

Charles Williams
The Masques of Amen House

together with
Amen House Poems

and with

Selections from the Music for the Masques
by Hubert J. Foss

Introduction by Bernadette Lynn Bosky

Edited and annotated by David Bratman

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The Masque of the Manuscript

Originally performed before Humphrey Milford and the staff of the Oxford University Press in the Library of Amen House, London, 28 April 1927, with the following cast:

Persons of the Presentation

THE INTRODUCER OF THE MASQUE	Charles Williams
THE SINGER	Dora Stevens
THE MASTER OF THE MUSIC	Hubert Foss
PHILLIDA (Librarian)	Phyllis Jones
THE MANUSCRIPT	Nina Condron
DORINDA (Production)	Helen Peacock
ALEXIS (Publicity)	Gerard Hopkins
COLIN (Editorial)	Frederick Page

[The Masque presents the Library at Amen House, the front wall of which forms the back of the stage. CAESAR'S chair is between the two recesses, but rather more forward; the rest of the spectators are behind him. The Masque opens with the sound of trumpets; after a few measures the curtains are withdrawn for the INTRODUCER, who kneels to CAESAR, and then rising speaks:]

INTRODUCER	For no desire of long dead days that were When Herrick or when Wither sang, great sir, The Christmas revel, or at Jonson's call Dances of gallant masquers thronged Whitehall, Or Milton, young, bright-harnessed, and still glad, Made Comus' self more beauteous than law bade — For no such trick of backward-thrusting sight Have we desired or framed an hour's delight. But since by you and in this house at least Joy hath not wholly ended, nor surceased From labour, nor from anger (if such be), But makes a glad and perfect memory Mixed with some worth of every day's employ, And that rich exile, that wild vagrant, Joy — She who alone all sheaves of harvest binds — Wandering one autumn day about our minds, Met with a chance and high-fantastic thought, And for some season of pure nonsense sought — Twelfth Night or Shrovetide or what carnival Of private honour levels with them all, Caesar, the praise of fair months made your own In this imperial and sacred throne. Since still such thought and fantasy endures, Missing God's birthday, let it fix on yours; With what Alexis, what Dorinda, gave,	2
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What Colin, and what Phillida, made brave,
 And all the rest, here or beyond, who knew
 Aught of the absurd and pleasant thing we do:
 Ah, too absurd! and yet a place should be
 For this of ours, for all absurdity!
 Solemn devices have no better thrift
 Than that the Athenian craftsmen for a gift 32
 Brought to their Duke; as they, so we to ours;
 As he to theirs, be tender to our powers.
 If it amuses, well; if not, forgive;
 And bid your children and your liegemen live.
 In this fifteenth and happiest year of grace, 37
 Let our Birth Night solemnity have place.

[He withdraws. The curtains are closed after him and a song is heard from behind them.]

THE SINGER Over this house a star 39
 Shines in the heavens high,
 Beauty remote and afar,
 Beauty that shall not die;
 Beauty desired and dreamed,
 Followed in storm and sun,
 Beauty the gods have schemed
 And mortals at last have won.

 Beauty arose of old
 And dreamed of a perfect thing,
 Where none should be angry or cold *
 Or armed with an evil sting;
 Where the world shall be made anew,
 For the gods shall breathe its air,
 And Phoebus Apollo therethrough
 Shall move on a golden stair.

 The star that all lives shall seek,
 That workers of books desire, †
 All that in any wise speak
 Look to this silver fire:
 Shakespeare in utmost night
 Moved on no other quest
 Than waits who studies aright ‡
 Edition and palimpsest. 62

 O'er the toil that is given to do,
 O'er the search and the grinding pain,

* *none should be* Carol: *none shall be*

† *workers* Carol and score: *makers*

‡ *Than waits who studies aright* Carol: *Than waits him who reads aright* Score:
Than serves him who reads aright

1. The Carol of Amen House

with a rocking movement

pp

rall. a tempo

A HIDDEN VOICE sings

O - ver this house a star Shines in the hea - vens high,

Beau - ty re - mote and a - far, Beau - ty that shall not die;