

# Gennesis carrion



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## Gennesis Carrion Professor Fulton 350: 324 Chastity Overpowering Sexuality

Even until present day, virginity is held in high esteem and considered a virtue, something sacred and worthy of praise. Being a virgin is a symbol of innocence, highly valued by religions and encouraged by them to remain so; it is something that only the bond of marriage is a worthy reason for its loss. Virginity is a symbol of purity, the intactness and immaculacy of the body and soul. It represents the body has remained untouched by sexual acts and the soul has remained untainted by sexual urges; both remain unmarked by acts of foreign mind and touch. Virginity is the prominent theme of Milton's short play *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* [Comus]. In mentioned play, Milton confines sexuality to exist only with accordance to the sanctity of a woman's chastity. He uses mythological allusions to support the sacredness of chastity and utilizes the character of Comus as a symbol of the malevolent factors at work tempting virginity to be abandoned for a more liberal sexuality whereas the character of the Lady is the personification of chastity. Before beginning the play, the textbook's publisher provides some short background information in the preface. In such background, one learns Milton's use of allegory between the characters in *Masque* with the Earl of Bridgewater and his family (the Egerton's). The preface also states *Masque's* "elevated conception of chastity was meant to disassociate the Egerton family from scandal", such scandal being the Second Earl of Castlehaven's (the brother-in-law of Bridgewater's wife) indiscretions against his wife and female servants. This information provides readers a possible reason for Milton's strong concern with chastity in *Masque*. Another possible reason could have been a commissioned purpose to aid the Earl of Bridgewater, and newly appointed Lord President of the Council of Wales, to establish a

credible and respectable impression and reputation. Milton accomplished this with basing the characters of *Masque* off of the Earl's children with his two sons being the brothers in the play and with his daughter being the Lady, the cherished virgin of the play, although this basis was never clearly stated thereby remaining allegorical. When readers first encounter the Lady, she has become separated from her brothers and is lost wandering through the woods. She calls out welcoming "pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope... [and the] unblemished form of Chastity" to protect her through her excursion. Her choice of aid represents her regard for chastity; she places it in alliance with hope and faith, two aspects connected to religion and of high importance. Not only does the Lady place superior significance on chastity, but she herself is the personification of it. Readers can truly comprehend Milton's perspective towards chastity specifically in the passage spoken by the Elder Brother (lines 420-475). Within this passage, the Elder Brother speaks of the honor and power that comes with a woman being chaste; he is referring to his sister, "She that has that, is clad in complete steel... no savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer will dare to soil her virgin purity". The Lady is chaste, furthermore she is chastity, she has the protection which being so provides. Forms of evil will avoid her for that is to how far of an extreme virginity is held, that not even evil would take the risk of violating a woman's purity. The Lady is free to roam the forest and "pass on with unblenched majesty". She does not have to fret or fear any that may cross her path for none "hath hurtful power o'er true virginity". Virginity, chastity, purity are the ultimate powers, the ultimate protection for a woman against harm to her body and her soul. Continuing with the passage of the Elder Brother, he also goes on to elaborate on what occurs when chastity is lost.

He refers to the physical act of a woman losing her virginity (having sex) as letting in the “defilement to the inward parts”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, defile means to bruise or maul and defilement as the act of being defiled therefore the act of being bruised or mauled; the use of this word to describe sex gives it an animalistic twist, a savage perspective. This causes sex to be viewed as an act too undignified and somewhat immoral to be committed by humans. Even religiously, sex is only meant for the purpose of procreating life, not as a means of pleasure. The Lady, being the personification of chastity, upholds all that is pure and denounces the vile obscenities caused by liberal sexuality: “that which is not good, is not delicious to a well-governed and wise appetite”. Her logic being that to those who have faith and cherish chastity would not fall to evil temptation and sexual urges. Those aforementioned evil temptations and sexual urges are what the character of Comus symbolizes. Instantly when Comus learns the existence of the Lady, once he hears her song, he is automatically drawn to her. Comus claims to have never heard “such sober certainty of waking bliss”; the sound he has heard is that of the Lady therefore bring the sound of true purity. Comus is instinctively attracted to the Lady and proclaims “she shall be [his] queen”. This attraction is an instinct, same as good versus evil or ying and yang; it is a balance of positive and negative forces. With the Lady being chastity in corporeal form and Comus being the personification of temptation, it is no surprise for Comus to desire to conquer the Lady and make her his wife thereby taking away her virginity. No longer being chaste, the Lady would then belong to him symbolizing purity falling for temptation. Comus attempts to entice the Lady by urging her to “be not coy, and be not cozened 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 partaken bliss". Comus refers to virginity as vaunted, meaning it is a trait only desired for bragging of its possession; he does not hold it in high esteem such as the Lady whom places it next to hope and faith; Comus places it next to vanity, which is a deadly sin, therefore supporting his purpose of symbolizing evil and temptation. Milton utilizes various allusions to mythological accounts to support his extreme importance placed on chastity. He even states, " Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call/ Antiquity from the old schools of Greece to testify the arms of Chastity? ". An example of such is when the Lady had been found captured and the Attendant Spirit called upon the Sabrina, Goddess of the river, for assistance to release the Lady from her entrapment. Sabrina fell victim to the jealousy of her stepmother and was thrown into the river; however since she was a " virgin pure", the sea god Nereus took pity upon her and ordered her " quick immortal change' into a river goddess while still maintaining her " maiden gentleness". This allusion provides evidence of the power of virginity; due to Sabrina being chaste was she rewarded with immortality and an opportunity to remain in the mortal realm and utilize her newly-appointed power to aid those maidens in peril. Also, Sabrina retained her " maiden gentleness" meaning, although she is no longer considered a virgin for she is an immortal, she remains chaste; she remains untouched and pure and " un-defiled" as Milton would suggest. Sabrina's purpose is to " help ensnared Chastity", a reference towards the Lady, and therefore liberates the Lady with the touch of her " chaste palms". Milton assures he refers to Sabrina's palms as " chaste" continuing with his constant and repetitive emphasis on the virtue of chastity. Whether the reason for Milton's strong concern with

chastity in Masque was a commissioned service or to convey personal views, the emphasis of chastity is still the main topic of this short play. With the use of allusions to mythological historical accounts and personification, Milton emphasizes the sacredness of virginity and the power it holds. In Masque, Milton creates a world in which chastity makes a woman close to, if not completely, invincible. She may roam through dangerous settings with no fear for evil itself is not courageous enough to dare place chastity at risk; she has the protection of Gods and Goddesses at her disposal if help is needed; if death were to occur, she has the chance of becoming rewarded with immortality or automatically be held in praise for having remained a virgin through life. Same as chastity is acclaimed, sexuality is denounced. Sexuality is made to appear animalistic, savage, vile, a complete dishonor. A woman who gives in into her sexual curiosity is doomed in life and considered a sinner in the next. She loses the virtues associated with chastity and becomes a victim of her own unwise decision to not hold virginity as sacred therefore constituting chastity as the dominating power sexuality must succumb to.