L'Allegro
John Milton (1645)

Hence loathed Melancholy
Of Cerberus, and blackest midnight born,
In Stygian Cave forlorn
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy,
Find out some uncouth cell,
Wher brooding darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-Raven sings;
There under Ebon shades, and low-brow'd Rocks,
As ragged as thy Locks,
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.

But com thou Goddes fair and free,
In Heav'n ycleap'd Euphrosyne,
And by men, heart-easing Mirth,
Whom lovely Venus at a birth
With two sister Graces more
To Ivy-crowned Bacchus bore;
Or whether (as som Sager sing)
The frolick Wind that breathes the Spring,
Zephyr with Aurora playing,
As he met her once a Maying,
There on Beds of Violets blew,
And fresh-blown Roses washt in dew,
Fill'd her with thee a daughter fair,
So bucksom, blith, and debonair.
Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods, and Becks, and Wreathed Smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport that wrinckled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.
Com, and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastick toe,
And in thy right hand lead with thee,
The Mountain Nymph, sweet Liberty;
And if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crue
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved pleasures free; [40]
To hear the Lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night,
From his watch-towre in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
Then to com in spight of sorrow, [45]
And at my window bid good morrow,
Through the Sweet-Briar, or the Vine,
Or the twisted Eglandine.
While the Cock with lively din,
Scatters the rear of darkness thin, [50]
And to the stack, or the Barn dore,
Stoutly struts his Dames before,
Oft list'ning how the Hounds and horn,
Chearly rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of som Hoar Hill, [55]
Through the high wood echoing shrill.
Som time walking not unseen
By Hedge-row Elms, on Hillocks green,
Right against the Eastern gate,
Wher the great Sun begins his state, [60]
Rob'd in flames, and Amber light,
The clouds in thousand Liveries dight.
While the Plowman neer at hand,
Whistles ore the Furrow'd Land,
And the Milkmaid singeth blithe, [65]
And the Mower whets his sithe,
And every Shepherd tells his tale
Under the Hawthorn in the dale.
Streit mine eye hath caught new pleasures
Whilst the Lantskip round it measures, [70]
Russet Lawns, and Fallows Gray,
Where the nibling flocks do stray,
Mountains on whose barren brest
The labouring clouds do often rest:
Meadows trim with Daisies pide, [75]
Shallow Brooks, and Rivers wide.
Towers, and Battlements it sees
Boosom'd high in tufted Trees,
Whe it perhaps som beauty lies,
The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes. [80]
Hard by, a Cottage chimney smokes,
From betwixt two aged Okes,
Where Corydon and Thyrsis met,
Are at their savory dinner set
Of Hearbs, and other Country Messes, [85]
Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses;
And then in haste her Bowre she leaves,
With Thestylis to bind the Sheaves;
Or if the earlier season lead
To the tann’d Haycock in the Mead, [90]
Som times with secure delight
The up-land Hamlets will invite,
When the merry Bells ring round,
And the Jocond rebecks sound
To many a youth, and many a maid, [95]
Dancing in the Chequer’d shade;
And young and old com forth to play
On a Sunshine Holyday,
Till the live-long day-light fail,
Then to the Spicy Nut-brown Ale, [100]
With stories told of many a feat,
How Faery Mab the junkets eat,
She was pincht, and pull’d she sed,
And he by Friars Lanthorn led
Tells how the drudging Goblin swet [105]
To ern his Cream-bowle duly set,
When in one night, ere glimps of morn,
His shadowy Flale hath thresh’d the Corn
That ten day-labourers could not end,
Then lies him down the Lubbar Fend. [110]
And stretch’d out all the Chimney’s length,
Basks at the fire his hairy strength;
And Crop-full out of dores he flings,
Ere the first Cock his Mattin rings.
Thus don the Tales, to bed they creep, [115]
By whispering Windes soon lull’d asleep.
Towred Cities please us then,
And the busie humm of men,
Where throns of Knights and Barons bold,
In weeds of Peace high triumphs hold, [120]
With store of Ladies, whose bright eies
Rain influence, and judge the prise
Of Wit, or Arms, while both contend
To win her Grace, whom all commend.
There let Hymen oft appear [125]
In Saffron robe, with Taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With mask, and antique Pageantry,
Such sights as youthfull Poets dream
On Summer eves by hauntèd stream. [ 130 ]
Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonsons learned Sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespear fancies childe,
Warble his native Wood-notes wilde,
And ever against eating Cares, [ 135 ]
Lap me in soft Lydian Aires,
Married to immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of lincked sweetnes long drawn out, [ 140 ]
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running;
Untwisting all the chains that ty
The hidden soul of harmony.
That Orpheus self may heave his head [ 145 ]
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heapt Elysian flowres, and hear
Such streins as would have won the ear
Of Pluto, to have quite set free
His half regain'd Eurydice. [ 150 ]
These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee, I mean to live.
Notes

Introduction. It is nearly impossible to understand and appreciate John Milton's L'Allegro without also having read its companion piece, Il Penseroso. Whereas l'allegro is "the happy person" who spends an idealized day in the country and a festive evening in the city, il penseroso is "the thoughtful person" whose night is filled with meditative walking in the woods and hours of study in a "lonely Towr." First published in 1645, the two poems complement each other structurally and contain images which are in specific dialogue with one another.

In 1983, Gerard H. Cox wrote that "it is obvious that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are companion poems, but precisely how and why they are related remains an open question" (Cox 45). Over the years, scholars have suggested a wide range of connections between the two. To some, the poems represent a battle between Day and Night/Mirth and Melancholy (Tillyard 1); to others, opposing paths (of pleasure and wisdom) toward complete union with God (Cox 58); and to still others, Milton's own struggle to become a "whole" man and a truly great poet (Zacharias 6). Roy Flannagan even suggests that L'Allegro is the light-hearted Charles Diodati and Il Penseroso is the studious Milton (Flannagan 65). Certainly, there is evidence of this in Milton's letter to his dear friend when he writes:
it is in my favor that your habit of studying permits you to pause frequently, visit friends, write much, and sometimes make a journey. But my temperament allows no delay, no rest, no anxiety — or at least thought — about scarcely anything to distract me, until I attain my object and complete some great period, as it were, of my studies. (Flannagan 1051)

Almost every critic agrees, however, that "[w]hat one poem twists, the other untwists" in an unending cycle of what might be called "dissonant companionship" (Finch and Bowen 18). Abandoning Latin for simple English in these twinned poems, Milton borrows greatly from such English poets as Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, and he looks directly to Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for pastoral descriptions of hobgoblins and fairies. The pair of poems should be read aloud in order fully to appreciate their complementary sounds; *L'Allegro*'s lilting pitch and images of crowing roosters and singing larks deeply contrasts with *Il Penseroso*'s somber tone and "Belmans drousie charm."

The copytext for this edition of *L'Allegro* is a copy of Milton's 1645 *Poems* owned by Rauner Library at Dartmouth College (Hickmott 172).

*Jennifer Hickey*

*L'Allegro*. In its original Italian form, allegro means "lively, gay, merry." Now it is used as a musical term to indicate a brisk pace (*OED2*).

*Melancholy*. A physiological condition associated with both depression and genius. Melancholy is the personified muse Milton invokes in *Il Penseroso* line 12.


*uncouth*. Unknown, desolate.

*Ebon*. A type of hard, black wood (*OED2*).

*Cimmerian*. The Homeric land of the Cimmerians was so close to the edge of the world that it was eternally wrapped in the "mist and cloud" of night *(Odyssey* 11.13-19).

*Line 10*. Once the loathed Melancholy has been exorcised, Milton is able to write in the more free-flowing form of octosyllabic couplets.

*yclearp'd*. Named, called. Most editors point to this archaisim as particularly Spenserian.
Euphrosyne. The Goddess of Mirth. As one of the three graces — Euphrosyne (Mirth), Aglaia (Brightness) and Thalia (Bloom) — she is typically thought of as the daughter of Zeus and Eurynome (Hesoid's Theogony 907-11). Here, however, Milton makes her the daughter of Venus (goddess of love and beauty) and Bacchus (god of wine), technically making Mirth Comus's half-sister (A Mask 46-58). See also Caravaggio's Bacchus (1597) and Rubens' Bacchus (1638-40).

Sager. Wise men. Here Milton suggests that the following alternate myth of Euphrosyne's birth (which he has invented) is superior to traditional stories.

Zephir with Aurora. This alternate ancestry of Euphrosyne makes her the daughter of the west wind and the dawn. As Roy Flannagan suggests, Milton may be saying that accurately tracing Mirth's origin is not important: "getting there is all the fun, in the sense that the begetting of Mirth must be joyful and guilt-free" (Flannagan66).

Fill'd her. Begot, as if he were breathing wind into her. Gerald Cox connects this act with poetic inspiration and writes, "Euphrosyne affords man the inspiration to transform himself and so reach a higher level of being" (Cox 48) In other words, Mirth will awaken man to his joyful potential.

Cranks. Like "quip" and "wile," a crank is a fanciful verbal trick (OED2). Becks. "A gesture expressive of salutation or respect; an inclination of the head; an obeisance, a bow, a curtsey, a nod." Also perhaps a flirtatious "come-on" (OED2definition 2).

Hebe's. The goddess of youth.

Sport. Youthful mockery, jest. Here, personified Sport is seen ridiculing the elderly Care, as if youth were insulting aged dignity (Flannagan 67).

trip...toe. Here, "trip" means to step or dance full of life and vigor; "fantastic," fancifully imagined. Contrast these lines with Il Penseroso:

\begin{quote}
Com pensive Nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, stedfast, and demure,...  
Com, but keep thy wonted state,  
With ee\'v\'n step, and musing gate... (31-32, 37-8)
\end{quote}

Many scholars point out the resemblance to Ariel's words in Shakespeare's The Tempest 4.1.44-47.

crue. "Crew," reminiscent of Comus's gang of revelers. Several editors have noted that lines 37-40 echo Christopher Marlowe's Passionate Shepherd to His Love, which is consistent with the pastoral mode of the poem.
unreproved. Blameless, or simply unblamed? An activity might be blameworthy but normally left unrebuked.

*Lark.* The counterpart to *Il Penseroso*'s nightingale; traditionally the first bird to sing in the morning. Gerald H. Cox notes that in his *Second Prolusion* Milton writes:
Why, it is quite credible that the lark herself soars up into the clouds at dawn and that the nightingale passes the night in solitary trilling in order to harmonize their songs with that heavenly music to which they studiously listen.

*Bid good morrow.* There has been some disagreement over who comes to the window to "bid good morrow." While critics have suggested Mirth, the Lark, and the Dawn, most editorial opinion supports L'Allegro himself. For a discussion on this issue see Stanley Fish 113-15.

*Eglantine.* Honeysuckle.

*the Cock.* The rooster and his Dames are the first of several paired figures (for example, the clouds and the mountain's breast, and so on) which Casey Finch and Peter Bowen suggest reflect the poem's theme of sexual companionship. The fact that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are in dialogue (conversation) with each other furthers this theme, as Milton believed the chief purpose of marriage was conversation (*Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* 1.2).

*Scatters the rear.* As in military combat, the rooster's crowing forces Darkness' troops to retreat quickly.

*stack.* Haystack.

*Chearly.* Cheerfully.

*Hoar Hill.* The dew-covered hills of a summer morning (*OED2*).

*Som time.* Analyzing *L'Allegro* as if it were a cinematic montage with dream sequences and slow dissolves, Herbert Phelan notes that while lines 41-56 seem to be in the present tense, 57-69 describe a different time period (Phelan 3).

*state.* The sun begins his stately march as if he were a king.

*dight.* Clothed.

*tells his tale.* Most editors identify this as a play on words: the shepherd recounts his story and/or counts his sheep.

*Lines 53-68.* In 1958, Robert Graves suggested that Milton had misplaced lines 53-68. Graves believed the lines belonged after line 114, which would make the
action clearer. Fish, however, strongly disagrees and insists that Milton purposely did not want a clear plot line (Fish 119). Left without the restraints of a continuous plot line, the reader is more able to respond emotionally to the poem.

*Lantskip.* Landscape.

*measures.* "To travel over, traverse (a certain distance, a tract of country)" (OED2 definition 5).

*pide.* Pied, spotted.

*Cynosure.* "Something that attracts attention by its brilliancy or beauty; a centre of attraction, interest, or admiration" (OED2 definition b, citing this instance).  
*Corydon and Thrysis.* Greek pastoral figures. See Virgil's *Eclogues* 2, 3, 5, 7.  
*Phillis...* *Thestyris.* Two more Virgilian shepherds. For Phyllis, see Eclogues 3, 5, and 7; for Thestyris, Eclogue 2.

*Bowre.* Cottage.

*Mead.* Meadow.

*secure.* Free from care; derived from the Latin meaning (OED2).

*Rebecks.* A medieval form of fiddle with three strings (OED2).

*Faery Mab.* Queen of the fairies. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio describes Mab as the fairies' midwife, who makes people dream of thwarted love (1.4.54). Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut, which reminds us of the "Nut-brown Ale" from line 100. To me, this points to Shakespeare's Mab, as opposed to Ben Jonson's from *Entertainment at Althorpe* (2.1.294) which some editors have suggested.

*junkets.* "Any dainty sweetmeat, cake, or confection" (OED2 definition 3).

*Friars Lanthorn.* Friar's Lantern. Merritt Hughes defines this as the will-o'-the-wisp: "a thing (rarely a person) that deludes or misleads by means of fugitive appearances" (OED2, definition 4).

*Goblin.* Several editors have suggested the goblin here is a version of Shakespeare's Puck, the hobgoblin from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Milton's goblin will do housework and field work only if he is fed by the homeowner.

*Lubber Fend.* Lubber Fiend: "A beneficent goblin supposed to perform some of the laborious work of a household or farm during the night" (OED2 definition 6, citing this instance).
Chimney’s. Fireplace.

Crop-full. Sated, full. Presumably, the goblin has just gorged himself on the cream which was set out for him.

Mattin. Morning song.

Towred Cities. The scene now shifts from a day in the country to a night in the city.

weeds. Garments, here courtly costumes.

triumphs. Courtly festivals.

Hymen. God of marriage.

Sock. The slipper worn by Greek comic actors. Traditionally the sock refers to comic performances and the buskin to tragic.

fancies childe. As if Shakespeare were the child of imagination (fancy) personified.

Lydian Aires. John Carey and Alastair Fowler note that in the Republic 3.398-9, Plato associates this Greek musical mode with laxness, conviviality, softness and sloth. James Hutton, however, suggests that Milton may not have meant this as a pejorative term, since Cassiodorus speaks of it approvingly as providing relaxation and delight (Carey and Fowler).

harmony. Marc Berley writes: Both L’Allegro and Il Penseroso end with passages about divine music....the poet is asking for nothing other than the reattuning of the human soul, asking for an end to 'Earthy grossness,' and for the ability to enjoy (as did Adam and Eve before the fall)...the harmonious structure of the universe reflected in the human soul (Berley 151-52).

Orpheus...Pluto...Eurydice. Orpheus is the Greek musician poet who travels to Hades in order to bring his wife, Eurydice, back to earth. His powerful music makes Pluto grant his wish, but with the condition that Orpheus cannot look back at Eurydice as he leads her out of Hades. Orpheus cannot fulfill this condition, and that is why Milton describes Eurydice as "half regain'd" (Ovid, The Metamorphoses, Book 10). If L’Allegro were to master the Lydian Aires, he might be able to free Eurydice himself.

Elysian. The Elysian Fields, where dead Greek heroes lived.
I mean to live. Compare this with Il Penseroso’s concluding couplet:
These pleasures Melancholy give,
And I with thee will choose to live.
Because the conditional “if” is not present in Il Penseroso, several critics have suggested that Milton chooses Melancholy over Mirth. David Miller interprets this as choosing Christian contemplation over Greek pleasures (Miller 40).