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# “What Hath Night to Do with Sleep?”: Biopolitics in Milton’s *Mask*

MELISSA E. SANCHEZ

This essay begins with the premise that Milton’s *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* makes legible the central, if usually tacit, role that sexual practice plays in both early modern and modern definitions of what it means to be human. In particular, *A Mask* – along with the religious and philosophical traditions that inform it and the critical discussions that have surrounded it – demonstrates the extent to which normative definitions of sex are based on a biopolitical temporality that shapes ontological distinctions between human and animal behavior. Comus, in many readings, is perverted and bestial because he flouts both normal daily rhythms (decent people work during the day and go to bed early) and normative developmental trajectories (one becomes a grown up only when one marries and has children). What these daily and developmental norms have in common is an orientation of one’s sexual life toward future plans rather than present needs or pleasures. So one might say that what determines whether one is normal – or, to use the term most often employed by Milton and his critics, virtuous – is not only the gender of one’s object choice but also the extent to which one practices the sexual restraint that sustains what Jack (Judith) Halberstam describes as the “narrative coherence of adolescence-early adulthood-marriage-reproduction-childrearing-retirement-death.”<sup>1</sup> Such a chronology is a uniquely human aspiration. Indeed, Heidegger wondered whether the animal can be said to be “constituted by some kind of time” at all, given that it “merely has life,” not the being-toward-death, the sense of anticipation and potentiality that defines *Dasein* and therefore humanity.<sup>2</sup> Read in the context of the philosophical and religious tradition that has shaped the outlook of both Milton and his modern critics, living in and for the present as Comus does, with its related choice of matter over spirit, this world over the next, becomes evidence not just of immaturity or perversion. In the estimation of the Lady and the Attendant Spirit, Comus’s *carpe diem* sexuality signifies a failure to be fully human and therefore a relinquishment of the rights and privileges to which human being is entitled.<sup>3</sup>

The anxiety that sex transforms humans into beasts is, of course, central to the Circe myth on which *A Mask* is based. It is not only the Attendant Spirit, the Brothers, or the Lady who construe Comus’s offers of present pleasure as a bad thing. With a few exceptions, Milton’s readers have unanimously accepted the Spirit’s and the Lady’s evaluation of the pleasures, one might say the “lifestyle,” that Comus promotes and therefore have inadvertently endorsed an ideology whose normative project queer theory uniquely allows us to appreciate.<sup>4</sup> I quote

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such readings at length in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of an idealization of chastity among critics with otherwise very different arguments and methodologies. In describing Comus's association with Cotytto, William A. Oram suggests that, given classical and Renaissance associations of this goddess with transvestitism and licentiousness, the “befriending” that Comus asks of Cotytto “would seem to involve demonic possession which would result in a loss of rational control and a subsequent performance of goddess's bestial ‘dues.’”<sup>5</sup> Stanley Fish describes sexual temperance as a “liberating action” in that it is “the sign of a refusal to be in bondage to natural processes and a declaration of dependence on a power that controls, and can at any time suspend, them.”<sup>6</sup> Victoria Silver praises chastity as “a loving and reverent inflection towards the world and the body, the domains in which God, the soul, and their particular joy are made known.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, William Shullenberger applauds the Lady because she “effectively critiques and repudiates the pleasure package Comus has to offer, because she is able to envision and articulate a more compelling and comprehensive alternative,” one of “mature womanhood” based on “the possibilities of a higher order of pleasure which chastity offers.”<sup>8</sup> Feminist readings of *A Mask* have argued that chastity can liberate women not only from the excesses of libidinal drives, but also from the patriarchal constraints that chastity notionally sustains, and they have thereby implicitly sanctioned a normative suspicion that sex is innately dangerous and degrading.<sup>9</sup> Richard Halpern, for instance, notes that presence in *A Mask* of maenads, Amazons, and nymphs of Diana “mark the point at which virginity ceases to denote submission and begins to denote revolt.”<sup>10</sup> John Rogers argues that the Lady offers an image of “self-sufficient femininity” that “functions to reconfigure the authoritarian dynamics of power in the world at large.”<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Schwarz sees chastity as a compromised by nonetheless significant form of female agency that “might expose coercive normativity to its own double edge.”<sup>12</sup>

The point I want to make about such readings is not that they are inaccurate. To be sure, *A Mask* represents chastity much as these readers say it does. My observation, instead, is rather simple, even obvious. I want to point out that the idealization of chastity in *A Mask*, along with the philosophical and theological traditions from which it emerges, promotes heteronormativity insofar as it privileges certain sexual behaviors (those that are restrained, loving, monogamous, and procreative) over others (those that are uninhibited, anonymous, promiscuous, and nonprocreative). In reading *A Mask* through the framework of queer theory instead, we can appreciate how definitions of the human – along with the rights and privileges that we accord those who fit into that category and deny those who do not – are informed by what Elizabeth Freeman has called “chronopolitics,” the shaping of biopolitical status through temporal mechanisms that determine which human experiences “officially count as a life or one of its parts.”<sup>13</sup> In 1633, Milton acknowledged his own uneasy relationship to a normative timeline when he wrote a friend to contrast his desires for scholarly fame, which might require continued retirement from the world, with the “potent inclination in bred w<sup>ch</sup> about this tyme of a mans life sollicit most, the desire of house & family of his owne to w<sup>ch</sup> nothing is esteemed more helpfull then the

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early entering into credible employment, & nothing more hindering then this affected solitarinesse.”<sup>14</sup> However much Milton may recognize “house & family” as what one *should* want at “this tyme of a mans life,” his own inclination toward “solitarinesse” throws such normative logic into question.

Given that Milton wrote this letter so close to the composition of *A Mask*, we can understand this work as a meditation on the question of what constitutes normal and proper sexuality. Indeed, Shullenberger has rightly read *A Mask* as depicting the initiation of the Lady into sexual maturity.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Shullenberger, like most of Milton’s critics, leaves unexamined the ideal of chastity to which the masque directs the Lady, I want to look more closely at the implications of this ideal, as well as the contradictions inherent within it.<sup>16</sup> For to queer Milton, as I understand it, is not just to look for his depictions of same-sex desire, though that is undoubtedly an important part of such a project. To queer Milton is also to examine his complex engagement with a heteronormative assumption that sex is most virtuous – indeed, most human – when it occurs between adults in a monogamous, loving, long-term, procreative relationship.

A queer reading of Milton, more specifically, helps us to challenge ideals of proper sexuality – and particularly what Michael Warner has called “the politics of sexual shame” – in the same way that feminist theory has helped us to question the gendered norms and hierarchies that Milton at times endorses.<sup>17</sup> As Warner has observed, “Perhaps because sex is an occasion for losing control, for merging one’s consciousness with the lower orders of animal desire and sensation, for raw confrontations of power and demand, it fills people with aversion and shame.” A queer ethics emerges not when we deny the shame of sex by insisting that it is entirely innocent and natural, “pleasurable and life-affirming.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, “in those circles where queerness has been most cultivated, the ground rule is that one doesn’t pretend to be *above* the indignity of sex. . . . A relation to others, in these contexts, begins in an acknowledgment of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself.”<sup>19</sup> We might compare Silver’s assurance that “the Lady’s predicament represents a way of dignifying human being without trying to escape it” with Warner’s certainty that “If sex is a kind of indignity, then we’re all in it together.”<sup>20</sup> An awareness of the contrast between what we might call a reflexively normative ethics of sex and a consciously queer one allows us to question what Laurie Shannon calls “human exceptionalism,” the notion that humanity is bounded off from all other creatures by virtue of our ability to rationalize and regulate our bodily functions.<sup>21</sup> For while *A Mask* certainly promotes a normative ethics of sex, it also shows that such an ethics cannot be sustained by the rationality that ostensibly separates human from beast. A normative sexual ethics, rather, rests on an appeal to a higher power that exceeds human reason and thereby exposes not only the limits of such reason but also the violence necessary to sustain a liberal humanist ideal of personhood and politics.

In *A Mask*, Comus makes visible an alternative way of being in the world, one that follows from reflection on what it means to embrace the dark and disturbing aspects of sexuality and one that the Spirit and the Lady cannot fully defeat or resist. I am not suggesting that Milton himself endorsed expressions of desire that we would now call “queer.” Quite the opposite: I have no doubt that

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he would side with the Spirit and the Lady. But *A Mask* also acknowledges that chaste deferral may be no more rational than promiscuous indulgence – for the ultimate defense of the former depends not on reason but on a network of faith and violence that cannot be fully squared with the logic that ostensibly separates the human *cogito* from the *bête-machine*.<sup>22</sup>

The association of what Lee Edelman has called “reproductive futurism”<sup>23</sup> with humanity as such has a long history in Christian and Neoplatonic thought. A central figure in this history is St. Augustine, who locates the distinction between humans and beasts in the human ability to reflect on, theorize, and make value judgments about the sense perceptions that we share with animals. Whereas “the life of the lower animals consists entirely in the pursuit of physical pleasures and the avoidance of pains,” to be human is to look to a future when the body’s needs will be left behind: “we repair the daily wastage of our bodies by eating and drinking, until the time comes when you *will bring both food and our animal nature to an end* [1 Cor. 6.13] . . . But for the present I find pleasure in this need, though I fight against it, for fear of becoming its captive.”<sup>24</sup> The truly happy life is always in the future, for “even the righteous man himself will not live the life he wishes unless he reaches that state where he is wholly exempt from death, deception, and distress, and has the assurance that he will for ever be exempt. This is what our nature craves, and it will never be fully and finally happy unless it attains what it craves.”<sup>25</sup>

For the Neoplatonist philosophers whose influence permeates *A Mask*, this aspiration was a result of humanity’s mixed nature.<sup>26</sup> In Pico’s version of the creation myth, God made humanity “a creature of indeterminate nature” and instructed the first human that “thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. 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.” The Protestant Reformers were less optimistic about humanity’s power to transcend what Ficino had called “the beast in us.”<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Luther and Calvin recommended marriage as the best way to redeem animal desires. As Luther allows, “in point of physical life there is no difference or very little difference between us and the animals . . . the only difference is that they have no reason.”<sup>28</sup> For Luther, the thing that redeems the sexual impulse is the ability to contain it within procreative marriage:

this word which God speaks, “Be fruitful and multiply,” is not a command. It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [*verke*] which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore. Rather, it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or a woman but creates them the way they have to be, so he does not command them to multiply but creates them so that they have to multiply. And

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whenever men try to resist this, it remains irreversible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice.<sup>29</sup>

The only proper way to give into the “nature and disposition” with which God has endowed humanity is to “multiply” oneself within the confines of marriage. But even married sex must not be too sexy. In the conjugal bed, Luther warns, “a man has to control himself and not make a filthy sow’s sty of his marriage.”<sup>30</sup> The sexual impulse is naturally to “multiply,” not to find pleasure. To enjoy the work of procreation too much is to degenerate into a beast.

The Attendant Spirit’s prologue and epilogue situate *A Mask* within a tradition that equates a futurist orientation with virtue and value, a presentist one with perversity and emptiness. He would therefore seem to epitomize the vulgar Platonism that Silver has critiqued as a mode of thought characterized by “the desire to escape mortality by transcending the embodied condition of our humanity and all those discomfiting circumstances that go with it.”<sup>31</sup> Yet even as he longs for transcendence, the Spirit acknowledges its impossibility.<sup>32</sup> In the prologue, the Spirit appears incapable of disengaging himself from the earth; in the epilogue, he imagines a heaven defined by the distinctly worldly activities of marriage and procreation. The first sentence of *A Mask* oscillates between heaven and earth and aligns them with a series of oppositions – human and animal, future and present, eternity and immediacy – that will concern the work as a whole:

Before the starry threshold of *Jove’s Court*  
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes  
Of bright aerial Spirits live inspher’d  
In Regions mild of calm and serene Air,  
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,  
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care  
Confin’d and pester’d in this pifold here,  
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,  
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives  
After this mortal change, to her true Servants  
Amongst the enthron’d gods on Sainted seats.  
Yet some there be that by due steps aspire  
To lay their just hands on that Golden Key  
That opes the Palace of Eternity:  
To such my errand is, and but for such,  
I would not soil these pure Ambrosial weeds  
With the rank vapors of this Sin-worn mold. (1-17)

The Spirit presents a grammatically complete sentence within the first line and a half, one that, despite its inverted syntax, contains a clear piece of information: “Before the starry threshold of *Jove’s Court* / My mansion is.” But then he continues the sentence for nine and a half more lines, only two and a half of which

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actually describe Jove’s Court, their grammatical object. Notably, the Spirit is more interested in denigrating “this dim spot, / Which men call earth” than he is in celebrating “Regions mild of calm and serene Air”: 7 out of 11 lines are about earth. However much the Spirit tries to escape the “pifold” of earth, we might say that he himself remains “Confin’d and pester’d” there, revealing that it is not just the body but also the mind that is held captive by the “Sin-worn mold” that is at once the earth, the dirt that covers it, and the humanity that will gradually decay into the dust of which it was first formed. As in Augustine’s analysis, the truly virtuous human strives not to sustain life, but to prepare for its end, when we will finally be “wholly exempt from death, deception, and distress.” The temporal and spatial dimensions of the Spirit’s speech thus come together: it is only “After this mortal change” that we can reach the serene place “Before Jove’s Court” and “Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot.”<sup>33</sup>

So what is it actually like at the “starry threshold of *Jove’s Court*,” the “Palace of Eternity”? To find out, we have to wait until the Spirit’s epilogue. Here, we first learn that even the pleasures of the “Gardens fair / Of *Hesperus*” are inferior and temporary (981-982). The Spirit’s description of “The *Graces*,” “the rosy-bosomed *Hours*,” and “*Iris* . . . with humid bow” frolicking in the flowers becomes more disturbing than delightful when these “Beds of hyacinth, and roses” are revealed as the place “Where young Adonis oft reposes, / Waxing well of his deep wound / In slumber soft” (986, 992, 998, 999). These “Gardens fair” are also the site of injury, death, and mourning insofar as they contain Venus and Adonis, whose adulterous relationship is ultimately located “on the ground” where Venus “Sadly sits” – mired, we can assume, in the “rank vapors of this Sin-worn mold” (1001, 1002). What initially seemed a description of fanciful delight and liberation from earthly care ends up only another version of the pifold the Spirit disdains. The consolation is that there is a better world “far above in spangled sheen,” one defined by marriage and procreation:

Celestial *Cupid* her fam’d son advanc’t,  
Holds his dear *Psyche* sweet entranc’t  
After her wand’ring labors long,  
’Till free consent the gods among  
Make her his eternal Bride,  
And from her fair unspotted side  
Two blissful twins are to be born,  
Youth and Joy; so *Jove* hath sworn.

Cupid and Psyche were allegories for Christ and the Soul in Neoplatonic philosophy, and their relationship was understood in conjugal terms.<sup>34</sup> This “eternal” union, the Spirit tells us, is possible only “After [*Psyche’s*] wand’ring labors long,” and the tense shifts of this epilogue paradoxically imagine such fruitful union as both accomplished and uncertain. Cupid “holds” Psyche in a present that has come “After” her labors, but the rest of the sentence is in the future conditional: this will not happen “’Till free consent the gods among / *Make* her his eternal Bride,” and the twins “are *to be born*” – or “so *Jove* hath sworn.”

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Like other of Milton’s poems concerned with the gap between human time and divine eschatology, *A Mask* registers that gap in tense shifts: from a divine perspective of the *nunc stans*, this family has already been formed, even if from a human perspective its arrival must remain a matter of faith.

Such slippage from present to future makes legible the extent to which idealizations of chaste love pattern the heaven of the future on present, worldly institutions of marriage and procreation.<sup>35</sup> These institutions then proleptically acquire value and coercive force as a result of the future that they signify. Edelman has described the logic of reproductive futurism as one in which “all sensory experience, all pleasure of the flesh, must be borne away from this fantasy of futurity secured, eternity’s plan fulfilled . . . . Paradoxically, the child of the two-parent family thus proves that its parents *don’t* fuck and on its tiny shoulders it carries the burden of maintaining the fantasy of a time to come in which meaning, at last made present to itself, no longer depends on the fantasy of its *attainment* in time to come.”<sup>36</sup> If we agree with John Leonard that “the Cupid and Psyche lines stand among the healthiest passages in Milton,” we confuse vehicle and tenor and thereby identify the profoundly human constructs of marriage and reproduction with the divine order that ostensibly sanctions them.

But the corresponding escape from the irreducibly bestial and perverse aspects of all sex – whether within or outside marriage, monogamy, and romance – is ultimately unachievable, as the Spirit’s depiction of Comus’s temptations inadvertently admits. As we have seen, Augustine and Luther both recognized that however much bodily needs may be channeled into social institutions, these needs cannot be denied and therefore provide an insistent reminder of our animal nature. Indeed, as Laurie Shannon has argued, until Descartes formalized the distinction between the *cogito ergo sum*, the thinking human, on the one hand, and the *bête-machine*, the mechanical beast, on the other, there was no such thing as the blanket category of “the animal,” a term which hardly appears in English before the end of the sixteenth century, as humanity’s opposite. The operative model was instead Aristotle’s *De Anima*, which endowed all things with a soul and postulated a taxonomy in which each higher form of life incorporated all kinds of souls below it. According to this model, human beings were higher than non-human animals but still on a continuum with them.<sup>37</sup> As the classical and early modern philosophical and theological traditions that I have sketched attest, distinctions between human and animal being had long been haunted by the possibility that the boundary could easily be crossed, that the human could degenerate into a beast (though beasts could never become human). For the Attendant Spirit, it is precisely this danger that Comus represents, for he

Excels his Mother at her mighty Art,  
Off’ring to every weary Traveler  
His orient liquor in a Crystal Glass,  
To quench the drought of *Phoebus*, which as they taste,  
(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst)  
Soon as the Potion works, their human count’nance,  
Th’express resemblance of the gods, is chang’d



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Into some brutish form of Wolf, or Bear,  
Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,  
All other parts remaining as they were.  
And they, so perfect is their misery,  
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,  
But boast themselves more comely than before,  
And all their friends and native home forget,  
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty. (63-77)

Although the Spirit initially describes the travelers' transformations as a result of Comus's "mighty Art," by the end of the passage it is clear that the travelers are more victims of their own somatic pressures than of Comus's diabolical power. Comus certainly offers the drink of "orient liquor in a Crystal Glass," but the travelers are "chang'd / Into some brutish form" as a result of their decision to "quench the drought of *Phoebus*." As Stephen Orgel has pointed out, it doesn't seem so bad to drink when one is thirsty: these people are "weary," after all, and parched by the heat of the sun.<sup>38</sup> Is thirst always "fond" and "intemperate," then, simply because it is a bodily need? In the Spirit's account, the answer would seem to be "yes." Even worse, the travelers are unable to tell what has really happened to them, misapprehending their "foul disfigurement" – their loss of human form – as a change that has made them "more comely than before." "Perfect misery" means a wretchedness or abjection so complete that it can no longer be perceived. What the travelers have lost is the Augustinian ability to find animal life unsatisfying and therefore to abandon the human circle of "friends and native home" in favor of a "sensual sty." As the Elder Brother will later concur, lust is its own punishment. By giving into the impulses of the body, one becomes increasingly subject to those needs. If one indulges lust "By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk, / But most by lewd and lavish act of sin," one loses the distinction between body and soul, as the soul "grows clotted by contagion, / Imbodies and imbrutes." This is the state of the undead, the spirit that remains on earth even after the demise of the body, "loath to leave the body that it lov'd, / And link't itself by carnal sensuality / To a degenerate and degraded state." Unchaste sex becomes a form of necrophilia – a pleasure in bodies emptied of the spirit or mind that defines "life."

Comus offers an alternative theory of sexuality. But rather than claim a utopian or transcendent approach to pleasure, Comus acknowledges abject and shameful aspects of sex. The "ugly-headed monsters" with which he is surrounded make visible, as the Lady claims, the bestial dimension of the life he lives – a dimension he makes no effort to repress or sublimate. The difference between Comus's approach, on the one hand, and the Lady's and the Spirit's, on the other, is not that the former is bestial and the latter human. The difference is that Comus admits the innate perversity of desire while the Lady and the Spirit believe that monogamous and procreative sex transcends the animal body with all its undignified drives and secretions. Comus's own first lines reject both the reproductive futurism that the Spirit endorses and the diurnal rhythms of "normal" adulthood. In his invocation of Cotytto, Comus emphasizes her ability

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to blur distinctions and collapse boundaries: she is “ne’er . . . call’d but when the Dragon womb / Of Stygian darkness spits her thickest gloom, / And makes one blot of all the air” (128, 131-133).<sup>39</sup> Imagining “thickest gloom” as the excretion of the “womb / Of Stygian darkness,” Comus evokes the threat of the abject as Julia Kristeva has described it. For Kristeva, abjection is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”<sup>40</sup> Abjection, in Kristeva’s analysis, confronts us with the fragile states in which “man strays on the territory of the animal” and confronts “the hold of *maternal* entity before ex-isting outside of her.”<sup>41</sup> Rejecting as it does moral and social limits, “Abjection then wavers between the *fading away* of all meaning and humanity . . . and the *ecstasy* of an ego that, having lost its Other and its objects, reaches, at the precise moment of this suicide, the height of harmony with the promised land.”<sup>42</sup> This merging of human with earth – we might here recall the “Sin-worn mold” of the Spirit’s prologue or the decaying corpses of the Elder Brother’s speech – is at once terrifying and attractive. It signifies the same embrace of death that the Augustinian tradition of thought recommends, just without the transcendence.

Yet Comus’s challenge to the boundaries on which subjectivity and society depend is as attractive as it is frightening.<sup>43</sup> For when he offers an alternative temporality, Comus also reveals how artificial and fragile are the normative ideologies that the Spirit espouses:

What hath night to do with sleep?  
Night hath better sweets to prove,  
*Venus* now wakes, and wak’ns Love.  
Come let us our rites begin,  
’Tis only daylight that makes Sin,  
Which these dun shades will ne’re report. (93-114, 122-127)

In describing night as the time for pleasure rather than sleep, Comus rejects “normal” temporalities and boundaries as well as the values that adhere to them. The “Midnight shout and revelry / Topsy dance and Jollity” that Comus describes is also a refusal of a normative ideal of maturity, the “Strict Age” that is marked by “Rigor,” “Advice,” “sour Severity” – and early bedtimes. We might think of Halberstam’s description of queer time as “the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence-early adulthood-marriage-reproduction-childbearing-retirement-death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility.”<sup>44</sup> Read in the context of queer critiques of chronopolitics, Comus’s rejection of Spirit’s teleological schema also signifies a rejection of the heteronormative ideology such a schema upholds and naturalizes. For Comus, the way to approach both death and divinity is to ignore the “grave Saws” and instead “Imitate the Starry Choir,” those heavenly bodies that are utterly indifferent to the human time that is based on their rotations. The “Months and Years” that measure out a life are merely a human interpretation of the heavens’ meaning, not the secure ascent to “the starry threshold of *Jove’s* Court” that the Spirit claims. In the “dun shades” of night,

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bodies and categories merge and the firm meanings that light might “report,” or put into discourse, fade from view. These are not objective or constant realities but discursive formations of a value system that has been constructed by the human imagination, not the divine fiat that heteronormative ideals and institutions claim merely to obey and enforce.

Comus similarly threatens the gendered and sexual orders on which the Spirit’s idealization of the procreative family depend. Comus, notoriously, is “Much like his Father, but his Mother more” (57), and critics have seen this ambiguity as evidence of his degraded state. Fish derides him as a hermaphroditic momma’s boy, while Louise Simons observes that Comus’s wielding of Circe’s cup and Bacchus’s wand, iconic images of the female and male genitalia, announces that he has no clearly dominant sexual identity.<sup>45</sup> Ralph Singleton condemns Comus as “a gay sensualist and seducer.”<sup>46</sup> Tracing representations of Comus’s sexual ambiguity to classical, biblical, and Renaissance sources, on the one hand, and the scandalous sodomy trial of the Earl of Castlehaven, on the other, Ross Leasure describes Comus as a “predator of ambiguous sexuality on the prowl in hopes of seducing the Lady and victimizing her brothers.”<sup>47</sup>

The critical condemnation of both gender ambiguity and same-sex desire in *A Mask* allows us to see how the seemingly neutral ideal of chastity can shore up connections between normative narratives of temporal development, human ontology, and sexual desire and practice. Particularly insofar as all of the other characters can be read as what Ann Baynes Coiro calls “refractions” of Comus, we can see his challenge to gender boundaries as a challenge to normative sexual values more largely.<sup>48</sup> Whereas Coiro deems *A Mask* “startlingly feminist,” however, I would argue that the Spirit’s and the Lady’s denigration of sexuality must also be understood as denigrations of the feminine insofar as it has traditionally been aligned with the sensual, the particular, and the temporary as against the intellectual, the universal, and the eternal.<sup>49</sup> In Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of the Circe myth, “the powerful seductress is at the same time weak, obsolete, and vulnerable” – and must remain so in order for rational man’s domination of nature to be secured.<sup>50</sup> As Robyn Marasco has argued, Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis shows that the vilification of sex is the deprecation of “the only power formally granted to woman, rendering obsolete the power of female seduction and forcing upon her a new imperative: submit to civilization or remain outside of it.” Moreover, because Odysseus’s marriage to Penelope signals the completion of male domination over both women and the passions, “Circe’s story stands as the point of transition, not from a feminine order to one of masculinist domination, but from the mythic power of sexuality to the triumph of sublimated rationality.”<sup>51</sup> The “sublimated rationality” idealized by classical, Renaissance, and modern writers requires the demonization of the femininity, queerness, and animality that it seeks to transcend – or, failing transcendence, to destroy in the name of defending virtue. Comus challenges such a hierarchy not just in his attractiveness but, more importantly, in his insistent challenge to the logic of heteronormativity. For Milton’s *Mask* ultimately shows that the chastity it advocates cannot be defended by recourse to rationality alone.

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The debate between the Lady and Comus that is the centerpiece of *A Mask* disturbs the valuation of chastity that critics have let pass without comment and that continues to shape the biopolitical scripts through which Milton’s work has been understood. The standard historical narrative is that companionate marriage constitutes a *via media* between two sexual options that mainstream Protestant Reformers discouraged: lifelong celibacy, on the one hand, and promiscuity, on the other. Indeed, as we have seen, Luther collapsed celibacy and promiscuity as two sides of the same coin, deeming the inevitably failed aspiration to virginity as the cause of “fornication, adultery, and secret sins.” In the debate between Comus and the Lady, promiscuity is instead set off against both marriage and virginity. In response to the Lady’s distinction between Comus’s “lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute” and “a draught for *Juno* when she banquets,” a line that Leonard has convincingly argued celebrates marriage, Comus aligns marriage with virginity.<sup>52</sup> Both, he argues, attempt to deny the abjection of our creaturely desires and to project onto them a stable and coherent meaning. The result is that chastity, whether permanent or temporary, appears not as the recognition of our limitations but as a delusional attempt to escape uncertainty:

List Lady, be not coy, and be not cozen’d  
With that same vaunted name Virginity;  
Beauty is nature’s coin, must not be hoarded,  
But must be current, and the good thereof  
Consists in mutual and partak’n bliss,  
Unsavory in th’ enjoyment of itself. (737-742)

The “mutual and partak’n bliss” that Comus recommends would appear to echo the Protestant ideal of companionate marriage, but Comus is careful to distinguish the lifestyle he has in mind from that initiated by “*Juno* when she banquets.” His description of beauty – and the youth and pleasure it metonymically evokes – as currency embraces rather than denies the radical instability of bodily life. Like a coin, beauty has no intrinsic value or significance. The promiscuous circulation that Comus recommends threatens the clear structures of identity and stability for which both virginity and marriage strive. Whereas these forms of chastity remove us from circulation, and have clear definitions, promiscuity is defiantly erratic. In refusing to pretend that sex within some relations is inherently different from that within others, Comus admits and embraces the abjection of all human activity. Comus’s earlier threat to make the Lady like “Root-bound” Daphne in this sense only literalizes the choice that in his view she is already making, that of stasis. As critics have observed, this predicament is an epitome of the earthly existence that the Spirit and the Elder Brother imagine as that of virtue: one in which we defer, or at least justify, carnal pleasure in the name of a future that is, really, only a matter of faith.

The conclusion of the debate between Comus and the Lady affirms that the reproductive futurism that *A Mask* espouses relies not on facts, logic, or evidence, but on an invocation of “some superior power” (800). Milton’s Christian convictions are, of course, central to his writing, so it is hardly surprising that he

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ultimately substitutes divine rapture for human reason. What is surprising, however, is the absence of critical commentary on the significance of this substitution. For what the nonresolution of the debate demonstrates is that the ideology that *A Mask* celebrates is no more logical than the alternative view offered by Comus. The Lady does not emerge the clear winner of the argument. In fact, she cuts off the debate, charging in frustration that “thou art not fit to hear thyself convinc’t” (792). She charges that Comus behaves as he does because he is what he is: precisely the sort of Cartesian *bête-machine* whose automatic, mindless response to the material world renders it inferior to those guided by reason and reflection. Remarkably, however, the Lady appeals not to the reason that is traditionally treated as the mark of humanity, but to something that sounds a lot like the irrational ecstasy that Comus endorses. Queer theory’s critique of normative ideology allows us to see that the contest is not between human rationality and self-consciousness, on the one hand, and bestial sense and abjection, on the other. Rather, it is between two different perspectives on the proper response to the bodily needs and desires, not to mention the intellectual limitations, that thwart humanity’s attempts fully to transcend animal existence. The Lady, notably, claims no agency or reason for herself – or anyone else. She warns, rather, that the “uncontrolled worth of this pure cause” will

. . . kindle my rapt spirits  
To such a flame of sacred vehemence,  
That dumb things would be mov’d to sympathize,  
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,  
Till all thy magic structures rear’d so high,  
Were shatter’d into heaps o’er thy false head. (792-799)

In the Lady’s final words, “sacred vehemence” replaces secular reason. “[D]umb things” will be “mov’d to sympathize,” and the passive construction of the sentence registers the passionate nature of this response. These “dumb things” may sympathize with the Lady, but they cannot articulate the reasons for their agreement. Similarly, the “brute Earth” will respond in the only way an irrational thing can: with brute force that destroys rather than persuades that which threatens it.

Comus may allow that the Lady’s words are “set off by some superior power,” but he refers not to the power of reason but the threat of physical violence, comparing his shaky and sweating reaction to that of “*Saturn’s crew*” when “the wrath of *Jove* / Speaks thunder and the chains of *Erebus*” (800, 803, 801-802). He not persuaded by what he continues to characterize as “mere moral babble,” and he resolves to “dissemble” his fear and “try her yet more strongly” (807, 805, 806). This is not, of course, to claim that Comus relies only on suasive reason. He tricks the Lady into following him, holds her against her will, and threatens her with physical and sexual violence, and as many feminists have pointed out, the sexual liberation he preaches may sustain masculine sexual privilege.<sup>53</sup> Rather, I want to point out that a feminist celebration of female chastity may unwittingly endorse the sexual moralism that has historically been used both

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to deny women sexual agency and to deny sexual minorities rights. Read in terms of ongoing debates between feminist and queer scholars, the exchange between Comus and the Lady reveals the limits of both a celebration of all sex as liberatory and a condemnation of all sex as disempowering.<sup>54</sup> Comus and the Lady have both resorted to physical force or its threat. Comus seems to recognize, as the Lady does not, that his victory will count only if he can persuade the Lady – for surely he could physically overcome her if that was what he really wanted. As Kathleen Wall has argued, “Comus does not want to rape [the Lady], he wants to *initiate* her.”<sup>55</sup> The Lady’s drinking, and the sexual initiation it signifies, will have a transformative effect only if she is the agent, however coerced her action may be. And while Comus certainly appeals to the same passions that the Lady evokes, promising “delight / Beyond the bliss of dreams,” he also asserts the wisdom of accepting these passions. His final words, after all, are “Be wise, and taste.” The two parts of this exhortation need not be seen as contradicting one another. Rather, Comus’s conjunction of wisdom and taste challenges a Christian Neoplatonic framework by defining the acceptance of bodily appetites as a rational and judicious choice.

This helps explain why after the Lady is released, the Spirit urges that they “fly this cursed place, / Lest the Sorcerer *us* entice / With some other new device” (939-941, my emphasis). For, as we saw earlier, the Lady herself was attracted to “the sound / Of Riot and ill- manag’d Merriment” (171-172). Even as she insists that she “should be loath / To meet the rudeness and swill’d insolence / Of such late Wassailers” she heads right to the spot “Whence ev’n now the tumult of loud Mirth / Was rife and perfect in my list’ning ear” (177-179). And although she approaches these wassailers only in order to get help (and I think we should believe her on this), their presence does stir up “A thousand fantasies / . . . / of calling shapes and beck’ning shadows dire” (205, 207). As the Lady’s subsequent lines make clear, these “calling shapes and beck’ning shadows dire” are also allegories of her own desires. The syntax of the clause, which defers the adjective “dire” until the end, suggests that the fear or foreboding aroused by these fantasies comes only as an afterthought to their alluring summons. As Shullenberger has beautifully put it, “the wood is the place where reason must come to terms with all that it is not, where the human discovers itself as an indeterminate question rather than a complacent assumption, where one meets oneself in forms one isn’t prepared to recognize.”<sup>56</sup> The Lady is, as critics have argued, rightfully furious at being held hostage. But her threats of violence also suggest the limits of the rationality for which she should stand, and therefore make her more like Comus than most critics have noticed.<sup>57</sup>

The Spirit’s epilogue admits the inadequacy of the vision of *A Mask* on purely rational grounds. These closing lines assert instead the contradiction at the heart of the view that normal and perverse sex, along with the definitions of humanity and bestiality they sustain, are grounded on a contrast between rationality and irrationality, reflection and instinct. For this distinction ultimately cannot be upheld on the grounds of rationality and reflection alone. Rather, as the Lady, the Elder Brother, and the Spirit admit, and as Sabrina’s necessary intervention attests, the equation of monogamous and procreative sex with virtue

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requires a supplementary appeal to a higher power. The final words of *A Mask*, like the Lady’s final threat to Comus, accept that the virtue it has been celebrating is, ultimately, not available through human choice alone but requires divine intervention that may collapse rescue and retribution:

Mortals that would follow me,  
Love virtue, she alone is free,  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the Sphery chime;  
Or if Virtue feeble were,  
Heav’n itself would stoop to her. (1018-1023)

Initially, the Spirit promises that virtue “alone is free,” subject only to its own dictates, not external influence or force. But then he admits that virtue could turn out to be “feeble,” too weak to stand on its own, so not quite “free.” In this case, he assures us “Heav’n itself would stoop to her.” Divided by that distinctly Miltonic “or,” the Spirit’s two definitions of virtue concede the limits of human rationality fully to defend the ideals it constructs without recourse to something beyond itself. And with that concession – one that Milton could not avoid, given his particular theological convictions – *A Mask* allows for a theory of sex that can rightly be called “queer” insofar as it undoes the clear distinctions between reason and passion, human and beast, and thereby opens a space within which we might question the biopolitical projects that such distinctions both naturalize and sustain.

### Notes

I would like to thank the members of the audience at the University of Michigan conference on “Violence in the Early Modern Period” for their smart and helpful feedback on this essay. As always, Chris Diffey was an invaluable reader and listener throughout the writing process.

1. “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ* 13 (2007): 177-195; 182. For an extensive critique of such a developmental ideal, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

2. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 396.

3. Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben locate Heidegger’s meditations on the question of what distinguishes the human from the animal in the specific ideological and political context in which he was writing (Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], 127; Agamben, *The Open*, trans. Kevin Attell [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004], 75-77). Considering the problem across a longer history, Dorothy Yamamoto notes that some medieval theologians had argued that Jews could not really be human if they could not understand the dual nature of Jesus. She concludes that in this tradition, “Humanness may not be our birthright but may depend upon the exercise of a particular faculty,” and asks “If such a faculty is *not* exercised, does it then cease to exist? And do we lose our purchase upon humanness as a result?” (“Aquinas and Animals: Patrolling the Boundary?”, in *Animals on the Agenda*, 80-89).

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4. One exception is Stephen Orgel, who locates the danger of Comus in the rejection of social, rather than metaphysical, virtues. See *Spectacular Performances: Essays on the Theatre, Imagery, Books and Selves in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).
5. William Oram, “The Invocation of Sabrina,” *SEL* 24 (1984): 121-139; 126.
6. Stanley Fish, “Problem Solving in *Comus*,” in *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001): 140-160; 156.
7. Silver, “Thoughts in Misbecoming Plight: Allegory in *Comus*,” in *Critical Essays on John Milton*, ed. Christopher Kendrick (1995), 47-73; 68.
8. William Shullenberger, “Girl, Interrupted: Spenserian Bondage and Release in Milton’s *Ludlow Mask*,” *Milton Quarterly* 37 (2003): 184-204; 189, 185, 198. In addition, see Raymond G. Schoen, “The Hierarchy of the Senses in *A Mask*,” *Milton Quarterly* 7 (1973): 32-37; Joan S. Bennett, “Virgin Nature in *Comus*,” *Milton Studies* 23 (1987): 21-32; A. S. P. Woodhouse, “The Argument of Milton’s *Comus*,” in *A Masque at Ludlow: Essays on Milton’s Comus*, ed. John Diekhoff (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968).
9. Feminist critics who have examined how the ideal of married chastity in *A Mask* constrains women’s choices include Marcia Landy, “Kinship and the Role of Women in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* (1972): 3-18; and Julie H. Kim, “The Lady’s Unladylike Struggle: Redefining Patriarchal Boundaries in Milton’s *Comus*,” *Milton Studies* 35 (1997): 1-20.
10. Richard Halpern, “Puritanism and Maenadism in ‘A Mask,’” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 88-105; 94.
11. John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 118.
12. Kathryn Schwarz, “Chastity, Militant and Married: Cavendish’s Romance, Milton’s Masque,” *PMLA* 118 (2003): 270-285; 281.
13. Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 84-85 (2005): 57-68; 57.
14. *Complete Prose* 1.319. Leonard treats this as a confession that Milton was “open to the idea of marriage” and therefore as evidence that he embraced a heteronormative ideal of marriage as the best life (Leonard, “‘Good Things’: A Reply to William Kerrigan,” *Milton Quarterly* 30 [1996]: 117-127; 126).
15. Shullenberger may be right that “the particular form of the Lady’s socialization proves consonant with Milton’s sense of the kind of adult character adequate to the challenges of his period,” but we can nonetheless ask whether we want to celebrate this same idea of adulthood.
16. William Shullenberger, “Into the Woods: The Lady’s Soliloquy in *Comus*,” *Milton Quarterly* 35 no 1 (2001): 33-43; 34.
17. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 74.
18. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 2.
19. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 35. Leo Bersani similarly proposes that accepting that sex involves impulses and practices that cannot be redeemed by narratives of love or pleasure encourages relinquishment of its ethical insofar as it compels us to relinquish the “sacrosanct value of selfhood, a value that accounts for human beings’ extraordinary willingness to kill in order to protect the seriousness of their statements.”
20. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 35.
21. Laurie Shannon, “Invisible Parts: Animals and the Renaissance Anatomies of Human Exceptionalism,” in *Animal Encounters*, ed. Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 137-157; 137.
22. While the Cartesian paradigm postdates the composition of *A Mask* by several years, it has been so influential on modern understandings of the human that I use it here as shorthand for the set of assumptions that this essay interrogates. For discussions of Descartes influence, see Laurie Shannon, “The Eight Animals in Shakespeare, or, Before the Human,” *PMLA* 124 (2009): 472-479; Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*; and Bruce Boehrer, *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 8-10, 16-17.
23. Edelman, *No Future*, 2.



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24. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Hackett, 1993), 14, and *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 10.31. See also Gillian Clark, “The Fathers and the Animals: The Rule of Reason?”, in *Animals on the Agenda*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: Illini, 1998), 69, 76.
25. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 14.25.
26. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 224-225.
27. Discussion of I Cor. 15 in *Luther's Works* (St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1958-86), 28.189.
28. Discussion of I Cor. 15 in *Luther's Works* (St. Louis and Philadelphia, 1958-86), 28.189.
29. *The Estate of Marriage*. [1522] Trans. Walther I Brandt.
30. *A Sermon on Estate of Marriage*, 415. Similarly, Calvin warned that “This excess Ambrose censured gravely, but not undeservedly, when he described the man who shows no modesty or comeliness in conjugal intercourse, as committing adultery with his wife” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008], 8.44). For a fuller discussion of the contradictions inherent in Reformation views of marriage, see Melissa E. Sanchez, “Modesty or Comeliness: The Predicament of Reform Theology in Spenser’s *Amoretti and Epithalamion*,” *Renaissance* 65 (2012): 5-24.
31. Silver, “Thoughts in Misbecoming Plight,” 71. For readings that would have Milton adhering to this version of Platonism, see Sears Jayne, “The Subject of Milton’s Ludlow Mask, in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); and Fish, “Problem Solving in *Comus*.”
32. For another reading of this oddity, see Fish, “Problem Solving in *Comus*.”
33. The Spirit’s cosmography echoes that of Pico: “The region above the heavens He had adorned with Intelligences, the heavenly spheres He had quickened with eternal souls, and the excrementary and filthy parts of the lower world He had filled with a multitude of animals of every kind” (224).
34. See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 160-176.
35. As Halpern notes, “In *A Mask*, heavenly bliss seems to be only a trope for wedded bliss” (“Puritanism and Maenadism,” 97).
36. Edelman, *No Future*, 40-41.
37. Shannon, “The Eight Animals in Shakespeare.” See also Derrida, who examines the “mutation” between Montaigne, who attributed to animals a capacity for reason, and Descartes (*The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 6-7), and Boehrer’s argument that the Cartesian *cogito* sought to resolve an early modern crisis of distinction (*Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010], 1-27). Agamben sees the taxonomic shift happening later, with the nineteenth-century development of the human sciences (*The Open*, 23-27). The Cartesian model has recently been cast into doubt by the field of animal studies. Along with Shannon and Derrida, see Donna Haraway, *Cyborgs, Simians, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-42 and *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Cary Wolfe, *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
38. Orgel, *Spectacular Performances*, 117. Will Stockton has rightly argued that in *A Mask* sex is not limited to genital penetration but includes a range of corporeal drives and pleasures, so that *all* bodily appetites become saturated with libidinal and moral significance (“The Seduction of Milton’s Lady,” in *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern Literature*, ed. Will Stockton and James Bromley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012], 233-61).
39. See, for instance, Oram, and Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton’s Puritan Masque* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 150.

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40. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.
41. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12-13.
42. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 18.
43. Other critics who have noted Comus's attractiveness include Rosemary Tuve, "Image, Form, and Theme" in *A Mask*, in Diekhoff, 138; and Orgel, *Spectacular Performances*, 121.
44. Halberstam, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," 182.
45. Fish, "Unblemished Form," in *How Milton Works*, 172-175; Louise Simons, "'And Heaven Gates Ore My Head': Death as Threshold in Milton's Masque," *Milton Studies* 23 (1987): 53-96; 61-62.
46. Ralph Singleton, "Milton's *Comus* and the *Comus* of Erycius Puteanus," *PMLA* 58 (1943): 949-957: 950.
47. Ross Leasure, "Milton's Queer Choice: Comus at Castlehaven," *Milton Quarterly* 36 no. 2 (2002): 63-86.
48. Ann Baynes Coiro, "'A Thousand Fantasies': The Lady and the *Masque*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas MacDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 89-111.
49. Coiro, "'A Thousand Fantasies,'" 89.
50. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 56.
51. Robyn Marasco, "'Already the Effect of the Whip?: Critical Theory and the Feminine Ideal,'" *differences* 17 no 1 (2006): 88-115; 96, 97. For an example of the equation of virtue with sexual continence and masculinity, see Fish's approving observation that "the Lady has internalized the father's authority and identifies with him so strongly that her feminine nature has been wholly subordinated" ("Unblemished Form," 172).
52. Leonard, "'Good Things,'" 122-124.
53. As Leah Marcus and John Leonard have rightly pointed out, this is hardly as situation in which both parties in the debate have equal freedom and power. See Leonard, "Saying 'No' to Freud: Milton's *A Mask* and Sexual Assault," *Milton Quarterly* 25 no 4 (1991): 129-140; 133; Leah Marcus, "The Milieu of Milton's *Comus*: Judicial Reform at Ludlow and the Problem of Sexual Assault," *Criticism* 25 (1983): 293-327; 317. See also Silver, who argues that the Lady's anger is intelligible in light of the real bodily injury she has received ("Thoughts in Misbecoming Plight," 70).
54. Feminists, that is, have long accused queer scholars with misogyny and the assumption of masculine privilege, while queer scholars have charged feminists with homophobia and reactionary sexual moralism. For examples, see, respectively, Dympna Callaghan, "The Terms of Gender: 'Gay' and 'Feminist' *Edward II*," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 275-301; and Jonathan Goldberg, "Introduction," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke, 1994), 1-14.
55. Kathleen Wall, *The Callisto Myth from Ovid to Atwood: Initiation and Rape in Literature* (McGill-Queen's Press, 1988), 57. See also Tuve, "Image, Form, and Theme," 148.
56. Shullenberger, "Into the Woods," 35.
57. As even Fish admits, "the energy [Milton] must deploy in order to shore up and support the structure whispers to us of its precariousness and of the extent to which the purity he celebrates is finally inseparable from the materiality he pushes away" ("Unblemished Form," 184).