

Have you seen the bright lily grow?

Ben Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), Act II, Scene 6

Attributed to Robert Johnson
Transcribed and edited by Christopher Baum

(New York Public Library, Drexel MS 4175, No. xlix)

(1)

Do but look on her eyes, they do light All that love's world com -
(Text in source:) Have you seen the bright li - ly grow, Be - fore rude hands have

5 (2)

pri - seth, Do but look on her hair, it is bright, As Love's star, when it ri - seth, Do but
touch'd it? Have you mark'd the fall of the snow, Be - fore the earth hath smutch'd it? Have you

10

mark, her fore - head's smooth - er, Than words that soothe her; And from her arch'd brows, such a
felt the wool of bea - ver? Or swan's down, e - ver? Or have smelt to the bud of the

15

grace Sheds it - self through the face; As a - lone, there triumphs to the life, All the
bri - ar, or the nard in the fire? Or have tas - ted the bag of the bee? O, so

(1) Here and in a few other places the underlay of the first verse does not fit the notes and rhythms in the source. In places where this happens, the words in question are supplied without precise underlay (as here, where two syllables are printed beneath a single note) so that the music can be presented in its original form and the exact fitting of the words left to the performer.

(2) Throughout the edition, the rhythm of ornaments is given as it appears in the source (though beaming is modernized).

Have you seen the bright lily grow?

19

gain, all the good, of the elements'— strife, of—the elements' strife.
white, O, so soft, O, so sweet, so sweet, so— sweet is she.

(Oxford, Christ Church Library, MS 87, f. 4v)

24

Have you seen the bright li-ly grow, Be-fore rude hands have touch'd it? Have you

29

mark'd the fall—of the snow, Be-fore the—soil—hath smutch'd it?

32

Have you felt the wool of bea-ver? Or swan's down, e-ver?

(3) Original reading (note, in addition to the rhythmic differences, the use of *white* where the play text gives *bright*):

Have you seen the white li-ly grow, be-fore

(4) Here and in bars 28 and 31, the source gives *had* in place of *have* or *hath* (the readings in the published text of the play).

Have you seen the bright lily grow?

34 (5) (6)

Have you smelt of the bud of the bri-ar, or the nard in the fire? Have you tas-ted the bag of the bee?

37

O, so white, _____ O, so soft, _____

39

O, so sweet, _____ so

40 (7)

sweet _____ is she.

(5) The published text of the play gives *Or, have* where this source, both here and in bar 36, reads *Have you*.

(6) The source gives *to the bud* where the published text of the play reads *of the bud*.

(7) The source gives *was* in place of *is*.

This song appears, without attribution, in several manuscript sources. The current consensus seems to favor Robert Johnson as the most likely composer, but Alfonso Ferrabosco II has also been put forward as a candidate, and of course the possibility remains that neither of these men was the composer.

The text originally appeared in *The Devil is an Ass*, in the two-verse form presented here. By the time the poem was published, as part of the non-dramatic collection *Underwood*, in the 1640-41 edition of Jonson's works, it had acquired an addition stanza, placed before the original two, beginning "See the chariot at hand here of love". One source (New York Public Library, Drexel MS 4257, No. 2) sets this newer stanza (while providing the other two as text only), but all others set the original second verse, beginning "Have you seen but a bright lily grow?", and give no additional stanzas.

For this edition, two sources have been employed. In order to present the original (two-verse) song in something like the form it might have taken in the theater, the original first stanza has been set to the less ornamented of the two sources. See note (1) concerning the underlay for this verse, which is of course editorial (and inevitably approximate).

As for the second verse, there are minor differences among the various sources (several of which, for instance, give *white* in place of *bright* in the first line), and in no case do the words match precisely the text as published in the play. It is quite common for the texts found in musical settings of playsongs from this period to differ in details from the versions eventually published (often years later) by the playwrights themselves. It is often wisest to prefer the version of the text given in the musical source, and in general that has been the approach taken for this edition (with exceptions given in the footnotes). The Christ Church manuscript is unique among all sources in using past-tense verbs (notably *so sweet was she* in place of *so sweet is she*); in this respect the consensus reading has been preferred and present-tense verbs used.

The text is given below as it appears in the 1692 folio edition of Jonson's works.

Do but look on her Eyes! They do light — —
All that Love's World comprizeth!
Do but look on her Hair! it is bright,
As Love's Star, when it riseth!
Do but mark, her Fore-head's smoother,
Then words that sooth her!
And from her arched Brows, such a Grace
Sheds it self through the Face;
As alone, there Triumphs to the Life,
All the Gain, all the Good, of the Elements strife!

Have you seen but a bright Lilly grow,
Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Have you mark'd but the fall of the Snow,
Before the Soyl hath smuch'd it?
Have you felt the Wooll o' the Bever?
Or Swans Down, ever?
Or, have smelt o' the Bud o' the Bryer?
Or the Nard i' the Fire?
Or, have tasted the Bag o' the Bee?
O, so white! O, so soft! O, so sweet is she!