

ARCADES

John Milton

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*Milton, John (1608-1674) - English poet and prose writer who is one of the most highly regarded figures in world literature and is widely considered the greatest poet since Shakespeare. Often called the "Puritan Poet," he had many of the good traits of the Puritans as well as many of the bad and spent much of his life immersed in political and religious controversy. Arcades (1633) - A fragment of a pastoral masque put on by the young people of Egerton in honor of their relative, the countess-dowager of Derby. *
Arcades

Part of an entertainment presented to the
Countess
Dowager of
Darby at
Harefield, by som Noble persons of her Family, who appear on the
Scene in pastoral habit, moving toward the seat of State with this Song

1 SONG

Look Nymphs, and Shepherds look,
What sudden blaze of majesty
Is that which we from hence descry
Too divine to be mistook:

This this is she
To whom our vows and wishes bend,

Heer our solemn search hath end.

Fame that her high worth to raise,
Seem'd erst so lavish and profuse,
We may justly now accuse
Of detraction from her praise,
Less then half we find exprest,
Envy bid conceal the rest.

Mark what radiant state she spreads,
In circle round her shining throne,
Shooting her beams like silver threds,
This this is she alone,
Sitting like a Goddess bright,
In the center of her light.

Might she the wise Latona be,
Or the towred Cybele,
Mother of a hunderd gods;
Juno dare's not give her odds;
Who had thought this clime had held
A deity so unparalel'd?

As they com forward, the genius of the
Wood appears, and turning toward them, speaks
Gen. Stay gentle Swains, for though in this disguise,
I see bright honour sparkle through your eyes,
Of famous Arcady ye are, and sprung
Of that renowned flood, so often sung,
Divine Alpheus, who by secret sluse,
Stole under Seas to meet his Arethuse;
And ye the breathing Roses of the Wood,
Fair silver-buskind Nymphs as great and good,
I know this quest of yours, and free intent
Was all in honour and devotion ment
To the great Mistres of yon princely shrine,
Whom with low reverence I adore as mine,
And with all helpful service will comply
To further this nights glad solemnity;
And lead ye where ye may more neer behold
What shallow-searching Fame hath left untold;
Which I full oft amidst these shades alone
Have sate to wonder at, and gaze upon:
For know by lot from Jove I am the powr
Of this fair Wood, and live in Oak'n bowr,
To nurse the Saplings tall, and curl the grove

With Ringlets quaint, and wanton windings wove.

And all my Plants I save from nightly ill,
Of noisom winds, and blasting vapours chill.

And from the Boughs brush off the evil dew,

And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blew,
Or what the cross dire-looking Planet smites,
Or hurtfull Worm with canker'd venom bites.

When Eev'ning gray doth rise,
I fetch my round

Over the mount, and all this hallow'd ground,
And early ere the odorous breath of morn
Awakes the slumbring leaves, or tasseld horn
Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,
Number my ranks, and visit every sprout
With puissant words, and murmurs made to bless,
But els in deep of night when drowsines
Hath lockt up mortal sense, then listen I
To the celestial Sirens harmony,
That sit upon the nine enfolded Sphears,
And sing to those that hold the vital shears,
And turn the Adamantine spindle round,
On which the fate of gods and men is wound.

Such sweet compulsion doth in musick ly,
To lull the daughters of Necessity,
And keep unsteddy Nature to her law,
And the low world in measur'd motion draw
After the heavenly tune, which none can hear

Of human mould with grosse unpurged ear;
And yet such musick worthiest were to blaze
The peerless height of her immortal praise,
Whose lustre leads us, and for her most fit,
If my inferior hand or voice could hit
Inimitable sounds, yet as we go,
What ere the skill of lesser gods can show,
I will assay, her worth to celebrate,
And so attend ye toward her glittering state;
Where ye may all that are of noble stemm
Approach, and kiss her sacred vestures hemm.

2 SONG

O're the smooth enameld green
Where no print of step hath been,
Follow me as I sing,
And touch the warbled string.

Under the shady roof
Of branching Elm Star-proof,
Follow me,
I will bring you where she sits
Clad in splendor as befits
Her deity.

Such a rural Queen

All Arcadia hath not seen.

3 SONG

Nymphs and Shepherds dance no more
By sandy Ladons Lillied banks.

On old Lycaeus or Cyllene hoar,
Trip no more in twilight ranks,
Though Erymanth your loss deplore,
A better soyl shall give ye thanks.

From the stony Maenalus,
Bring your Flocks, and live with us,
Here ye shall have greater grace,
To serve the Lady of this place.

Though Syrinx your Pans Mistres were,
Yet Syrinx well might wait on her.

Such a rural Queen

All Arcadia hath not seen.

THE END