, and draws its energy from, a region of dissimilitude, of otherness, from which order may be won only by forceful intervention.”<sup>105</sup> This “otherness” is the body or matter of the text itself.

In the *Faerie Queene*, something of this battle between words and meaning, signifiers and signified, is conveyed through the Palmer’s use of the word “drift.” When the Palmer worries that Acrasia “will slip away, and all our drift despise” (12.69.9), the word drift carries its archaic, active meaning of an “intention, purpose, object, aim,” or “scheme, plot, design, device.”<sup>106</sup> In its two previous appearances in Book 2, however, “drift” conversely signifies incompleteness, the frustration of purpose, wandering or error, and evil intent. Thus, in canto 1, the villainous Archimago “By forged

<sup>101</sup> Wadowski, “Spenser, Tasso, and the Ethics of Allegory,” 380.

<sup>102</sup> David Quint, “Tasso, Torquato,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton, 678–79.

<sup>103</sup> Melinda J. Gough, “Tasso’s Enchantress, Tasso’s Captive Woman,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2001): 526.

<sup>104</sup> Jerome, Letter LXVI (“To Pammachius”), in *Saint Jerome*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, vol. 6 of *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1893), 138.

<sup>105</sup> Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 8; 55.

<sup>106</sup> *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), s.v. “drift, n.,” 4; 5, accessed August 26, 2018, <http://www.oed.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/view/Entry/57712?rskey=O5YiKK&result=1&isAdvanced=false>

treason, or by open fight / . . . seekes, of all his drifte the aymed end” (1.3.3-4). The negative associations of “drift” are even stronger when it is used by Spenser for a second time in canto 12, as Guyon and the Palmer, sailing with the “Ferryman” (10.1) Alma has lent them towards Acrasia’s bower, encounter a danger clearly modelled on the classical Scylla and Charybdis: the “Gulfe of Greedinesse” (3.4) and the “Rocke of vile Reproch” (8.1) Similarly to those who opt for Scylla over Charybdis, the Rocke

. . . drawes

All passengers, that none from it can shift:

For whiles they fly that Gulfes deuouring iawes,

They on this Rock are rent, and sunck in helples wawes.

(4.6-9)

The rock is described as “A daungerous and detestable place” (8.2) which attracts

wretches, whose vnhappie cace,

After lost credit and consumed thrift,

At last them driuen hath to this despairefull drift.

(7-9)

In the Homeric narrative, “drift,” especially in its associated sense of delay and “ennervating idleness,”<sup>107</sup> encompasses Odysseus’s year-long sojourn on Circe’s island. The most famous symbol of this temptation in the *Faerie Queene*, of course, is the monster “Errour,” who is encountered by Una and the Redcrosse Knight in the “wandering wood” of Book 1 (1.13.6). As Klein notes, Errour’s form, which “Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide, / But th’other halfe did womans shape retaine” (14.7-8) is “a conflation of the serpent and the siren,”<sup>108</sup> which also, perhaps, bears a resemblance to

<sup>107</sup> Brodwin, “Milton and the Renaissance Circe,” 21.

<sup>108</sup> Joan Larsen Klein, “From Errour to Acrasia,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1978): 176.

Virgil and Ovid's Scylla, a maiden above the waist and a raging monster below. Further Circean associations are present in the description of the Redcrosse Knight's journey into the wood: "Led with delight," he and Una soon "cannot finde that path, which first was showne, / But wander too and fro in waies vnknowne" (1.10.1; 4-5).<sup>109</sup> Whether or not we agree with Klein that this is sufficient to identify Error's wood as the *Faerie Queene's* first "pleasure garden" or imitation Eden,<sup>110</sup> there are, therefore, certain discursive parallels between Acrasia and the monster of Book 1. Acrasia's Bower too is a place that threatens drift: as Guyon and the Palmer approach, they see her new beau "laid a slombering, / In secret shade, after long wanton ioyes" (12.72.5-6), his head in the lap of "that wanton Lady" (76.8). Meanwhile, "His warlike Armes, the ydle instruments / Of sleeping praise, were hong vpon a tree" an emblem that issues a cautionary warning about the perils of pleasure to Guyon, or indeed any man who would seek valour in martial pursuit.<sup>111</sup> Against this, the Palmer's worry that Acrasia "will slip away, and all our drift despise" (69.9), suggests a rewriting of the errant drift of Acrasia's Bower in service of a teleological quest for virtue. This, of course, is pre-emptive: Acrasia, and the alternative drift she represents, have yet to be captured. It is also, however, rather fitting. Expectancy is the *modus operandi* of allegory – a systematic redirection of meaning that anticipates, in order to arrest and reassign, the value of the signs it encounters. As contemporary writers stressed, linguistic indeterminacy is a characteristic of the fallen world, where error is, to some degree, unavoidable.<sup>112</sup> Allegory, therefore, is always in pursuit of meaning. We might think here of the sea-

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<sup>109</sup> As Giamatti (*The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, 187) notes, for Renaissance epic poets wandering is also an "emblem for spiritual uncertainty," a consequence of man's disobedience and his Fall. See for instance the concluding verses of Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

The World was all before them, where to choose  
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:  
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,  
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.  
(12.646-649)

<sup>110</sup> Klein, "From Error to Acrasia," 179.

<sup>111</sup> As C. S. Lewis observes, "In other poets temptation usually summons the will to Titanic action, to the inordinate resolutions of a Tamburlaine, a Faustus, a Macbeth, or a Satan. In Spenser it more often whispers 'Lie down. Relax. Let go. Indulge the death wish'" ("Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser," *Études Anglaises* 14, no. 2 (1961): 116).

<sup>112</sup> Milton expresses this idea through an imaginative retelling of the myth of Isis and Osiris in the *Areopagitica*:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after Him were laid asleep, then strait arose a wicked race of deceivers, who as that story goes of the Ægyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how

monsters Guyon and the Palmer encounter earlier in the canto, which, the Palmer “well auiz’d” Guyon, are illusions delivered by Acrasia “to worke vs dread, / And draw from on this iourney to proceede” (26.1; 4-5) – a statement which coheres with the increasingly combative framing of the duo’s quest, yet proves ultimately unverifiable.

Romance itself, of course, is a “fundamentally expansive and digressive mode” which depends on error for narrative sustenance,<sup>113</sup> even as the form is organised around its overcoming. Spenser, I would argue, is acutely aware of this, yet in Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene*, the killing of the monster Error is marked by very little pathos – it is, rather, the destruction of Acrasia’s Bower that critics tend to lament. The reason, I would suggest, is that unlike the “darksom hole” (1.1.14.3) of Error herself, which the reflected light of Redcrosse’s armour quickly throws into relief, Acrasia’s Bower marries error with pleasure such that it is difficult to discern where the one ends and the other begins. In narrative and didactic terms, this makes a certain sense: in Book 1, as Klein finds, “Spenser first presents lust in its true form – noxious, bestial, and diabolical – so that his reader will know it rightly. Next he shows his reader the biform siren clothed like the Whore and able when disguised to enervate, seduce, and enchant man, even to bring him to the edge of damnation. Only when Duessa is stripped of her borrowed robes is she shown to be nearly as ugly as Error herself.”<sup>114</sup> By the time we arrive at Book 2, “when the temptation to lust is clothed in the seductive flesh of Phaedria and the lovelier allurements of Acrasia, we have been prepared to recognize that they are tempting us to sin and that lust is monstrous and deadly in form and consequence on account of its iconographical attributes and the true knowledge – ‘doctrine’ we have learned in earlier episodes.”<sup>115</sup>

The threat that the Bower poses to the sophisticated reader is indeed greater than Error’s den: if at the beginning of Book 1, as Hume has discussed, Redcrosse is “the spiritually imperfect

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they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewd her lovely form into a thousand peeces, and scatter’d them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the carefull search that Isis made for the mangl’d body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them.

In the Fallen world error itself is endless, and truth will not be discovered whole “till her Masters second comming; he shall bring together every joynt and member, and shall mould them into an immortall feature of lovelines and perfection” (*Areopagitica* 338).

<sup>113</sup> Catherine Nicholson, “‘Against the Brydale Day’: Envy and the Meanings of Spenserian Marriage,” *English Literary History* 83, no. 1 (2016): 52.

<sup>114</sup> Klein, “From Error to Acrasia,” 177.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

believer beguiled by false religion,”<sup>116</sup> his victory over the monster and the sin she represents is nevertheless relatively easy. Before Redcrosse “raft her hatefull heade without remorse” (24.8) and Error’s children gorge themselves to death on their mother’s body, the Redcrosse Knight “grypt her gorge with so great paine, / That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraîne” (19.8-9). Under the pressure of this constraint, Error, we are told, “spewd out of her filthie maw / A floud of poyson horrible and blacke” (20.1-2). As Hume finds, Error’s “floud” associates her vomit with the water released by the Dragon of Revelation to prevent the Woman of the Apocalypse from passing, a Biblical event which, according to Bale’s gloss, speaks to the temptations to idolatry and superstition with which the Devil has afflicted mankind from the time of Eve onwards.<sup>117</sup> In the *Faerie Queene*, however, this temptation has peculiarly literary implications. Error’s vomit, we are informed, “full of bookes and papers was” (20.6); “Her fruitfull cursed spawnne of serpents small, / Deformed monsters, fowle, and *blacke as inke*” (22.6-7, my emphasis). The episode concludes with a final twist: Error’s spawn, “bellies swolne” with the blood and flesh of their mother “with fulnesse burst” (26.5), so that Redcrosse finds “His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend” (9), an implosion which might suggest that error will be short-lived once it has been cut off at its monstrous source. For Milton, however, the pursuit of those who would seek to kill error outright through a censorious regulation of what might be freely published is in fact detrimental to the recovery of truth: “all

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<sup>116</sup> Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 75. Hume further notes that “Each of the enemies of the Redcross Knight in the first half of Book 1 is a false religionist. Two are papists (Archimago and Duessa) while two are adherents of Mahomet (Sansfoy and Sansjoy)” (ibid., 80).

<sup>117</sup> As Bale explains,

And the dragon (saith St John) did cast out of his mouth water after the woman. A doctrine of hypocrisy, errors and lies, hath always passed from the synagogue of Satan. None other fruits hath gone from them, than wavering superstitions, idolatry, and heathen ceremonies: these hath flowed forth like a great river; daily have they augmented, and continually increased. Innumerable are the cumbrous and unprofitable burdens of their fantasies and dreams, wherewith they noy men’s consciences, drown their small faith, and overload their souls.

This stinking water did the serpent vomit by his ravenous antichrists, which are his insatiable mouth, to stop the passage of the woman. He poured it forth in abundance, that he might cause her to be caught of the flood. Such is always the mischievous nature of the devil and his angels. Vengeable assaults have they, and innumerable crafts to deceive the innocent, not knowing them. Our first mother Eve was thus trapped in the beginning, and so had been drowned with Adam her husband, had they not had faith in the promised Seed. An innumerable multitude had been, and are yet to this day, swallowed up of this flood, and without great difficulty none escapeth it. Exceeding is the compass, study, and practice of this false generation. Evermore pour they out their poison; they dispute matters with errors and lies, with counsels and customs, having upon their side the darkened powers.

Ibid., 78. Hume cites John Bale, “The Image of Both Churches,” in *Select Works of John Bale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 17–18.



opinions, yea errors, known, read, and collated, are of main service & assistance toward the speedy attainment of what is truest” (311). As Butler notes, in the *Areopagitica* “immediately after summarizing the legend of Guyon, Milton asserts that the ‘scanning of error’ is necessary ‘to the confirmation of truth.’”<sup>118</sup> This statement, I would suggest, supports the argument that Milton’s “astonishing mistake” with regard to the Guyon episode may have been intentional.<sup>119</sup> In Milton’s tract, the pedagogical usefulness of error, which allegory as a form of legalistic censorship seeks to suppress, undergirds the speaker’s assertion of “the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read” (312).

In fact, if in Spenser’s narrative the Redcrosse Knight’s hasty slaughter of Errour would seem to be necessary – Una, a figure for the “true” church,<sup>120</sup> bids her companion to “Strangle her, els she sure will strangle thee” (1.19.4) – it is also shown to be prideful:

Thus ill bestedd, and fearefull more of shame,  
Then of the certaine perill he stood in,  
Halfe furious vnto his foe he came,  
Resolud in minde all suddenly to win,  
Or soone to lose, before he once would lin.

(24.1-5)

Kane has argued that in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser illustrates “the problem of religious idealism or indeed any virtue when it is exercised blindly as an abstraction. The root of the problem is the illusion of independence, self-control, and moral self-sufficiency which aggressive ethical codes engender.”<sup>121</sup> Whether or not we accept this as a significant preoccupation of Spenser’s work, it certainly informs Milton’s reworking of Spenserian material in his *Maske*. In Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene*, Redcrosse’s assertion that “Vertue giues her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade”

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<sup>118</sup> Butler, “Milton’s ‘Sage and Serious Poet Spenser,’” 120.

<sup>119</sup> Neither would this be the first instance of intentional error in Milton’s work. For other examples, see John Leonard, “‘Thus they Relate, Erring’: Milton’s Inaccurate Allusions,” *Milton Studies* 38 (2000): 96-121.

<sup>120</sup> Douglas Brooks-Davies, “Una,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton, 705.

<sup>121</sup> Kane, *Spenser’s Moral Allegory*, 53.

(12.9) is true enough in the sense that Errour's "cursed spawn of serpents" the knight "encombred sore but could not hurt at all" (22.6; 9). Yet when this allegorical maxim is similarly invoked by the Lady's Brother in Milton's *Maske*,

Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk,

(372-4)

it is not borne out by what follows. The Lady will encounter Comus in "Dim darkness, and this leafy labyrinth" (*Maske* 277) regardless of her putative virtue,<sup>122</sup> and indeed, as I will suggest in my next chapter, her somewhat haughty abstinence plays a part in the state of spiritual and moral paralysis to which she succumbs.

Acrasia, similarly, appears to present Sir Guyon with a challenge which Spenser's allegory of temperance cannot wholly surmount. Further evidence that the relationship between allegory and poetry itself is at stake in Spenser's treatment of Acrasia is unearthed by Gough, who observes that in Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Ancient Gods* – a known influence on Tasso – "the poet refers explicitly to Jerome's beautiful captive in conjunction with two additional gendered tropes for reading: the figure by which allegory is presented as a veiled woman and the metaphor by which Ulysses before the Sirens becomes an exemplary interpreter."<sup>123</sup> The trope of captivity and the trope of Ulysses and the sirens, as these relate to Sir Guyon and the Palmer, have already been discussed — we have now, therefore, to consider Acrasia's veil. In the *Odyssey*, Circe dons her veil or *καλύπτρη* (*Od.* 10.545), together with a cloak, when after having consented to Odysseus's request to leave her island for Ithaca, she travels secretly to the shore to leave the black ewe and ram which the Greeks will sacrifice to summon the dead and Tiresias as her prophecy demands. Yarnall suggests that Circe

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<sup>122</sup> We may remember Spenser's description of the path to Errour's den, "like to lead the labyrinth about" (*FQ* 1.1.11.4). On the labyrinth as a symbol for error, see John M. Steadman, "Spenser's 'Errour' and the Renaissance Allegorical Tradition," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 62, no. 1 (1961): 22–38.

<sup>123</sup> Gough, "Tasso's Enchantress, Tasso's Captive Woman," 536.

is thereby “reassuming the remoteness and sufficiency unto herself that are her prerogatives as a goddess,”<sup>124</sup> an idea that also informs Chapman’s translation of this passage:

We went wofull on  
 To ship and shore, where, was arriu’d as soone  
*Circe* vnseene; a blacke Ewe, and a Ram,  
 Binding for sacrifice; and as she came  
 Vanisht againe, vnwitness by our eyes;  
 Which grieu’d not vs, nor checkt our sacrifice;  
 For who would see God, loath to let vs see?<sup>125</sup>

Circe’s veil here might be seen as a type of *integumentum*, as the term was developed from Macrobius’s conception of the *narratio fabulosa* by Bernard de Silvestris and other medieval commentators, a “covering” that protects and shields truth from those that would seek to despoil it:

philosophers . . . make use of fabulous narrative; not without a purpose . . . nor merely to entertain, but because they realize that a frank, open exposition of herself is distasteful to Nature, who, just as she has withheld an understanding of herself from the uncouth senses of men by enveloping herself in variegated garments (*vario rerum tegmine operimentoque*), has also desired to have her secrets (*arcana*) handled by more prudent individuals through fabulous narratives. Accordingly, her sacred rites are veiled in mysterious representations (*figurarum cuniculis*) so that she may not have to show herself even to initiates. Only eminent men (*summatibus viris*) of superior intelligence gain a revelation of her truths.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Homer, *Homer’s Odysseys*, trans. George Chapman (London: Rich. Field for Nathaniell Butter, 1614), 159.

<sup>126</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 1.2.17-18.

If poetry itself, as Boccaccio claims, *velamento fabuloso atque decenti veritatem contegere* (“veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction”),<sup>127</sup> unveiling, therefore, becomes a metaphor for right reading. This idea informs Spenser’s designation of the *Faerie Queene* as an “allegorie or darke conceite,” his explanatory comments in the Letter to Raleigh provided “for your better light in reading thereof” (4-5). In the *Faerie Queene*, there is at least one example of a true *integumentum*: the “slender veile” that clothes the statue of Venus, discovered by Scudamore in her temple in canto 10 of Book 4. The narrator’s interpretation here serves only to deepen the mystery:

The cause why she was couered with a vele,  
 Was hard to know, for that her Priests the same  
 From peoples knowledge labour’d to concele.  
 But sooth it was not sure for womanish shame,  
 Nor any blemish, which the worke mote blame;  
 But for, they say, she hath both kinds in one,  
 Both male and female, both vnder one name:  
 She syre and mother is her selfe alone,  
 Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none.

(41)

As Ruthven suggests, the veil, together with the hermaphroditism and parthenogenetic capabilities of the statue, establish her as a *Venus Genetrix* who “emblematises, through the resolution of sexual difference into sexual unity, that greater resolution of discord into concord which is celebrated in *FQ* IV.”<sup>128</sup> Her lower half is bound together by an ouroboros – “a snake, whose head and tail were fast

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<sup>127</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio’s “Genealogia Deorum Gentilium,”* trans. Charles G. Osgood (New York: The Library of the Liberal Arts, 1956), 14.7.

<sup>128</sup> K. K. Ruthven, “Etiological Tales,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton, 255. In his popular mythography, Cartari explains that Venus is depicted as “both male and female” since “she is in charge of the generation of all creation” (*Vincenzo Cartari’s Images of the Gods of the Ancients*, trans. Mulryan, 423).

combyned” (40.9) – a figure which usually represents cosmic continuity, the eternal dance of form and matter to which *eros*, in Neoplatonic philosophy, is key.<sup>129</sup>

As Panofsky has observed in his discussion of Titian’s *Sacred and Profane Love*, however, through the Elder Pliny “the Renaissance was well acquainted with the fact that Praxiteles [the first sculptor of the life-size, naked female form] had made two famous statues of Venus, one draped, the other nude, and that the nude one, after having been refused by the inhabitants of Kos, had become the glory of the Isle of Knidos.”<sup>130</sup> Against the tendency of medieval art to contrast the nude to the clothed unfavourably,<sup>131</sup> the rise of Neoplatonic philosophy saw nudity increasingly used to represent “the ideal and intelligible as opposed to the physical and sensible, the simple and ‘true’ essence as opposed to its varied and changeable ‘images,’”<sup>132</sup> a distinction which O’Brien suggests incorporates an epistemic dichotomy between worldly things “cloaked in deception” and “naked truth.”<sup>133</sup> Concurrently, as Hume has explored, in the writings of the Reformers the “veil” of allegorical interpretation, where it had been historically drawn over certain parts of the Bible such as Genesis, was subject to an increased distrust.<sup>134</sup> Luther describes allegory itself as “like a beautiful harlot who fondles men in such a way that it is impossible for her not to be loved, especially by idle men,”<sup>135</sup> a view which resonates with Tasso’s understanding of why Aristotle does not discuss allegory in his *Poetics*: “ma se la difesa è con qualche difetto del primo senso, e congiunta con difetto nel decoro, e con qualche bruttezza o sconvenevolezza ne le cose imitate, non è buona né lodevole difesa” (“But if the defence [allegory] involves some fault in the first meaning and is combined with a fault in

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<sup>129</sup> Ayesha Ramachandran, “Cosmology and Cosmography,” in *Edmund Spenser in Context*, ed. Andrew Escobedo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 328. See Servius’s note on Virgil’s *Aeneid* 5.85: *annus secundum Aegyptios indicabatur ante inventas litteras picto dracone caudam suam mordente, quia in se recurrit* (“according to the Egyptians, before the invention of the alphabet the year was symbolized by a picture, a serpent biting its own tail, because it recurs on itself”), cited by Danuta Shanzer, *A Philosophical and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella’s “De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii” Book 1* (California: University of California Press, 1986), 159.

<sup>130</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 153. Panofsky cites Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 36.20.

<sup>131</sup> Panofsky argues that “wherever mediaeval art established a deliberate contrast between a nude figure and a draped one the lack of clothes designates the inferior principle” (*ibid.*, 156). See *ibid.*, 154, for examples.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Viking O’Brien, “Astarte in the Temple of Venus: An Allegory of Idolatry,” *Studies in Philology* 96, no. 2 (1999): 154.

<sup>134</sup> Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 167.

<sup>135</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Volume 5 (Lectures on Genesis, Chapter 26-30)*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, W. A. Hansen, G. V. Schick, and P. D. Pahl (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 347.

decorum, some ugliness or unseemliness in the things imitated, it is neither good nor commendable.”)<sup>136</sup>

As Gough finds, “Tasso condemns allegory when it is used to defend episodes which involve some fault at the literal level, ‘qualche difetto del primo senso.’ Rather than nullifying such lapses of decorum, he suggests, allegory becomes contaminated by the faults it attempts to justify.”<sup>137</sup> This is a natural extension, perhaps, of Sidney’s Platonic argument that the strength of poetry lies in the excellence of the “idea, or fore-conceite of the work, and not in the work it self” (*Apologie* C3r). It may also, however, touch on the problem of textual idolatry which we began to discuss earlier. In Spenser’s text, the Temple of Venus that houses the veiled statue has idolatrous connotations, as the narrator’s comparison of the edifice to the Biblical Temple of Diana at Ephesus, denounced by the Apostle Paul in Acts 19:26-27, begins to suggest.<sup>138</sup> Within her Temple “deckt with crownes, and chaynes, and girlands gay, /And thousand pretious gifts worth many a pound” (1.10.37, 6-7), Venus herself, we are told, stands “Vpon an altar of some costly masse” (39.2), and “in shape and beautie did excell / All other Idoles, which the heathen adore” (40.1-2). Elsewhere in the *Faerie Queene*, veiling *in malo* is associated with illusion and deceit. Duessa, “a false sorceresse” (2.34.8) of Book 1 who describes herself as “the daughter of Deceipt and Shame,” (5.26.9) as Gough observes, “employs techniques akin to those of allegory and *allegoresis* in order to foster illusion and deception” in her dealings with Fradubio.<sup>139</sup> Conjuring a “foggy mist” (2.38.5) to veil the spectacle from true discernment, she pretends to reveal the “foule vgly forme” (8) beneath the “borrowed beauty” of her rival Fraelissa, so that Fradubio “Her loathly visage viewing with disdain, / Eftsoones I thought her such, as she me told” (39.2; 5-6). Duessa’s literary associations with both Mary Queen of Scots – for the Reformers, a present-day Whore of Babylon – and Circe, with whom the Scottish Queen was

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<sup>136</sup> Torquato Tasso, *The Discourse on the Heroic Poem*, trans. Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 153–54; Tasso, *Prose*, ed. Ettore Mazzali (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959), 674.

<sup>137</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 125.

<sup>138</sup> *FQ* 1.10.30.1-2 see O’Brien, “Astarte in the Temple of Venus,” for a more in-depth discussion of this reference, and the idolatrous associations of Spenser’s Temple more widely.

<sup>139</sup> Melinda J. Gough, “‘Her Filthy Feature Open Showne’ in Ariosto, Spenser, and *Much Ado about Nothing*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 1 (1999): 49.

often associated by her enemies, have been well established by critics.<sup>140</sup> Dressed in “roiall robes, and purple pall” (1.8.46.2) and carrying a “golden cup,” “replete with magick artes; / . . . And secret poyson” (8.14.1-4), the figure bears out, as Gough argues, Tyndale’s fear of a Popish conspiracy “to destroy the whole literal sense” of the Bible and his warning to “beware of allegories; for there is not a more handsome or apt thing to beguile withal than an allegory; nor a more subtle and pestilent thing in the world to persuade in a false manner than an allegory.”<sup>141</sup> Prince Arthur and the Redcrosse Knight’s final stripping of Duessa herself in canto 8, therefore, so that “Such as she was, their eies might her behold” (46.6) – an event which, as Hume has found, “derives from the prophecy in Revelation 17.16 that the Whore of Babylon will become desolate and naked”<sup>142</sup> – is an act of triumphant iconoclasm against both religious, and semiotic idolatry.

Neither the example of Venus’s protective *integumentum* or Duessa’s veil of deceit, however, will quite explain the purpose of the veil worn by Acrasia. Acrasia’s veil, like the “christall waues” of the pool which only show the wrestling Damzelle’s “snowy limbes” more “plaine” (2.12.64.6-7), for better or worse does not conceal anything: her “vele of silke and siluer thin,” we are told, “hid no whit her alablaster skin, / But rather shewd more white, if more might bee” (77.4-6). In her study of the influences of Italian epic-romance on Spenser’s Bower scene, Gough notes that while the trope of the veiled women is deployed conventionally by Trissino in his portrayal of Acratia in Book 5 of *L’Italia liberata dai Goti*, and by Ariosto in his relation of the exposure of Alcina in canto 7 of *Orlando Furioso*, the significance of the veil worn by Tasso’s Circean Armida in the *Liberata* is less orthodox. Both Ariosto and Trissino’s unveilings serve to dispel the illusions created by Circean or Sirenic figures, themselves discursively linked, as we have seen, to the dangers of poetry itself: the exposure of the enchantresses’ falsity, if we continue the metaphor, is therefore analogous to the act of right reading.<sup>143</sup> Tasso’s Armida, however, a figure no less representative than her Italian predecessors of

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<sup>140</sup> See Richard A. McCabe, “The Masks of Duessa: Spenser, Mary Queen of Scots, and James VI,” *English Literary Renaissance* 17, no. 2 (1987): 224–42; Gareth Roberts, “Circe,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton, 165–67.

<sup>141</sup> Gough, “Her Filthy Feature Open Showne,” 47. See William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1848), 428.

<sup>142</sup> Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 95.

<sup>143</sup> Gough, “Daughters of Circe,” 112–13.

erotic and literary excess, remains unmasked.<sup>144</sup> Gough ascribes this narrative decision ultimately to Tasso's endorsement of an Aristotelian poetics whereby the imitation of ugly things is seen as a breach of epic decorum, in place of which, she suggests, he champions the Neoplatonic notion of the "beautiful marvellous" as a mode more suitable for epic poetry.<sup>145</sup> Taking his cue perhaps from Boccaccio and Jerome's discussion of the captive pagan woman of Deuteronomy, the "excess" Armida threatens is not stripped but rather assimilated into the Christian epic by Tasso via his subsequent tale of her conversion.

Noting that Acrasia's beauty "is never revealed to be unreal in itself," Gough argues that "Spenser will not fully repudiate Acrasia, unveiling her as a hag; but he also chooses not to attempt to assimilate her with a narrative of conversion like the one Tasso employs. In what seems to be an attempt to find a 'mean' between these extremes, Spenser invents the razing of the Bower with which the enchantress is metonymically identified."<sup>146</sup> Within the context of Gough's analysis of Acrasia's Circean association with poetry and the poetic imagination, this argument is persuasive. Yet we should not rush to artificially restrict the play of meaning that Spenser's text invites, and given the particular religious and ethical problems that the Palmer's mentorship of Guyon throughout Book 2 exposes, I would suggest that there is an additional theological dimension to Acrasia's veil that Gough does not sufficiently unpick. Veiling, in fact, is also a Pauline trope – in 2 Corinthians, having made his famous distinction between the understanding available to man under the Law and that which the Gospel permits, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2.3.6), Paul notes that the Israelites' "minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ." As we see with Spenser's description of Guyon's encounter with Mammon's daughter Philotime, the knight proves perfectly capable of resisting temptation when it comes covered with a "cloke": he understands that while

. . . face right wondrous faire did seeme to bee,  
That her broad beauties beam great brightnes threw

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 124-31.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 158; 205.



Through the dim shade, that all men might it see:  
 Yet was not that same her owne natiue hew,  
 But wrought by art and counterfetted shew,  
 Thereby more louers vnto her to call;  
 Nath'lesse most heuenly faire in deed and vew  
 She by creation was, till she did fall;  
 Thenceforth she sought for helps, to cloke her crime withal.

(2.7.45)

Guyon is not, however, prepared for the veil to be taken away – to read spiritually, “in fleshy tables of the heart.” Consequently, when he sees Acrasia, he is unable to diagnose in her appearance any imperfection,<sup>147</sup> and the temptation to idolatry this threatens is checked only by his iconoclastic destruction of the enchantress’s equally fair Bower.

As my next chapter will explore more fully, the relationship between allegory and law is extremely problematic for Milton, but perhaps also so for Spenser. Following Fowler and Weatherby,<sup>148</sup> Kaske traces Spenser’s engagement with law in Book 2 back to an earlier episode upon which Guyon’s search for Acrasia is founded: the tale of Amavia, her dead husband Mordant “fordonne” (2.1.51.4) by Acrasia, and Ruddymane, the couple’s baby son who Guyon and the Palmer find playing in the “goreblood thick” (39.7) of his dying mother “beside a bubbling fountain” (40.2). As Kaske and others have observed, this outline of Amavia’s narrative, which sees “Mordant’s drinking Acrasia’s wine in a garden and magically bequeathing it to his infant son Ruddymane as a bloodstain symbolizing original sin (2.1.35-2.11),” presents a “striking re-enactment” of the Biblical Fall.<sup>149</sup> Kaske’s argument about the legalistic significance of the episode, however, is based on two further claims. The first is that the well in which Amavia and Ruddymane lie, which cannot cleanse

<sup>147</sup> Magarik notes that “aniconic Jewish law requires that visual art, in order to avoid tempting the viewer to idolatry, contain a visible imperfection” (“Milton’s Phylacteries,” 53).

<sup>148</sup> A. D. S. Fowler, “The Image of Mortality: *The Faerie Queene*, II.i-ii,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1961): 91–110; Harold L. Weatherby, “Two Images of Mortality: Spenser and Original Sin,” *Studies in Philology* 85, no. 3 (1988): 343–45.

<sup>149</sup> Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics*, 16.

the babe's "guiltie hands from bloody gore" (2.3.4) – a sharp contrast to the Well of Life of Book 1 that could "guilt of sinfull crimes cleane wash away" (11.30.2) – and appears even to have hastened his father's death,<sup>150</sup> represents Mosaic Law.<sup>151</sup> The second is that Amavia, who "wrapt . . . in Palmers weed" (1.52.8) had freed Mordant from Acrasia's clutches and

. . . through wise handling and faire gouernance

. . . recured him to a better will,

Purged from drugs of fowle intemperaunce,

(54.6-8)

yet who nonetheless cannot prevent her husband from falling victim to the enchantress one last time, enacts "the Pauline paradox that law revives sin."<sup>152</sup> Given the prevalence of legalistic tropes later on in Book 2 as Guyon and the Palmer prepare for their own encounter with Acrasia, and the well's wider symbolism (which we will shortly discuss), I would tend to agree with both of these points, although the further distinctions Kaske makes, including the argument that Amavia represents "natural law," are perhaps too nice.<sup>153</sup>

Undoubtedly, Amavia's hopes for the son who will survive her are founded in Law:

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<sup>150</sup> At the well, after Amavia has brought him from Acrasia, Mordant ". . . stoupt to drincke: /The charme fulfilld, dead suddenly he downe did sincke," (*FQ* 2.1.55.8-9).

<sup>151</sup> Kaske does provide a list of dissenting opinions: for other critics, the well has represented "baptism [see Fowler, "The Image of Mortality"], natural purity, a too-sudden reformation, the opposite extreme of insensibility to the erotic, or the female generative principle" (*Spenser and Biblical Poetics*, 166).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>153</sup> Kaske also argues that given the narrative of Mordant's death, "this legacy from a man who ingested something proffered by a woman in a garden renders Mordant a type of Adam and Acrasia a type of the tempting Eve" (*ibid.* 160). I would argue however that Acrasia, whose Bower "enclosed rownd about" (2.12.43.1) like a *hortus conclusus* appears more paradisiacal than "Eden selfe, if ought with Eden mote compayre" (52.9) plays more the role of the serpent in Spenser's scenario, Mordant that of Eve. Mordant, we are told, initially "knew not . . . his owne ill" (2.1.54.5) and is therefore not properly akratic, a state which, as my chapter on *Paradise Lost* will discuss, was found by commentators to encompass Adam's, but not Eve's, response to temptation. Whereas in the *Faerie Queene's* narrative of Mordant's Fall, Acrasia "with cup thus charmd, him parting she deceiud" (1.55.3), the Biblical Adam is famously not taken in by the serpent's claims. It would fit with the general theme of Book 2 for Mordant to act as an Eve before Acrasia, confirming the reader's suspicion of the effeminising nature of unbridled lust. We should bear in mind however that the analogy, in whatever direction we seek to draw it, is not exact. Giamatti makes the point that there is no single allegorical code we can apply to crack Spenser's epic – the *Faerie Queene* "will not yield to consistent historical, or moral, or mythological, or ethical interpretation. Of course, it will yield to all of these approaches much of the time, but not to any one of them all of the time" (*The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, 234).

But thou, sweete Babe, whom frowning froward fate  
 Hath made sad witnessse of thy fathers fall,  
 Sith heuen thee deignes to hold in liuing state,  
 Long maist thou liue, and better thriue withall,  
 Then to thy lucklesse parents did befall:  
 Liue thou, and to thy mother dead attest,  
 That cleare she dide from blemish criminall;  
 Thy litle hands embrewd in bleeding brest  
 Loe I for pledges leaue. . . .

(2.1.37)

As Evans finds here, “Amavia’s language is legal: she interpellates her son as a ‘witnessse’ to his father’s murder; she asks that he ‘attest’ to her innocence; and she identifies his bloody hands as ‘pledges’ to her freedom from ‘criminall’ stain.”<sup>154</sup> Yet If Kaske’s thesis is correct, following the Pauline paradigm – “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (Romans 7.5) – law is implicated in both the sin and early mortality of the child’s parents. The reader with any knowledge of Romans has, in fact, been doubly forewarned: in Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene*, we learn that Mosaic law, “writt in stone / With bloody letters by the hand of God,” is “The bitter doome of death and balefull mone” (10.53.6-8).

As the tragic example of Mordant and Amavia further indicates, in the *Faerie Queene* Acrasia poses a threat that law alone is ill-equipped to handle. Faced with the reality that Ruddymane’s hands will never be clean, the Palmer transforms them into phylacteries, bodily inscriptions that serve as a reminder both of the law and of man’s inherited concupiscence:

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<sup>154</sup> Kasey Evans, “How Temperance Becomes ‘Blood Guiltie’ in The Faerie Queene,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 49, no. 1 (2009): 47.

. . . let them still be bloody, as befell,  
 That they his mothers innocence may tell,  
 As she bequeathd in her last testament;  
 That as a sacred Symbole it may dwell  
 In her sonnes flesh, to mind reuengement,  
 And be for all chaste Dames an endlesse monument.

(2.2.10.4-9)

This call to “reuengement,” together with our knowledge of the quest which Guyon and the Palmer are shortly to commence, implicates Acrasia herself in the bloody legacy of man’s first disobedience.<sup>155</sup> Tellingly, Amavia’s blood returns to haunt Guyon and the narrator as they approach the threshold of Acrasia’s Bower in canto 12. Refusing to drink from Excesse’s cup, Guyon instead spills its contents, so that, we are told, “the liquor stained all the lond” (57.5). When he encounters Acrasia in the Bower itself, the knight’s binding of the enchantress could be seen to similarly reinscribe the wrong he seeks to redress. As I have suggested, in Reformed theology, man is either incurably vicious, or remains continent in his struggle: struggle itself, therefore, is a hallmark of the Christian life, and the words of Romans 7:23, “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members,” might be voiced equally well by *Paulus Christianus* as by the Apostle pre-conversion. If binding is a trope for law and sin, however, it also carries discursive associations with magic. In his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Augustine had indicted *illi ipsi qui seducunt per ligaturas, per praecantationes, per machinamenta inimici, misceant praecantationibus suis nomen Christi: quia iam non possunt seducere Christianos, ut dent venenum, addunt mellis aliquid, ut per id quod dulce est, lateat quod amarum est, et bibatur ad perniciem* (“those who lead astray [seducunt] by magical bindings [ligaturas], by spells, by the devices of the Enemy, and mix the Name of Christ in with their spells. Because they are now not able to lead Christians astray, in order to give them poison they add a little

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<sup>155</sup> This argument is also made by Stambler (“The Development of Guyon’s Christian Temperance,” 89) and Weatherby (“Two Images of Mortalitie: Spenser and Original Sin”).

honey, so that which is bitter lies hidden by the sweet, and is drunk destroying them”).<sup>156</sup> Minus the invocation of the name of Christ, of course, this is in effect what happens to Spenser’s Mordant at the hands of Acrasia: “him that witch had thrall’d to her will, / In chaines of lust and lewde desires ybownd” (2.12.54.2-3).

At the end of Book 2, then, the Palmer and Guyon attempt to redress the inner state of moral and spiritual paralysis that Acrasia’s “magical bindings” induce in Mordant by projecting back onto the enchantress – and thereby reifying – the metaphorical binding of her victims in sin. In a final act of retribution, or narrative redistribution, the “pitifull spectacle” (1.40.1) of Amavia, Mordant and Ruddymane is superseded by the “rigour pittillesse” (12.83.2) with which Guyon destroys Acrasia’s Bower.<sup>157</sup> The immediate threat that Acrasia’s alluring poetic context poses to errant knights and readers alike thus dealt with, we are returned swiftly to the canto’s allegory, as the Palmer belatedly reveals the human nature of the island’s “seeming beasts” (85.1) and restores them to their former bodies. The exception of Gryll, who stubbornly refuses to submit to the lesson of the Palmer’s narrative and “Repynded greatly, and did him miscall, / That had from hoggish forme him brought to naturall” (86.8-9) only furnishes further matter to be swept into the awaiting, interpretative net which Guyon and the Palmer, at the Books close, are shown to jointly wield:

Saide Guyon, See the mind of beastly man,  
That hath so soone forgot the excellence  
Of his creation, when he life began,  
That now he chooseth, with vile difference,  
To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.

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<sup>156</sup> Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractus CXXIV* in Migne, *Patrologia latina*, 35 (1845), column 1440. Translated and cited by Gareth Roberts in “The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions,” in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205. Ironically, as Roberts notes, Augustine’s description of the deception integral to the conjurer’s art is couched in the same terms as Sidney’s prescription for effective, virtue-promoting poetry, through which readers are “brought to take most wholsom things, by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant tast.” Like Augustine’s magician, the poet “dooth not only show the way, but giueth so sweete a prospect into the way, as will intice any man to enter into it” (*Apologie for Poetrie*, E4r).

<sup>157</sup> Spenser diverges from Tasso here. As Wadowski observes, “where Tasso’s garden magically vanishes, Spenser’s knight of Temperance, Guyon, razes it with considerable effort” (“Spenser, Tasso, and the Ethics of Allegory,” 366)

To whom the Palmer thus, The donghill kinde  
 Delightes in filth and fowle incontinence:  
 Let Gyill be Gryll, and haue his hoggish minde,  
 But let vs hence depart, whilest wether serues and winde.

(87)

### From Spenser's chaste Nymph to Milton's Sabrina

Interestingly, as Skemer finds, in the works of the church fathers *ligatura* is used interchangeably with *phylacterium* to denote phylacteries.<sup>158</sup> For Milton, as my preceding discussion will have suggested, binding – whether it is through allegory, or a literal inscription of the law's injunctions – is an insufficient response to the danger that Acrasia poses. In his preface to *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton would seem to acknowledge the necessity of law to support continent action, given man's permanent stain of concupiscence and “the grosse distorted apprehension of decay'd mankinde” (183). Yet as Butler notes, for Milton simply stating a law will not guarantee a citizen's compliance. Following Plato, Milton insists on the importance of rhetoric to persuade a subject to obedience where force will not:

To such lawes as were of principall moment, there should be us'd as an induction,  
 some well temper'd discourse . . . which being utter'd with those native colours and  
 graces of speech, as true eloquence the daughter of vertue can best bestow upon her  
 mothers praises, would so incite, and in a manner, charme the multitude into the love

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<sup>158</sup> Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2010), 11.

of that which is really good as to imbrace it ever after, not of custome and awe, which most men do, but of choice and purpose, with true and constant delight.<sup>159</sup>

In a sense, this is simply another formulation of the Horatian platitude. Yet the word “charme” brings us back into Circean territory. Milton seems to be suggesting that the Circean, or Mercurial qualities of poetic language, as discussed in my introduction, may prove virtuous if – and only if – the listener or reader’s “choice” is preserved. In the hands of a tyrant, however, it is “No marvell if the people turn beasts, when their Teachers themselves as Isaiah calls them, Are dumbe and greedy dogs that can never have enough . . . So little care they of beasts to make them men, that by their sorcerous doctrine of formalities they take the way to transforme them out of Christian men into Iudaizing beasts” (*Apology for Smectymnuus* 345). We might think here of Milton’s phylactery-bearing George Palmer, and his fictional shadow, the Palmer of the *Faerie Queene*.

In keeping with the legalistic associations of the Palmer’s mentorship of Guyon throughout Book 2, it seems only fitting that Acrasia is bound by the pair “in chaines of adamant” (82.6) at the end of canto 12 – the Mosaic “law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2) first appears, of course, on the stone tablets of the Decalogue. Importantly however, in Book 2, stone imagery also coalesces around the characters of Amavia and the Nymph of the Well, as Spenser sketches a relationship between law and chastity with which Milton, in his *Maske*, will in turn directly engage. We learn from Spenser’s Palmer that the well in which Amavia and Ruddymane lie came to be when a chaste nymph, pursued

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<sup>159</sup>Milton, *Reason of Church Government*, 181; Todd Wayne Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub, 2008), 109. See also Jesus’s speech in Milton’s *Paradise Regained*: Jesus reports that in his youth, although he yearned

To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke,  
Thence to subdue and quell o’er all the earth  
Brute violence and proud tyrannic power,  
(1.217-19)

he

Yet held it more humane, more heavenly, first  
By winning words to conquer willing hearts,  
And make persuasion do the work of fear  
(221-23)

All further citations to the poem are taken from John Milton, “Paradise Regained,” in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Carey, 424–512.

by *Dan Faunus*, begged Diana to “let her die a mayd” (2.8.5) and was consequently turned into a weeping stone:

The goddesse heard, and suddeine where she sate,  
 Welling out streames of teares, and quite dismayd  
 With stony feare of that rude rustick mate,  
 Transformd her to a stone from stedfast virgins state.  
 .....  
 Lo now she is that stone, from whose two heads,  
 As from two weeping eyes, fresh streames do flow.

(8.6-9.2)

The nymph’s “stony feare” here – fear, we remember, is another consequence of law – is hardly auspicious, and as Weatherby notes, while “virginity is virtuous, and no one who knows Spenser’s work can doubt that he thought so . . . this nymph’s virginity is negative (one recalls by contrast the wholly positive presentation of virginity in Belphoebe, in the next canto).”<sup>160</sup> A strong suggestion that Amavia’s death, too, is a kind of petrification, is present in the narrator’s description of her “white alabaster brest” (1.39.5) and her eyelids “On which the drery death did sitt, as sad / As lump of lead” (45.2-3), as well as in Guyon’s fear that the “stony cold” will have gripped her “frozen hart” (46.5-6) before she can tell her tale. Yet there is also a sinister difference between the two figures. Where the transformed nymph’s weeping “eyes” or stones produce “fresh streames” (2.9.2), from Amavia’s all too mortal “alabaster brest . . . / . . . forth gusht a stream of gorebloud thick” (1.39.5-7). This “griesly wownd” (39.6), of course, is self-inflicted.

In Amavia’s retelling of the course of events that led to her fateful act, Acrasia, upon discovering that Mordant’s wife had “recurred” him and was planning his “deliuerance,”

With cup thus charmd, him parting she deceiud;

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<sup>160</sup> Weatherby, “Two Images of Mortalitie: Spenser and Original Sin,” 341.



Sad verse, giue death to him that death does giue,  
 And losse of loue, to her that loues to liue,  
 So soone as Bacchus with the Nymphes does lincke:  
 So parted we and on our iourney driue,  
 Till comming to this well, he stoupt to drinke:  
 The charme fulfilled, dead suddainly he downe did sincke.

(55.3-9)

The opposition between vice and virtue, pleasure and chastity implicit in Acrasia's reference to "Bacchus" and the "Nymphes," inspires the Palmer's explanation, in canto 2 of Book 2, of Ruddymane's strangely water-resistant, bloody hands. According to the Palmer, the nymph's

. . . vertues in her water byde:  
 For it is chaste and pure, as purest snow,  
 Ne lets her waues with any filth be dyde,  
 But euer like her selfe vnstayed hath benee tryde.

(2.9.6-9)

Acrasia's binding "charme" (1.55.9), as Amavia herself claims, would appear to be fulfilled from the moment that the pleasure-loving Mordant drinks from the nymph's pure well and the knight is deprived of his life, Amavia of her *ama*. The riddle of the curse,

. . . giue death to him that death does giue,  
 And losse of loue, to her that loues to liue,  
 So soone as Bacchus with the Nymphes does lincke,

(55.4-6)

provides scope for a second loss of life, as well as love, yet it does not demand it: the deprivation of love from one who loves to live is, strictly speaking, not the same as a deprivation of life itself. It would seem therefore that it is the working of the Law itself within Amavia that extends Mordant's sin through to her own self-slaughter, bringing the notion that man and wife are "one flesh" (Matthew 19:4-6) – and that flesh breeds "mortalitie" (2.1.57.2) – to its most tragic conclusion.

Acrasia's prophecy, that death and "loss of loue" will prevail "So soone as Bacchus with the Nympe does lincke," is, however, also interesting for the connection it suggests between Book 2 of Spenser's epic and Milton's *Maske at Ludlow Castle*, where the sorcerer Comus, who is said to be the son of Bacchus and the "nymph" Circe (54) – a genealogy that appears to be unique to this author – plays the role of the Lady's tempter. As we will see in my next chapter, falling prey to Comus and his "rout" in the "blind mazes" of a "tangled wood" (92. s.d; 180) not unlike that where Spenser's Redcrosse knight had met Errour, the Lady resists the enchanter's attempts on her chastity to find herself, like Spenser's nymph, "transformd . . . to a stone from stedfast virgins state" (2.8.9). Yet unlike Spenser's nymph or Amavia, the Lady does not die. Her liberty is instead secured through the intercession of another nymph, Sabrina, who sprinkles the Lady with "drops" (911) from the fountain over which she presides. Milton informs us that Sabrina, like Spenser's Nymph of the Well, was a "virgin pure," who having "Commended her fair innocence to the flood" to escape a pursuer, underwent "a quick immortal change" (825; 830; 840).

The parallels between the two figures are not exact. The threat that precipitates Sabrina's "change" is not explicitly sexual, for instance – and indeed, the most likely source for Milton's nymph is the Sabrina that Spenser introduces later on in Book 2 as part of his "Chronicle of Briton Kings" (10.arg.1).<sup>161</sup> Spenser's Sabrina, however, merits only 9 lines of verse, whereas the Nymph of the Well, alluded to in Acrasia's "charme" of canto 1, is the focus of several stanzas in canto 2 and has an important bearing on the wider narrative of Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, as my preceding discussion of Acrasia and Mosaic law would suggest. The discursive correspondence between several key aspects of Spenser's Nymph and Milton's Sabrina is further suggestive of a symbolic relationship

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<sup>161</sup> Like Milton's nymph, Spenser's Sabrina was the "sad virgin" (10.19.6), daughter of Loocrine, who suffers death by drowning at the hands of her stepmother, the jealous Queen Guendolene. According to this legend, the River Severn in which Sabrina drowns is posthumously named after her

between the two figures. Where in the *Faerie Queene* the water of the fountain of the Nymph of the Well, still imbued with the nymph's "stony feare" (2.2.8.7) appears to be the catalyst required for Acrasia's curse to take effect, Milton's Sabrina

. . .can unlock

The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,

If she be right invoked in warbled song.

(852-54)

Again, where Spenser's nymph is unable or unwilling to wash Amavia's blood from Ruddymane's hands – blood which, in language more familiar from the Mosaic *lex talionis* than the Gospel, the Palmer decrees to be a "a Sacred Symbole . . . / In her sonnes flesh" (2.10.7-8) – Milton's Sabrina, we are told,

. . . 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.

(842-45, my emphasis)

Milton thereby reverses the Amavia episode, both in terms of narrative structure (Sabrina's fountain is invoked at the end of the *Maske*, after the Circean Comus, Milton's Acrasia figure, has escaped),<sup>162</sup> and of Biblical typology. As I will explore more fully in my next chapter, the later writer's version of the "pure" well symbolises not law, but grace, the essential ingredient that as Evans notes, Guyon's vengeful dealing with Acrasia forgoes.<sup>163</sup> Love, with its Christian attendant Charity, rules supreme at

<sup>162</sup> This, of course, is exactly what the Palmer had worried would happen with "Acrasia, whom we must surprise, / Els she will slip away, and all our drift despise" (12.69.8-9).

<sup>163</sup> Evans, "How Temperance Becomes 'Blood Guiltie' in The Faerie Queene," 50. Evans points to William Baldwin's warning in his 1547 *Treatise of Moral Philosophy* (1547): "Wrath and revengement taketh from man

the end of Milton's *Maske*: the Lady is returned to her life at Ludlow and the Attendant Spirit waxes lyrical about the mythical birth of Youth and Joy from Cupid and Psyche, figures often used in the Platonic tradition to represent the union of the soul with divinity. As we will see shortly, Milton achieves this alternative vision by introducing a third element to Spenser's Bacchus/nymph duality: the Lady's faith, and the moral and spiritual choice of which she might therefore avail.

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the mercy of God, and destroyeth and quencheth the grace that God hath given him" (cited in Eugene D. Hill, "Revenge Tragedy," in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2002), 328).

“Like his Father but his Mother More”: Milton’s Circean *Maske at Ludlow Castle*

Setting the scene: Circe, Comus and Acrasia

The Spenserian influences at work in Milton’s *Maske at Ludlow* have been well-documented by critics.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, Milton’s Sabrina is thought to acquire her name and aspects of her history from the tale of the drowned nymph narrated in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*. Yet if Sabrina enjoys an afterlife in Milton’s *Maske*, so too does Spenser’s Acrasia. Left bound, but not destroyed after Guyon’s exploits in the Bower of Bliss, Acrasia acquires a symbolic dynamism in Milton’s *Maske* that strains against the limits of Spenser’s moral allegory. Importantly, Acrasia cannot be mapped directly onto any single figure in Milton’s text. Her legacy manifests rather through the dialectical complexity of the relationship Milton conceives between the figures of Comus, Comus’s absent mother Circe and the Lady, an interchange which establishes *akrasia* as a driving principle of the work’s dramatic, moral and philosophical engagement. This triadic relationship, I argue, activates the *potentia* or possibility inherent within the drama’s central trial of conscience, a potentiality which enables the Lady’s eventual consent and accession to grace even as it proves vitally dependent, in Milton’s poetics, upon the survival of akratic liberty.

My assertion of the presence of *akrasia* in Milton’s masque rests on three main principles: the Circean lineage of the “damned magician” (601) Comus, the insufficiently explained paralysis of the Lady this character attempts to ensnare, and the masque’s thematic preoccupation with “chastity,” a

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Guillory, *Poetic Authority*; Maggie Kilgour, “Comus’s Wood of Allusion,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 61 (1992): 316–33. Multiple versions of Milton’s *Maske* are extant. *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle* was printed anonymously in 1637, and appeared again, with some significant changes, in Milton’s *Poems* of 1645 as well as in the poetry collection published in 1673. Two manuscript versions of the *Maske* also survive: one in the Trinity manuscript (1634) and another in the Bridgewater manuscript (1634), often held to be the “performance” text due to its ownership by the Bridgewater family and its redactions of potentially sensitive speeches. For a reproduction and comparison of the various texts, see S. E. Spratt, ed., *A Maske: The Early Versions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973). Throughout this chapter, I cite from Carey’s modernised edition of the 1673 text, “A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle,” in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Carey, 173–223.

concept of the highest importance in medieval and early modern discussions of akratic states. Firstly, it is important to my argument that Milton does not, as some critics would posit, “make Circe a man.”<sup>2</sup> Comus remains a distinct figure in the *Maske* and carries with him a classical and theatrical heritage that is important in its own right, as my discussion of Ben Jonson’s Bacchic “belly” god in my first chapter will have indicated. Nonetheless, Milton’s novel assignment of Circe and Bacchus as Comus’s mother and father, a story “never yet . . . heard” (44) before it is recounted by the Attendant Spirit at the beginning of the masque, remains a critically neglected aspect of the text. The fact of this genealogy situates the akratic interest of Milton’s masque within a Circean and literary frame of reference, even as the early narrative appearance of the Attendant Spirit’s account, which establishes the “roving” (60) Comus in an “ominous wood” (61) some distance from his mother’s mythic residence, might suggest an effort to hold it apart from the central action of the drama. In fact, the invocation, and displacement of the maternal spectre performed here is indicative of the special discursive status that Milton grants Circe in his *Maske*,<sup>3</sup> a status which is somewhat unexpected, given the poet’s more conventional deployment of the Goddess in his early work.

In *Elegia prima*, a verse letter written to Milton’s friend, Charles Diodati, Circe is used as a figure for sexual temptation as it presents itself to the poet through the *virgineos choros*, or young women he admits to observing from an *umbra loci* (“shady spot”) in a dense grove of elms just outside the city.<sup>4</sup> Similarly perhaps to Spenser’s Palmer’s warning not to pause before the “dolefull Mayd” (*FQ* 2.12.28.2) or the mermaids he and Guyon encounter on the way to Acrasia’s Bower, in his *Elegy* Milton suggests that a path of abstinent avoidance affords the only protection from such temptation:

*Ast ego . . .*

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<sup>2</sup> Yarnall suggests that this decision in part derives from the influence of Jonson’s Comus figure in *Pleasure Reconiled to Virtue* on Milton’s masque (*Transformations of Circe*, 149). Furthermore, given the sexual overtones of the Lady’s temptation, she argues it would have seemed “ludicrous or, worse still, scandalous” to cast Alice Egerton’s Lady against a female enchanter.

<sup>3</sup> There are some interesting similarities here with Shakespeare’s treatment in *The Tempest* of the witch Sycorax, another absent mother of a licentious son.

<sup>4</sup> Milton, “Elegia Prima Ad Carolum Diodatum,” in *Poems*, ed. and trans. Carey, lines 50-52. Carey dates *Elegy I* to around April, 1626.

*Moenia quam subito linquere fausta paro;  
Et vitare procul malefidae infamia Circes  
Atria, divini Molyos usus ope..*

(85-88)

“I intend to quit this fortunate town as quickly as possible . . . and, with the help of divine moly, to leave behind the infamous halls of the deceiver, Circe.”)

Again with Spenser, in *Elegia sexta* – written three years later than *Elegia prima*,<sup>5</sup> and again addressed to Diodati – Milton turns to a Circean metaphor to illustrate the ethics of epic poetry, although here it is the writer, and not the reader, who must bind himself to the proverbial mast. Against the Bacchic indulgence that may provide legitimate inspiration for the *elegia levis* or “light-footed elegy,”<sup>6</sup> Milton invokes Circe as one of the dangers that threaten the sacred mission of the epic poet, and which must be countered by the temperance of the poet himself:

*Sic dapis exiguus, sic rivi potor Homerus  
Dulichium vexit per freta longa virum,  
Et per monstrificam Perseiae Phoebados aulam.*

(71-73)

“in this way, sparing of food, and drinking water from the brook, Homer guided Ulysses across great oceans and through Circe’s hall, where men were turned to monsters . . . .”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Carey, *Poems*, 116, dates Milton’s *Elegia Sexta* to December 1629.

<sup>6</sup> Milton, “*Elegia Sexta*,” in *Poems*, ed. and trans. Carey, line 49.

<sup>7</sup>See also Milton’s later declaration that “he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things” in *An Apology for Smectymnuus* 303.

Finally, in *Prolusion 7*, “Learning Makes Men Happier Than Does Ignorance,” one of a series of orations written by Milton during his university years, Circe’s bestial transformations are invoked to warn of the dangers of mental torpor and the abandonment of reason:

And so at last we may ask what are the joys of Ignorance. Are they to enjoy what one has, to be molested by no one, to be superior to all cares and annoyance, to live a secure and quiet life insofar as possible? Truly, this is the life of any wild beast or bird. . . . Why crave for the heavenly power of the mind in addition to these pleasures? Ergo, let Ignorance throw off her humanity, let her have Circe’s cup and betake herself on all fours to the beasts.<sup>8</sup>

Circe stands here for the threat which man’s brutish inclination to vice and passion poses to his reason, and thus to the security of the ontological, and spiritual position he occupies in the *scala naturae*, as discussed in my introduction. As the *Balet*’s moral allegory had put it, Circe is that desire which, if overindulged, “urges us to those vices which make us resemble animals, that is to say, lechery, drunkenness, cruelty and certain other vices. But the man who is endowed with Reason is protected against these poisons.”<sup>9</sup>

If Milton’s use of the Circean trope in these early examples seems fairly typical of the allegorical readings promoted by the humanist tradition, in *Paradise Lost*, as my final chapter will argue, this tradition vies with a more complex presentation of elements of the myth in tandem with the poet’s interrogation of what it means for man to have been “free to fall,” yet “sufficient to have [with] stood” his temptation by the serpent in the garden of Eden.<sup>10</sup> This results, I suggest, in the formulation of a “Circean” metaphysics, expressed primarily through Milton’s notion of Chaos, which serves to protect the writer’s conception of Christian Liberty. Thirty years prior to the publication of Milton’s masterpiece, however, the poet can be seen grappling with these same questions through the Circean interest of his *Maske*. As we will see, the liminal relationship of Circe to the events of the drama

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<sup>8</sup> Milton, “Prolusion 7,” in *Milton: Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises*, trans. Phyllis B. Tillyard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 117.

<sup>9</sup> Beaujoyeux, *Le Ballet Comique de La Royne*, trans. MacClintock, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 3.99.



frustrates the typically allegoric hermeneutic that might otherwise have come into play, instilling at the heart of the work a certain symbolic indeterminacy which both conditions, and protects the akratic potentiality channelled by Comus. Throughout the masque Circe's absence will continue to signify, as the drama's narrative works to forge a natural, but also supernatural sympathy between mother and son. We learn from the Attendant Spirit that Comus, like his infamous mother, offers visitors to his lair an "orient liquor in a crystal glass, / To quench the drought of Phoebus" (65-66). Later, upon hearing the "chaste footing" (146) of the Lady, "some virgin sure" (148), Comus will himself declare that

...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.

(150-153)

This might seem to render Comus a straightforward surrogate for his more famous mother. In fact, a carefully guarded difference between the figures of Circe and Comus in Milton's text prevents their relationship from succumbing to this kind of poetic determinism. The Attendant Spirit's description of Comus, born of Bacchus and Circe, as "Much like his father, but his mother more" (57) insists upon the character's mythological hybridity and frustrates the reduction of the maternal tie to a relationship of pure resemblance, even as the greater comparative significance of this half of Comus's filial descent is stressed. Indeed, Comus, we are told, "Excels his mother at her mighty art" (63).

The question posed by the Attendant Spirit, "Who knows not Circe / The daughter of the Sun" (50-51) might seem at this early point in the masque entirely rhetorical, yet the character's speech in fact glosses over a distinction of some importance: *which* Circe is known? There is no easy answer. Milton's *Maske* would seem to bear witness to a multitude of Circes, both ancient and modern. The Attendant Spirit's description of Comus's dwelling as an "ominous wood / . . . in thick shelter of

black shades embowered” (61-62) recalls the *lucus inaccessus* of Virgil’s Circe.<sup>11</sup> Yet the intoxicating beauty of the Goddess’s singing voice as it emerges through Comus’s reminiscence at lines 251-260 is, in fact, a distinctly Homeric trope: Ovid’s Circe does not sing at all, and far less is made of the special quality of the enchantress’s voice in Virgil’s *Aeneid*.<sup>12</sup> If, moreover, Comus’s practice of changing his victims’

. . . human countenance,  
 The express resemblance of the gods . . .  
 Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,  
 Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,  
 All other parts remaining as they were  
 (68-73)

is a nod to the costuming of the anti-masquers, the allegorical implications of this change to the men’s “human countenance” indicate a departure from classical mythology, where almost the inverse of this transformation occurs.<sup>13</sup> As Shullenberger notes, “those enchanted by Homer’s Circe experience the horror of entrapment in bestial form, for they retain their human consciousness, their memory, their longing for home. . . . The essentially and indomitably human in them painfully resists their metamorphosis. But Comus’s victims, like those of Spenser’s Acrasia . . . undergo a spiritual transformation that signifies itself in their disfigurement and anonymity. They have lost their minds.”<sup>14</sup>

This recollection of Acrasia, together with the Palmer who guides Guyon through her bower in Spenser’s epic, is significant. As we have seen, in the *Faerie Queene* the “monstruous” minds of

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<sup>11</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.11

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this difference, see Veerle Stofellen, “Vergil’s Circe : Source for a Sorceress,” *L’Antiquité Classique* 63 (1994): 123–24.

<sup>13</sup> There is an element of parody in Milton’s adoption of other aspects of the Homeric narrative. Where Odysseus’s crew are said to seem “more beautiful” once Circe has transformed them back to men from their bestial state, Comus’s rout, who remain unrestored at the masque’s close, “not once perceive their foul disfigurement, / But boast themselves more comely than before” (74-75). This total corruption of perception and self-knowledge cements our sense of the men’s moral and spiritual degeneration.

<sup>14</sup> William Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton’s Comus as Initiation* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 156.

Acrasia's transformed "louers" (*FQ* 2.12.85.3-5) point to Spenser's revision of the common allegory of the Circe myth as the universal mortal struggle between reason and appetite to accommodate the "reformed" anthropology of the *Faerie Queene*. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, if man's flesh is utterly corrupt in a Reformed polemic, the contagion of original sin has also debased that part of him most like to God—his mind. Thus, in *Paradise Lost*, when Adam is reunited with Eve after she has tasted the forbidden fruit he describes her as "Defaced, deflowered, and now to death devote!" (9.901). In the *Maske* then, as Shullenberger notes, the change undergone by Comus's victims, "less complete physiologically than that of the poor souls of the *Odyssey*, is more complete where it matters."<sup>15</sup> It is, however, important to note that Milton did not accept the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. If man's divine likeness has been damaged by the Fall, *reliquiae et quoddam lumen omnium mortalium cordibus permansit* ("remnants and a certain gleam have persisted in the hearts of all mortals"), which "gleam" in the regenerate *vero spiritus sancti opera indies ad perfectionem primaevam renovator* ("is daily renewed in the direction of its pristine perfection by the working of the holy spirit").<sup>16</sup> In *De Doctrina Christiana*, then, man's continued degeneration is less the work of "original" than of "personal" sin, against which a good education can guard.<sup>17</sup> If, moreover, the Attendant Spirit, who introduces us to Comus and his rout, works off a Spenserian crib-sheet, this does not necessarily signal Milton's endorsement of the character's mediating function in the *Maske*. Indeed, the very opposite may be the case. The suggestive corollary between the Attendant Spirit's role as both exegete and guide to those who pass through the *Maske*'s *selva obscura* ("... 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 convoy," 78-81) and that of Spenser's Palmer in Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* should, given what was earlier argued of the ambivalence of this character and other pretenders to moral authority in Milton's *Areopagitica*, caution against a wholesale acceptance of the Spirit's assumed omniscience.

<sup>15</sup> Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. and ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers et al., vol. 8, *The Complete Works of John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 677. All further references to *De Doctrina Christiana* are to this edition, cited parenthetically as *CD* hereafter.

<sup>17</sup> Milton notes that *Peccatum cuiusque proprium est quod quisque per se, praeter commune illud peccatum, peccat* ("each person's own sin is that which each commits on his own account, besides that common [original] sin"), *CD* 419.

This point begins to establish Milton's interrogation of allegory as both a hermeneutic tool and mode of literary representation; a critique that, as I gestured in my first chapter, will be seen to run throughout the *Maske*. While the textual relationship between Comus and Circe established in the masque is eventually irreducible to allegory – Comus's character does not exist in pure allegorical relation to any one "stock" representation of Circe – the dramatic function of the Attendant Spirit's character reads almost as a prototype for Fletcher's notion of the "daemonic" quality of the mode. Fletcher's exposition of the metaphysical underpinnings and *modus operandi* of allegory relies heavily upon the notion of daemonic agency, a concept which the critic draws ultimately from Plato, Euripides, and Aristophanes, where "characters with names like Necessity or Ambition are sometimes referred to as daemons, and they appear to hover between personified abstraction and actual deity."<sup>18</sup> As aerial creatures who reside between the heavens and earth and act as messengers between gods and men, daemons offer an analogy for the operation of allegory within hierarchical cosmologies supported by linguistic, philosophical and theological systems which "compartmentalise function," unceasingly relating microcosm to macrocosm, imperfect part to perfect whole.<sup>19</sup> As one whose "errand" (15) sees him pass between "the starry threshold of Joves Court" (1) and "the smoke and stir of this dim spot" (5), a movement which bridges the celestial and earthly spheres, the Attendant Spirit, I would therefore argue, embodies the allegorical principle in Milton's *Maske*: tellingly, in the Trinity manuscript, the character is given an alternative appellation: "Daemon."<sup>20</sup> As my discussion hereafter will draw out, the poetic syntax operative in the masque, and indeed across Milton's corpus as a whole, premises the Spirit's totalising claim to knowledge and moral authority upon a legalistic elision of command and action that veers dangerously close to the territory of sacramental ritual, magic and idolatry. The type of allegorically licensed authority which the Attendant Spirit purports to possess in the *Maske* proves ethically and theologically anathema to Milton even at this relatively

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<sup>18</sup> Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1964); Andrew Escobedo, "Daemon Lovers: Will, Personification, and Character," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 22 (2007): 214.

<sup>19</sup> Fletcher, *Allegory*, 40. See Stephen G. Nichols, "Melusine Between Myth and History: Profile of a Female Demon," in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 137–64, for a useful discussion of medieval "demonological narrative."

<sup>20</sup> Milton, *A Maske: The Earlier Versions*, ed. Sprott, 42.

early stage of his career. It is to this type of allegorical determinism, I argue, that a prophylactic *akrasia*, vital to the poet's notion of Christian liberty, is in the *Maske* tentatively opposed.

### The Lady and the Law

Against the Attendant Spirit, an alternative source of guidance and wisdom is putatively established in the masque in the form of the Lady's brothers. These characters are advanced by Milton as would-be defenders of their sister's virtue, moral advocates upon whose protection she might rely. Yet it is not difficult to detect inadequacies in both the Younger and Elder Brother figures. As we will see again with *Paradise Lost*, in the *Maske* the tensions or ambiguities that qualify Milton's apparently encomiastic portrayal of the brothers often emerge where the script's mythographical investment is most pronounced. One such moment occurs in the redacted version of the myth of Minerva and the Medusa used by the Elder Brother to defend the surety of his sister's chastity at lines 446-51.

Tellingly, the analogy the Elder Brother draws between this mythic trope and his sister's present situation is not quite fit for purpose. Although Minerva might herself possess "rigid looks of chaste austerity" (449), it is essentially a misreading, given the sexual vulnerability that prompts Medusa's transformation in Ovid's account,<sup>21</sup> to attribute such chaste looks to the "snaky-headed Gorgon" (446) herself. Gallagher reads the Elder Brother's use of the Medusa analogy as revealing of Milton's youthful liking for allegorical exegesis, a proclivity the poet had supposedly overcome by the time of his writing of *Paradise Lost*. Reading the implications of the Medusa "allegory" into the masque as a whole, he finds a "certain irony in the Brother's vehemence, since later his quite chaste sister will herself be restrained by 'an enchanted Chair' and threatened with being transformed to alabaster by the power of Comus' wand."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.797-98: *hanc pelagi rector templo vitiasse Minervae / dicitur* ("Tis said that in Minerva's temple Neptune, lord of the Ocean, ravished her").

<sup>22</sup> Philip J. Gallagher, "'Real or Allegoric': The Ontology of Sin and Death in 'Paradise Lost,'" *English Literary Renaissance* 6, no. 2 (1976): 334. The idea that virginity is a virtue sufficient unto itself, so that "She that has that, is clad in complete steel" (420), is refuted by Milton in his *Apology for Smectymnuus* as he uses the metaphor of the virginal woman to illustrate the need for proper church governance: "if Christ be the Churches

In my view, this does not do justice to the complex nature of Milton's poetics in the *Maske*. I would argue that something more than irony is intended, or at least effected here, and that this owes much to the fact that if the Medusa figure is indeed allegorically active, it is an allegory fraught with difficulty. There is general scholarly agreement that the wider dialogue in which the Medusa reference appears works to undermine the Brothers' credibility as both moral and spiritual guides and guards of their sister's chastity. Madsen argues of the Elder Brother's speech that "the patronizing tone, the superabundance of mythological reference, the irrelevance of all this to the Lady's situation, the diction itself, all suggest the imaginative but inexperienced schoolboy,"<sup>23</sup> while Fletcher notes that when "Like an inspired tutor, the Elder Brother exclaims, 'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity,'" "The repetition keys the tone, and it verges upon farce."<sup>24</sup> Whilst I would agree with this analysis, returning attention to the Medusa figure, it might be argued that an emphasis solely on the "ironic" or "farcical" impact of the Elder Brother's speech is short-sighted. These effects are certainly dramatically significant, yet the speech also works proleptically as an expression of the nuanced ethical statement that emerges through Milton's juxtaposition of the Lady's claims to chastity, and the spiritual, as well as physical petrification which – like Spenser's Nymph of the Well and Amavia – she is shown to undergo.

Earlier, I suggested that Milton's Attendant Spirit holds a hierarchically equivalent position and performs a similar function in the *Maske* to that of the Palmer in Spenser's epic. Yet if aspects of the Spirit's character are decidedly legalistic, the portrayal of Comus too carries some affinity with this mode. While Comus's "charming Rod" may only bear a parodic likeness to the Palmer's "vertuous staffe,"<sup>25</sup> the trope of petrification that emerges through the Elder Brother's allusion to Medusa, and which occurs again with Comus's threat to use his wand to keep the Lady's "nerves . . . all chained up in alabaster" (559) proves in the wider context of the *Maske* suggestively evocative of

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husband expecting her to be presented before him a pure unspotted virgin; in what could he shew his tender love to her more, then in prescribing his owne wayes which he best knew would be to the improvement of her health and beauty. . . . For of any age or sex, most unfitly may a virgin be left to an uncertaine and arbitrary education" (188).

<sup>23</sup> William G. Madsen, "The Idea of Nature in Milton's Poetry," in *Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton*, by William G. Madsen, Todd W. Furniss, and Richard B. Young (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 210.

<sup>24</sup> Angus Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque; an Essay on Milton's Comus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 211.

<sup>25</sup> Milton, *A Maske*, 92.1, s.d.; Spenser, *FQ*, 2.12.86.1.

the biblical relationship between Law and stone. At no point in the *Maske* does the Lady drink from the “charmed cup” (51) that is the downfall of those of her captor’s previous victims who “taste through fond intemperate thirst” (67). The Lady is clearly innocent of this vice. Yet as the wider textual implications of the Elder Brother’s Gorgon analogy and Comus’s allusion to alabaster might suggest,<sup>26</sup> her “chastity” as she understands it proves restrictive and life-denying.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that unlike Spenser’s Mordant, who gives in to Acrasia’s temptation and then drinks the water from the nymph’s well, fulfilling Acrasia’s prophecy that death and “loss of loue” will ensue “So soone as Bacchus with the Nympe does lincke” (*FQ* 2.1.55.6), the text of Milton’s *Maske*, as we have received it, fails to tie the Lady’s catatonia directly to any specific external cause: Comus’s threat, “if I but wave this wand . . .” (658) is never explicitly realised, whilst elsewhere stage directions concerning the use of this instrument tend to be clear.<sup>28</sup> Rather than unbridled concupiscence then, the penalty for which under Mosaic Law is spiritual or actual death, the Lady’s predicament may signify the spiritual arrestation or stagnation of the Christian individual excessively conscientious of the old Covenant or Law. This condition, moreover, is identified with a type of allegorical hermeneutics to which Milton, as my last chapter began to suggest, was scathingly opposed.

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<sup>26</sup> Alabaster is a stone with funereal associations, as the contemporary use of this material for effigies and Spenser’s description of the dying Amavia’s “white alabaster brest” (*FQ* 2.1.39.5) further indicates. See also Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi*, where the widowed Duchess, wooing Antonio, seeks to distance herself from “the figure cut in alabaster / [which] Kneels at my husband’s tomb” (John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah S. Marcus (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2009), 1.2.364-65).

<sup>27</sup> This idea is revisited by Milton in the Ovidian allusion that appears at lines 660-61, where Comus threatens to turn the Lady to “a statue, or as Daphne was / Root-bound, that fled Apollo.” Ovid’s presentation of the tale of Apollo’s pursuit of the nymph Daphne, whose metamorphosis into a Laurel tree at the crucial moment of the narrative preserves her chastity, is essentially ambivalent. Daphne is transformed into a beautiful ever-green tree, *perpetuos semper gere frondis honores*, (*Met.* 1. 565), but the change also leaves her barren, rendering Apollo’s desire for Daphne *sterilem . . . amorem*, “a fruitless love” (*Met.* 1.496). Daphne’s chastity, of course, is generally celebrated by early modern allegorists: Golding, for instance, praises the nymph as a “A myrror of virginitie,” in the introduction to his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Arthur Golding, “The Epistle,” in *The. Xv. Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, Entytuled Metamorphosis*, by Ovid, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Willyam Seres, 1567), a2r-b3r). Comus’s pejorative use of the myth in Milton’s *Maske* does, however, have some precedent in post-Reformation literature, where chaste marriage and not sterile virginity is presented as the ideal state. In Spenser’s *Amoretti*, for instance – a sonnet sequence which rejects the *sterilis amor* of the Petrarchan poet’s fixation on an unavailable paramour, celebrating instead both the pursuit and attainment of marital love – the poet-lover wittily turns Ovid to his advantage, using the myth of Apollo and Daphne to warn the lady he loves of the dangers of spurning him. In the speaker’s retelling, Daphne’s metamorphosis is in fact a punishment for her prideful rejection of “Phoebus lovely fire” (*Amoretti* 28).

<sup>28</sup> See 92.1, “Comus enters with a charming-rod in one hand,” and 812.1-8214, where the absence of any mention of the wand in the stage directions is accounted for by the Spirit’s reproach of the Brothers: “O ye mistook, ye should have snatched his wand” (814).

That true spiritual liberty could not arise under the Mosaic Law is stressed by Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana: Lex enim quandiu est, cogit, quia servitutis lex est* (“For the law, as long as it exists, does coerce, for it is a law of slavery; and coercion and slavery are as inseparable from the law as freedom, too, is from the gospel.”)<sup>29</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, this motif of “coercion and slavery” – translated alternatively as “constraint and bondage”<sup>30</sup> – is also prevalent in medieval and early modern discussions of allegoresis. Guyon and the Palmer’s binding of Acrasia at the end of Book 2 of the *Faerie Queene*, for instance, is reminiscent of Jerome and Boccaccio’s deployment of the captive woman of Deuteronomy 21 as a figure for the way that Pagan literature might be seized, stripped of excess signification and realigned to conform with Christian values. In practice, as we have also seen, this hermeneutic strategy introduces further religious and ethical difficulties which Spenser’s text highlights, but does not resolve. In the Odyssean episodes of the Palmer and Guyon’s sea passage to Acrasia’s Bower, the Palmer’s strictures function much like allegory itself, systematically binding Guyon to a series of interpretative assumptions that protect him from the potentially dangerous pleasures that might otherwise surface in this part of the epic. Yet as I have argued, against the titular claim of Book 2, this constraint also prevents the character, and reader, from engaging in the acts of discernment and moral confrontation that would seem necessary to the development of a truly temperate disposition. Similarly to the way in which the Acrasia narrative is framed in Spenser, in Milton’s *Maske*, a biblical register of stone and law conjoins with the metaphoric association of allegory with bondage to suggest a spiritual reason for the Lady’s paralysis. Moving beyond Spenser, however, Milton also attempts to engineer a solution to the problem he depicts.

The reasons for the Lady’s eventual liberation in the *Maske* become clearer, I would argue, when we consider the interaction between Milton’s own particular brand of Protestant poetics and the Reformed doctrine of *sola scriptura*. The passage from 2 Corinthians, to which Milton devotes considerable attention in *De Doctrina Christiana*, and to which his statement that “the law, as long as it exists, does coerce, for it is a law of slavery; and coercion and slavery are as inseparable from the

<sup>29</sup> CD 715. The biblical passage Milton draws from here is 2 Corinthians 3:3.

<sup>30</sup> John Milton and Merritt Yerkes Hughes, *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: Hackett Publishing, 1957), 1012.



law as freedom, too, is from the gospel” alludes, also contains a line that came to form a cornerstone of Reformation discussions of the proper modes of scriptural exegesis: “the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3.6). As MacCallum notes,

In the history of the study of the Bible, two influential interpretations of this statement have frequently vied with each other. One interpretation conceives of the life-giving spirit in terms of knowledge, the other in terms of grace. The first view results in a theory of Christian symbolism; it identifies the work of the spirit with the comprehension of metaphorical or figurative expressions, maintaining that spiritual understanding arises from a gradual realization of the true meanings of signs. This theory leads finally to allegorical interpretation of the Bible. The alternative view of the Pauline injunction results in a theory of Christian liberty. This explanation associates the letter with the outward and compulsory law and the spirit with grace.<sup>31</sup>

Only the latter reading of Paul was accepted by the sixteenth-century Reformers,<sup>32</sup> and Milton appears to have aligned himself with the theologians in this respect. In his *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline of England* (1641), for instance, we learn how “. . . men came to scan the Scriptures, by the Letter, and in the Covenant of our Redemption, magnifi’d the external signs more then the quickning power of the Spirit, and yet looking on them through their own guiltinesse with a Servile feare, and

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<sup>31</sup> H. R. MacCallum, “Milton and Figurative Interpretation of the Bible,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1962): 397.

<sup>32</sup> MacCallum, “Milton and Figurative Interpretation of the Bible,” 398. See also John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1848), 175:

The exposition contrived by Origen has got into general circulation – that by the letter we ought to understand the grammatical and genuine meaning of Scripture, or the literal sense (as they call it), and that by the spirit is meant the allegorical meaning, which is commonly reckoned to be the spiritual meaning. Accordingly, during several centuries, nothing was more commonly said, or more generally received, than this – that Paul here furnishes us with a key for expounding Scripture by allegories, while nothing is farther from his intention. For by the term letter he means outward preaching, of such a kind as does not reach the heart; and, on the other hand, by spirit he means living doctrine, of such a nature as worketh effectually . . . on the minds of men, through the grace of the Spirit.

finding as little comfort, or rather terror from them again.”<sup>33</sup> This account associates the “symbolic” mode of reading with both the oppression of Law and the promotion of textual idolatry – a phenomenon towards which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Milton shows particular disdain. Thus, in *De Doctrina Christiana*, he warns that in reading scripture

*ex iis quae scripta sunt, nulla consecretaria, nisi necessario plane deducta. Sunt admittenda; ne pro iis quae scripta sunt, ea quae scripta non sunt, credere cogamur, et pro divina doctrina humanas rationes perunque fallaces, nubem pro vero corpore amplectamur: iis enim quae scripta sunt in sacris libris, no iis quae disputata sunt in scholis, fides obligatur.*

(“no inferences from the things written are to be admitted unless they are plainly necessary deductions, lest we be forced to believe the things not written instead of the things written, and embrace mostly fallacious human reasonings instead of divine teaching, a cloud instead of the true body; for faith is bound by the things written in the sacred books, not by the things disputed in the schools.”) (805)

The emphasis meanwhile placed by the Reformers on typological readings of the Bible, even as “symbolic” or allegorical readings of scripture were increasingly disfavoured, has been discussed extensively by historians and literary scholars.<sup>34</sup> We might take the Angel Michael’s revelation to Adam in Book 12 of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as an example of the exegetical work typology, which explicates the old testament in light of the new, could perform:

. . . Law appears imperfect, and but given

With purpose to resign them in full time

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<sup>33</sup> John Milton, “Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline of England,” in *The Works of John Milton*, vol. 3 (Columbia), 3.

<sup>34</sup> See for instance Donald R. Dickson, “The Complexities of Biblical Typology in the Seventeenth Century,” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 11, no. 3 (1987): 253–72, and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).

Up to a better covenant, disciplined  
 From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit,  
 From imposition of strict laws, to free  
 Acceptance of large grace, from servile fear  
 To filial, works of law to works of faith.

(300-306)<sup>35</sup>

Whilst the importance of typology to medieval hermeneutics should not be underrated,<sup>36</sup> a significant difference in its use by earlier and later theologians does tend to be observed. For Preus, this difference may be traced to divergent treatments of the trope of “promise” in medieval and early modern exegesis. In the older tradition, “Christians live, in part, under the same *lex* and *doctrina* (*mutatis mutandis*) as the Old Testament people. But they live under different promises. For promise has an intrinsic historical and temporal meaning: it points to a time of fulfilment . . . The consequence seems to be that the Old Testament promises are irrelevant to the Christian virtue of hope, which depends entirely on the New Testament.”<sup>37</sup> A “hermeneutical divide” thus operates between the testaments, so that the Old Testament’s “sole theological relevance is in its New Testament antitypes.”<sup>38</sup> A shift in this approach, which displaces the “divide,” has been attributed by several scholars to Luther and the later Reformers’ rather different understanding of promise. Preus suggests that for Luther, the “spirit” that opposed the “letter” of the Law came to encompass promise, so that “the ‘divide’ no longer lies between the testaments but begins to appear as a distinction grounded in the Old Testament itself – between its law and its promise, between ‘two testaments’ found there, between the ‘law of Moses’ and the ‘law of the Lord.’”<sup>39</sup> Both the Israelites and Christians live under the same promise, yet full knowledge of the “matter” of this promise becomes available only through Christ. Thus, “the requirements for Old Testament exegesis are that the interpreter have a good

<sup>35</sup> Echoes of Galatians 3:22-6 and Hebrews 86 are present here.

<sup>36</sup> Dickson, “Biblical Typology,” 263.

<sup>37</sup> James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise. Old Testament interpretation from Augustine to the young Luther* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969), 17.

<sup>38</sup> Preus, *From Shadow to Promise*, 16; 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

knowledge of the New Testament, as well as the living Spirit, who gives ‘eruditio’ (spiritual understanding).”<sup>40</sup>

As Preus notes, this method of reading demands that “the interpreter does not place himself with the Old Testament writer in time.”<sup>41</sup> The alternative hermeneutic approach might be exemplified by the narrative perspective Milton offers his reader at the end of *Paradise Lost*, where we bear witness to the Angel Michael’s apocalyptic revelation to Adam of the entire span of human, and Christian history – a revelation which our first parent, who lacks lived experience of the Gospel, fails to fully grasp.<sup>42</sup> By way of contrast, Milton seems to suggest, the Christian reader freed from the yoke of the law and well-versed in typology may find spiritual profit even in Pagan allusion.<sup>43</sup> Green makes this point in her discussion of the significance of Milton’s relation of Ovid’s Deucalion and Pyrrha to the repenting Adam and Eve in Book 11 of *Paradise Lost*, the first and only mythic comparison the poet grants the couple after their fall:

. . . nor important less  
 Seemed their petition, than when the ancient pair  
 In fables old, less ancient yet than these  
 Deucalion and chaste Pyrrha to restore  
 The race of mankind drowned, before the shrine  
 Of Themis stood devout.

(11.8-14)

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the significance of Adam’s various misapprehensions in this part of *PL*, see Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, “Structure and the Symbolism of Vision in Michael’s Prophecy, *Paradise Lost*, Books 11-12,” *Philological Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1963): 25–35, and Regina M. Schwartz, “From Shadowy Types to Shadowy Types: The Unendings of *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 24 (1989): 123–39. Where Schwartz argues that “Adam’s veil never lifts” (ibid. 126), Lewalski sees Adam’s faith advance in line with Michael’s historical revelation, so that “Adam’s experience is directly related to that of his progeny. By their example and at the same rate of speed as they, he is led to understand the true meaning of the Covenant of Grace first revealed to him in the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent” (“Structure and Symbolism,” 29-30).

<sup>43</sup> Bacon had praised “the wisdom of the primitive ages . . . [which] invented the figure to shadow the meaning,” (Francis Bacon, “De Sapientia Veterum,” in *Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding and R. Ellis, vol. 6 (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1857), 698), an idea echoed by Raleigh, who attested that these “crooked images [of the] one true history” contain some “Reliques of Truth” (Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London, 1614), 1.1.6).

As Green notes, in *Paradise Lost* “the first stage of the Father’s promise to ‘soften stony hearts’ (3.189) is fulfilled in the inward change that takes place in Adam and Eve, and which is symbolized, with characteristic subtlety and indirection on Milton’s part, in Deucalion and Pyrrha’s recreation of the human race through the miraculous softening of hard stones.”<sup>44</sup> The alert reader will notice a further analogy between the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha and the Old Testament story of Noah, for whom, as we learn later in Book 11, God “relents, not to blot out mankind” (11.891), and acts instead to “raise another world” (11.877), a decision which, Green finds, “in turn looks directly towards the Last Judgement, when fire rather than water will ‘purge all things new’ (xi. 900) and ‘dissolve Satan with his perverted world’ before ‘New heavens, new earth, ages of endless date’ are raised ‘From the conflagrant mass, purged and refined’ (xii. 546–49).”<sup>45</sup> Pagan, Old Testament and New Testament narratives thus converge to furnish “a graded typological framework for the historical vision recorded in the concluding books of the epic.”<sup>46</sup>

As the above discussion might suggest, critical attention to Milton’s prophetic treatment of the Mosaic tradition has tended to focus on the late texts of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. Yet the influence of this radically revisionary reading practice may also be detected in his earlier work. Something very like it may account for the strange version of the story in Exodus 16 of God’s provision of manna to the Israelites which appears in the *Areopagitica*, a misrepresentation which has, in comparison to Milton’s erroneous recall of Guyon’s encounter with Mammon in the *Faerie Queene* in the same work, received slight critical attention. The allusion to Exodus is of particular interest

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<sup>44</sup> Mandy Green, “‘Ad Ferrum Ab Auro’: Degenerative and Regenerative Patterning in the Final Books of *Paradise Lost*,” *Modern Language Review* 102, no. 3 (2007): 659. See also Ovid, *Met.* 1.400–402:

*Saxa (quis hoc credat, nisi sit pro teste vetustas?)  
ponere durtiem coepere suumque rigorem  
mollirique mora mollitaque ducere formam.*

“The stones – who would believe it unless ancient tradition vouched for it? – began at once to lose their hardness and stiffness, to grow soft slowly, and softened to take on form.”

Sandys’ allegorical explanation is further instructive here: “God is said in the Gospell to be able of stones to raise up children unto Abraham: the sence not unlike, though diviner: meaning the ingrafting of the Gentilies into his faith, hardened in sinne through ignorance and custome. So the giving us hearts of flesh instead of those of stone, is meant by our conversion” (*Ovid’s Metamorphosis Englished*, 70).

<sup>45</sup> Green, “Ad Ferrum,” 661.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 662.

since it is used by Milton to illustrate the virtue of temperance, dialectically bound up, as has been discussed, with the trope of *continentia* or chastity, a thematic preoccupation of the *Maske*. Explaining in the *Areopagitica* that “God uses not to captivat under a perpetuall childhood of prescription, but trusts . . . [man] with the gift of reason to be his own chooser” (310), Milton notes that “when he himself tabl’d the Jews from heaven, that Omer which was every mans daily portion of Manna, is computed to have bin more then might have well suffic’d the heartiest feeder thrice as many meals” (309). Such generosity signifies that where the “great . . . vertue” of temperance is concerned, “God committs the managing of so great a trust, without particular Law or prescription, wholly to the demeanour of every grown man” (309). What is strange about this is that, as Kolbrener points out, Milton’s retelling of the story of Exodus “occludes the *intemperance* of the Israelites who, against the directive of Moses, hoard their daily measure so as to have an abundant supply for the following day. Thus Exodus 16: 20: ‘Not withstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them.’”<sup>47</sup> Kolbrener argues that “Milton’s omission tends to emphasize the reasoned temperance of the Israelite multitude while obscuring their need for divine guidance that comes through Moses’s ‘wroth,’”<sup>48</sup> yet in terms of the surrounding text of the passage in *Areopagitica*, this claim seems unsubstantiated. All that Milton stresses is that the munificence of God gives the Israelites the *liberty* to be temperate: he does not preclude the possibility that they will fail to enact this virtue. By writing Moses out of the Biblical story, there is a strong sense of typology at play in Milton’s reading. Indeed, such liberty as he presupposes in suggesting that God leaves man “to be his own chooser” is properly precluded under the Law. While the Israelites themselves are bound by Law, Milton, as a Christian, is not. Rhetorically, this typological inflection works to situate him as both reader and writer, within and yet without the Old Testament text he cites.

We can return, now, to the *Maske*. As Milton would explain in *De Doctrina Christiana*, the notion of Christian liberty is critically dependent upon the “abrogation” of the Mosaic “law of servitude” with the coming of the Gospel (*CD* 715). Law is thus dialectically bound up in the

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<sup>47</sup> Kolbrener, “‘Plainly Partial,’” 66.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

operation of liberty and grace, and it is the movement from one state to another that the Lady's situation in the *Maske* might exemplify. In Milton's poetic and polemical works, this departure from or rupture of the order of Law is sometimes indicated by a considered misreading of the sort his retelling of the Exodus manna episode in the *Areopagitica* enacts. This misreading, as I have suggested, opens a discursive space where the possibility exists for man to conduct himself in either a temperate or intemperate fashion. This rejection of compulsion indicates an important tenet of Augustinian theology – the idea of a human will that is free to consent to sin, but also to accept grace – and would seem to prove entirely compatible with Milton's later Arminian tendencies; as he would write in *De Doctrina Christiana*, those that *ad perfectionem in Christo consequendam serio atque assidue nituntur . . . perfecti saepe in scripturis, et inculpati, et non peccare dicuntur; quia peccatum in iis ut haereat non regnat tamen* (“strive earnestly and assiduously to attain perfection in Christ . . . [are] often said in scripture to be perfect and blameless, and not to sin; for though sin still cleaves to them, it does not reign [in them]”) (609). The strong influence, as I shall argue, that an Augustinian emphasis on volitional movement bears even on the earlier theology of Milton's *Maske*, runs counter to the reception of the voluntarist model by the Reformers, who tended to prefer Augustine's later “Anti-Julian” writings where the intractability of concupiscence – in which both man's will and reason are hopelessly mired – is far more strongly stressed.<sup>49</sup>

As I have suggested in the previous chapter, Spenser's attempt to establish a moral framework for *The Faerie Queene* that might redeem the meaningfulness of the action of its heroes from the fatalist leanings of Reformed theology sees him yoke an Aristotelian, “intellectualist” understanding of human capability to the Christianised, Platonic notion of the perpetual conflict between spirit and flesh that permeates medieval anthropology. As such, Spenser is able to suggest that reason in regenerate man *may* uphold virtuous action. This is only secured, however, by means of an oppressive legalism which guides through prohibition. If, as has been argued of the Lutheran spiritual polarity,<sup>50</sup> there is little opportunity in this schema for an experience of true *akrasia*, there is also very little “positive” moral action of which Sir Guyon, like the continent Lutheran individual, might avail

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<sup>49</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

himself. As Teskey observes “For the Spenserian knights, who are, in effect, what they do in the story, there is no Cartesian sanctuary where Reason can sit back and choose.”<sup>51</sup> Teskey’s relation of this lack of choice to the allegorical machinery of *The Faerie Queene* is insightful, and recalls the morally didactic grounds upon which Spenser justifies his art in the prefatory “Letter to Raleigh.” Conversely, in Milton’s polemical tracts, the scepticism with which he treats the notion that any earthly authority, spiritual or secular, might dictate the proper arbitration of meaning – a wariness which informs both the antipathy towards legalism and distrust of allegorical hermeneutics evident in these works – may be instructive in understanding the necessity of *akrasia* to the later writer’s theology and poetics.

It is in the sacramental lexis of the *Areopagitica*, perhaps, that these ideas converge most acutely. The absence of Moses, the very embodiment of Law, from the passage concerning manna, which Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana* explains as a type for the Lord’s Supper,<sup>52</sup> is highly significant given the position he takes on the use of such sacraments in the later tract. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton disputes the “indispensable” nature of sacraments such as the Eucharist, since such material entities *per se nec salute conferunt nec gratiam, sed utramque tantummodo credentibus vel obsignant vel repraesentant* (“by themselves confer neither salvation nor grace, but [merely] either seal or symbolize each of these benefits for believers only”).<sup>53</sup> Such practices are acceptable if one recognises that, as in all earthly experience of the divine, the spiritual import of sacramental rites is highly mediated, yet a further qualm emerges around the tendency of clerics to attempt to monopolise the practice of the same, annexing the object’s mediatory function to their own spiritual authority. Thus, Milton goes on to critique those ministers who refuse to “allow the celebration of the Lord’s Supper . . . unless they themselves are its ministers,” since *novi testament sacerdos unicus est Christus . . . non est igitur ullus ordo hominum qui munus hoc sacra dandi ac dispensandi, sibi prae aliis vindicare iure possit; cum in Christo aequae omnes sacerdotes* (“the unique priest of the covenant is Christ. . . there is therefore no order of humankind which can rightly claim for itself before others

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<sup>51</sup> Gordon Teskey, “From Allegory to Dialectic: Imagining Error in Spenser and Milton,” *PMLA* 101, no. 1 (1986): 10.

<sup>52</sup> *CD* 749.

<sup>53</sup> *CD* 755.



this function of giving and dispensing the sacred things, since in Christ we are all equally priests”).<sup>54</sup>

We might think again here of Milton’s jibe at Herbert Palmer, as he threatens to return the “impudence” his righteous adversary finds in his honest claim to authorship – Milton’s faithful participation, if you will, in the literary banquet of scriptural interpretation – “for a phylactery to stitch upon his arrogance.”<sup>55</sup>

### The Lady’s predicament

In the *Maske*, I would argue, Milton, like Spenser seeks to establish a virtue ethics that expands moral and spiritual potential beyond the limits set by a deterministic and pessimistic Reformed theology. Yet for the reasons set out above, Milton refuses to accept Spenser’s legalistic solution. In the extended temptation scene played out between Comus and the Lady, ethical and mythological, religious and representational concerns converge. The Lady’s sexual vulnerability, belaboured by her brothers prior to this scene, is elaborated rhetorically here in the terms of the debate concerning the proper use of beauty that is staged between herself and Comus. That the Lady counters Comus’s celebration of “mutual and partaken bliss” (740) with the “holy dictate of spare temperance” (766) and “the sage / And serious doctrine of virginity” (785-86) would seem to establish the sorcerer’s offering as a Circean cup of concupiscence, yet there is more at stake here than the resistance of sensual pleasure. In my first chapter, I began to discuss the anti-Laudian implications of Milton’s representation of Comus and his “rabble” in the *Maske*, yet in fact his critique runs deeper than the contemporary political controversy. As critics have noted, the “charmed cup” of “misused wine” that Comus inherits from his mother is, like the golden cup that Excesse offers Guyon in Spenser’s bower of bliss, strongly redolent of the rhetoric and imagery that accompanied Reformation indictment of the Catholic cup of communion, and idolatrous “Popish” practices more widely.<sup>56</sup> There is, moreover, a

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<sup>54</sup> *CD* 759.

<sup>55</sup> *Tetrachordon* 68.

<sup>56</sup> Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 158. The whore of

strong link between Reformation iconoclasm, which sought to destroy all such idols, and contemporary distrust of allegory as a mode which “can suddenly reverse its governing convention so that poetical images are no longer regarded merely as signs but as the true forms of existence beneath the text that our senses read out to us.”<sup>57</sup>

Milton’s “living apprehension of Scripture,”<sup>58</sup> a mode of reading in the “Christian liberty” tradition discussed earlier, serves in part as a prophylactic against the idolatrous dangers of allegorical exegesis by positing the active, individual Christian mind as an essential third term in any representational or hermeneutic process. If, against the confusion of signifier and signified threatened by allegory, an emphasis on mediation is evident here, there is a parallel, prominent insistence in Reformed literature upon the importance of the *right* mediator: Christ. As Dickson notes, one consequence of the Reformers’ efforts to move away from medieval allegoresis was that “typological symbolism . . . became especially important for relating the individual Christian’s life to Christ’s in a crucial theological way.”<sup>59</sup> Milton’s Lady would seem to understand this. She will not taste from Comus’s cup since “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” (701-704). If her second claim here, that “that which is not good, is not delicious / To a well-governed and wise appetite” recalls Aristotelian *sophrosyne*, a virtue which requires the sense perceptions to work together with reason in perfect moral harmony, the first part of the Lady’s argument, “none / But such as are good men can give good things,” is as Madsen notes “squarely in the Christian tradition . . . ‘In all cases of this kind,’ says St. Augustine, ‘it is not the quality of the things we use, but our motive in using them and

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Babylon is said to carry a “golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication” (Revelations 17:4).

<sup>57</sup> Teskey, “From Allegory to Dialectic,” 19.

<sup>58</sup> MacCallum, “Milton and Figurative Interpretation of the Bible,” 399.

<sup>59</sup> Dickson, “The Complexities of Biblical Typology,” 264. The theme of *Imitatio Christi* is treated by the Apostle Paul (see for instance 1 Cor. 11:1 and 4:16-17; Phil. 3:10, 17; and 1 Thess. 1:6), and became a staple of medieval theological and devotional literature, as the popularity of Thomas à Kempis’s early fifteenth-century work, *De Imitatione Christi*, might attest. For the early modern reception history of Kempis’s book, which was translated by Protestant, as well as Catholic writers, see David Crane, “English Translations of the *Imitatio Christi* in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Recusant History* 13 (1975): 79–100; Elizabeth K. Hudson, “English Protestants and the *Imitatio Christi*, 1580-1620,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 4 (1988): 541–58; and Maximilian von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425 - 1650: From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

our way of striving for them, that causes our actions to be either commendable or reprehensible.”<sup>60</sup>

In questioning Comus’s motive, then, the Lady is acting as a good Christian – an iconoclastic, Reformed Christian, what’s more, if we deem her speech to carry sufficient oppositional weight against the idolatrous implications of Comus’s offer. Yet at other moments in the *Maske*, she acts as one unduly bound by Law. The Lady’s appeal as she wanders alone in the woods to “thou unblemished form of Chastity” (214), the third part of a personified, allegorical triad which also comprises “pure-eyed Faith” and “white-handed Hope” (212) recalls the entrance of the triumphant virtues in the French *Balet* and Jonson’s *Pleasure*, but also Augustine’s encounter with the figure of “Continentia” in Book 8 of his *Confessions*.<sup>61</sup> The narrative at this point in the *Confessions* enlists a different interpretation of Romans 7 to that which I have described as the “mature” Augustinian reading of the biblical speaker as an *enkratic*, or continent, *Paulus Christianus*. For Augustine, at this earlier stage in his spiritual and literary career, the speaker who laments that “that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7: 15) is the akratic Paul, pre-conversion, with whom Augustine himself, similarly bound by the law, identifies.<sup>62</sup> In the *Confessions*, the vision Augustine then receives of Lady Continentia, the spouse of God, precipitates his reading of Romans 13: 13-14 with its instruction to *induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis* (“clothe yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh concerning its physical desires”), a dictum which was *quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt* (“like a light of sanctuary poured into my heart; every shadow of doubt melted away”) (8.12.29). Augustine accepts grace, and remains continent thereafter. In Milton’s *Maske*, however, the Lady is *not* bound by the Law. Her appeal to a personified virtue figure who would not seem out of place in a medieval mystery play, therefore, is both anachronistic and rather idolatrous in effect, reliant as it is upon “the identification of the

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<sup>60</sup> Madsen, “The Idea of Nature in Milton’s Poetry,” 204. Madsen cites Augustine, “Christian Instruction,” in *Christian Instruction, Admonition and Grace, The Christian Combat, Faith, Hope and Charity*, trans. John J. Gavigan (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 12.19. In the *Maske*, the Lady’s interrogation of Comus’s motive further anticipates Christ’s response to Satan’s temptation of food following his forty day fast in Milton’s *Paradise Regained*, where Jesus retorts that he will only eat “as I like / the giver” (2. 321-22).

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. Carolyn J. B. Hammond, Loeb Classical Library, LCL 26-27 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 8.11.27. All other references and translations are to this edition.

<sup>62</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, 25.

mediator with the object of mediation.”<sup>63</sup>

The apparent seriousness of this lapse might be mitigated by appealing again to Preus’s argument that a new understanding of “promise” came to bridge the hermeneutical divide between the Old and New testaments in Reformed exegesis: Luther thus observes “a parallel, an analogy, of situations in the lives of the Old Testament faithful and the Christian. For the Old Testament believer to be under the law and asking for Christ is the same as for the Christian to be in sin and asking for forgiveness.”<sup>64</sup> If the Lady’s plea to Chastity were fashioned in this way, her safety, *sub gratia*, might seem to be assured, yet it is difficult to locate any direct admission in her speech of even that “indwelling” original sin for which the regenerate owe continued repentance.<sup>65</sup> Where the Lady is silent on this matter, however, the text in which her character is inscribed is not. Although, as I have suggested, the Lady is clearly not vicious, the physicality of her predicament cannot be denied. Despite her virginity, the Lady finds herself finally incapacitated in a chair “Smear’d with gums of glutinous heat” (916), an image which, as Le Comte argues, carries distinctly sexual associations,<sup>66</sup> and which might also recall Ovid’s tale of Circe’s jealousy and punishment of her love-rival Scylla (*Met.* 14.1-74), given that, as Green notes, early modern writers tended to see “Scylla herself [as] the prime culprit for her transformation, which becomes a punishment for sexual sin.”<sup>67</sup> Sandys, for instance, explains that Scylla, “once polluted with the sorceries of Circe; that is, having rendred her maiden honour to bee deflowred by bewitching pleasure . . . is transformed to an horrid monster . . . That the upper part of her body, is feigned to retaine a humane figure, and the lower to be bestiall.” This metamorphosis “intimates how man, a divine creature, endued with wisdome and intelligence, in whose superiour parts, as in a high tower, that immortall spirit resideth . . . can never so degenerate

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<sup>63</sup> William Kolbrener, *Milton’s Warring Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 151. Milton’s view that even under the gospel we possess “a twofold scripture: the external scripture of the written word, and the internal one of the holy spirit . . . etched on believers’ hearts,” that which is internal being “supreme and pre-eminent” (*CD* 811), may also be relevant here.

<sup>64</sup> Preus, *From Shadow to Promise*, 172.

<sup>65</sup> Critics have for some time speculated about a possible autobiographical connection between the Lady of the *Maske* and Milton himself, nicknamed by his peers at Cambridge the “Lady” of Christ’s. If Fallon’s observation that “where anxious self-examination and conviction of sin is a Protestant norm enforced by Lutheran and Calvinist theology, Milton writes instead of his blamelessness and heroic virtue” is accepted, the Lady’s own lack of repentance in the *Maske* might further support this hypothesis (Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton’s Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007), 21).

<sup>66</sup> Edward Le Comte, *Milton and Sex* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 1–2.

<sup>67</sup> Mandy Green, *Milton’s Ovidian Eve* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 171.

into a beast, as when he giveth himselfe over to the lowe delights of those baser parts of the body, Dogs and Wolves, the blind & salvage fury of concupiscence” (*Met*, 475). For the captive Lady in Milton’s *Maske*, this degeneration seems to have already half-begun. Despite her vocal resistance of her tempter, the Lady is found by her friends with her “baser parts” *in extremis*, stuck fast to Comus’s “marble venom’d seat” (915).

The particular nature of the Lady’s helplessness might further remind us of Christian discussions of *akrasia* as a state of bondage (*ligamen*), to which reason is subjected by the passions.<sup>68</sup> This draws upon the Augustinian understanding, discussed in my previous chapter, that in his fallen state man’s will suffers from a double inclination towards action guided by right reason on the one hand and concupiscence on the other. In fact, we may be forewarned of the danger the Lady’s innate, mortal concupiscence poses to her spiritual welfare far earlier in the *Maske* than the climactic binding scene. The brothers’ rather hyperbolic claims for their sister’s “saintly chastity” (452) raise suspicions which are only exacerbated by certain inconsistencies within the Lady’s own speech, if we listen with a Miltonic ear. It is noteworthy that the character’s account of why her brothers left her in the woods is revised in the presence of Comus: alone on stage, the Lady announces that they “Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket side, / To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit” (184-85), yet before her tempter, she suggests that her siblings’ purpose was “To seek i’ the valley some cool friendly spring” (281). Given the Bacchic association of berries earlier in the *Maske* (Bacchus’s “clustering locks, / With Ivy berries wreathed” (54-55), we are told, attracted Circe’s desiring gaze), as well as the significance of fruit in the Biblical story of man’s first wandering or going astray, the Lady’s late removal of the berries from her account of her abandonment may suggest a tacit awareness, yet public denial, of her complicity in the sin of our “general mother” (*PL* 4.492).<sup>69</sup> This denial is portentous. As

<sup>68</sup> Aquinas, *De Malo*, ed. Leonina, vol. 23, *Opera Omnia*, q3 a9. Cf. Aristotle, *EN*, 1146a24.

<sup>69</sup> The spectre of the Fall is raised again later in the *Maske*, as Comus implores the recalcitrant Lady to “be wise, and taste” (812) the cup he offers her. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Satan tempts Eve to disobey God and take the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge by claiming that if

Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,  
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then  
Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,  
Knowing both good and evil as they know.

(9.706-710)

Milton knew, “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John I.8). Without a confession of sin, repentance is impossible, and *Renato resipiscentia fide* (“repentance is prior to faith”).<sup>70</sup> We may begin to see, then, why the lady’s appeal to “Faith...hope...and... Chastity” does not procure the expected heavenly succour.<sup>71</sup> Instead of “a glistening guardian” (218), the “noise” (226) she makes with her song to Echo attracts only the attention of Comus and the Attendant Spirit, who initially fails to come to her aid.<sup>72</sup>

### Chastity, charity and choice

Perhaps even more revealing than the Lady’s legalistic, semi-idolatrous dependency, her lack of repentance and ill-qualified assertion of faith, however, is her substitution here of chastity for charity, the scriptural partner of faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13) of which “the greatest of these *is* charity” (1 Cor. 13:13). The *Maske*’s particular emphasis on chastity, of course, is often understood in terms of Milton’s preoccupation with this virtue, which seems to have borne especial personal significance for the poet.<sup>73</sup> Given moreover the recent, and notorious, trial and execution of the Earl of Castlehaven (Lord Bridgewater’s brother-in-law) for sexual crimes against his own household, the theme of the *Maske* may have been particularly apt.<sup>74</sup> Yet the Lady’s theatrical amendment of

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Eve is persuaded by this argument, as her speech before she eats the fruit makes clear:

Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine,  
Fair to the eye, inviting to the taste,  
Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then  
To reach, and feed at once both body and mind?  
(9.776-79)

<sup>70</sup> *CD* 573.

<sup>71</sup> The less than desirable consequences of the Lady’s song are particularly striking given that elsewhere, Milton is fond of stressing virginity’s Orphic powers. See for instance his *Epitaphium Damonis*, 212-19; *Lycidas*, 175-81 and *Elegia sexta*, 63-4.

<sup>72</sup> The character’s rather cryptic explanation for his lack of intervention at this point, “Longer I durst not stay,” might remind the more cynically-minded audience member of the Spirit’s self-confessed reluctance to “soil these pure ambrosial weeds, /With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould” (16-17).

<sup>73</sup> For a discussion of Milton’s ideas about chastity, see Bonnie Lander Johnson, *Chastity in Early Stuart Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 138-71.

<sup>74</sup> See Barbara Breasted, “‘Comus’ and the Castlehaven Scandal,” *Milton Studies* 3 (1971): 201-24, for this argument, and John Creaser, “Milton’s ‘Comus’: The Irrelevance of the Castlehaven Scandal,” *Milton Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1987): 24-34, for an opposing view.

scripture, which entails, Ross argues, a “reduction of the highest supernatural grace to a secondary practical virtue . . . too startling, too exposed, to have been accidental,”<sup>75</sup> has serious theological ramifications. Importantly, given the symbolic register and thematic preoccupations of the *Maske*, in the Thomist tradition *caritas* or charity differentiates the old from the new Law.<sup>76</sup> Without charity, the movement from law to gospel, or, analogously, from sin to grace, is all but impossible: tellingly, Weatherby notes of Spenser’s Nymph of the Well, whose associations with Law were outlined in my previous chapter, that

the Palmer’s story of her desperate flight from Faunus and her ultimate liquefaction as a last and equally desperate resort is contrary in emphasis at every point to the image of Christ enduring in perfect charity the passion which his persecutors impose upon him and freely pouring out water from his wounded flesh for the salvation of those very persecutors. The waters that transmit her virtue are “chast and pure” but also “cold through feare” (2.2.9). . . . Small wonder that unlike the water of baptism, poured out freely in fervent charity, this spring will not heal the wound of man’s nature.<sup>77</sup>

The supernatural provenance of charity is made clear by Milton in *CD*, where he notes that a charitable disposition arises *ex sensu divini amoris in corda regenitorum per spiritum effuse* (“out of a sense of the divine love poured out into the hearts of the regenerate through the spirit”).<sup>78</sup> It is for this reason perhaps that the Lady’s preference of chastity, a virtue of particular importance to her character in the *Maske*, leads Ross to regard her as “wholly self-regarding,” guilty of exaggerating “her own role in the workings of grace.”<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Milton’s declaration in *De Doctrina Christiana* that *charitatis defectis . . . caetera nostra dona atque opera quamvis optima videantur, reddit nobis inutilia* (“a failure of charity . . . renders useless to us our other gifts and works, however excellent they may

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<sup>75</sup> Malcolm Ross, *Poetry and Dogma, the Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in 17th Century English Poetry* (N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 196.

<sup>76</sup> Preus, *From Shadow to Promise*, 48.

<sup>77</sup> Weatherby, “Two Images of Mortalitie,” 341–42.

<sup>78</sup> *CD* 601.

<sup>79</sup> Ross, *Poetry and Dogma*, 198.

seem”) (1061) ostensibly weighs in favour of this assessment.

It ought to be considered, however, that if the voluntarist theology to which I have argued the *Maske* is indebted would seem to grant man considerable control over his own moral destiny, Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings stress the impossibility not only of charity but chastity existing apart from an act of divine will. That this is also Milton’s position is, I would argue, implicit in his theological works, where he claims that *Recte autem de Deo sentire, natura vel ratione sola duce sine verbo aut nuntio Dei, potest nemo* (“No one can have a right perception of God with nature or reason as sole guide, without God’s word or his messenger”).<sup>80</sup> In her discussion of the Lady’s address to chastity, rather than charity in the *Maske*, Shohet raises the interesting possibility that “to early modern Reformers, in fact, the similarity between the two terms might have been more evident than the force of Milton’s distinction. For charity, like chastity, entails a relation to three aspects of the world that a Reformist Christian must address: the self, other people, and God.”<sup>81</sup> She suggests furthermore that “This close relationship between ‘chastity’ and ‘charity’ informs the conventional Reformist figuration of all sin as ‘spiritual fornication’: the soul spurning her proper beloved for the seductions of Satan. Charity (loving God) demands chastity (refusing all advances of improper desires).”<sup>82</sup>

If, then, there are grounds to posit an important working relationship between the virtues of chastity and charity, we must question further why the chastity to which the Lady lays claim in the *Maske* is not sufficiently charitable to merit her liberation from the old Law. The crux of the matter, I would suggest, lies in the way we interpret “improper desires.” In the *Maske*, the Lady appears to attempt to bypass the problematic relationship between continence and temperance that emerges, as we have seen, in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, by cutting temperance down to size. Her appeal to the “sage / And serious doctrine of virginity” (785-86), an ironic echo, perhaps, of Milton’s tribute to the “sage and serious” poet Spenser in the *Areopagitica* (311), retroactively inscribes the negative attributes of this form of chastity into the “holy dictate of spare temperance” (766) that she had cited,

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<sup>80</sup> *CD* 27.

<sup>81</sup> Lauren Shohet, “Figuring Chastity: Milton’s Ludlow Masque,” in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 158.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



in nearly parallel syntax, only a few lines earlier.<sup>83</sup> As with Guyon's "temperate" destruction of Acrasia's bower there is something incongruous about this effort: where Guyon goes too far in what he will allow the virtue to encompass, the Lady does not nearly go far enough. While we ought to be careful of trying to unduly schematise or regiment Milton's thought,<sup>84</sup> there is enough of Spenser in the *Maske* to support the idea that Milton might deliberate invoke the faulty syntax of the *Fareie Queene's* Aristotelian schema, in order to create aporias within his own text that work to subtly undermine the Spenserian "negative" chastity to which the Lady also lays claim. If, as I shall suggest, it is difficult to dismiss out of hand Comus's critique of the Lady's "lean and sallow abstinence" (708), the enchanter may also with some justice deride her "pet of temperance" (720). The Lady's understanding of this virtue is as limited as that of the "chastity" it encompasses. Indeed, the Lady's paralysis suggests she is yet to complete this earlier stage of her education, the apprehension of a fuller, more "positive" notion of chastity upon which, as I will discuss, true charity depends. Yet although the Lady's relational treatment of continence and temperance lacks the syllogistic cogency of an Aristotelian, intellectualist schema, her continence or "chastity," taken alone, might on this same understanding seem sufficient. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Aristotelian *akrasia* primarily involves an error of judgement, from which Milton's Lady is ostensibly safe. In the *Maske* she invokes the language of regenerate reason in her defence against Comus, linking her mental faculties to moral propriety:

Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind  
 With all thy charms, although this corporal rind  
 Thou hast immanacled, while heaven sees good.

(662-664)

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<sup>83</sup> Milton follows the Church Fathers in diluting the qualitative difference between continence (*enkrateia*) and temperance (*sophrosyne*) as it emerges in Aristotle. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, temperance is glossed as *quae in appetendis corporis voluptatibus modum servat . . . Temperantia est cum sobrietas et castitas tum verecundia et honestas* ("[the virtue] which preserves measure in pursuing the pleasures of the body. . . . Temperance includes not only sobriety and chastity but also respectfulness and decency") (1075). Chastity itself, according to Milton, *est temperantia a libidine carnis illicita* ("is self-restraint from unlawful carnal desire") (1079).

<sup>84</sup>As one critic rather despairingly notes, "the picture of virtue in Milton's poetry is extravagantly eclectic and nonsystematic . . . It is all but impossible to hold together Milton's various comments on virtue and the virtues, which veer between Aristotelian and Augustinian poles" (Fallon, "Milton and Literary Virtue," 182).

To a certain extent, the Lady is justified in this claim. It is a safe assumption that the Lady and her reason are indeed regenerate, given that she professes Christian faith, and that during the masque her “human countenance” (68) remains exempt from the telling transformation of Comus’s earlier victims. Yet as my earlier discussion of the Lady’s bound state might suggest, the matter is rather more complicated than this. As we have seen, in Reformed theology, the spirit-flesh division drawn by Augustine in relation to original sin disintegrates, so that significant, if not devastating damage is done even to regenerate man’s right reason. It is noteworthy here that the extended argument between the Lady and Comus, which she seems at one point poised to win – “She fables not, I feel that I do fear / Her words set off by some superior power” (799-800) – cannot free her from her bind. Neither may this be remedied by the rational efforts of other human, or even supernatural agents: the Lady’s brothers fail to free her, even with the aid of the Attendant Spirit’s “haemony,” a plant which in a typically Miltonic move is described as “. . . more med’cinal...than that Moly, / That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave” (635-36).<sup>85</sup> It is here, then, that Milton’s virtue ethics most obviously departs from Spenser’s. The security of reason as arbiter would seem far more embattled in the *Maske* than it is in the *Faerie Queene*, at least as far as Book 2 is concerned, where in contrast to Comus’s skilled rhetoric, Acrasia never speaks.<sup>86</sup>

At the end of the *Maske*, however, Comus vanishes, the Lady is freed, and the siblings are brought before their parents in “triumph,” having “through hard assays” prevailed “O’er sensual folly, and intemperance” (971-73). Something, then, must have happened, beyond the rational efforts of the Lady that have already been rehearsed and the initial endeavours of both the Attendant Spirit and her brothers. To understand this, we must look more closely at the theological underpinnings of the Miltonic relationship between reason and “choice” that I alluded to earlier in the context of the manna passage in the *Areopagitica*. In the *Maske*, the reason why the Lady’s vocal efforts prove insufficient to free her from her captor, I suspect, is that for Milton, reason *is* choice – reason without it is not true

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<sup>85</sup> As I discussed in my introduction, in medieval and early modern discourse, moly is often allegorically portentous of reason.

<sup>86</sup> John E. Hankins makes this observation in his entry on “Acrasia,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. Hamilton, 6.

reason at all. Spenser's attempt to reconcile human moral and spiritual potential with a Reformed theology that renders mortal reason and will utterly corrupt results, as I have discussed, in a reliance on legalism which ultimately voids such choice. Milton, I have suggested is fully aware of this problem. The Lady's assumed virtue, dependent on the power of words and signs, *lex* rather than *spiritus*, then, might invite no less scepticism than Comus's "magic dust" (165) and "glozing courtesy, / Baited with reasons not unplausible" (162-63). Indeed, given the close symbolic relationship between law, stone and allegorical hermeneutics in the *Maske*, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Lady cannot be extricated from her "marble venomed seat" (915). In adhering so dogmatically to the ultimately repressive nature of the chastity she espouses, the Lady, like Spenser's Nymph of the Well, risks allegorical reduction herself. Evidence of Milton's particular theological stance on both the nature and proper acquisition of Christian virtue will allow us to go further with this analysis. As Shohet notes, Reformed theologians' discussion of charity often drew upon Luther's commentary on Galatians: "But here stands Paul in supreme freedom and says in clear and explicit words: 'That which makes a Christian is faith *working through love*.'"<sup>87</sup> In this context, Milton's comment in *De Doctrina Christiana* that faith is *non in intellectu proprie, sed in voluntate esse sitam* ("properly . . . seated not in the understanding but in the will"),<sup>88</sup> is extremely suggestive.

In the *Maske*, I would argue, Milton draws upon a brand of voluntarist scholasticism renounced by Luther and Calvin in order to convey the Lady to what he considers to be an ethically and theologically sound state of continence. For Milton, who announces in *De Doctrina Christiana* that *Cum autem statuisset Deus homines restituere, decrevit etiam sine dubio . . . amissam libertatem, aliqua saltem ex parte restituere voluntati* ("when God had decided to restore mankind, he also indubitably decreed . . . to restore lost freedom to the will, in some measure at least"),<sup>89</sup> man's reason may be truly regenerate only if his will can also bear the potential for spiritual growth. Importantly, as Milton's retelling of the manna episode in Exodus to accommodate the possibility that the Israelites might engage in either temperate or intemperate behaviour might suggest, the akratic heritage and

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<sup>87</sup> Shohet, "Figuring Chastity," 158. The translation cited is from Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Pelikan, vol. 27, 31 (emphasis added).

<sup>88</sup> *CD* 593.

<sup>89</sup> *CD* 95.

proclivity that the Lady refuses to own in the *Maske* is in fact essential to Milton's own virtue ethics and soteriology. If, as Saarinen suggests, "A truly akratic action can only be properly explained when a plurality of simultaneous possibilities is presupposed,"<sup>90</sup> the reverse must also hold true. This raises the proverbial elephant in the bower that Spenser's Guyon attempts to stamp out with Acrasia: without *incontinentia*, there can be no *continentia*. In other words, if the Lady has no established understanding of what it is to be unchaste, she cannot truly know whether the desires that motivate her are "proper" or otherwise. The Lady's development of a form of chastity that is in itself charitable is in fact dependent on her akratic capability. Thus, as Milton argues in the *Areopagitica*, it is only "he that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he [who] is the true wayfaring Christian" (311). Arguably, in her meeting with the Circean Comus, the Lady is gifted with an opportunity to realize this aspect of her human nature. Indeed, the Lady's appeal to faith, hope and chastity, personified figures which she claims to "see . . . visibly" (215), comes immediately after her account of a far more nebulous, internal experience whereby

. . . A thousand fantasies  
 Begin to throng into my memory  
 Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
 And airy tongues, that syllable men's names  
 On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.

(204-8)

These lines are deeply ambivalent. It is not clear to what, exactly, the Lady refers, but there is a palpable sense of the allure of these "shadows dire", which "startle" (209) as if to transfix her. The Lady's immediate claim that such thoughts may ". . . not astound / The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended / By a strong siding champion Conscience" (209-11), seems designed to counteract and neutralize this experience. As we have seen, however, before too long she will indeed be held "In

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<sup>90</sup> Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought*, 6.

stony fetters fixed, and motionless” (813), the virtue and reason she pretends to manifestly insufficient to secure her freedom from Comus’s bonds.

Paradoxically, we might consider the Lady’s fatal elision of chastity with charity in the *Maske* amongst those examples of Miltonic misreading that can herald spiritual renovation. If, that is, such a “misreading” leads the Lady to confront, interrogate and repent of her own unchaste, or akratic potential, she may come to establish “true” continence, the basis of a charitable disposition that, with faith, is both the tenor and vehicle of grace. As Milton’s Angel Michael will explain to Adam in *Paradise Lost*,

. . . only add  
 Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,  
 Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,  
 By name to come called charity, the soul  
 Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath  
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
 A paradise within thee, happier far.

(12.581-87)

A type of volitional awakening or arousal, conceptually indebted to Milton’s fortification of his defence of Christian liberty with an Augustinian “consent theory of morality,”<sup>91</sup> is instrumental to this process. As Fallon notes, although Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana* supports “the Pauline (and Augustinian) position that the merit of good works is God’s alone, he insists there and in *Paradise Lost* (1) that grace sufficient to choose the good is given to all; and (2) that the choice of whether we will accept the grace leading to faith and its concomitant good works is ours.”<sup>92</sup> This “choice” or volitional movement, which follows typologically the progression from the old Law to the new, cannot be outsourced. Thus, in the *Maske*, the brothers are unable to seize Comus’s wand to break the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>92</sup> Fallon, “Milton and Literary Virtue,” 184.

“spells” that bind the Lady, although they fulfil the Spirit’s commandment to “break his glass, /And shed the luscious liquor on the ground” (650-51). The brothers thereby successfully re-enact Guyon’s confrontation of Excesse in the *Faerie Queene*, yet in the *Maske*, the performance of this rite alone is insufficient to win their sister’s freedom. As Milton would explain in his *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, “the state of religion under the gospel is far differing from what it was under the law . . . the law was then written on tables of stone, and to be performed according to the letter, willingly or unwillingly; the gospel, our new covenant, upon the heart of every believer, to be interpreted only by the sense of charity and inward persuasion.”<sup>93</sup>

We have nearly arrived at the comprehensive understanding of the Lady’s predicament in the *Maske* upon which I will rely in my discussion of Milton’s dramatic resolution. There is, I believe, one remaining element to consider. From the fuller description of charity given by Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana*, we learn that this virtue arises *ex sensu divini amoris in corda regenitorum per spiritum effusi, qua affecti qui in Christum inseruntur, peccato mortui, Deo redivivi, sua sponte ac libere bona opera parturiunt* (“from a sense of the divine love shed poured out into the hearts of the regenerate by the spirit; influenced by which, those who are being ingrafted into Christ become dead to sin and alive again to God, and bring forth good works spontaneously and freely”).<sup>94</sup> My discussion of the provenance of charity has addressed the role of divine providence in enabling the Christian will to work “spontaneously and freely.” Milton’s claim that charitable individuals are “planted in Christ”, however, requires further attention. The Lady, as I have noted before, identifies herself with Christ, modelling her rebuttal of temptation upon the saviour’s response to his own. As Milton’s observation that *redimere non est idem ac purificare* (“‘to redeem’ is not the same as ‘to purify’”) (CD 527) might suggest, however, this does not suffice. Although *redempti quidem sunt omnes vel inscientes vel etiam adhuc inimici . . . purificatus nemo nisi volens et per fidem* (“all are redeemed, even those who are ignorant [of God] or who are even yet [God’s] enemies. . . no one has been purified except willingly and through faith”) (CD 529). Preus notes that for Luther, “The idea of faith, resting on the *mera promissio* . . . cannot be developed with Christ as its subject, and therefore not tropologically either.

<sup>93</sup> Milton, *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, in *Works* vol. 6 (Columbia), 848.

<sup>94</sup> CD 601.

For Christ is neither *purus homo* nor *in culpa*. And therefore, the abyss of despair and nothingness, the threat of ultimate abandonment and *desperatio*, which for man in sin is a real threat, cannot in Christ come to genuine expression. In fact, *conformitas* has no place here; on the contrary, the real distance between Christ and man is disconcertingly exposed. As *deus-homo* . . . [Christ] is not, at this most crucial point, one of us men.”<sup>95</sup> Essentially, this means that Christ must “become the object of faith rather than its exemplary subject.”<sup>96</sup> As such, the Lady may not simply take the exemplary continence modelled by Christ for her own: it is only through faith, which involves the adoption of Christ as a mediator *beyond* herself, that she may avail of the continence appropriate to her own spiritual condition. The Lady’s insufficient recognition of Christ as external mediator mirrors what I have argued to be her under-developed, inner mediatory capacity, properly represented by an active will or conscience. The net result, as much critical response to her character in the *Maske* would seem to attest, is narcissism: a regressive psychological and spiritual state, which we will have cause to revisit in my discussion of Milton’s Satan in the next chapter on *Paradise Lost*.

### The staging of Sabrina

The “stony fetters” (818) with which the Lady verbally girds herself, then, prove in the end both physically and spiritually endangering. Against the limited efficacy of “haemony” (637), the success of the Attendant Spirit’s invocation of Sabrina, a figure who for many of the *Maske*’s readers represents the operation of grace,<sup>97</sup> may recall Milton’s prophetic view that “the mighty weakness of the gospel” will “throw down the weak mightiness of man’s reasoning.”<sup>98</sup> Sabrina’s literary provenance and symbolic efficacy in the *Maske* is complex and far-reaching: in Kilgour’s formulation, “as a human who is also part of nature and a supernatural force, she is a hybrid: human,

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<sup>95</sup> Preus, *From Shadow to Promise*, 232. This argument relies on a preference for John’s Gospel, *consummatum est* (Vul. 19.30) over Mark (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (15:34)) on the matter of Christ’s last words.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>97</sup> See for instance A. S. P. Woodhouse’s influential article: “Comus Once More,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1950): 218–23.

<sup>98</sup> Milton, *The Reason of Church Government*, 246.

river, goddess, foreigner, and now part of the English landscape, a real literary mutt who is Virgilian/Ovidian/ Spenserian and now Miltonic,”<sup>99</sup> yet there are a number of indications in the *Maske* that her character functions as a type of intercessional, or mediatory figure through whom the Lady might channel her faith. As Kilgour notes, “Sabrina herself, whose name, the Severn, puns on ‘sever,’ divides the Lady from Comus.”<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere, indeed, Milton understands the original *logos* or Word through which God created the World as another such division or cut; so that “by his divorcing command the world first rose out of Chaos, nor can be renew’d again out of confusion but by the separating of unmeet consorts.”<sup>101</sup> Typologically, however, man is loosed from the bonds of the Law by Christ, the word makes flesh. Given that as Lewalski notes, “The chaste Sabrina’s tainted origin [in the adulterous union of her parents] points to original sin as the source of the Lady’s plight,”<sup>102</sup> the nymph, who has herself undergone death and resurrection (Nereus’s daughters, we are told, having bathed Sabrina in waters containing nectar and asphodel upon her escape from Guendolen, “dropped” her “in ambrosial oils till she revived, /And underwent a quick immortal change / Made Goddess of the River” (839-41)), might appear a particularly appropriate figure to represent the death of the old Lady, and the birth of the new. As I have suggested, for Milton redemption is not synonymous with purification, but this latter too may be associated with Sabrina. Sabrina’s sprinkling of the Lady with “drops” from a “fountain pure / . . . of precious cure” (911-12) is strongly redolent of the act of baptism – more so, indeed, than Mordant’s act of drinking from the Nymph’s Well in the *Faerie Queene*. For Milton, baptism represents *sigillum illius gratiae iam exhibitae, remissionis peccatorum, sanctificationis* (“a seal of grace already shown forth, of the remission of sins, of sanctification”) (CD 739). We ought not to approach such sacraments, he notes, *nisi explorata conscientia eiectisque peccatis debemus* “without examining our conscience and casting out our sins” (CD 761). In the *Maske*, therefore, Lady’s baptismal encounter with Sabrina might therefore be thought to represent her experience of that inner movement or “assent” upon which Milton’s notion of true Christian virtue so vitally depends.

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<sup>99</sup> Maggie Kilgour, *Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 83.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Milton, *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, in *The Works of John Milton*, vol. 3 (Columbia), 420.

<sup>102</sup> Lewalski, “Milton’s *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing,” 314.



In *De Doctrina Christiana*'s discussion of baptism, however, Milton will also assert that *frustra contendunt qui aspersionem in baptismum pro immersione induxerunt: manus enim qui lavant immergere solent, non aspergere* "it is in vain that those who have brought sprinkling into baptism to replace immersion contend that baptism signified sprinkling . . . for those who wash their hands are accustomed to immerse them, not sprinkle them" (CD 743). The "ambrosial oils" moreover, which the Attendant Spirit informs us, Sabrina received "into the porch and inlet of each sense" (839), would seem evocative of the practice of "extreme unction" practised by the "Papists" that Milton further condemns (CD 765). Indeed, given what might be considered to be, at the very least, Milton's ambivalence towards sacramental rites and allegorical poetics, phenomena which exist in uneasy rhetorical proximity to the domain of idolatry, the decision to use a figure such as Sabrina to render dramatically visible the Lady's consent to grace is puzzling. There would seem to be enough symbolically portentous material in the *Maske* as a literary work to do without Sabrina. If the Lady, as I have suggested, might be understood as a type of self-wounding Medusa, petrified by her own chaste legalism, the biblical significance of her escape from Comus's bonds is clear, recalling the tropes of spiritual renewal expressed in Ezekiel 36:26 ("A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh") which Milton draws on, together with Ovid's myth of Pyrrha and Deucalion, in his description of Adam and Eve's repentance in *Paradise Lost*:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood  
 Praying, for from the mercy-seat above  
 Prevenient grace descending had removed  
 The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh  
 Regenerate grow instead . . .

(11.1-5)

In fact, Sabrina's very presence in Milton's ostensibly "Protestant" masque has met with critical suspicion. For Ross, the nymph's invocation by the Attendant Spirit, and her subsequent sprinkling of

the Lady, comprises “a kind of bastard ritual which combines pagan and Christian elements.”<sup>103</sup>

Suggesting that “the total effect of the scene is not to lift the doctrine of virginity to the shining regions of heavenly grace but to destroy the doctrinal abstraction by actualizing it,” Ross argues that “the Christian and pagan ingredients of the symbolism have cancelled each other out. The Christian images, dissociated from charity, remain static and merely picturesque.” Unlike Milton’s successful typological deployment of Ovid’s myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha in *Paradise Lost*, perhaps, “the pagan material reduces the Christian associations to the merest magic.”<sup>104</sup>

That there might be an alternative understanding of this part of the *Maske*, however, is suggested by Ortiz, who reads the scene as testament to Milton’s “acceptance of figuration and theatricality, despite their moral ambivalence.”<sup>105</sup> Ortiz’s argument reaches back to the climactic scene between Comus and the Lady, where the Lady declares her desire to denounce her captor with

. . . such a flame of sacred vehemence,  
 That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,  
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,  
 Till all thy magic structures reared so high,  
 Were shattered into heaps o’er thy false head.

(794-98)

The Lady’s strongly worded repudiation of Comus here has a Spenserian echo: the “uncontrolled worth” (792) she imagines harnessing recalls Guyon’s “rigour pittillesse,” the “vehemence” of her “rapt spirits” (793) the “wrathfulness” which powers the knight’s destruction of Acrasia’s bower in *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>106</sup> Within the generic parameters of the *Maske*, however, the violence of this

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<sup>103</sup> Malcom Mackenzie Ross, “Milton and The Protestant Aesthetic: The Early Poems,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1948): 356.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph M. Ortiz, “‘The Reforming of Reformation’: Theatrical, Ovidian, and Musical Figuration in Milton’s Mask,” *Milton Studies*, no. 44 (2005): para. 29,

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-](http://gateway.proquest.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-)

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<sup>106</sup> *FQ* 2.12.83.2-4.

rhetoric threatens to rebound upon its utterer. As Ortiz notes,

In threatening to bring down Comus's "magic structures," the Lady reiterates a brand of antitheatricity typical of Ben Jonson in his attacks on Inigo Jones, whose magic structures Jonson begrudged as the most popular element of the Stuart masque. Similar to Jonson's expressions of "unresolved ambivalence" toward the stage, the Lady's implicit criticism of the masque paradoxically belies the fact that she is one of the principal entertainers of the evening: the magic structures falling on Comus's head would presumably fall on hers, too.<sup>107</sup>

We might conclude, with Ortiz, that "the sincerity of the Lady's argument depends on a deliberate unawareness of its occasional context."<sup>108</sup> If this were to be the case, the character's speech would run directly counter to one of the most significant, and arguably, necessary characteristics of the masque form as Milton knew it. As Ortiz notes, the "theatrical self-consciousness" which Orgel and others have identified as crucially enabling of the peculiar dramatic and rhetorical effects of early modern masque culture (we may think again here of Circe's sneer at the "man-maide" Pallas in Townshend's *Tempe Restored* (95, 14)) is wholly absent from the Lady's speech.<sup>109</sup> Whereas "the hero of a Stuart masque conventionally triumphs by virtue of 'know[ing] that he is an actor in a masque and is conscious of the presence and significance of the audience,'" the masque, for Milton's Lady, is "a remarkably unreflexive event."<sup>110</sup> Following this argument, then, the Lady's defence of her chastity is inadequately qualified in generic, as well as broader ethical or theological terms. Yet her stance may also carry wider, epistemological implications. As Ortiz notes, the mediated, figurative form of knowledge transmitted by the masque (a form which according to some Renaissance mythographers, as we saw in my first chapter, is itself embodied by Comus) is of the same order as the entirety of the realm of experience which man in his fallen state may access.<sup>111</sup> The Lady's speech thus threatens to curtail not only the personal progression of her character but the very possibility of

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., para. 9.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. Ortiz cites Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 13.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 30.

moral discernment at the symbolic or figurative level. Her paralysis indicates the dangers of this: in the optimistic moral allegory Sandys draws from the detail of Circe's reverse-metamorphosis of the transformed Greek sailors, "as *Circes* rod, waued ouer their heads from the right side to the left: presents those false and sinister perswasions of pleasure, which so much deforms them: so the reuersion thereof, by discipline, and a view of their owne deformity, restores them to their former beauties" (480). The Lady's immobility, then, would seem to suggest some kind of internal hindrance caused by a lack of self-knowledge, a natural inability to preserve or further her virtue unaided despite her "discipline."

In the wider context of the *Maske*, however, this same incapacitation promotes dramatic, and by extension, moral and spiritual opportunity. For Milton, it would seem that like the Christian individual, good art is engaged in a process of continual transformation and regeneration. Indeed, charity itself cannot arrive outside of representation. As Shohet notes, "the heart of the Christian constitution . . . is 'love' (*caritas*), not as an emotive relation but as the way for faith to become manifest in the world, actively 'working through' experience."<sup>112</sup> For this reason, the Lady is mistaken to sever the "freedom" of her mind from Comus's attempts to engage with her: there is in fact a dialectical relationship between the two. As the earlier discussion of the importance of *akrasia* to Milton's Christian liberty and ethics would suggest, the process of virtue forming bears a strong influence on the nature of the virtue that might be established in an individual. Following Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians to "prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21), the "choice" that is at the heart of Milton's epistemology and virtue ethics is, in the *Areopagitica*, presented as the product of a process of trial and error that requires careful discrimination. In support of this, Milton invokes Apuleius's tale of "those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder" (310) as a metaphor for the Christian duty to cleave the good in the World from the evil that it so closely resembles. Analogously, Milton's Comus, insofar as he provides a surface for hermeneutic and moral reflection, may function in the *Maske* more or less like Spenser's Acrasia, so that the Lady speaks truer than she knows when, approaching Comus's rabble, she acknowledges that

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<sup>112</sup> Shohet, "Figuring Chastity," 158.

. . . 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?

(176-80)

Understood in relation to the questions about knowledge and its dissemination that preoccupy Milton in the *Areopagitica*, the poet might appear to be motivated at this point in the *Maske* by the same moral didacticism invoked by Spenser in his defence of his epic as a work through which man may be taught “to separate error from truth.”<sup>113</sup> Yet there is, I would argue, an important difference between Milton’s and Spenser’s poetics. Where Spenser’s art seeks ultimately to deactivate error through an allegorical, binding hermeneutic, Milton’s would set it free. At the end of the *Maske*, as Lewalski notes, “Comus (unlike other antimasque figures) is neither conquered, nor transformed, nor contained, nor reconciled.”<sup>114</sup> In the *Areopagitica*, Milton would appear to extend the “principle of contrariety” that Danielson finds in the Eden of *Paradise Lost*,<sup>115</sup> to encompass the figurative, literary realm: “Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human vertue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with lesse danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity then by reading all manner of tractats, and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read” (312). Some such endorsement of representative or figurative freedom seems equally to inform Milton’s *Maske*, where as Shullenberger notes, Milton “expands Comus’s role beyond the conventional containing structure of the antimasque, assigns a significant set of culturally recognizable arguments to him, and endows him with the mesmerizing eloquence to elaborate

<sup>113</sup> Teskey, “From Allegory to Dialectic,” 9.

<sup>114</sup> Lewalski, “Milton’s *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing,” 309.

<sup>115</sup> Dennis Danielson, *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 172.

them.”<sup>116</sup>

### Sabrina and Circe

There is a certain persuasiveness to Ortiz’s argument that in the *Maske* Milton employs “theatricality and Ovidian allusion to demonstrate the radical instability of figurative knowledge, in a way that makes complete ‘moral purity in art’ impossible,” yet also “establishes figuration as essential to any postlapsarian aesthetic.”<sup>117</sup> Even if we accept this, however, Sabrina’s function as a sort of *dea ex machina* figure, wheeled in at the last moment to resolve the drama’s central conflict, may still appear symptomatic of the poet’s failure to reconcile the “static, Neoplatonic self-evidence of virtue, power, and error,” which Shohet has argued forms “the epistemological basis of Stuart court masque,”<sup>118</sup> with a more Miltonic, “literary” waywardness. Indeed, Ortiz acknowledges “the precariousness of Milton’s project,”<sup>119</sup> and we might, in a last analysis, view the poet’s contribution to the masque genre as itself an alembic for his developing thought, a trial of his own developing philosophical and literary imagination. Yet a further case for the symbolic cohesiveness and eventual success of the *Maske*, I would argue, could be made by shifting focus from Sabrina’s relation to the Lady to another figure, whose silence belies her significant presence in this latter part of the masque – Circe. Kilgour notes of Sabrina that “as part of her dual nature she seems to bring together different forms of metamorphosis; while there are clearly Christological resonances in her ability to walk on water (896-7), she also resembles Ovid’s Circe, who skims the surface with dry feet (*Met.*, 14.49-50).”<sup>120</sup> Bearing in mind the polyvalency of Circean mythography to which, I argued at the beginning of this chapter, the *Maske* bears witness, Sabrina’s anointing of the Lady may also recall Circe’s washing of Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey*:

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<sup>116</sup> Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth*, 143.

<sup>117</sup> Ortiz, “The Reforming of Reformation,” para. 5. Ortiz cites Norbrook, “The Reformation of the Masque,” 106-7.

<sup>118</sup> Shohet, “Figuring Chastity,” 151.

<sup>119</sup> Ortiz, “The Reforming of Reformation,” para. 5.

<sup>120</sup> Kilgour, *Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid*, 83.

I bath'd; and odorous water was  
 Disperpled lightly, on my head, and necke;  
 That might my late, heart-hurting sorrowes checke  
 With the refreshing sweetnesse.<sup>121</sup>

Given Milton's observation in his poetic and polemical works of the difficulty and laborious effort involved in telling good from the evil that opposes it in this world, Sabrina may here play the *bono* to Circe's *malo*. Indeed, I would tend to agree with Kilgour's contention that "while Stanley Fish argues that the masque moves toward the differentiation of figures who are at first hard to tell apart (Comus and the Spirit take similar disguises), it seems to me to work in the reverse: from a situation of clear antithesis to one of more complex mixing, in which the act of discrimination is both more difficult and more urgent."<sup>122</sup> As we have seen, in *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton invokes the Circe myth in direct connection to this trope, juxtaposing the "charming cup" of "vertue" carried by "chastity and love" with the "thick intoxicating potion which a certaine Sorceresse the abuser of loves name carries about" (305), an image which might recall Comus's dual inheritance of Bacchic and Circean influences. Yet Comus and the Attendant Spirit, Sabrina and Circe, are not the only figures in the *Maske* to bear similarities. The Lady too may possess Circean attributes. The "divine enchanting ravishment" (244) of the Lady's song invokes a maternal memory that moves Comus to a rapturous lyricism of his own:

. . . I have oft heard  
 My mother Circe with the Sirens three,  
 Amidst the flowry-kirtl'd Naiades  
 Culling their Potent hearbs, and balefull drugs,

<sup>121</sup> Homer, *Homer's Odyssey*, trans. Chapman, 154.

<sup>122</sup> Kilgour, *Milton and the Metamorphosis of Ovid*, 84.

Who as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,  
 And lap it in Elysium . . .

(251-56)

Revard notes of this moment that although both the Lady “and her song are innocent (she is only calling for aid), the effect is not. The rapture she causes may be heavenly, but it is not without sexual implications, for Comus is aroused and enticed by the Lady’s singing. She inadvertently enthrals Comus the enchanter.”<sup>123</sup> There is something of this too, of course, in the erotic undertones of Milton’s *L’Allegro*, where in lines which bear a striking resemblance to the above verse, the poet appeals to “Mirth” – an Orphic figure born from Venus and Bacchus – to

Lap me in soft Lydian airs,  
 Married to immortal verse  
 Such as the meeting soul may pierce  
 In notes, with many a winding bout  
 Of linked sweetness long drawn out,  
 With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,  
 The melting voice through maze running;  
 Untwisting all the chains that tie  
 The hidden soul of harmony.<sup>124</sup>

*L’Allegro*, for Greene, is symptomatic of “the young Milton’s filtered or displaced sexuality,”<sup>125</sup> and as such betrays a kind of hysteria: “When *L’Allegro* asks for soft Lydian airs, we have no immediate reason to doubt that he can hear them, until, as the poetry imitates them with progressively ravishing sweetness, the very existence of such enchantment becomes open to question. . . . This would be

<sup>123</sup> Stella P. Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera’s Hair: The Making of the 1645 “Poems”* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 145.

<sup>124</sup> John Milton, “L’Allegro,” in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Carey, lines 136-44.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas M. Greene, “The Meeting Soul in Milton’s Companion Poems,” *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no. 2 (1984): 173.



music more potent than Orpheus', music which would succeed where he failed, music such as has never been heard, sounding only in a limbo of the imagination."<sup>126</sup>

In the *Maske*, it might be argued, this giddy ardour gives place to cynicism: the presence for Comus of Circe in the Lady's song casts aspersions on the possibility that any "holy" (245) innocence might inhere in female nature – indeed, given the punishment visited upon womankind after the Fall, in a certain sense all women, and especially sensuous, singing women, are Circean sirens.<sup>127</sup> The Orphic beauty of the Lady's song might only be defended, then, by a plea of the sort Milton makes in *Areopagitica*, that "all kind of knowledge, whether of good or evil; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled" (308). In connection with this point, it is worth noting that the Attendant Spirit claims to have heard the Lady's Song somewhat differently to Comus. For Comus, as we have seen, the "divine enchanting ravishment" (244) of the Lady's song invokes the power of his mother's voice to "take the prisoned soul, / And lap it in Elysium" (255-56), a spiritual experience of sorts, but one which carries with it associations of indolence and easy pleasure, temptations which waylay Odysseus more than once in Homer's poem. To the Spirit, by contrast, the Lady's "soft and solemn-breathing sound" (554) seems to precipitate a kind of spiritual awakening or ascent: her "strains . . . might create a soul / Under the ribs of death" (560-61). Siren song may be valuable, on this reading, for the opportunity it affords for discerning, as well as testing, the virtue of its hearers. This would seem to accommodate Milton, again with Spenser, squarely within the "commonplace" allegorical tradition that co-opts the story of Odysseus into "an important defense against the notion that poetry seduces as does the Sirens' song," the threat of which was often elided with Circe. Accordingly, Odysseus becomes "an emblem of wisdom and temperance," his "cunning and continence" set "against the deceptive pleasures [of] Homer's temptresses."<sup>128</sup> In the *Maske*, however, it is the Lady's acts of perception and discrimination that take centre stage, inviting far greater scrutiny of her ethical conduct than we are likely to bestow upon either Comus or the Attendant Spirit. In view of the symbolic relationship between Circe and the Lady which, I have argued, the *Maske* establishes, in the dualist, allegorical paradigm set out above the Lady would have

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>127</sup> Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair*, 145.

<sup>128</sup> Gough, "Daughters of Circe," 59.

to act as an Odysseus to her own internal Circe to guarantee her virtue. Indeed, a masculinisation of the Lady's character would seem to tally with the view of critics such as Lander Johnson that "Milton's morality viewed the affective and the feminine as too proximate to the vice of effeminacy, and contrary to truly masculine and rigorous chastity."<sup>129</sup>

Yet as I have argued throughout this chapter, the sensual and sensitive aspect of the Lady's mixed nature cannot, and will not, be so easily repressed. The Circean Comus, moreover, functions as rather more than an externalisation of the Lady's inner concupiscence, a foil to the essential goodness of her regenerate nature. These characters play an active role in shaping the virtue that, by the end of the masque, the Lady would seem to possess. As my discussion of charity might suggest, for Milton as for Reformed believers more widely, the *vita contemplativa* was considered inferior and potentially deleterious to the development of a "positive" Christian ethics and, indeed, poetics, so that he "cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised, and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat" (*Areopagitica* 311). The rhetorical function of Milton's Circe is thus rather more complex than we might assume from the allusions to her character in his earlier Latin poetry, which bear witness, as I have argued, to the figure's familiar, Ovidian deployment as a "symbol of dangerous, corrosive passion."<sup>130</sup> Indeed, a revisionary trend in more recent scholarship has put strain upon Woodhouse's influential allegorical reading of the *Maske*, with several critics finding that Sabrina, the character most instrumental in securing the Lady's freedom from bondage, is also ultimately irreducible to the stable signification that allegory demands. Smith argues that "hardly anything is said by or about Sabrina that encourages allegorical identification,"<sup>131</sup> while for Shohet "Admitting multiple interpretive possibilities, suggesting a whole new way of signifying, Sabrina's representational plenitude constitutes the chaste alternative to the semiotic 'abstinence' of fixed or single meanings,"<sup>132</sup> a reading which might recall the essential ambivalence of Circe's *pharmakon*.

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<sup>129</sup> Lander Johnson, *Chastity in Early Stuart Literature and Culture*, 141.

<sup>130</sup> Charles Segal, "Myth and Philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid's Augustanism and the Augustan Conclusion of Book XV," *The American Journal of Philology* 90, no. 3 (1969): 271.

<sup>131</sup> George William Smith Jr., "Milton's Revisions and the Design of *Comus*," *English Literary History* 46, no. 1 (April 1, 1979): 68.

<sup>132</sup> Shohet, "Figuring Chastity: Milton's Ludlow Masque," 157.

In fact, although in Chapman's translation of Homer's *Odyssey* Circe's "raushing" voice leads on to her deception of Odysseus's men,<sup>133</sup> the picture of the goddess that emerges from the Greek account overall, with which we can assume Milton was familiar,<sup>134</sup> is far more ambivalent. For Homer, as Segal notes, "the two sides of Circe – lustful sensuality and the refinements of civilization, the power both to brutalize and to sing – can still coexist in a complex whole."<sup>135</sup> The Circean cadences of the Lady's song in the *Maske* may therefore work to enrich rather than deplete the latter's spiritual potential, which the severe "chastity" the character insists upon leaves untapped. As critics have noted, a kind of musical dialecticism operates in Milton's masque to create yet another layer of patterned signification. Importantly, Smith observes that while the Lady's song to 'Sweet Echo' receives only the response of Comus, a nice irony given the somewhat predictable conventions of "echo" songs in contemporary masques,<sup>136</sup> "the song to 'Sabrina fair,' with which it is paired and for which there was no antiphonal convention, brings Sabrina's answer in song."<sup>137</sup> Similarly, Ortiz's attempt to redeem the *Maske* from the discursive and ethical impasse observed by other critics relies on the salvific power of music, a theme with which readers of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* will already be familiar. In the Sabrina scene, Ortiz argues, Milton "re-channels the musical and Ovidian elements of the antimasque in order to free the Lady, thus authorizing the modes of figuration and performativity – which Comus had abused – as necessary and valuable aspects of human experience."<sup>138</sup>

If, moreover, in Milton's *Apology for Smectymnuus* the "thick intoxicating potion which a certaine Sorceresse the abuser of loves name carries about" (305) is a Circean image, Circean too – in

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<sup>133</sup> Homer, *Homer's Odysseys*, 151.

<sup>134</sup> Milton may or may not have read Chapman's translation, but allusions to the *Odyssey* pepper his prose and poetic works: see for instance *CD* 1081.

<sup>135</sup> Charles Segal, "Circean Temptations: Homer, Vergil, Ovid," 425.

<sup>136</sup> In both Jonson's *Masque of Queenes* and Browne's *Inner Temple Masque*, songs to Echo elicit a musical rejoinder from the Nymph herself.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, "Milton's Revisions" 58. Walls finds the song to "Sabrina fair" amongst the more conventional elements of Milton's *Maske*. The song was performed by Henry Lawes, the masque's composer and the Egerton children's music master. As Walls notes, "masque musicians were . . . commonly characterized as priests or poets. In other words, they were portrayed as men of more than ordinary wisdom and authority. Accordingly, their songs elucidate the mysteries of the masque's device and initiate the apparently magical transformations" (*Music in the English Courtly Masque*, 46). We may think here also of the musician-priests in Jonson's *Pleasure Reconci'd to Virtue*, whose song opens the mountain Atlas (218-23), and of the instrumental role of the musicians of the *voûte dorée* in the action of the French *Balet Comique*.

<sup>138</sup> Ortiz, "The Reforming of Reformation," para. 29.

the tradition of the *pharmakon* – is the idea that books of ill repute “are not temptations, nor vanities; but useful *drugs and materials* wherewith to temper and compose effective and strong medicines, which man’s life cannot want” (*Areopagitica* 315, my emphasis). Interestingly, Homer’s Circe is herself a tempering force, serving to moderate Odysseus’s hubristic desire.<sup>139</sup> When she is asked by Odysseus if, having sacrificed six of his men to Scylla, he might avenge them, the Goddess answers

O vnhappy! art thou yet  
 Enflam’d with warre? and thirst to drinke thy swet?  
 Not to the Gods giue vp, both Armes, and will?  
 She, deathlesse is, and that immortall ill  
 Graue, harsh, outragious, not to be subdu’d,  
 That men must suffer till they be renew’d  
 Nor liues there any virtue that can flie  
 The vicious outrage of their crueltie.  
 Shouldst thou put Armes on, and approach the Rock,  
 I feare, sixe more must expiate the shooke.<sup>140</sup>

As Wolfe argues, “Homer’s Circe does not intend for Odysseus to conclude from his experience with Scylla that one must, or even can, avoid all contention and adversity; instead, she teaches him to moderate, rather than eliminate, his impulse toward strife.”<sup>141</sup> The theme of trial and challenge that persists through Homer’s narration of Odysseus’s encounter with Circe is, as we have seen, inflected with moral and spiritual significance in later allegorical treatments of the myth, with Circe often implicated in the failings of the men she leads astray. Yet Circe herself is a goddess, and thus, according to Aristotle (*NE* 1145a25-26), herself exempt from *akrasia*. Importantly, given the Lady’s

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<sup>139</sup> Yarnall argues that Circe’s warning to Odysseus “beautifully illustrates the perspective, constant in Homer, against which the glory of heroism is seen. . . . [Circe’s] divine knowledge makes military prowess appear as a limited thing” (*Transformations of Circe*, 17).

<sup>140</sup> Homer, *Homer’s Odyssey*, 183.

<sup>141</sup> Jessica Wolfe, “Spenser, Homer, and the Mythography of Strife,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2005): 1249.

inability to defeat Comus through her powers of refusal alone in Milton's *Maske*, in the *Odyssey*, as Yarnall reminds us, "Circe's power becomes benevolent [only] *after* it is challenged and fully met."<sup>142</sup>

As this chapter draws to a close, it ought to be acknowledged that the significance of Circean mythology to the *Maske*'s final meaning has been remarked previously by at least one critic. Angus Fletcher perceptively notes that "in *Comus* the most important instance of subsurface implication is the use of the myth of Circe . . . Milton is withholding much of the direct narrative content of the myth of Circe, and it is this withheld context that fills the interior spaces of the myth of Comus, Thyrsis, the Lady, her brothers, and Sabrina."<sup>143</sup> Yet although, the tropes of echo, semantic instability or *pharmakon* and Circe's catalytic, potentialising powers are brought tantalisingly close together in the final pages of Fletcher's monograph, a synthesis of these ideas never quite arrives. Given the lack of precedent for the argument the critic makes, perhaps we can hardly blame him – history, after all, has not been kind to Circe, and a reading of the kind I have attempted here runs very much against the grain. It is difficult to find a parallel for Milton's unusual treatment of Circean mythography in the *Maske* in either contemporary or modern literature. At the close of his *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), a poem linked by Danielson to Augustine's teachings on the importance of free will, Sir John Davies asks

For what is Man without a mouing mind,  
Which hath a iudging wit, and choosing will?  
Now, if God's power should her election bind,  
Her motions then would cease, and stand all still.

And why did God in man this soule infuse,  
But that he should his maker know, and loue?  
Now if loue be compeld, and cannot chuse,  
How can it gratefull, or thank worthie proue?

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<sup>142</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 21.

<sup>143</sup> Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque; an Essay on Milton's Comus*, 244–45.

Loue must free hearted bee, and voluntarie,  
 And not enchanted, or by Fate constraind;  
 Nor like that loue, which did Vlysses carie  
 To Circes ile, with mightie charmes enchaind.<sup>144</sup>

Circe is here presented as the antithesis of love “free hearted . . . and voluntarie.” Yet this is both un-Homeric – in the *Odyssey*, Circe lets Odysseus go – and, I would argue, un-Miltonic. In Chapman’s translation of Homer, Circe not only instructs Odysseus how to avoid the threat of the Sirens, she advises that

When your friends  
 Haue outsaild these: the danger that transcends  
 Rests not in any counsaile to preuent;  
 Vnlesse your owne mind, finds the tract and bent  
 Of that way, that auoids it. I can say  
 That in your course, there lies a twofold way;  
 The right of which, your owne, taught, present wit  
 And grace diuine, must prompt.<sup>145</sup>

This, surely, is Milton’s moral too.

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<sup>144</sup> Sir John Davies, *Nosce Teipsum* (London: Richard Field for John Standish, 1599), 37.

<sup>145</sup> Homer, *Homer’s Odyssey*, 181.

*Paradise Lost: Milton's Circean Chaos*

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has proved rich hunting ground for scholars of classical reception in the Renaissance. In this ostensibly most biblical of poems, classical allusions, references and mythical paradigms are interlaced with the Christian story of our first parents' Fall. As critics have long recognised, "Milton's epic similes involving mythical comparisons are point for point relevant to the action of the story. Thus myth serves the double function of description and thematic development."<sup>1</sup> Given that *Paradise Lost* features only one explicit allusion to Circean mythography, it would seem difficult to trace a continuity between the *Maske* and Milton's later poem in this particular respect: Fletcher's important observation that "in *Comus* the most important instance of subsurface implication is the use of the myth of Circe" may seem less relevant to a study of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, however, I will argue via an analysis of the literary and metaphysical implications of Milton's portrayal of Eve and Chaos at key junctures of his poem that the same Circean potential so important to the exploration of Christian liberty in the *Maske* is granted enhanced providential importance in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's most ambitious work.

Before Eve tastes the apple and precipitates both her own and Adam's Fall in book 9 of the poem, the animals that surround her in the garden of Eden are said to be ". . . more duteous at her call, / Than at Circean call the herd disguised" (9.521-22).<sup>3</sup> As I will suggest, the effect Milton achieves by placing the reference to the Circe story here, at this point in his narrative retelling of the Biblical creation story, is far from straightforward. In these two lines, Milton juxtaposes tropes of providential design and divinely sanctioned female authority with something that is altogether more sinister. Milton's description of Eve's command over the beasts of Eden rests on the biblical notion that before the Fall, our first parents possessed perfect dominion and mastery over the natural world:

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan H. Collett, "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology in *Paradise Lost*," *PLMA* 85, no. 1 (1970): 88.

<sup>2</sup> Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque*, 244.

<sup>3</sup> The hyperbolic comparison is typically Miltonic – we might recall the description of the herb "Haemony" in the *Maske* as "more med'cinal" than moly (635-36).

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Gen. 1:26)

As Peter Harrison has discussed, in Patristic exegesis of Genesis, “The loss of dominion over nature was linked to the domination of reason by bestial and carnal affections, and the beasts themselves were identified with individual passions.”<sup>4</sup> On one level then, Milton’s description of the animals so “duteous” to Eve’s call is simply a continuation of an earlier passage in book 4, where a portrait of the “Fair couple, linked in happy nuptial league” (4.339) amidst the “frisking . . . / . . . beasts of the earth” (4.341-42) invites nostalgia for a time in our prelapsarian history when man’s God-given dominion over the beasts of the sea, air and earth was effortlessly maintained, and man and beast lived harmoniously, removed from any threat of violence. Milton’s yoking of Circean myth to this divinely sanctioned and sanctified relationship does, however, complicate matters. It must not be forgotten that treatments of Circe in the Reformed literature of Milton’s near-contemporaries are generally damning: as Brodwin argues, by the time of Milton’s writing of *Paradise Lost*, “Circe had become perhaps the most familiar Renaissance symbol of spiritual degradation.”<sup>5</sup> Initially, it might seem plausible to cite Chapman’s translation of Homer’s account of Circe’s rule over the beasts – a passage of obvious relevance to any discussion of Circean presence in *Paradise Lost* – as an exception to this rule:<sup>6</sup>

Before her gates; hill-wolues, and Lyons lay;

Which with her virtuous drugs, so tame she made;

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<sup>4</sup> Harrison, “Reading the Passions,” 73.

<sup>5</sup> Brodwin, “Milton and the Renaissance Circe,” 22.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of Homeric influences in Milton’s *PL*, see Sarah Van der Laan, “Milton’s Odyssean Ethics: Homeric Allusions and Arminian Thought in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 49 (2008): 49–76; and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, “The Genres of *Paradise Lost*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113–29.



That Wolfe, nor Lyon, would one man inuade  
 With any violence.<sup>7</sup>

Chapman's coupling of "virtuous" with "tame" would seem to suggest that the Goddess's command over her herd serves a protective function. Given however that at the corresponding moment in Homer's *Odyssey* it is κακὰ φάρμακα, or "evil drugs" that the Goddess is said to employ to subdue her herd, this may be best understood as an instance of Chapmanian irony which draws out the inherently unnatural basis of the enervated condition in which the transformed men find themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Wolfe's suggestion, that Chapman "recognizes that Homeric epic generates irony out of the conflict between disparate perspectives,"<sup>9</sup> might also, however, provide a useful vantage point from which to investigate the significance of the negative associations of Milton's reference to Circe at this point in his epic. The specific narrative conditions which foster meaning here, I would argue, ought to be considered in light of broader critical observations about Milton's "proleptic" use of myth in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>10</sup> The comparison of Eve with Circe is made as Satan, himself "disguised" (9.522) in the form of the serpent, spies on Eve as she gardens alone in Eden. The sexually enticing, Circean qualities of Eve are prominent in the focalised account we are given of Satan's prolonged observation of "her heavenly form" (457). Musing on "This flowery plat," her "sweet recess," he is nearly overcome, brought to a point of "stupid" (465) docility fitting for a member of Circe's herd as

. . . Her every air<sup>11</sup>

Of gesture or least action overawed

<sup>7</sup> Homer, *Odyssees*, 150.

<sup>8</sup> As Burrow notes, Chapman "frequently adds phrases and whole lines to Homer and sometimes simply gets him wrong" (Colin Burrow, "Chapmaniac: Chapman's Homer," *London Review of Books*, June 27, 2002; <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n12/colin-burrow/chapmaniac>). The view that such mistranslations are often purposeful is put forward by Jessica Wolfe in "Chapman's Ironic Homer," *College Literature* 35, no. 4 (2008): 151-86. The case for "virtuous drugs" being intended ironically may be strengthened by referring to Ovid's description of the *pressos latice radice nocenti* which Circe sprinkles into the pool visited by Scylla in *Metamorphoses* 14.56.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfe, "Chapman's Ironic Homer," 174.

<sup>10</sup> Collett's argument that in *Paradise Lost*, "inherent in the beauty of most of the myths is fragility and often ruin," is particularly pertinent here (Collett, "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology," 88).

<sup>11</sup> There may be a subtle indication here that Eve is singing as she works, invoking another Circean quality which is made much of, as we have seen, in Milton's *Maske*.

His malice, and with rapine sweet bereaved  
 His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought.

(9.459-62)

Within a matter of lines, however, Satan recovers himself. Driven forward by “Fierce hate” (471) and a determination “all pleasure to destroy” (477), he draws closer to begin the temptation that will precipitate both Eve and Adam’s fall.

When a comparison of Eve to Circe is made a second time, the allusion (although implicit) derives from Satan’s behaviour, and as we will see, might be suggestive of a more self-conscious effort on the fallen angel’s part to use myth to his advantage, expose Eve’s weaknesses and regiment her place within the allegorical hierarchy that had long been superimposed on the story. “Fawning,” we are told, the Serpent “licked the ground whereon she trod” (9.526), an attitude which recalls the manner in which the beasts who wait at the threshold of Circe’s palace greet the first dispatch of men from Odysseus’s crew in Homer’s poem: “Within the forest glades they found the house of Circe, built of polished stone in a place of wide outlook, and round about it were mountain wolves and lions, whom Circe herself had bewitched; for she gave them evil drugs. Yet these beasts did not rush upon my men, but pranced about them fawningly, wagging their long tails” (*Od.* 210-15). This behaviour is indicative of the effeminacy induced by Circean enchantment, and by analogy, therefore, with Eve herself.

As the encounter in *Paradise Lost* between Eve and Satan unfolds, however, it is clearly the latter who has the upper hand. In the course of his temptation of Eve, Satan refers to Eve repeatedly as “goddess” or “goddess humane” (9.547; 732), the title by which Homer’s Circe is also introduced, and thus plays on Eve’s sense of her own “mixed” nature. Eve of course knows she was born of Adam, who was himself made in God’s image, and thus enjoys a certain proximity to divinity. Yet the human pair are made consciously aware of their difference from God and his angels from the time of their creation onwards in the poem, and in Book 5 Milton relates Adam’s curiosity to know

Of things above his world, and of their being  
 Who dwell in heaven, whose excellence he saw  
 Transcend his own so far, whose radiant forms  
 Divine effulgence, whose high power so far  
 Exceeded human.

(455-59)

This leads to the character's questioning of the angel Raphael, who indicates that the gap Adam perceives between himself and the higher beings in heaven may not be so intransigent after all. Over the lunch they share in Eden, Raphael explains to Adam and Eve that earthly food may be metabolised as easily by angels as by men, since both groups, though placed on different rungs of the *scala naturae*, exist in a continuum of the same ontological plane. Within their "several active spheres," (5.477) both angels and men partake of nourishment so that "body [may] up to spirit work" (478). Within this paradigm, informed by Milton's monist metaphysics,<sup>12</sup> the "discursive" (488) knowledge made available to man through his reason, to which his "corporal nutriments" (496) are "sublimed," differs "but in degree" (490) from the angels' "intuitive" knowledge (488). Raphael even suggests that should the human pair "be found obedient," and "unalterably firm" in their love for God, "whose progeny you are" (501-3), the gap might close, so that

Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,  
 Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend  
 Ethereal . . .

(497-99)

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<sup>12</sup> Milton states this concisely in *De Doctrina Christiana: Spiritus . . . ut substantia excellentior, substantiam utique inferiorem virtualiter, quod aiunt, et eminenter in se contient; ut facultas facultatem spiritualis et rationalis corpoream, sentientem nepe et vegetativam* ("Spirit, being the more excellent substance, virtually (as they say), and eminently contains within itself what is undoubtedly the inferior substance – just as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal one, that is, the sentient and vegetative faculty") (295). Detailed studies of Milton's monism and materialism include Danielson, *Milton's Good God* and Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Yet the conditional tense is important here, and in the meantime, he exhorts Adam to

. . . enjoy  
 Your fill what happiness this happy state  
 Can comprehend, incapable of more.

(503-5)

Eve looks on. Within the poem's hierarchical continuum of human and divine beings, of course, she is subordinate not only to God and the angels but to Adam: the pair, we are told, were made "He for God only, she for God in him" (4.299).<sup>13</sup> In the early books of *Paradise Lost*, Eve proves readily compliant with this notion, addressing Adam as "My author and disposer" and confirming that

. . . what thou bidst  
 Unargued I obey; so God ordains,  
 God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more  
 Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.

(4.635-38)

This is affirmed again in Book 8, as Eve elects to leave Adam to converse with the angel Raphael alone, a decision she makes, the narrator explains, not because she is "not capable" of understanding

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<sup>13</sup> Eve herself draws out the implications of this notion:

. . .O thou for whom  
 And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh  
 And without whom am to no end, my guide  
 And head.

(4.440-43)

See also Gen. 2:23, "Adam said, This is now . . . flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"; 1. Cor. 11:3, "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man" and 11:9, "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man."

“what was high” (8.49-50), but because “Her Husband the relater she preferred / Before the angel” (8.52-3).

Between these two declarations, however, our sense of Eve’s satisfaction with her status in Eden – or at least her conviction of the lack of any real alternative – may be shaken somewhat. The intervening event of course is Eve’s Satanic dream in Book 5, wherein she is guided towards

. . . the tree  
Of interdicted knowledge: fair it seemed,  
Much fairer to my fancy than by day.

(5.52-3)

The implications of the dream will be discussed in more detail later, yet it is important to note here that the claims the figure “shaped and winged like one of those from heaven” (55) makes for the deifying attributes of the fruit of the tree, “Forbidden here, it seems, as only fit / For gods, yet able to make gods of men” (69-70), closely resemble those that will persuade Eve to taste the “fair fruit” (9.731) in Book 9. Satan’s use of the epithet “Goddess” in his flattery of Eve in Book 9 recalls the promise of the figure who appears in her dream of Book 5,

Taste this, and be henceforth among the gods  
Thyself a goddess, not to earth confined,  
But sometimes in the air, as we, sometimes  
Ascend to heaven, by merit thine, and see  
What life the gods live there, and such live thou.

(5.77-81)

Granted, Eve reports a “damp horror” (65) upon witnessing the figure pluck and eat the fruit of the tree in her dream, and expresses relief to have woken. Yet there is a moment of elation in her account of the ending of the dream, an elation which, together with Eve’s later receptivity to Satan’s offer of a

“strange alteration” (9.599), suggests that Satan has successfully “involved” (9.75), or insinuated himself into, her desire:

. . . Forthwith up to the clouds  
 With him I flew, and underneath beheld  
 The earth outstretched immense, a prospect wide  
 And various: wondering at my flight and change  
 To this high exaltation.

(5.86-90)

As I will discuss, another precedent for the hubristic lapse, or “false ambition,”<sup>14</sup> that attends Eve’s Fall and which seems to make her more susceptible to the Serpent’s temptation, “eat thereof . . . / . . . and . . . be as gods” (9.706-10), might be found in the character’s account of her own creation in Book 4 (450-80), where she admits to initially preferring herself, Narcissus-like, to Adam. As the ending of her dream might suggest, however, a certain blurring between Satan, the infamous fallen angel, and Eve, the first woman, is also apparent here: the flight Eve dreams of has already been undertaken by Satan, whose “wonder at the sudden view / Of all this world at once” (3.542-43) as he emerges from Chaos prefaces Milton’s panoramic vision of the earth as seen from above. In Book 4 we see this trope repeated, as Satan gains access to Eden and uses the tree of life as a “prospect” (200) from which to “wonder” (205) at Eden’s “delight” (206) whilst “devising death” (197), for mankind. Thereafter, a further, and related parallel between Satan and Eve is established through the form of the temptation in Book 9, where the serpent’s promise of apotheosis and more general appeal to Eve’s pride and ambition recalls the motivations given in Books 1 and 2 for the fallen angel’s own rebellion against God, whom “he trusted to have equalled the most high, / If he opposed” (1.40-41).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Sandys, *Ovid’s Metamorphosis Englished*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.*, 106: “But a fearfull example we haue of the danger of selfe-loue in the fall of the Angells; who intermitting the beatificall vision, by reflecting vpon themselues, and admiration of their owne excellency, forgot their dependance vpon their creator.”

Leading up to the temptation in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, around the time of Milton's comparison of Eve to Circe, we are presented with an increasingly solipsistic economy of desire and pleasure, in which the provoking agents, Eve and Satan are confused to the point of merger. If Satan, observing Eve, is initially the subject and originator of his desire,

As one who long in populous city pent,  
 .....  
 Among the pleasant villages and farms  
 Adjoined from each thing met conceives delight,  
 (9.445-49)

subject and object are soon run together through the syntactically ambivalent addendum that

If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,  
 What pleasing seemed, for her now pleases more,  
 She most and in her look sums all delight.  
 Such pleasure took the serpent to behold.  
 (9.452-55)

The unstable perspective through which we gain access to the interplay between Satan and Eve in this part of the book makes it unclear, then, exactly who the Circean agent in the encounter is – and this, surely, is the point. In order for Milton to achieve theological coherence, Eve, who like Adam was made “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.99) must be tempted, yet fall of her own volition,<sup>16</sup> a point which might recall my discussion of the Lady's predicament in Milton's *Maske*.

I might seem dangerously close here, given what I argued previously of the positive, indeed necessary Circean attributes which Milton builds into his notion of Christian liberty in the *Maske*, of

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<sup>16</sup> The significance of this point for the theology and poetics of *Paradise Lost* has been widely acknowledged, although critics continue to dispute its implications. See for instance Danielson, *Milton's Good God*; William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John C. Ulreich, “‘Sufficient to Have Stood’: Adam's Responsibility in Book 9,” *Milton Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1971): 38–42.

depicting Satan himself as the most “Circean” character of *Paradise Lost*, with his initiation of Eve’s Fall an ultimately happy event to be celebrated in the tradition of *felix culpa*.<sup>17</sup> Yet the Circean aspects of the relationship between Satan and Eve in *Paradise Lost* cannot, of course, be considered without recourse to Milton’s Sin. If, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, there is something of Ovid’s Scylla in the Lady’s bondage to her chair “Smear’d with gums of glutinous heat” (*Maske*, 916), in Milton’s portrayal of Sin in *Paradise Lost* the influence of both the Ovidian myth and its allegorical treatment in Sandys’ account is yet more prominent.<sup>18</sup> Like Scylla, who is presented by Ovid as an unfortunate, innocent party to the jealous rage that is born from Circe’s love for her suitor, yet post-transformation endangers men through a treacherous temptation of her own,<sup>19</sup> and like Milton’s Sin, initially a victim of Satan’s incestuous lust who becomes, along with their grim progeny Death, a “hell-hound” (10.630) to torment mankind,<sup>20</sup> Eve, a victim of Satan’s temptation in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, will herself become a tempter in turn.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship between Milton’s Scylla-inspired Sin and Eve is fortified by the similarities between the birth narratives of Eve and Sin in the poem (both Eve and Sin emerge, fully formed, from the left side of their male progenitor) and in Milton’s positioning of Sin as gatekeeper of hell, in which Tertullian’s famous attack on women is writ large: “You are the devil’s gateway . . . you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert – that is,

<sup>17</sup> An classic exposition of the idea of the *felix culpa* in *Paradise Lost* is found in A. O. Lovejoy, “Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,” in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1948), 277–95.

<sup>18</sup> Philip J. Gallagher argues of Milton’s Sin and Death that while “the structure of the sequence is indebted to St. James, whose Epistle (1.15) contains an allegorical vision of lust begetting sin and sin begetting death . . . Milton’s proximate source for the iconography of Sin is the allegorical portrait of Error in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1.1.14-15). Covertly the narrative is mythological: it depends ultimately upon Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 14.40-74) for Sin’s appearance and upon Hesiod (*Theogony*, 2.924-26) for details of her birth” (“Real or Allegoric,” 322).

<sup>19</sup> Sandys notes that “once polluted with the sorceries of Circe, that is, having rendred her maiden honour to bee deflowered by bewitching pleasure, . . . [Scylla] is transformed to an horrid monster. And not so only, but endeavours to shipwracke others (such is the envy of infamous women) upon those ruining rocks, and make them share in the same calamities)” (*Ovid’s Metamorphosis Englished*, 475).

<sup>20</sup> Martz suggests that the reference to the “Night-Hag” (2.662-66) in Milton’s description of the “hell hounds” (2.654) that torment Sin herself “recalls Circe’s use of *Hecateia carmina* (14.44) while mixing her poisonous herbs” to transform Scylla in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Louis Lohr Martz, *Milton, Poet of Exile* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 215).

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, an echo of Sandy’s account of the “deflowered” Scylla’s fate might sound in Milton’s description of Adam’s response to his fallen wife, “From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve / Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed” (9.892-3), and his subsequent damning appraisal of Eve as “Defaced, deflowered, and now to death devote” (9.901).



death – even the Son of God had to die.”<sup>22</sup> This moralised entwining of the Biblical account of the fall with Ovidian mythology relies on the assumption of a dualistic spiritual hierarchy between man and woman, but also, and perhaps especially, within humankind itself. As we have seen, for Sandys the myth of Scylla “intimates how man, a divine creature, endued with wisdom and intelligence, in whose superiour parts, as in a high tower, that immortall spirit resideth . . . can never so degenerate into a beast, as when he giveth himselfe over to the lowe delights of those baser parts of the body, Dogs and Wolves, the blind & salvage fury of concupiscence” (*Met.* 475). Indeed, Browning argues that “Milton refers to the Ovidian Circe tradition repeatedly throughout *Paradise Lost*, specifically in relation to the characters of Sin, Satan, and Eve,” and that “inherent in this Ovidian tradition is the archetypal conflict between reason and appetite within the individual – largely reflected in a medieval Catholic anthropology.”<sup>23</sup> If this seems inconsistent with the theological perspective I have claimed for Milton thus far, Browning, quoting Luther’s discussion of sin as a “poison,” “infused into our nature” at birth,<sup>24</sup> manages to accommodate a “Reformed revision” of the medieval paradigm within her reading of the later parts of *Paradise Lost*. “After the Fall,” we learn,

Sin realizes her full potential. She is no longer the Scylla victim of Book II, subject to the abuse and rule of her son; neither is there any suggestion of her continued torture by the “Cerberian” mouths that surround her. In Book 10, we find the allegorized presence of Circe – all of the basic components of the myth are present. Sin is here the infecting agent whose function is to make humanity thrall to appetite. She no longer offers her poison as a drug, but is herself the poison. Unlike the ancient Circe figures, Sin’s potion is no longer external. Circe’s contagion here becomes original sin.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, “On the Apparel of Women,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. and trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 4 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Browning, “Sin, Eve, and Circe,” 135.

<sup>24</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, ed. Pelikan, vol. 1, 169.

<sup>25</sup> Browning, “Sin, Eve, and Circe,” 146.

This sin, of course, is first internalised by Eve when “in evil hour / Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate.” Thereafter, in consequence of the Fall, her “poison” will be transmitted genealogically to all of mankind as a “propagated curse” (10.729) – a proleptic use of myth indeed.

Arguably, Milton had linked Circe with the Fall, and thus with Eve, in his earlier work. The narrative of his *Maske* sets up the story of Comus’s birth and parentage as mythically anterior to the events that take place during the course of its performance, much as the biblical Fall is anterior to human history proper. We learn from the Attendant Spirit that Comus’s father Bacchus “on Circe’s island fell” (*Maske* 50), an interesting choice of verb that is followed by a caesura, ensuring its stress, before a rhetorical parenthesis that underlines the analogy between the spiritual consequences of man’s Fall following Eve’s temptation and the myth of Circe: “. . . (Who knows not Circe / The daughter of the Sun, whose charmed cup / Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape, / And downward fell into a grovelling swine)” (50-53). As Yarnall remarks, “the Homeric allegorists’ vision of a voluptuous Circe beckoning the rational, temperate Odysseus to drink from her poisoned cup possesses obvious similarities to the figure of Eve holding out the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge to a still-innocent Adam in Genesis 3.”<sup>26</sup> The trope of *akrasia*, moreover, implicit in humanist allegories of the Circe myth, emerges again in conjunction with Milton’s Circean treatment of Eve in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>27</sup> If, as I have suggested, a prominent strategy of Satan’s temptation is to appeal to Eve’s desire for knowledge, the rhetoric through which this appeal is conveyed is itself provocatively sensual. Satan’s (fictional) account of how he acquired language through eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge begins with a rich description of the fruit’s sensory allure, whereby the act of eating is presented primarily as an indulgence of appetite: “hunger and thirst,” we learn – or are reminded – are “Powerful persuaders . . .” (9.586-87). Just as with Spenser’s ekphrastic description of Excesse, the reader might well thirst along with Eve, Satan’s other auditor, for the multi-sensory experience of this “fruit of fairest colours mixed, / Ruddy and gold” (9.577), that produces “a savoury odour” (9.579) more pleasing than “smell of sweetest fennel, or the teats / Of ewe or goat dropping with milk at

<sup>26</sup> Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe*, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Spenser compares the Bower of Bliss to Eden in *FQ* 2.12.2, further suggesting the topicality of Eve’s Fall for explorations of Circean *akrasia* in Renaissance literature.

even” (9.581-82).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Eve’s senses succumb one by one to the “eager appetite” (9.740) “waked” by Satan’s “words replete with guile” (9.773), together with “the smell / So savoury of that fruit, which with desire, / Inclinable now grown to touch or taste, / Solicited her longing eye.” (9.740-43). Satan’s success is manifest in the very language that Eve uses after she tastes the fruit, commencing upon a panegyric to that “sovereign, virtuous, precious of all trees / In Paradise, of operation blest / To sapience” (9.795-97). As Grossman notes of these lines, “Eve’s unintended pun on ‘sapience’ signifies the reduction of knowledge to taste that attends her identification of physical and divine power,”<sup>29</sup> a phenomenon which would horrify Milton’s Lady, who quickly discerns “vizarded falsehood, and base forgery” (*Maske* 697) behind Comus’s attempts to get her to drink his “liquorish baits fit to ensnare a brute” (699). Against the Lady’s disdain for “swinish gluttony” (775) and preferred observance of the “sober laws, / And holy dictate of spare temperance” (765-66) in the *Maske*, in *Paradise Lost* Milton signals Eve’s loss of temperance at the moment of her Fall through the very manner in which she devours the forbidden fruit: “Greedily she engorged without restraint” (9.791).

In *Paradise Lost*, in fact, Eve yields to Satan despite her earlier warning by Adam on their parting:

. . . God left free the will, for what obeys  
Reason, is free, and reason he made right,  
But bid her well beware, and still erect,  
Lest by some fair appearing good surprised  
She dictate false, and misinform the will  
To do what God expressly hath forbid.

(9.351-56)

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<sup>28</sup> My argument here is indebted to Stanley Fish’s seminal application of “reader-response” criticism to the theology and poetics of Milton’s work.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall Grossman, *Authors to Themselves: Milton and the Revelation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 192.

Milton's inclusion of this advice speaks to a marriage of intellectualist and voluntarist ideas of *akrasia* at this point in the poem, and would seem to implicate Eve, even before her Fall as an akratic agent – against both God and Adam's injunction, she allows her glozing "Tempter" (9.549) to persuade her to eat. Day has argued that the propensity of Eve's reason to be misled by her "lesser faculties" (5.101) is first established in Book 4, when gazing at herself in the pool, to which she has been led by "unexperienced thought" she "acts initially not from reason but from the stimulation of her senses, and . . . is incapable of distinguishing the reality of the sky from the illusion of the water's reflection of the sky."<sup>30</sup> Day is not wrong, exactly, but as my forthcoming discussion will suggest, the point of Eve's watery self-encounter, and its aftermath, lies substantially elsewhere. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton does problematise the notion that a wholly harmonious relationship between human reason and sense perception existed even in Eden, but he does so far more overtly through the important passage in Book 5 where Eve relates to Adam the dream in which Satan had tried to manipulate "the organs of her fancy, and with them forge / Illusions as he list" (4.802-3), to produce "distempered, discontented thoughts" (807) and "inordinate desires / Blown up with high conceits engendering pride" (808-9). The events of Eve's dream, of course, foreshadow those of the Fall itself, and as Milton's narrative in Book 9 would attest, Eve's decision to taste the fruit offered by the serpent is brought about at least in part by the Satanic motivators listed above.

It is worth noting that Milton's thought here runs counter to Augustine's position in *De civitate Dei*, where we are told that before the Fall man and woman were innocent because they did not feel any emotional disturbance or *perturbatio* (14.10). In order, however, to explain how in the absence of *perturbatio* mankind could lapse from a more intuitive state of having knowledge of evil solely through knowledge of the good, to the fallen state of having knowledge of evil through experience,<sup>31</sup> Augustine had posited the idea of multiple falls, or a protracted fall, caused by a *mala*

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<sup>30</sup> Douglas Day, "Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, 4," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 3, no. 3 (1961): 370.

<sup>31</sup> See Adam's speech in his Fallen state in *Paradise Lost*:

. . . since our eyes  
 Opened we find we know  
 Both good and evil, good lost, and evil got,  
 Bad fruit of knowledge.

*voluntas* (“evil will”). Therefore, *In occulto autem mali esse coeperunt ut in aperiam in oboedientiam laberentur* (“when the first human beings began to be evil, they did so in secret, and this enabled them to fall into open disobedience”) (14.13). Something like this, it is reasonable to assume, might inform Milton’s addition of Eve’s dream to the Biblical account of the Fall that is dramatized in *Paradise Lost*. Yet as Poole reminds us, during the initial dream temptation “at no point do her teeth meet the fruit.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, both Adam, Eve’s interlocutor in Book 5, and a majority of commentators consider Eve’s first temptation to be involuntary given her condition of sleep.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, upon the dissolution of this state, Eve’s will reasserts itself: “. . . oh how glad I waked / To find this but a dream!” (5.92-93). Her action, then, cannot truly be described as *akratic* in the voluntarist sense, and indeed, we are reminded that in the Augustinian paradigm, the phenomenon of an intractable *akrasia* attendant upon a disenfranchisement of the will is best understood as a consequence, and not a cause of the Fall:

*Denique, ut breviter dicatur, in illius peccati poena quid inoboedientiae nisi inoboedientia retributa est? Nam quae hominis est alia miseria nisi adversus eum ipsum inoboedientia eius ipsius, ut, quoniam noluit quod potuit, quod non potest velit? In paradiso enim etiamsi non omnia poterat ante peccatum, quidquid tamen non poterat, non volebat, et ideo poterat omnia quae volebat. Nunc vero, sicut in eius stirpe cognoscimus et divina scriptura testatur, homo vanitati similis factus est. Quis enim enumerat quam multa quae non potest velit dum sibi ipse, id est voluntati eius ipse animus eius eoque inferior caro eius, non obtemperat?*

(“To put it briefly then, in the punishment of that sin the requital for disobedience was no other than disobedience. For man’s wretchedness consists only in his own disobedience to himself, wherefore, since he would not do what he then could, he now has a will to do what

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(9.1073)

<sup>32</sup> Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, 175. Poole adds that “the absence of the eating in the dream might argue resistance in the face of temptation; or – a new possibility – it might make the point that the actual bite is unimportant, desire being the real transgression. But we cannot say which is the more secure interpretation” (ibid.).

<sup>33</sup> In Aristotle, of course, sleep – together with madness and drunkenness – is one of the states to which the akratic man’s condition of “knowing” is compared. See *NE* 1147a10-18.

he cannot. In paradise, to be sure, man could not do everything whatsoever even before he sinned, yet, whatever he could not do, he did not have a will to do, and in that way he could do everything that he would. Now, however, as we recognize in his offspring and as holy Scripture attests, “Man has become like vanity.” For who can count up all the things that man has a will to do but cannot as long as he is disobedient to himself, that is, as long as his very mind and even his flesh, which is lower, are disobedient to his will?”<sup>34</sup>

Something of this is reflected in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton would appear to style Eve’s speech differently before and after the Fall in conformity with this doctrine. As she contemplates the serpent’s claims (9.733-780), both her reason and her appetite are united in her desire for the fruit.<sup>35</sup> There is little to suggest that she does not fully believe Satan’s “persuasive words, impregn’d / With reason, to her seeming, and with truth” (737-38). As Eve rehearses the serpent’s words in her own speech, Milton cements the power and seeming inevitability of the Satanic argument’s appeal through a marked use of *trductio*:

For good unknown, sure is not had, or had  
 And yet unknown, is as not had at all.  
 In plain then, what forbids he but to know,  
 Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 14.15.

<sup>35</sup> See Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph Over Reason*, 200, for a more extended discussion of the interplay between reason and appetite in Eve’s thought processes before the Fall.

<sup>36</sup> In fact, in Book 7 Raphael had warned the human pair that “knowledge is as food, and needs no less / Her temperance over appetite” (126-27). Speaking to Adam in Eve’s absence, the angel is more explicit:

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,  
 Leave them to God above, him serve and fear;  
 Of other creatures, as him pleases best,  
 Wherever placed, let him dispose: joy thou  
 In what he gives to thee, this paradise  
 And thy fair Eve; heaven is for thee too high  
 To know what passes there; be lowly wise:  
 Think only what concerns thee and thy being.

(756-59)

A certain unity of mind and action is also connoted by the short clauses in the perfect tense through which the act of the transgression itself is narrated: “she plucked, she ate” (781). This harmony, however, dissolves with the Fall, at which point Eve seems to experience a loss of unity of being. In its place, she finds a new self-consciousness that enables her to practise her own kind of serpentine “guile” (655): “But to Adam in what sort / Shall I appear?” (817). Indeed, upon their reunion, Eve presents herself to Adam with a new performativity:

To him she hasted, in her face excuse  
 Came prologue, and apology to prompt,  
 Which with bland words at will she thus addressed.

(9.853-55)

Her physical appearance meanwhile betrays the inner conflict, or dissonance behind her “bland words”:

Thus Eve with countenance blithe her story told;  
 But in her cheek distemper flushing glowed

(886-87)

Eve’s appeal to Adam is nonetheless successful. “Fondly overcome with female charm,” (999), and unable to bear the idea of living without his wife when she is punished for her sin by death, Adam “scrupled not to eat” (997). The phrase “female charm” is pivotal in assessing Adam’s motivation for

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 (8.167-73)

Ironically, by failing to restrict her desire for knowledge to that which “concerns thee and thy being,” and by directly disobeying God’s commandment not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Eve effectively bars herself and Adam from attaining the kind of “intuitive” knowledge Raphael had referred to at 5.488.

choosing to share Eve's fate. As we have seen, the word "charm" carries Circean connotations in both Milton and Spenser's work, and in *Paradise Lost* its appearance here, rather than in conjunction with Milton's reference to the Circean herd earlier in Book 9, is significant. As Brodwin notes, "although Milton explicitly associates Eve's momentary influence upon Satan with the temptation of Circe . . . . Eve's major Circean function is none other than to tempt Adam to his fall."<sup>37</sup>

"The charm of beauty's powerful glance"

Brodwin's argument is persuasively damning, and in conceding its cogency, the case for Milton's wholly negative use of the Circean figure in *Paradise Lost* – a case made by the vast majority of scholarship on the subject – might seem to be closed. In this vein, Giamatti argues of Milton's comparison of Eve and the animals in Eden to the "herd" that obeyed the "Circean call," that "the reference to Circe, at this crucial moment, links Eve to the prototype of the evil woman in a garden from whom Eve's immediate predecessors, Alcina, Armida and Acrasia, were all descended."<sup>38</sup> Yet Giamatti prefaces her statement by noting that "of all the analogies by which to imply the harmony and innocence of the creatures in the garden before the Fall, the comparison of Eve to Circe's power is, to say the very least, the most ambiguous,"<sup>39</sup> a remark that is left frustratingly undeveloped. In this next section I will argue that disburdening Eve of any exclusive equivalence with the "evil woman in a garden" frees up new interpretative possibilities for Milton's Circean allusions and references. As with Milton's *Maske*, I want to suggest that the Circean motif in *Paradise Lost* is more diffuse and far-reaching than we might assume. In addition to the initial, and most famous Circean temptation, which results in the "archetypal, swinish metamorphosis" so prominent in Virgil and Ovid's accounts, Brodwin discusses two additional subtypes which appear in Homer's version of the myth: the temptation of "effeminating sex," and that of "enervating idleness."<sup>40</sup> While this schema is somewhat crude, it does give us a framework through which we might further scrutinise the degree of likeness

<sup>37</sup> Brodwin, "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," 60.

<sup>38</sup> Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, 329.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Brodwin, "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," 21.



between Milton's Eve and the mythological Circes inherited and embellished by the Renaissance humanist tradition. Brodwin makes a convincing case for Milton's exploration of the second two temptations in his earlier work, but her argument for the presence of these aspects of Circean mythology in *Paradise Lost* – aspects which are run together under the rather vague umbrella of Adam's neglect of "higher obligations" as a direct result of Eve's Circean charm – lacks nuance.<sup>41</sup>

The charge that Eve induces effeminacy, or uxoriousness in her partner has been discussed extensively in the critical literature,<sup>42</sup> often in relation to Adam's decision to share Eve's fate when she offers him the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Post-fall, as I have suggested, Milton does stress this aspect of the first couple's relationship: the Son himself rebukes Adam for the act in which

Thou didst resign thy manhood, and the place  
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
And for thee, whose perfection far excelled  
Hers in all real dignity . . .

(10.148-51)

Critics who view Milton's Eve as a product of a more misogynistic exegetical or allegorical tradition often base an argument for continuity between the Eve known by Adam in a prelapsarian paradise, and the Eve who tempts him to his fall, by drawing upon Adam's confession to Raphael in Book 8 of his vulnerability to "the charm of beauty's powerful glance" (8.533), the word "charm," of course, sounding again at the pivotal moment in Book 9. We are alerted to the troubling consequences of Adam's susceptibility to the "commotion strange" (8.531) that his passion for Eve arouses by the first man himself:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>42</sup> See for instance Brodwin, "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," 61–64; Day, "Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, 4," 373–81; James W. Stone, "'Man's Effeminate s(Lack)ness': Androgyny and the Divided Unity of Adam and Eve," *Milton Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1997): 33–42.

All higher knowledge in her presence falls  
 Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her  
 Looses discount'nanced, and like folly shows;  
 Authority and reason on her wait,  
 As one intended first, not after made  
 Occasionally . . .

(8.551-56)

The adjective “discount'nanced” here is foreboding, recalling as it does Satan’s “disfigured” (4.127) and “mad demeanour” (129), the physical manifestation of the fallen angel’s “distempers foul” (4.118) which leave their mark on his “passion dimmed . . .face” (114), and foreshadowing the couple’s state, “discount'nanced and discomposed” (10.110) after the Fall. Instructing Adam on how he might better relate to Eve, in Book 8 Raphael advises that

What higher in her society thou findst  
 Attractive, human, rational, love still;  
 In loving thou dost well, in passion not,  
 Wherein true love consists not; love refines  
 The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat  
 In reason, and is judicious, is the scale  
 By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend,  
 Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause  
 Among the beasts no mate for thee was found.

(586-594)

The Neoplatonic opposition of “heavenly love” to bestial, “carnal pleasure” that Milton’s angel makes here relies on the assumption that the passions are subordinate to reason, just as animals are subordinate to humans, the angels and ultimately God himself within the *scale naturae* which forms the basis for contemporary moral allegories of Circean allure. Within the more fluid Neoplatonic schema, as we have seen it deployed in the *Balet* and Townshend’s *Tempe Restored*, a man who pays too much heed to his appetites and succumbs to lust risks imbruting himself, while he who is capable of a more contemplative, “true love” of beauty participates in an earthly image of divinity, and thus draws closer to God himself.

Yet as several critics have discussed, a reading of Eve’s sexual allure before the Fall as sinful is itself problematic,<sup>43</sup> as indeed is the idea that passion has no place in Milton’s Eden. As Blackburn notes, in *Paradise Lost* “Milton goes to lengths unprecedented in hexameter literature to make clear his belief that Adam and Eve were created with a full complement of human appetites.”<sup>44</sup> Raphael, then, is condemning a particular *type* of passion in his speech to Adam – that of excessive, or “ungoverned appetite” (11.517), which in the *Maske*, as we have seen, proves synonymous with the state of intemperance, and elsewhere in Milton’s corpus, with sin itself.<sup>45</sup> Yet even here we have to be careful. It cannot be denied, of course, that Milton’s Eve is associated with excess. The physical attributes Milton endows her with speak to an overwhelming beauty and fertility which the narrator’s tempering exposition fails to contain: the claim that her “wanton ringlets . . . / . . . implied / Subjection” (4.306-8), for instance, is striking mostly for its seeming contradiction. Notions of “innocence” imported from the fallen world, Milton perhaps suggests, are anachronistic here. Yet the

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<sup>43</sup> J. M. Evans notes that Augustine, whom Milton follows in allowing that our first parents had (concupiscence-free) sexual relations in Eden before the Fall, used the paradigm set up by Paul in Romans 7 to inform his view that “the split between . . . [Adam’s] reason or will and his sexual appetite was both the first consequence of the Fall and an illustration of the general inability of his rational faculties to retain their authority over his bodily ones” (*Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 99). On Milton’s depiction of Adam and Eve’s sexual activity in the Eden of *Paradise Lost*, see James Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph Over Reason*, 191–92. For an account of the Jewish and Christian debates about whether Adam and Eve had conjugal relations in Eden see Gary Anderson, “Celibacy or Consumption in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 121–48.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas H. Blackburn, “‘Uncloister’d Virtue’: Adam and Eve in Milton’s Paradise,” *Milton Studies* 3 (1971): 130.

<sup>45</sup> Sin is “not in a predicament to be measur’d and modify’d, but is alwaies an excesse . . . and is as boundlesse as that vacuity beyond the world” (*Tetrachordon* 159).

poem does have an internal consistency of sorts, which we may use to guide our interpretation of this imagery. As Green and Lewalski have explored, a series of correspondences are set up by Milton in book 4 between Eve's physicality and the irregular, wild beauty of the garden itself, which "not nice art / In beds and curious knots, but nature boon / Poured forth profuse" (241-43).<sup>46</sup> Like Eve, nature in paradise "Wantoned as in her prime" (5.295), and nature, we are expressly told, is blameless.<sup>47</sup> We are reminded of this not only by Raphael in his admonitory speech to Adam in Book 8 ("Accuse not nature she hath done her part," 8.561), but again in book 11, after the Fall, where there is a resurgence of the Circean theme as Milton relates to Adam the suffering of future sinners:

Their maker's Image, answered Michael, then  
 Forsook them, when themselves they vilified  
 To serve ungoverned appetite, and took  
 His image whom they served, a brutish vice,  
 Inductive mainly to the sin of Eve.  
 Therefore so abject is their punishment,  
 Disfiguring not Gods likeness, but their own,  
 Or if his likeness, by themselves defaced  
 While they pervert pure nature's healthful rules  
 To loathsome sickness, worthily, since they  
 God's image did not reverence in themselves.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> As Lewalski puts it, in *Paradise Lost* nature "has a surprising tendency to excess and disorder, to overprofuseness and languid softness – [see] the 'mazy error' of the brooks, the 'wanton' fertility of the vegetation, the 'luxuriant' vines, the 'pendant shades'" (Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden," in *New Essays on "Paradise Lost,"* ed. Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 89). See also Green's discussions of Eve's relationship with the physical landscape and flora of the garden of Eden in *Milton's Ovidian Eve*.

<sup>47</sup> So too, of course, is Eve. Poole notes that "Adam and Eve are conspicuously reaffirmed as still innocent in Book 5. 'So pray'd they innocent,' the narrator reminds us; Adam is 'Accompanied . . . with his own compleat / Perfections'; and as for Eve, 'no thought infirm / Altered her cheek' (209, 352-3, 384-5)" (*Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, 175).

<sup>48</sup> This recalls Milton's *Maske*:

Soon as the potion works, their human countenance,  
 The express resemblance of the gods, is changed

(11.515-25)

While Milton's admission of the intractable legacy of Eve's transgression conforms with Reformed orthodoxy, the qualification in "Inductive *mainly* to the sin of Eve" (my emphasis), together with the pointed repetition of "themselves" in the second, eighth and eleventh lines of the above passage, serves to stress the role of individual agency in man's "brutish vice." In fact, an elision of Eve with passion and passion with Adam's demise proves inconsistent with what we know of Milton's particular theological perspective. Any clear opposition between the passions and *recta ratio*, we might recall, had already been destabilised in the *Areopagitica*, where Milton asks of God "Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue?" (319) Far from dismissing the passions as insignificant or ungodly, they are presented here as essential to that "freedom to choose," in particular Adam's freedom to choose, which proves to be a central tenet of Milton's Christian virtue ethics in both the *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost*.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, while I have suggested that recourse to a voluntarist model of *akrasia* is not essential to an understanding of Eve's lapse in *Paradise Lost* – Eve appears to fall with a unified will – Adam's

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Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,  
Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,  
(68-71)

And Augustine:

*Hominem vero, cuius naturam quodam modo mediam inter angelos bestiasque condebat ut, si Creatori suo tamquam vero domino subditus praeceptum eius pia oboedientia custodiret, in consortium transiret angelicum, sine morte media beatam immortalitatem absque ullo termino consecutus, si autem Dominum Deum suum libera voluntate superbe atque inoboedienter usus offenderet, morti addictus bestialiter viveret, libidinis servus aeternoque post mortem supplicio destinatus.*

("[God] created man's nature to be midway, so to speak, between the angels and the beasts in such a way that, if he should remain in subjection to his creator as his true Lord and with dutiful obedience keep his commandment, he was to pass into the company of the angels, obtaining with no intervening death a blissful immortality that has no limit; but if he should make proud and disobedient use of his free will and go counter to the Lord his God, he was to live like a beast, at the mercy of death, and enthralled by lust and doomed to eternal punishment after death.") (CG 12.22)

<sup>49</sup> Tilmouth notes that in Aristotle, passion is something to be cultivated and tempered rather than simply denied, since "desire driven . . . by rational goals is, in Aristotle's view, morally valuable, and so too are the passions which are expressions of that desire." He cites Castiglione, Thomas Wright and Montaigne amongst those Renaissance writers whose works bear signs of Aristotelian influence on this point (*Passion's Triumph over Reason*, 23)

case is different. In the *Maske*, as we have seen, Milton develops a modified Augustinian notion of the will to support his belief that human goodness and the freedom to choose are mutually establishing. These ideas are revisited in *Paradise Lost*, where choice, wedded to reason as it is in the *Areopagitica*,<sup>50</sup> is presented as a crucial part of God's covenant with man both before and after the Fall:

I made [man] just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
.....  
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
When will and reason (*reason also is choice*)  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,  
Made passive both, had served necessity,  
Not me.

(3.98-111, my emphasis)

Although both Adam and Eve are presented by Milton as rational beings, “sufficient to have stood though free to fall,” it is not a stretch to say that Adam's reason is of a higher order than Eve's, or that the robustness of Eve's reasoning capacity is to a certain extent reliant on that possessed by Adam. From the moment we learn that Adam was

for contemplation . . . and valour formed,  
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,

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<sup>50</sup> “Reason is but choosing” (*Areopagitica* 319).

He for God only, she for God in him,<sup>51</sup>

(4.297-99)

a hierarchy is established whereby Adam, at least nominally, is treated as Eve's intellectual superior. Adam is positioned by Milton more than once as Eve's moral and spiritual guide, not least in the fateful conversation that takes place between the two before the Fall. After this calamitous event, moreover, when Adam complains to the Angel Michael that ". . . the tenor of man's woe / Holds on the same, from woman to begin" (11.632-33), he is met with the reproach that

From Mans effeminate slackness it begins,

. . . who should better hold his place

By wisdom, and superior gifts received.

(634-36)

Before we arrive at the moment of Adam's Fall, then, the reader has been primed to view Adam's transgression as particularly grave, and for Adam to be implicated in the sin that precedes his own. Ulreich has argued that in the pivotal conversation between Adam and Eve in book 9, when Eve suggests she ought to leave his side to work in the garden alone and Adam "reluctantly consents: 'Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more' (372)," Adam "knows that his decision is mistaken, for only 'What obeys / Reason is free' (351-2), and Eve's action is impulsive."<sup>52</sup> This seems rather to do Milton's Eve a disservice: as Green has shown, Eve's suggestion that she and Adam part ways is "an expression of her desire to maximize their impact upon the garden by instituting a division of labour that will ensure an increase in productivity and efficiency by removing the distraction of amorous 'Looks,' 'smiles,' and 'Casual discourse' (9.222-23)."<sup>53</sup> Certainly, however, when Eve's encounter

<sup>51</sup> A line which Burrow, with some justice, has described as Milton's most unlikeable: Colin Burrow, "Shall I Go On?," *London Review of Books*, March 7, 2013; <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n05/colin-burrow/shall-i-go-on>.

<sup>52</sup> Ulreich, "'Sufficient to Have Stood,'" 39.

<sup>53</sup> Green, *Milton's Ovidian Eve*, 248.

with Satan has run its course, it is clear that Adam, unlike Eve before her Fall, knows the falsity of the serpent's claims, and is fully aware of the grave consequences that are likely to follow from his partner's lapse:

. . . Adam, soon as he heard  
 The fatal trespass done by Eve, amazed,  
 Astonied stood and blank, while horror chill  
 Ran through his veins, and all his joints relaxed

(9.888-91)

The decision to join her in disobeying God is therefore taken "Against his better knowledge, not deceived" (9.998-99). The Augustinian tradition, in fact, locates a voluntary *akrasia* in Adam's sin but not in Eve's:

*Non enim frustra dixit apostolus: Et Adam non est seductus, mulier autem seducta est, nisi quia illa quod ei serpens locutus est, tamquam uerum esset, accepit, ille autem ab unico noluit consortio dirimi nec in communionem peccati; nec ideo minus reus, si sciens prudensque peccauit*

"For not without significance did the apostle say, 'And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression'; but he speaks thus, because the woman accepted as true what the serpent told her, but the man could not bear to be severed from his only companion, even though this involved a partnership in sin. He was not on this account less culpable, but sinned with his eyes open." (CG 14.11)



It might be noted, furthermore, that Adam's vulnerability to the "charm" that some critics would hold responsible for his Fall is not in fact exclusive to his relationship with Eve.<sup>54</sup> At the beginning of Book 8, having attended to Raphael's account of God's creation, we are told that

The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear  
 So Charming left his voice, that he a while  
 Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear.

(8.1-3)

This reaction to good parallels both Comus's response to the "divine enchanting ravishment" (244) of the Lady's voice in Milton's *Maske*,<sup>55</sup> which, like Circe's song, "in pleasing slumber lulled the sense" (259), and later in *Paradise Lost*, Satan's reaction to Eve's "graceful innocence" (9.459), which

. . .with rapine sweet bereaved  
 His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:  
 That space the evil one abstracted stood  
 From his own evil, and for the time remained  
 Stupidly good . . .

(461-65)

Perhaps more significantly, while God acknowledges that Eve's charms are real indeed, he admonishes Adam that she was made

. . . lovely to attract  
 Thy love, not thy subjection, and her gifts

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<sup>54</sup> For the former argument, see for instance Le Comte: "It is reason versus passion, and reason loses" (Edward Le Comte, *Milton and Sex*, 97).

<sup>55</sup> Brodwin observes the continuity with Milton's *Maske* on this point. See, however, her qualification of the seemingly virtuous potential of such stupefaction ("Milton and the Renaissance Circe," 60). Satan has a very similar reaction to a cherub in *PL* 4.846-47: ". . . abashed the devil stood, / And felt how awful goodness is."

Were such as under government well seemed,  
 Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part  
 And person, hadst thou known thyself aright.

(10.152-156)

Similarly, Raphael responds to Adam's speech in book 8 on the subject of his helplessness in the face of Eve's allure by sternly reminding him of his own responsibility to discriminate her beautiful "outside" (568) from the inner qualities of "just and right" (572) that he possesses, and which he must know to be superior. If Adam were to "esteem" (572) himself rightly, and "weigh" (570) his attributes against those he finds so seductive in Eve, "The more she will acknowledge thee her head, / And to realities yield all her shows" (574-75).<sup>56</sup> The ideas expressed here are compatible with an Aristotelian, or intellectualist account of *akrasia* (we think again of the practical syllogism, and the vulnerability of perceptual knowledge to the demands of the appetitive drives), but also emphasise that choice, especially before the Fall, is not negated by the experience of passion, and that Adam has a moral and spiritual obligation to obtain the self-knowledge necessary to govern himself appropriately, before heaping blame on Eve.<sup>57</sup>

The emphasis placed by both Raphael and God on the importance of self-knowledge, of knowing "thyself aright" (10.156), moreover, speaks to some of the complexities of *akrasia* in Milton's particular brand of reformed theology. In the *Maske*, as we have seen, choice – even the possibility of akratic choice – is a necessary entailment of the freedom that allows man to reject sin and accept God's grace. In contrast to Eve's diligent narration of her dream, however, Adam refuses to acknowledge his own akratic tendencies, and is unable, therefore, to "know . . . [himself] aright." Indeed, one critic finds an inverted echo of Ovid's Medea's *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor* (*Met* 7.19-21) in Adam's defensive claim to Raphael that "yet still free," he is able to

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<sup>56</sup> The virtuosity of a "just honouring of our selves" is extolled by Milton in *The Reason of Church Government* 260.

<sup>57</sup> Poole points out that Milton had defended himself in *An Apology for Smectymnuus* from charges of sexual incontinence on the grounds of his "self-esteem, either of what I was or what I might be" (*Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, 151; *Apology for Smectymnuus*, 304). Milton would thus seem to posit a negative relationship between incontinence or *akrasia* and self-esteem.

“Approve the best, and follow what I approve,” and suggests that for this reason “we do not share his confidence.”<sup>58</sup> As it turns out, despite Raphael’s warning not to confuse Eve’s natural attractiveness with the desire that is kindled in him – “accuse not nature she hath done her part” (8.561) – Adam will do exactly this as he attempts to justify his decision to share Eve’s fate:

So forcible within my heart I feel  
The Bond of Nature draw me to my own,  
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine.<sup>59</sup>

(9.955-57)

Knoespel argues that these words “recall [Ovid’s] Narcissus: *hic, quid diligitur, vellem diuturnior esset; / nunc duo concordēs anima moriemur in una* (‘I would he that is loved might live longer; but as it is we two shall die together in one breath’) (4. 471-73),” and thus ensure the continuation of a trope that is most explicitly introduced by Milton in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, with the account of Eve’s encounter with her own image in a pool, an image for which she nearly “pined with vain desire” (466) shortly after her creation.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Knoespel implicates Adam in the narcissistic drama that envelops the couple at this earlier point, noting that Adam’s words to Eve as she flees him, “Return fair Eve, / Whom fly’st thou? Whom thou fly’st, of him thou art” (4.481-82), bear a striking resemblance to “Narcissus’ plea to his image when it suddenly disappears in the water before him.”<sup>61</sup>

On one reading, Adam’s narcissistic identification with Eve is an inevitability. The line “He for God only, she for God in him” (4.299), as well as the “voice” (467) which instructs Eve to turn from her reflection in the water and to gaze more fruitfully upon Adam instead, since “he / Whose

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<sup>58</sup> Douglas Bush, “Ironic and Ambiguous Allusion in *Paradise Lost*,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 60, no. 4 (1961): 639.

<sup>59</sup> As Tilmouth notes, Adam here “reverts to simply conceding the irresistible pull of passion, ‘So forcible’ now that it has become not a ‘link’ but a ‘bond of nature’ (9.955-56)” (*Passion’s Triumph*, 199).

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth J. Knoespel, “The Limits of Allegory: Textual Expansion of Narcissus in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 22 (1986): 94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. Bush suggests alternatively that the mythological allusion at play here is the speech of Ovid’s Apollo as he chases Daphne (in which case, Milton may imitate Spenser’s pro-marital deployment of the myth in the *Amoretti*, as discussed in the previous chapter) but draws a similar conclusion to Knoespel: “Milton’s brief but clear echo of Ovid contributes to making his lines the germ, no more, of the extravagant avowal of idolatry in 8.521-59, where Adam is on the way toward letting Eve usurp his own proper place and come between him and God” (“Ironic and Ambiguous Allusion,” 638).

image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy / Inseparably thine” (471-73) draws out the divinely sourced lines of correspondence that bind the couple through their creation *in imagine dei*, a bond that is both metaphysical *and* physical, as Adam’s account in book 8 of Eve’s creation from his “left side” (465) confirms. Yet from the moment of our first sighting of the pair in Eden, Milton’s narrator is at pains to stress that they are “not equal, as their sex not equal seemed” (4.296), and thus not equivalent. This is lost on Adam, whose induction that Eve is “myself / Before me” from his quite accurate observation that the first woman is “Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” (8.495) evidences a particularly dangerous kind of myopia that may account for the Circean “uxoriousness” of which he is often accused. In psychoanalytic terms, we could say that Adam channels his impression of Eve through his own highly idealised self-image until, after the Fall, she becomes “a projection of his own ego, an abstraction ‘to enjoy’ (1032).”<sup>62</sup> The “charmed” stupor into which Adam falls in Eve’s presence could therefore be understood as narcissistic in origin – Narcissus too, sick with self-desire “Astraughted like an ymage made of Marble stone . . . lyes.”<sup>63</sup>

In depicting Adam thus, Milton sets up another correspondence, this time with company we might rather the first man did not keep. In Book 4, Satan greets the angels Ithuriel and Zephon, sent by Gabriel to watch over Adam and Eve in Eden, with the following proud speech:

Know ye not then said Satan, filled with scorn,  
 Know ye not me? Ye knew me once no mate  
 For you, there sitting where ye durst not soar;  
 Not to know me argues yourselves unknown

(827-30)

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<sup>62</sup> Ulreich, ““Sufficient to Have Stood,”” 41. My argument here is indebted to the work of Knoespel, but also to Regina M. Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), who follows James W. Earl, “Eve’s Narcissism,” *Milton Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1985): 13-16, in using a psychoanalytic paradigm to analyse the trope of narcissism in Milton’s poem.

<sup>63</sup> Golding, *Metamorphosis*, 3.521-4. According to Aquinas, moreover, “Every sinful act proceeds from an inordinate desire for some temporal good. Now the fact that anyone desires a temporal good inordinately is due to the fact that he loves himself inordinately” (*ST I-II*, Q.77, Art. 4). In these terms, Adam’s excessive desire for Eve originate from his “inordinate” self-desire.

As Knoespel finds, “even when forced to recognize his present deformed shape Satan continues to be attracted to the idea he conceived of himself in Heaven. Like Narcissus, who continues gazing expectantly at his shape in Hades (504-05), Satan continues to love his false image in Hell.”<sup>64</sup> The issue of Satan’s narcissistic love for his own, as opposed to God’s image, is of course sin and death. Sin reminds her father that she was born “Lickest to thee in shape and countenance bright,” and that “. . . familiar grown, / I pleased” (2.761-62) until Satan

Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing  
 Becam’st enamoured, and such joy thou tookst  
 With me in secret, that my womb conceived  
 A growing burden.

(764-67)

Schwartz finds a brilliant corollary for this incestuous phenomenon in modern psychoanalytic theory:

Doubling is the spatial form of temporal repetition, and its source, according to both Freud and Otto Rank, is narcissism. In Satan’s refusal to confront a genuine Other – for such an Other would be an insult to the grandeur of the all-encompassing Self – he reproduces only projections of the Self. Like all regressive tendencies, narcissism has as its goal “the attempt to return to a state in which subject and object did not yet exist, to a time before that division occurred out of which the ego sprang,” to a time when Self and Other were combined in an internal love union. Thus, we might expect narcissism ultimately to lead back to the womb. But Freud would see this return as a regression to a state even earlier – the state of non-being

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<sup>64</sup> Knoespel, “The Limits of Allegory: Textual Expansion of Narcissus in *Paradise Lost*,” 83. The subject of Satan’s narcissism has been treated extensively in the scholarship on *Paradise Lost*, and my discussion of the matter here will therefore be brief.

prior to birth. This becomes the ultimate return; for disguised attempts to restore the original state of non-being. As the classical myth tells it, narcissism leads to death.<sup>65</sup>

Beyond the love child of Satan and Sin, we might think here of the morbidity inherent in Adam's response to Eve's Fall in Book 9, as he declares

. . . I with thee have fixed my lot,  
 Certain to undergo like doom, if death  
 Consort with thee, death is to me as life;  
 So forcible within my heart I feel  
 The bond of nature draw me to my own,  
 My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;  
 Our state cannot be severed, we are one,  
 One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself.

(9.952-59)

As I have suggested, in Milton's poem and in the exegetical tradition more widely, Eve is also implicated in Satan's deathly narcissism. In *Paradise Lost*, this identification is most damningly apparent in the temptation scene of book 9, but also in the Circean parallels between Eve and Sin that are set up through allusions to the Scylla myth in book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, and in the recasting of Eve as a female Narcissus drawn to her own "smooth watery image" (4.480) in book 4 of the poem. This latter scene, however, merits further scrutiny. While we are told that Eve "bent down to look" at her reflection (4.460) – a movement of some significance, given the relationship between posture and man's position relative to the "creeping" (Gen. 1.26) beasts in the *scale naturae* – her ears prove to be

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<sup>65</sup> Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating*, 99. Schwartz cites John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 43. See also Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. Harry Tucker, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971); Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1919), 217-256.

as receptive as her eyes to sense impressions, allowing her to hear the voice of God which leads her away and effects, as Knoespel has argued, “a separation of Eve from her physical image.”<sup>66</sup> If Eve approaches the pool with “unexperienced thought” (4.457), moreover, she leaves it having learned a valuable lesson: heeding the “voice” which “warned” (467) her of the self-limited nature of the “sympathy and love” (465) her reflection proffers,<sup>67</sup> she transitions through something akin to Lacan’s mirror stage.<sup>68</sup> This results, initially, in disappointment – Adam proves

. . . less fair,  
 Less winning soft, less amiably mild,  
 Than that smooth watery image,  
 (4.478-80)

but within this reaction is an acknowledgement of difference that Adam, who does not seem to move past the state described in psychoanalytic discourse as primary narcissism, never quite attains.<sup>69</sup>

Eve, of course, is far from infallible, and is perhaps more easily misled by Satan in book 9 than she is guided to the right course of action by God in book 4, where – however momentarily – she does look back from Adam towards the fairer image she had seen in the pool (480). Despite her

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<sup>66</sup> Knoespel, “The Limits of Allegory,” 98. An echo of the Puritan commonplace, “Faith comes from hearing” (Romans 10:17), may be intended here. Milton’s sense of the central ambivalence, yet necessity of the sense impressions to human moral and spiritual experience might be inferred from the poet’s juxtaposition of this moment – together with his later, bardic description of the muse bringing poetry “Nightly to my ear” (9.47) – with Satan’s positioning “. . . close at the ear of Eve” as he seeks to abuse “The organs of her fancy” (4.800; 802) in the dream temptation.

<sup>67</sup> Knoespel notes that in the narcissus pool scene in *PL* “Milton gives special meaning to the narrator’s intervention in the Latin story, but critics continue to base discussions on a comparison of Eve and the figure before her image. By stressing deception rather than warning, critics transform the fable into a passive rather than active narrative. Eve’s weakness, rather than [her heeding of] the divine source of correction, is stressed” (ibid., 80).

<sup>68</sup> See Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 74-81. Fowler, *Paradise Lost*, 247, suggests a possible allusion here to Porphyry’s commentary on Homer’s cave and water in *De Antro Nympharum*, which would endow the “liquid plain” (4.455) into which Eve gazes with further, Neoplatonic associations (briefly, Eve’s search for her own image in the water might be understood as representative of a descent into material creation, her recognition of herself – with the aid of the divine voice – as a “second-order” image being a necessary stage in her ascent to knowledge of a “higher” form of beauty).

<sup>69</sup> Knoespel, “The Limits of Allegory,” 94, argues that “even though Adam has a conceptual awareness that differences exist between himself and Eve, it remains passive and unarticulated.”

acknowledgement of Adam as her “. . . guide / And head,” (4.442-43), with two simple words, “Lead then,” (9.631) she allows Satan to replace her “Pre-eminent . . . / . . . consort” (4.447-48). As Revard adroitly puts it, during her temptation she “[abdicates] the rule of reason for the rule of the Serpent.”<sup>70</sup> Post-fall, moreover, while both Adam and Eve are forced to confront an ontological, as well as an epistemic difference in their alienation from God,<sup>71</sup> the correspondence between Eve and Sin, who “in power,” (existing as potential) before the Fall, is “once actual,” or once committed,<sup>72</sup> “now in body” (10.587) – and namely, in Eve’s body – is firmly cemented. An important counter-argument against critical efforts to establish Satan, Sin and Eve as a narcissistic triad is however made by Collett, who posits that “by using parallel myths, Milton has implicated Eve, but he wants the difference between Satan and Eve to be recognized as clearly as the similarity.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, while Eve’s infection by sin brings death, death is secondary to life, and it is “substantial life” (4.485) as the “Mother of human race” (475) that Eve is promised by the voice she chooses to heed at the pool, which draws her gaze from the “watery gleam” (461) of her own image to the less visually spectacular prospect of Adam. The outcome of this scene directly opposes Eve’s experience to that of Sin upon the birth of her son, an event greeted by another “echo” that by contrast ossifies any potential for the character’s growth beyond allegorical abstraction and subjects her to a kind of perpetual narcissistic agony, devoid of choice:

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<sup>70</sup> Stella P. Revard, “Milton’s Dalia and Eve: Filling in the Spaces in the Biblical Text,” in *Arenas of Conflict: Milton and the Unfettered Mind*, ed. Kristin Pruitt McColgan and Charles W. Durham (London: Associated University Presses, 1997), 278.

<sup>71</sup> As the couple were forewarned, “God hath pronounced it death to taste” (4.427) the fruit of the tree of knowledge. After the Fall, Adam and Eve’s mortality is confirmed: “For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return” (10.208). Humankind’s increased distance from divine truth, now available only in mediated forms, is indicated by Adam’s speech at 9.1080-84:

. . .How shall I behold the face  
Henceforth of God or angel, erst with joy  
And rapture so oft beheld? Those heavenly shapes  
Will dazzle now this earthly, with their blaze  
Insufferably bright.

<sup>72</sup> *Secundum in peccato est post concupiscentiam, ipsa mala action, seu malefactum ipsum quod actuale peccatum vulgo nominant* (“The second thing in sin after concupiscence is the evil action itself or the evil deed itself, which people commonly name actual sin”), *CD* 425.

<sup>73</sup> Collett, “Milton’s Use of Classical Mythology,” 92.



. . . I fled, and cried out Death;  
 Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sighed  
 From all her Caves, and back resounded Death.<sup>74</sup>

(2.787-79)

Milton's founding of the difference between the experiences of Eve and Sin upon their seeming commonality is legitimised by the poet's manipulation of well-established tropes of biblical typology, most obviously the Protoevangelium that is revealed in Book 3: Christ is "Made flesh, when time shall be, of Virgin seed, / By wondrous birth" (284). Indeed, it has been argued that the voice which draws Eve from the waters of the pool, the voice which she later struggles to discern from the "meditated guile" (9, "Argument") of Satan, both in her dream and in the temptation proper, foreshadows the popular trope in Marian literature of *conceptio per aurem*.<sup>75</sup> However this may be, Eve's eschatological destiny demands that she parts ways from the "self-enfolded desire" of the Satanic triad,<sup>76</sup> and it is at this moment in Milton's work that she most clearly does so.

The importance of the separation process that Eve undergoes at this early point only fully emerges after the Fall. The difference which Eve is forced to acknowledge between herself and Adam may, to a certain extent, provoke the rupture which precipitates her transgression: her suggestion that they should "divide our labours" (9.14) working separately but together to tame the garden's "luxurious" (9.209) overgrowth insists on difference as essential to God's work.<sup>77</sup> Yet while the outcome of Eve's solo venture is grave indeed, in the aftermath of her transgression the same

<sup>74</sup> Martz finds another continuation of the Narcissus theme here: "the repetition is a characteristic device of Ovidian rhetoric: thus at the end of the story of Narcissus and Echo we find a similar matching of words at the ends of the lines" (*Milton, Poet of Exile*, 216).

<sup>75</sup> Kent R. Lehnhof, "'Impregn'd with Reason': Eve's Aural Conception in Paradise Lost," *Milton Studies* 41 (2002): 38–75; Knoespel notes that "like the voice of Gabriel that brings fruitful tidings to Mary, the voice of God brings fertility to Eve" ("The Limits of Allegory," 87).

<sup>76</sup> Grossman, *Authors to Themselves*, 45. Grossman argues that Milton's unholy trinity of Satan, Death and Sin represents "the antithesis of the divine propagation of holy love in the emanation of desire for and through others" (*ibid.*).

<sup>77</sup> Brodwin neglects to mention, in her argument for Eve's induction of "ennervating idleness" in Adam, that before the Fall she is presented by Milton as markedly industrious. The spiritual significance of Eve's naming of the flowers (an extra-Biblical privilege) is discussed by McColley, and establishes a suggestive link to Circe's use of herbs to make her *pharmakon* (Diane McColley, "Eve and the Arts of Eden," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 104).

difference that prompts her separation from Adam also enables a vital dialecticism or reciprocity in their relationship, and it is through such reciprocity that the couple's loss is partially repaired.<sup>78</sup> Eve's desperate desire to spare Adam from the consequence of their mutual sin leads her to

. . . importune heaven that all  
 The sentence from thy head removed may light  
 On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,  
 (10.933-35),

Shoaf notes of this moment that

the willingness of Eve . . . to dual for Adam, to take his place (vicariously), even though – no, precisely because – she is *not* Adam, is evidence of the redeeming and the redeemable in her. To take the place of another in this context is to sacrifice oneself for another. It is not to usurp the privilege of another – that is what Eve wanted to do when Satan seduced her. It is rather to give oneself up, to hand oneself over, on behalf of another. This vicariousness, the structure of mutuality, is the love necessary for the translation from flesh into Word, and, as such, it is the foundation of Christianity, the founding decision of Christ . . . . And this is why, of course, Milton presents him, in the speech in which he duals for Eve, in the role of the *Priest* – “in this golden censer, mixed / With incense, I thy priest before thee bring” (11.24-25).<sup>79</sup>

This last quote presents an interesting transmutation of our theme: one of the many associations that Christ's “golden censer, mixed” may bear, as my discussion of anti-Papal propaganda in previous

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<sup>78</sup> The role Eve plays in the couple's repentance, upon which, as I have argued in the previous chapter the acceptance of God's grace depends, has been well documented by critics such as Joan S. Bennett, “Dalia, Eve, and the ‘Concept of Woman’ in Milton's Radical Christian Humanism,” in *Arenas of Conflict*, ed. Pruitt et al., 251–60; Grossman; Tilmouth; Lieb; Schwartz; and R. A. Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and the Prose* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), and can only be summarised here.

<sup>79</sup> Shoaf, *Milton, Poet of Duality*, 55.

chapters has signalled, is the image of Circe's charming cup. I would argue that it is Eve's capability to engage with another *as* other which eventually separates the first mother from Satan, and redeems her character from the decidedly negative "Circean" attributes she is seen to possess in Book 9.

### Chaos

The final part of this chapter will rely on an understanding that Eve's charm might well be considered Circean, yet Circean in a way that moves beyond the Satanic attributes most prominent in the scenes that anticipate the Fall. The power Eve has to effect redemptive as well as sinful action in Adam, and indeed all future mankind associates her, like Homer's Circe, with the *pharmakon*, and with the notion of free will that I have argued is at the heart of Milton's Circean ideology. Yet Eve provides only one of many opportunities for choice in *Paradise Lost*, for both men and angels. As with the *Maske*, a search for any positive Circean force in *Paradise Lost* must take into account the poem's wider metaphysical claims, particularly, I will argue, those that underlie Milton's portrayal of Chaos. It must be noted at the outset that the ontological and moral status of Milton's chaos in *Paradise Lost* has been subject to longstanding and ongoing critical debate.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, this controversy may stem from the conflicting ideas about the abyss that can be found in the scriptural and classical sources Milton had at hand for his perusal. The accounts of chaos held to be most influential include Plato's discussion of the *chōra* in his *Timaeus* (48e4), and the contrasting Biblical presentations of the generative abyss of Genesis 1:1-2 and the hellish abyss of the book of Revelation. For our purpose here, however, it is enough to note that Milton's Chaos allows for a multitude of interpretations. Yet while there has been an upsurge more recently in readings of Milton's chaos as good or neutral, many critics still have difficulty in reconciling Milton's statement in *De Doctrina Christiana* that "original matter was not an evil thing, nor . . . worthless: it was good, and it contained the seeds of all subsequent good . . . a confused and disordered state at first . . . [that] afterwards God made . . .

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<sup>80</sup> For a summary of the different interpretative positions that have been taken, see Mary F. Norton, "'The Rising World of Waters Dark and Deep': Chaos Theory and *Paradise Lost*," in *Arenas of Conflict*, ed. Pruitt et al., 140.

ordered and beautiful” (293) with the darker, personified Chaos that they find in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>81</sup> At least one recent scholar, moreover, has sought to revive the thesis that *Paradise Lost* features an inherently evil chaos. Scrutinising the claims that Schwartz, the critic in question makes, may aid us in understanding why, and how Milton’s text could be said to enable this (mis)reading.

In the *Tetrachordon*, Milton had contemplated whether there might be “any way possible to limit sin, to put a girdle about that Chaos . . .” (160). For Schwartz, this statement aligns more closely with the “poetic” treatment of Chaos in *Paradise Lost* than with the more orthodox view of first matter that is presented by Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana*.<sup>82</sup> As we shall see, in *Paradise Lost*, an associative, as well as more strictly narrative relationship is established between Satan, Sin and Chaos, the cumulative effect of which for Schwartz is that “the inference of an evil chaos [is] so difficult to escape that it is not worth trying.”<sup>83</sup> Schwartz’s position here is grounded upon a theologically conservative analysis of the particular qualities associated with Milton’s chaos, including limitlessness and excess, together with a damning interpretation of the special relationship that Satan seems to enjoy with Chaos at key junctures in the poem. I will return at a later point to the first charge, in which Milton’s portrayal of Eve’s “excess” is also implicated. As with the Circean qualities that Eve is seen to possess at the moment of her pivotal encounter with Satan, if we are to disentangle Chaotic from Satanic excess in *Paradise Lost*, the affinity that Schwartz and others have found between Satan and Chaos in Milton’s work must first be unpicked.

Like other critics who argue for an “evil” chaos in *Paradise Lost*, Schwartz, presumably for the sake of consistency, elides the metaphysical properties of Milton’s chaos with its spokesman the Anarch, an allegorical personage who declares that “havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain” (2.1009). Quite correctly, Schwartz notes that “the only encounter Chaos has in the poem is with Satan, whose

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<sup>81</sup> Danielson suggests that Milton’s assertion in the *CD* stands in direct opposition to the “meonic tradition, of which the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is an outgrowth,” which stipulates that “being is essentially good, nonbeing essentially evil, and that “all created things, because it is out of nothing that they are created, accordingly retain a necessary element of nihilism and are metaphysically evil in more than the merely technical sense of ‘less good than the Good’” (*Milton’s Good God*, 40). For an analysis of Milton’s contrary belief in *creatio ex deo*, see J. H. Adamson, “Milton and the Creation,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 61, no. 4 (1962): 756–78.

<sup>82</sup> Schwartz admits that “Milton the theologian is as emphatic and unambiguous as he could be on the subject of a good chaos” (*Remembering and Repeating*, 8). A related sense of surprise may be registered by Rumrich, who remarks of Milton’s chaos that “logically it should not be evil, yet the narrative and aesthetic evidence against it looks damning” (John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 144).

<sup>83</sup> Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating*, 11.

journeys through the abyss – at his fall from heaven, en route to tempt man, and upon returning to hell to announce his victory – make it familiar territory.”<sup>84</sup> Her conclusion that “needless to say, such dark missions also colour chaos by association” demands closer scrutiny, however.<sup>85</sup> For Schwartz, in fact, the relationship between Chaos and Satan in *Paradise Lost* is one of more than mere “association.” Her argument posits a natural sympathy between the inherently belligerent and destructive qualities of the Anarch and the fallen angels, and suggests at its furthest point a willed involvement on the part of Chaos in Satan’s mission to militarily undermine the ordered sanctity of heaven in Book 2, and to destroy the good in God’s creation more widely.<sup>86</sup> Undeniably, this interpretation has a certain attractiveness: as Fallon observes, it provides a “sense of a fund of evil existing prior to Satan’s sin [which] can satisfy our instinctive demand that actions be motivated, a demand frustrated by the mystery of radical evil.”<sup>87</sup> It is also however, in certain critical ways, a misreading of Milton’s text.

It is noteworthy that a personified, as opposed to primeval, Chaos is first introduced in the poem at a moment of great Satanic significance, the unfurling in Hell of “the imperial ensign” (1.536) by Azazel, “a cherub tall” (1.534) who is positioned provocatively at Satan’s right hand side.<sup>88</sup> This act, through which the “arch-enemy” (1.81) wilfully establishes a dominion that is properly God’s, forms a link in the poem’s chain of prideful self-raising, to which Eve’s tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge also belongs. More immediately, Satan’s raising of the flag provokes a reaction of cosmic magnitude:

. . .the universal host upsent

A shout that tore hell’s concave, and beyond

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Schwartz’s position, which renders the Anarch and the chaotic entity that God enlists in his work of creation virtually synonymous, has not gone unchallenged. While some critics have indeed viewed Chaos as a monolithic entity, others have sought to split off the personified Anarch from chaos *qua* chaos in Milton’s poem: see for instance Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*. The argument I make here falls into the latter camp, but calls for greater attention to be paid to the particularities of the Anarch’s allegorical presence in *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>86</sup> The suggestive parallels between the presentation of Chaos’s belligerent qualities and the fallen angels’ military coup are presented by Schwartz, *ibid.*, 26-7. Schwartz ties these similarities to a “wider cosmogonic conflict,” drawn ultimately from the apocryphal notion of a “primordial battle” between God and the abyss at the moment of creation, which she argues is “tacit in Milton’s epic.”

<sup>87</sup> Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers*, 191.

<sup>88</sup> Azazel’s orientation here may be seen to parody that of Christ, who we will encounter later in the poem seated to the right of God (3.62).

Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.

(1.541-43)

Syntactically, “the Reign of Chaos” is introduced as the indirect, secondary object of a clause which gives only slight indication of the direction in which Milton will develop his portrait of the despot who holds sway over the deep. From this point forth in the poem, however, the figure gains increasing personified life until it would seem that “Chaos’s actions demonstrate that he apprehends and can generate and enact order; he is obviously not simply the passive *prima materia* whose domain is ‘Encroacht on’ (2.1001) for God’s use in creation.”<sup>89</sup> The narrative timing of this initial introduction, moreover, may not be incidental. The first allusion to the Anarch Chaos follows close on the heels of a foundational act of Satanic self-assertion: like Sin, born from Satan

when at the assembly, and in sight

Of all the seraphim with thee combined

In bold conspiracy against heaven’s king,

(2.749-51)

the Anarch is born into the poetic narrative as Satan’s rebellious insubordination to God’s authority is brought to a point of dramatic intensity.

It is puzzling that Schwartz makes no mention of this, given the keen attention that we have seen her pay elsewhere in her work to the narcissistic impulses that govern Satanic relationships in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, within the psychoanalytic framework that is invoked in the later chapters of her book, the Anarch Chaos might be understood, no less than Sin or Death, to be a narcissistic projection of some of the more tyrannical, or megalomaniacal tendencies that are born of Satan’s monstrous self-desire, yet experienced as other. As Fletcher writes, “for allegorical heroes life has a

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<sup>89</sup> Norton, “‘The Rising World of Waters Dark and Deep,’” 147. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Chaos is in fact the mother of Night (*Theogony* 123). In the Platonic tradition, moreover, Chaos is usually gendered female. That Milton’s Anarch is male may be another indication that he is, as I will argue, an aspect or projection of Satan.

segmented character, and as each event occurs a new discrete characteristic of the hero is revealed . . . The allegorical hero is not so much a real person as he is a generator of other secondary personalities which are partial aspects of himself.”<sup>90</sup> Such a “hero” or, in this case, antihero, “will generate a large number of other protagonists who react against or with him in a syllogistic manner.”<sup>91</sup> In this sense, the Anarch is a strawman, a proxy for Satan’s eternally undefeated and undefeatable foe – God himself. In his provision of “the shock / Of fighting elements” (2. 1014-15) through which Satan makes his journey and mock *agon*,<sup>92</sup> Chaos resists, or “tamely endure[s]” (1028) the Arch-fiend just enough to maintain the momentum of the thirst for strife that emanates from his narcissistic wound – a wound that originates, perhaps, from the Satanic dread of a “lower deep” (4.76) of exclusion and difference, and spurs the character’s compulsion to destroy that good which he cannot “subdue” (4.85). Importantly, Chaos’s deific attributes reflect the same limited understanding of what it is to be God-like that underpins Satan’s own aspiration, much as Satan’s generation of Sin and Death presents a perverse parody of the divine acts of creation. As Shawcross observes, “in the allegoric understanding of things supplied by Chaos, we recognize an obverse to God and what he is and what he connotes.”<sup>93</sup> It is noteworthy that the techniques of parody and inversion which Milton uses most extensively to undercut Satan’s claims to rival his maker in the poem also encroach upon the far briefer characterisation of the Anarch in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>94</sup> Where ‘*Chaos Umpire sits*’ (II: 907), God bequeaths to humankind “within them as a guide, / *My Umpire Conscience*” (3.194-5), the Latinate delay in the syntax of the former clause of the second quotation expressing its disjunction from and distortion of the latter. With remarkable economy, the echo also hints at the relationship between tyrannical legalism (to which for Milton, as we have seen, an inner, guiding conscience that embraces faith and charity is opposed) and personification, a mode of allegory that through its Satanic

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<sup>90</sup> Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> In his passage through Chaos, Satan, we are told, was “more endangered, than when Argo passed / Through Bosphoros betwixt the jostling rocks” (2.1018-19). See Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 2.317, 552-611.

<sup>93</sup> John T. Shawcross, “Allegory, Typology, and Didacticism: *Paradise Lost* in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Enlightening Allegory: Theory, Practice and Contexts of Allegory in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Kevin Lee Cope, AMS Studies in the Eighteenth Century, no. 18 (New York: AMS Press, 1993), 63.

<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of the parodic elements of Satan’s generation of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*, see Victoria Khan, “Allegory, the Sublime, and the Rhetoric of Things Indifferent in *Paradise Lost*,” in *Creative Imagination: New Essays in Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 185-201.

association proves perhaps even more suspect in *Paradise Lost* than at any previous point in Milton's literary output.<sup>95</sup>

As Rumrich notes, while “from an Augustinian, ontological-moral perspective privation has also a moral significance indicating something that ought to be a certain way but, to some degree, is not – a willful deviation from or perversion of what the maker has ordained,” “because Chaos and Night have never been created, there is nothing that they ‘ought’ to be. Moral privation – evil – is something that they are incapable of, unless we were to assume that they could resist God's decision to create out of their realm . . . . Nor is there ever a hint that they could decline or resist.” Thus, “the factitious attitudes of allegorical characters do not qualify as ethical lapses.”<sup>96</sup> Understanding the Anarch in this way reroutes the “evil” Schwartz would attribute to Chaos back to its source: Satan himself. Like the other shadowy personages of *Paradise Lost*, Sin and Death, any agency we might wish to attribute to the chaotic despot proves in the final analysis “illusory”: as Fallon would have it, “like all mirages, the evil Chaos disappears when we get too close to it.”<sup>97</sup> The Satanic attributes that Milton's narrative projects onto the wrathful Anarch should not, therefore, unduly influence our understanding of the function that chaos *qua* chaos serves in the poem. Though this argument may seem radical, it confirms the intuitions of other recent writers who have grappled with the relationship between Satan and chaos in *Paradise Lost*. Rumrich's careful analysis, for instance, finds that “except when his narrative tracks Satan or his children, Milton never describes chaos in terms of war.”<sup>98</sup> In the absence of Satan's directing gaze, in fact, the very nature of Chaos's narrative presence in Milton's poem can be seen to change. Chaos's allegorical attendants,

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<sup>95</sup> Hoerner writes of “the complicity of allegory with the wrath of law” (Fred Hoerner, “‘Fire to Use’: A Practice-Theory Approach to *Paradise Lost*,” *Representations* 51 (1995): 104), while Fallon suggests that by the time of his writing of *Paradise Lost*, allegory had become for Milton “an ideal vehicle for presenting deficient ontology” (*Milton Among the Philosophers*, 192). For a more extended discussion of the significance of allegorical presentation in *Paradise Lost* than space will here allow, see also Gallagher, “‘Real or Allegoric’”; Grossman, *Authors to Themselves*; Michael Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in Its Rise and Decline* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Arnold Stein, *Answerable Style* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967).

<sup>96</sup> John Rumrich, “Of Chaos and Nightingales,” in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, ed. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 223.

<sup>97</sup> Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers*, 191.

<sup>98</sup> Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, 127.



Orcus and Ades, and the dreaded name  
 Of Demogorgon; Rumour next, and Chance,  
 And Tumult, and Confusion, all embroiled,  
 And Discord with a thousand various mouths

(2.964-67)

either slip from the poem entirely or reappear, apart from Chaos, in other Satanic contexts: it is telling that when we next encounter Discord, she has become the adopted “Daughter of Sin” (10.707).

Strikingly, however, it is not the actively belligerent or vengeful aspects of the Anarch who bids Satan “Go, and speed” (2.1008) on his diabolical quest that prove most worrying to Schwartz.

Her deepest anxiety is reserved for his “indeterminacy,” a point on which she is unequivocal:

“Indeterminacy – I think again of the unstable visage of the Anarch, Chaos – may well pose a greater threat in Milton’s moral universe than the Satanic one of a definite willed disobedience.”<sup>99</sup> Schwartz

suggests that such indeterminacy is Satanic, invoking “Satan’s protean nature – clouded angel, good cherub, toad, cormorant, serpent,”<sup>100</sup> yet interestingly, perhaps the greatest threat posed by the

Anarch’s instability is to Satan himself. If, through a process of narcissistic identification Chaos takes

on the attributes of Satanic desire, the Anarch also reflects the fallen angel’s deepest fears. Upon the

“throne / Of Chaos” (2.959-60) sits an “Anarch old, / With faltering speech and visage incomposed”

(988-89), an image of decay and disarray that could hardly fail to disturb one who possesses, despite

himself, “the bitter memory / Of what he was, what is, and what must be / Worse” (4.24-25).

Schwartz herself falters, I would suggest, because the element of flux that the Anarch incorporates is,

in a strict sense, *unallegorical*, and reaches more deeply into the poetic and philosophical texture of

*Paradise Lost* than her argument will admit. If we permit it, however, the visage of the Anarch may

serve as a portal through which to venture beyond the allegorical trappings of Milton’s poem to the

more metaphysical chaos that is at its heart, a chaos that, as I will argue, is premised on a Circean

notion of choice.

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<sup>99</sup> Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating*, 18.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Milton's Circean Chaos

Paradoxically, it is the same difference that Satan seeks to evade that chaos, as an entity beyond allegory, fosters in *Paradise Lost*. Chaos, in fact, may be the ultimate “other,” an

Illimitable ocean without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height,  
And time and place are lost.

(2.891-93)

Far from threatening Milton's moral universe, however, such difference or indeterminacy can be seen to condition the very *possibility* of such a universe.<sup>101</sup> Schwartz's argument for the “evil” nature of chaos struggles to compete against the conflicting evidence presented by none other than God himself in the poem:

Boundless the deep, because I am who fill  
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.  
Though I uncircumscribed myself retire,  
And put not forth my goodness, which is free  
To act or not, necessity and chance  
Approach not me, and what I will is fate.

(7.168-73)

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<sup>101</sup> While my argument here owes much to Danielson, Rumrich and Lieb, who have drawn attention to the importance of antithesis and dialecticism in the metaphysical presentation of *Paradise Lost*, the continuation and development of some of the key tenets of Milton's Circean poetics in the *Maske*, as explored in the previous chapter, should also be evident here.

As Danielson who finds “a remarkable case for the consistency of Chaos with divine omnipotence” in *Paradise Lost* notes, “the deep is boundless only *because* God himself is boundless and free, if he chooses, to place certain limits on himself for the sake of putting forth what amounts to a vast ocean of potentiality.”<sup>102</sup> The withdrawal of Godly direction from the realm of chaos need not, in Milton’s poem equate to the evil of privation: chaos originates from God and will, despite his retirement, always be a part of God, “because I am who fill / Infinitude” (168-89). This same withdrawal, however, creates a space within the poem’s moral and spiritual ontology that allows Milton to redeem, as far as he was perhaps ever able, the tragedy of the *akratic* rebellion of the will in Eden from a theology of utter pessimism:

...I made him just and right,  
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
 Such I created all the ethereal powers  
 And spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;  
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.

(3.98-102)

Importantly, such freedom is not only available to man at the moment of his temptation, but governs the entire metaphysical framework of *Paradise Lost*, upon which the success of the poem itself might be said to stand or fall. While in theological terms, it is clear that the origin of choice for Milton is God’s love, its mythopoetic locus in *Paradise Lost* proves to be chaos. It is precisely because Milton’s chaos is no place that it can be *every* place: “The womb of nature and perhaps her grave” (2.910-11). The regenerative and creative uses to which chaos is put by both God and man in Milton’s poem have been discussed at length elsewhere, and need not be rehearsed here, except to note with Kaufmann that the moral and metaphysical possibility inherent in chaos is brought to bear

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<sup>102</sup> Danielson, *Milton’s Good God*, 48.

also upon Milton's Eden, where the Deep is "that abyssal reservoir which rose up in the Garden as mist or fountain, and which signified the intimate union between the closed space of Eden's enclave and the infinite possibilities of the abyss. . . . the threat as well as the promise of flux."<sup>103</sup> Like Eve, chaos is premised in *Paradise Lost* as a vital partner in God's creative activity – if the abyss had not "heard his voice" (7.221), as Eve heard the divine voice by the pool which brought her to Adam, the world would not have come to be. Rumrich's argument that while "Eve's 'fruitful Womb' represents chaos on the human level,"<sup>104</sup> her "very richness of adornment – her cosmetic excess" also ties her "to the irrational wildness of chaos,"<sup>105</sup> is particularly interesting, moreover, given Milton's use of the Circean trope in his presentation of our first mother. Like Eve, Chaos "embodies two possibilities: one productive and one destructive," and like Milton's Circean Eve, the possibilities inherent in chaos, once freed from the shackles of the Satanic Anarch, can be seen to serve in the poem at a wider, cosmological level as a kind of *pharmakon*. As Danielson has argued, in *Paradise Lost*

God in creation actualizes possible goods that exist in Chaos in a state of mere potentiality; and man, if he obeys God, will be creative and free after the pattern that God has thus set for him. However, in the preactual abyss of Chaos there are evil possibilities as well, and likewise man's freedom to create and enjoy is accompanied by the possibility of destruction and self-enthralment. As Aristotle says in his section on actuality and potentiality . . . "Every potency is at the same time a potency of the opposite."<sup>106</sup>

Given the prominence of this relationship between potentiality and choice in *Paradise Lost*, and the symbolic strength for Milton of the Circean *pharmakon*, it should therefore seem no accident that Satan's journey through Chaos has reminded several critics of Odysseus's sea voyage in Homer's epic – indeed, Milton compares the arduousness of the fallen angel's way to "when Ulysses on the

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<sup>103</sup> U. Milo Kaufmann, *Paradise in the Age of Milton*, English Literary Studies 11 (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1978), 15.

<sup>104</sup> Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, 133.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>106</sup> Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, 49.

larboard shunned / Charybdis, and by the other whirlpool steered” (2.1019-1020). As we have seen, Aristotle uses Odysseus’s passage between Scylla and Charybdis to illustrate his notion of the golden mean: Milton’s Satan, despite his heroic posturing, is anything but temperate, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that a certain amount of irony is intended here. Yet as Lewalski has observed, in Milton’s *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, as in *De Doctrina Christiana*, readers are referred to Homer for a correct understanding of the nature and capacity of human free will.<sup>107</sup> In the same vein, Van der Laan makes a strong case that in *Paradise Lost*, Milton “uses the *Odyssey* to press an Arminian point against Calvinist orthodoxy,” since “by thinking in Odyssean terms, he argues not just for the operation, but for the necessity of moral effort in salvation.”<sup>108</sup> For Satan, the antithesis of all this effort implies, “Which way I fly is hell; myself am Hell” (4.75). Chaos, assuming a guiding role not unlike that of Circe to Odysseus as he journeys onward from her island, leaves Satan’s ability to choose unimpaired and accordingly delivers him to an Eden from which he can derive no joy: “If that way be your walk, you have not far” (2.1007). The qualifier “if,” with its suggestion of a multitude of walks and choices, once again links the moral terrain of *Paradise Lost* to its physical geography.

Chaos, we are earlier informed, is

Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,  
 But all these in their pregnant causes mixed  
 Confusedly . . .

(2.912-14)

Schwartz is quite correct that the “mixtures and confusions” of Chaos “violate all laws of sanctity,” if we follow the Biblical insistence on the necessity and goodness of divisions and distinctions in God’s

<sup>107</sup> Lewalski, “The Genres of *Paradise Lost*,” 119.

<sup>108</sup> Van der Laan, “Milton’s Odyssean Ethics: Homeric Allusions and Arminian Thought in *Paradise Lost*.” We might think here of Adam and Eve’s debate preceding their separation in Book 9. Rehearsing an idea familiar from Milton’s *Areopagitica*, Eve asks “And what is faith, love, virtue unassayed / Alone, without exterior help sustained?” (335-36).

creation.<sup>109</sup> Yet for Milton, as we have seen, mixtures and confusions are intrinsic to the fallen world. This is a world that is not itself inherently evil, and whose compound nature, “those confused seeds that were impos’d on *Psyche* as an incessant labor to cull out and sort asunder” (*Areopagitica* 310), serves the important function of both enabling and testing man’s capacity for moral choice and spiritual growth. Such choice, attendant on free will, is in Milton’s theology a vital marker of God’s continued love for man, and of divine hope for our redemption in Christ. Like both God and chaos, moreover, it is “uncircumscribed” (7.171): it is precisely because grace, as Rumrich finds, is “undeniably excessive” that there can be in the end no “way possible to limit sin, to put a girdle about that Chaos . . .” without disabling the dialecticism upon which Christian eschatology itself relies.<sup>110</sup> For Milton, as for all but the most wistful of Christian dreamers, the state of innocence that Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before the Fall is forever lost to postlapsarian mankind. Yet Milton also held that through knowledge – true knowledge of ourselves, gained from lived experience of the world around us, in partnership with faith, moral endeavour, and God’s freely given grace – we might inherit an inner spiritual life somewhat richer than that of the continent, Reformed believer: a veritable “paradise within” (12.587).

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<sup>109</sup> Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating*, 17; 11-13.

<sup>110</sup> Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, 140.

## Conclusion

My thesis looks at poetry and early modern poetics, but in the works of the authors I discuss – men who were writing under the wing of a broader European humanist tradition – poetics necessarily broaches the fields of moral philosophy, theology, and even epistemology. My thesis argues that the departures from traditional allegorical treatments of Circe in certain strands of English and European literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could contribute to our understanding of the intellectual history of this era. By examining the employment of this myth in relation to the theological, and ethical concerns of Spenser and Milton in particular, I have shown that there is still much to uncover in terms of the transmission, reception and reworking of ancient ideas in the early modern period. It should be noted that if the prominence of the Circean *pharmakon* in Milton's work owes much to the peculiar logic of his theology, it also hearkens nostalgically to the older idea of a nature still replete with divine immanence. Milton's presentation of chaos in *Paradise Lost* forges a link between moral and spiritual possibility and the natural world that would seem fundamentally antithetical to the notion of a mechanistic nature that had been pioneered by Bacon et al., and had seen perhaps its most sophisticated philosophical treatment in the work of Milton's contemporary, Hobbes.<sup>1</sup>

The longevity of the Circean trope in Renaissance literature, however, testifies both to the endurance of this older understanding of man's place in the world, and to the very real threat that those who would "make a kind of dead and wooden world, as it were a carved statue, that hath nothing neither vital nor magical at all in it" could seem to pose to a centuries-old, humanistic tradition of intellectual and artistic freedom.<sup>2</sup> We might think here of Milton's insistence that Adam must necessarily have been permitted by God to transgress, else he would have been a mere

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<sup>1</sup> According to Adamson, this belief is already present in Milton's adherence to an *ex Deo* view of creation: "the *ex Deo* theory, more than the *ex nihilo*, emphasizes the immanence of God in creation. Thus the corollary of the *ex Deo* theory of creation is a theory of deiform nature, one which is most radically opposed to a mechanistic nature" ("Milton and the creation," 776).

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, ed. Thomas Birch (New York: Gould & Newman, 1837), 209-10.

automaton: an “artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions” (*Areopagitica* 319). For Milton, “the end . . . of Learning is to *repair* the ruines of our first Parents” (*Of Education* 277), and such reparation, both in the sense of restoring and repenting for what has been lost, entails confronting, rather than running from our baser inclinations. Thus, in the *Areopagitica* he asks “Wherefore did . . . [God] create passions within us, pleasures around us, but that these rightly temper’d are the very ingredients of vertu?” (319), and remarks that

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister’d vertue, unexercis’d & unbreath’d, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excrementall whitenesse. (311)

Trial “by what is contrary,” however, is not without its dangers, and although I have given a generally favourable impression of Milton’s refashioning of Circean lore in support of his devotion to Christian liberty, this is not unqualified.

In his *Eikonoklastes*, Milton’s figure for political tyranny is none other than the “Circean cup of servitude,”<sup>3</sup> and it is clear that the poet of *Paradise Lost*, like Spenser before him, knew the *pharmakon* as both a poison and a cure. Across Milton’s corpus, the uncertainties of this world are pitted against his unwavering faith in the next, and we may wonder, in the end, how much store he really set by man’s transformative potential in this life. In *Paradise Regained*, after all, Jesus responds to Satan’s temptation to repossess the kingdom of “*Rome’s* great emperor,” and thereby end the tyranny of his rule, by asking

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<sup>3</sup>John Milton, *Eikonoklastes*, in *Works*, vol. 3, 488.



What wise and valiant man would seek to free  
 These thus degenerate, by themselves enslaved,  
 Or could of inward slaves make outward free?  
 Know therefore when my season comes to sit  
 On *David's* throne, it shall be like a tree  
 Spreading and overshadowing all the Earth,  
 Or as a stone that shall to pieces dash  
 All monarchies besides throughout the world,  
 And of my kingdom there shall be no end.

(4.81; 143-51)

Earthly power is thus renounced by Jesus for the spiritual kingdom over which he is destined to preside. Milton's political and theological perspectives on Christian liberty are brought together with Circean allusion once again in his *Samson Agonistes*, where Dalila's "fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms" are scornfully renounced by Israel's "deliverer."<sup>4</sup> This is not without cost, however. Samson's successful destruction of the temple realises both the Lady's threat of vengeance against Comus in Milton's *Maske* and, as my discussion in chapter 3 has suggested, its likely outcome:

. . . straining all his nerves he bowed,  
 As with the force of winds and waters pent,  
 When Mountains tremble, those two massy pillars  
 With horrible convulsion to and fro  
 He tugged, he shook, till down they came and drew  
 The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder  
 Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,  
 Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,

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<sup>4</sup> John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Carey, lines 934; 40.

.....  
 Samson with these immixed, inevitably  
 Pulled down the same destruction on himself.

(1646-58)

As Laura Knoppers has argued, although Samson succeeds in destroying the temple and killing the Philistines, the Israelites, enthralled by the spectacle of this violence, remain self-enslaved and unable to attain the internal, spiritual liberty he had promised.<sup>5</sup> Like Sir Guyon's casting down of Excesse's cup and his destruction of Acrasia's Bower in *The Faerie Queene*, the violence of Mosaic law collides with the threat of Circean slavery to dramatically powerful, yet morally ambivalent effect. This tension is never truly resolved in Milton's work, and its very lack of resolution is integral to the poet's meaning: it will be the task of future scholarship to determine its legacy.

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Knoppers, *Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 63.

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