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Phillip L. Bodey

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THE COMPLIMENT IN MILTON'S COMUS

by

Phillip L. Bodey

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Professor in Charge

Chairman of Department
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Abstract

John Milton's *Comus* is, despite much critical commentary claiming otherwise, a masque. As such, its emphasis is on the compliment, both direct and indirect, to the Earl of Bridgewater on the night of his inauguration as Lord President of Wales. The direct compliment to the Earl is rather homely, especially in comparison to the sycophantic compliments to King James in the masques of Ben Jonson. But Milton's indirect compliment is elaborate. First, the Earl is complimented through the implied contrast of him to the villainous tempter, Comus. This aspect of the compliment not only praises the Earl, but also exhorts him to find the ideal mean between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy in his ruling of Wales. Secondly, the Earl is indirectly complimented through the masque's treatment of Henry Lawes, the great Renaissance musician, represented by the character Lawes played in the masque production, the Attendant Spirit. Because the Spirit is presented in a highly favorable light, the Earl is complimented because he has used Lawes to educate his children. Thirdly, the Earl is indirectly complimented because three of his children are represented on-stage as fine young people; the characters that represent the children were played by them in the masque production. The treatment of the Earl's daughter is especially complimentary to the Earl, since
Chapter One
Comus and the Masque Genre

John Milton's A Mask: Presented at Ludlow Castle (hereafter referred to by its popular name, Comus) has been the subject of a considerable amount of scholarship, much of it misguided. Only recently have critics begun to appreciate Milton's real achievement in the work, an achievement peculiar to masques.

In the first chapter of this paper, we shall show why Comus is a masque, particularly by relating it to the court masques of Ben Jonson, the most important writer in the genre before Milton. As a result of this process, we shall be able to develop criteria for properly evaluating Comus, principally in terms of its compliment, the essential component of the genre. The rest of the paper will apply these criteria in an effort to expand scholars' growing appreciation of the complex compliment, frequently developed through elaborate imagery, that Comus delivered to the Earl of Bridgewater, under whose auspices the masque was performed on the night of the Earl's inauguration as Lord President of Wales.

Misguided criticism of Comus begins with Samuel Johnson, the first critic to deal extensively with Comus. Since Johnson becomes the basis for nearly all later
misunderstanding of Milton's masque, we must look at his response to the work:

A work more truly poetical is rarely found; allusions, images, descriptive epithets embellish almost every period with lavish decoration. . . [But] As a drama it is deficient. The action is not probable. . . so far as the action is merely human it ought to be reasonable, which can hardly be said of the two brothers, who, when their sister sinks with fatigue in a pathless wilderness, wander both away in search of berries too far to find their way back, and leave a helpless Lady to all the sadness and danger of solitude. . . . What deserves more reprehension is that the prologue spoken in the wild wood by the attendant Spirit is addressed to the audience; a mode of communication so contrary to the nature of dramatik representation that no precedents can support it.

Johnson's assessment continues in much the same vein for two pages. What is most noteworthy about this passage is Johnson's insistence on judging *Comus* as if a masque were a play. He does acknowledge that a masque allows for supernatural agents in the creation of which the author may "be given up to all the freaks of imagination. . . ." but that is his only concession.

Twentieth century critics know far more about the masque genre than Johnson did, yet greater knowledge has frequently led to no greater appreciation of Milton's achievement in *Comus*. No such appreciation can occur unless *Comus* is treated as truly fulfilling the requirements of the masque genre. But critics are all too often
reluctant to accept Milton's designation of *Comus*. Some are so reluctant that they define what they think they see in *Comus* and then create genres to fit the definitions. Thus, Eugene Haun calls it an example of a "substantive theater masque,"⁴ and J. B. Leishman identifies the genre of *Comus* as "a semi-dramatic poetical debate on a moral theme, with a pastoral and mythological setting affording much opportunity for beautiful description; self-sufficient as a piece of literature, but with just enough action, incident, spectacle, song and dance to make it enjoyable as a performance."⁵ This approach to the determination of the genre of *Comus* is a particularly extravagant critical exercise because it defines genres that are so narrow and exclusive that the normal value of genre designation, the understanding and evaluation of a given work through the comparison of it with similar works, is lost.

But a larger problem raised by such procedures as those of Haun, Leishman, and others lies in the implication that the masque genre should be very rigidly defined. Even a cursory exposure to masques roughly contemporary with *Comus* supports the claim of Stephen Orgel, perhaps the most astute present-day critic of the Jonsonian masque: "Its form. . . seems to be almost infinitely mutable."⁶ A look at Ben Jonson's masques will establish the mutability of the form that Orgel refers to. In establishing the nature of the masque, we do well to look at Jonson's works
because of his twenty-five years of experience as the principal creator of masques for the English court. Furthermore, critics have compiled a convincing array of indirect evidence that Milton knew Jonson's court productions well by the time of *Comus*.

Since Jonson's masques will often be used in this paper to provide a norm against which to evaluate *Comus*, we must pause briefly to look at the evidence that Milton knew Jonson's masques. Douglas Bush argues that Milton knew Jonson at least by the time of the writing of *Arcades* in 1632: "Milton's study of Jonson's masques... is very apparent in the plot, tone, and details of the *Arcades*."\(^7\) C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson are certain that Milton studied Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, performed in 1618, with its character of Comus, even though the work, while existing in manuscript form, was not printed until long after *Comus* was written.\(^8\) John G. Demaray shows extensive parallels between Jonson's *Hymenaei*, published in folio in 1616, and *Comus*.\(^9\) But the most persuasive evidence is Demaray's assertion that Milton's close friend, Henry Lawes, who collaborated on and acted in *Comus*, was apparently associated with the production of a number of Jonson's masques at court shortly before *Comus* was commissioned, and instructed Milton as to their nature.\(^10\) Lastly, one can hardly imagine the exceptionally scholarly Milton not thoroughly researching the masque genre before
he made his own contribution to it.

The Jonsonian masques that Milton undoubtedly studied amply demonstrate the mutability of the form, even though Jonson gave to the masque more structure than had anyone previously.11 The masque had been a kind of variety show performed to entertain and flatter the king or a member of the nobility.12 But Jonson sought, often successfully, to coordinate its various elements as a unified whole. Such was not an easy task with a genre using various kinds of dancing, music, elaborate spectacle, and poetry. Jonson elevated the poetry and subordinated the other elements to it to help unify his productions.13 Furthermore, he created a broad structure for the masque by dividing it into the antimasque, which he apparently invented,14 and the main masque. The antimasque consisted of a group of characters, usually played by professional actors, who in dancing and dialogue served as foils or sharp contrasts to the characters in the main masque. The main masque figures were played by both actors, who danced and sang, and courtiers, who displayed their elaborate costumes and also danced and sometimes sang; both groups of main masque figures were portrayed as quasi-mythological beings operating under the aegis of the ruler for whom the whole production was being presented.

Even when Jonson did abide by such a general structure for his masques (e.g., there is no antimasque in The Masque of Blackness), he was constantly creating variations
within that structure. Thus, *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*, by far the longest of his court masques, is composed almost entirely of an antimasque.\(^{15}\) *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* has two different groups of antimasque characters, and *Chloridia* has eight groups of antimasquers, each having its turn on-stage. What is more, Jonson's concept of what an antimasque should be composed of constantly changes: in *Oberon*, the antimasquers are poetry-spouting Satyrs who are given a place in the main masque; in *The Masque of Beauty*, the antimasquers are witches who must be banished before the main masque can begin; in *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*, the antimasquers are prose-speaking explicators of the meaning of the main masque; and in *Time Vindicated to Himself and to His Honors*, the antimasque consists of characters from Jonsonian low comedy.

Similarly, the nature of the main masque varies greatly throughout Jonson's career; Todd Furniss, the best critic of specific Jonsonian masques, catalogues four variations: main masques in the tradition of the Golden Age, those relating to pastoral traditions, those deriving from Roman triumphal ceremonies, and those which Furniss calls "combats of concepts."\(^{16}\) Obviously the masque genre allows the masque creator great latitude. Thus, such "genres" as the "substantive theater masque" should be abandoned as making unnecessarily fine distinctions.

So it seems reasonable to conclude that the real issue
concerning the genre of Comus is whether to follow Milton or Samuel Johnson. Despite her vast knowledge about the masque genre, Enid Welsford, in her monumental The Court Masque, follows Johnson.¹⁷ Welsford's argument that Comus is a play rests on her claim that it lacks two essentials of a masque. The first of these is masquers, the figures in the main masque who are members of the court or lesser nobles, who wear masks, perform singing and dancing, but not speaking or acting, parts in the performance of the work, and who at the high point of the performance are revealed, frequently in an elaborate setting, and presented to the audience before dancing the revels with members of the audience.¹⁸

Certainly the production of Comus used nobles in the main masque, i.e., that part of the performance which takes place after the antimasquers, Comus and his rout, are banished: the Lady was played by the Earl of Bridgewater's daughter, Alice, aged fifteen, and the two Brothers were played by his two sons, aged eleven and nine. An examination of the parts these three children played shows that Welsford's claim that they should not be called masquers is seriously flawed. Concerning the wearing of masks, whether or not Bridgewater's children wore them is impossible to determine from the text; Welsford apparently assumes that they wore none. And even if they did not wear masks, Welsford's failure to explore the significance of mask-
wearing in masques obscures the possibility that their absence is really only a further development of a tendency existing in the masque tradition before Milton. Welsford does show that the use of masques in court productions ultimately derives from ancient folk festivals in which the masks were worn to conceal the identity of the wearer so that he could misbehave. But as early as in the reign of Edward VI, in court productions, according to Orgel, "The basic identity of the courtier and his mask... was a constant and central idea for the masque." For Jonson, the mask is one of many devices to help attain "his ultimate goal in the masque form... to create a symbolic figure that would be an adequate representation of the courtier beneath the mask." Thus, by having his nobles play extensions of their own actual selves without wearing masks (if they did not), Milton obviously only furthers a line of development of the masque, a furthering that is easily justified in what we have seen was a highly flexible genre.

In any case, whether or not nobles playing parts in a production wear masks can hardly be considered the vital determinant of the genre of the production. The existence in Comus of other departures from the normal use of nobles in masques either can not be demonstrated or have important precedents in the court productions of Jonson. Thus, the fact that the Earl's children speak and act as well as
dance and sing is paralleled in Jonson's *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*, a parallel which Welsford herself acknowledges. But Welsford fails to note that the fact that the nobles in *Comus*, instead of being revealed at the high point of the performance, are part of the action virtually throughout the masque, even when the antimasquers are on-stage, is paralleled in Jonson's *Lovers Made Men*. In fact, Jonson's departure here from the normal use of masquers is far more radical than is Milton's. At the opening of *Lovers Made Men*, the nobles play false lovers and in this role actually dance the antimasque dance before they are converted to real lovers by Mercury and perform as courtiers usually do in Jonsonian masques. The imputation of falseness of any kind to the courtiers in a masque is highly unusual.

That Milton otherwise departed from the normal ways in which nobles were used in masques is not demonstrable. Welsford herself acknowledges that the Earl's children are presented to the audience (a stage-direction says, "This second Song presents them to their father and mother," who were, of course, prominent in the audience). How elaborate was the setting of this presentation is impossible to determine from the text, though the fact that before this direction the children are whisked off-stage and are not brought back until "The scene changes" (p. 112) allows for a considerable amount of ornamentation to accompany
the presentation. Welsford's complaint that the presenta-
tion is part of "a beautiful, but inessential, epilogue,"23
a judgment that is not necessarily accurate, relates not to
the issue of the genre of Comus, but to the degree of its
unity.

Whether or not Comus ended with revels, mixed dancing
involving masquers and members of the audience, is difficult
to determine from the text. That the children did dance is
indicated in the Attendant Spirit's song enjoining the
Country-Dancers from dancing: "Here be without duck or nod
Other trippings to be trod Of lighter toes..." (1. 961-3).
The description that follows of the dancing about to take
place sounds very much like a description of the revels in
a typical court masque: the dancing is referred to as
"such Court guise As Mercury did first devise With the
mincing Dryads On the Lawns and on the Leas" (1. 962-5).
The only relevant stage-direction merely says, "The dances
ended, the Spirit Epiloguizes" (p. 113). Leishman notes
the absurdity of considering these dances as other than
revels: "the more I try to imagine the spectacle of Lawes
[who played the Attendant Spirit] and the three children
alone on the stage and triumphing in victorious dance for
perhaps half an hour, while the audience sat and watched,
the more ludicrous and even bathetic it appears."24 And
the fact that the atmosphere of the revels is part of the
Epilogue25 (1. 984-5 portrays Spring, in the upper regions
through which the Attendant Spirit rises on his way to heaven, as reveling) tends to support the argument that revels must have taken place before the Epilogue, that the Epilogue is partially an explanation of the meaning of the revels.

Welsford's first basis for categorizing Comus as a play, not a masque, does not stand up under close examination. Her second basis is that "Milton has freed Comus... from the tone of compliment and gallantry which pervaded the Court masque." This claim serves even less successfully as a basis for disqualifying Comus as a masque. First, her analysis of Comus could not be further from the truth. The remaining three chapters of this paper will include a demonstration of the fact that the compliment in Comus extends throughout the masque; it should suffice for the moment to quote Leishman: "the whole plot... might in itself be regarded as an elaborate compliment." Secondly, while Welsford is accurate in stressing the importance of the compliment in the masque, she oversimplifies by treating it as a matter of tone and by failing to explain why the compliment is so important to the masque genre that its existence alone in a work almost suffices as a basis for categorizing the work as a masque, not a play.

The compliment, not only a matter of tone, is one of several elements available to the masque writer and used in varying proportions in different masques that create, during
the performance, a relationship between the spectators and the performers that is unique to the masque. Orgel has written the most about this relationship, defining the essence of the masque as follows: "It attempted from the beginning to breach the barrier between spectators and actors..." as a result, spectator and actor become virtual equals during the performance. Orgel's treatment of Jonson's masques shows that the revels were used to effect this unique relationship; thus, if we agree that the production of Comus included the revels, Welsford's basis for categorizing the work as a play is virtually destroyed.

That the compliment also establishes the unique masque relationship between performers and spectators can be seen by a brief look at one of Ben Jonson's compliments. At the end of Hymenaei, the figure of Reason tells the masquers to turn to King James, occupying the most prominent position in the audience, and "With grateful honors thank his grace That hath so glorified the place, And as in circle you depart Linked hand in hand so heart in heart May all those bodies still remain, Whom he, with so much sacred pain, No less hath bound within his realms Than they are with the ocean's streams." An obvious function of this compliment is to enable the performers to show proper obeisance before the King, who has not only created an occasion calling for a masque production (James had created
the occasion by sanctioning the marriage that the masque celebrates), but who has also financed the production (since masque productions usually made use of musicians, choreographers, stage architects, professional actors, and a poet or two, the cost was generally enormous). But in directing the attention of the masquers to the King, Reason acknowledges that the masque production does not reside in a world of its own, such as a play's self-contained stage-world, but that the masque-world expands outward to include the world of the King and his court. As Orgel says of one masque, through its compliment "the boundary between stage and audience has been removed." 30

Comus apparently contains two of the devices whereby the masque breaches the barrier between the spectator and the performer. But if anyone still doubts that Comus truly is a masque, an examination of the third masque device for creating the unique spectator-performer relationship should abolish all remaining skepticism. This third device might be called the occasional element, referred to briefly above. Masques occurred only on specific occasions such as holidays (e.g., Jonson's Christmas His Masque), the king's birthday (Jonson's Pan's Anniversary), or when the royal family visited the estate of a nobleman (Jonson's The Masque of Owls). The masque is designed to celebrate the specific occasion, and therefore each one is really suitable for performance only once. Jonson's The Gypsies Metamorphosed
is an interesting illustration of this fact: King James liked it so much that he wanted to see it twice after the original performance; as a result, there are three distinct versions of that masque. The occasional element in some masques consists simply of infrequent allusions to the occasion. But often the occasion determines the masque's device, i.e., its plot and theme. E.g., in Pan's Anniversary, since James's birthday was in early summer, James is identified as Pan, and the masque portrays Pan's effecting the reawakening of nature. This example should show that the occasional element helps bridge the spectator-performer barrier, especially by articulating in the production the reason that spectators and performers are celebrating.

*Comus* contains a considerable amount of the occasional element, the third device whereby masques bridge the spectator-performer barrier. Even Milton's title emphasizes the occasion, referring to both the place of the masque performance and the date, $^{31}$ expressed in terms of the liturgical calendar (the subtitle indicates that the performance took place on Michaelmas Night). The nature of the occasion is revealed by the Attendant Spirit who tells us of the Earl's "new-entrusted Scepter" (1. 36), an obvious reference to the inauguration of the Earl. That the Earl's coming to power promises good government in Wales is stated rather explicitly (1. 30-3). No doubt
the nature of the occasion also explains the numerous images throughout *Comus* that refer to the exercise of authority; e.g., even the night is personified as sitting "monarch yet in the mid sky" (1. 957). More subtly, the character of Comus must have strengthened the bond that held spectator and performer together at Ludlow Castle as they celebrated the Earl's inauguration. Michaelmas was traditionally the day when leaders of local councils in the area around Ludlow were replaced by newly-selected leaders. Around this transition in leadership grew the Michaelmas tradition of "the lawless hour":

The "hour" represents an extension of the symbolic moment when the reins of power were held by no one; it was the moment when the scepter or mace was suspended between its past holder and future possessor. During that period, then, . . . "anarchy" reigned; it was at an hour when it looked as if there were no government. Milton's Comus, as it were, wishes to extend the "lawless hour" privilege and its accompanying anarchy over the land; he wishes to convince the Lady that his "anarchy" is really "law."  

The occasion of the Earl's inauguration influences *Comus* in another way, and although it is unlikely that this contributed substantially to breaking down the spectator-performer barrier, it does illustrate that Milton paid extremely close attention to the occasion as he constructed his masque: William B. Hunter, Jr. argues that much of the content of *Comus*, e.g., the use of the Attendant Spirit,
Comus's attempt to lead a young person into sin, and even the Faith, Hope, and Chastity passage (1. 213-5) as a paraphrase of St. Paul's reference to faith, hope, and charity (I Corinthians, Chapter 13), derives from readings from The Book of Common Prayer which the spectators and performers would have heard at church on Michaelmas.33

But by far the most apparent way in which Comus refers to the occasion as a means of bridging the spectator-performer barrier is through Milton's experimental use of the masquers, explored above. Rather than having Bridgewater's children play the kind of quasi-mythological figures that Jonson's masquers usually played, Milton has his masquers play projections of their actual selves in the process of traveling to the inauguration, a vehicle for allegorically portraying the triumph over temptation. The literal plot of Comus thereby stages the process which the audience has just gone through, the coming to Ludlow for the Earl's inauguration.

The occasional element, the revels, and the compliment all serve to distinguish the masque from drama, but, as Welsford realized, the compliment is the most important of these; its importance derives from the fact that in Jonson's hands it becomes the unifying element in the masque (Orgel says that "occasional necessities" unify the masque,34 but his term really refers to the compliment more than to what we have referred to as the occasional element).
A brief look at Jonson's use of the compliment from *Hymenaei* that we have quoted above should illustrate how this unity is achieved. In the passage, James is praised primarily for uniting the kingdoms of England and Scotland: "heart in heart May all those bodies still remain Whom he, with so much sacred pain, No less hath bound within his realms, Than they are with the ocean's streams." This compliment may seem to be rather unrelated to a wedding masque, but Jonson creates a relationship between them through a metaphor; Scotland and England should be united as closely as are the masque dancers, emblematic of the married couple: "And as in circle you depart Linked hand in hand, so heart in heart May all those bodies still remain Whom he. . . hath bound within his realms. . . ." Jonson's method of unifying the masque on the basis of its compliment is figured in this use of metaphor: the compliment extends from direct statements to and about the king to indirect, usually only implied, statements. In *Hymenaei*, the compliment to James moves from direct statement to the metaphor, which implies that the unity of the married couple is effected by James, and from there, by implication, to all the other elements of the masque.

By virtue of the definition of the antimasque we have seen above, it readily lends itself to being included as part of the indirect compliment. The antimasque in its original form apparently served merely as entertainment;
as such, it was called the anticmasque. One of Jonson's
great contributions to the masque genre is that he turned
the anticmasque into the antimasque, which retains the
buffoonery and grotesquery of its forerunner, but which
becomes unified to the main masque by acting as foil to
it. In Hymenaei, the antimasque consists of eight dancers
who emerge from "a microcosm, or globe, figuring man" and
represent the passions and affections. As such, they
are disruptive, particularly because they threaten to
destroy the marriage that the masque is celebrating; but
Reason emerges just in time from the top of the microcosm
and restrains the antimasquers. The antimasquers thus help
to compliment James indirectly by indicating how disorderly
life can be without the kind of harmony James has imposed
on the British Isles. That this connection is legitimate
is indicated by the fact that the marriage itself, which
the antimasquers try to disrupt, is presided over by Juno,
whom Jonson treats as an anagram of unity. The parallels
between Reason, Juno, and James are obviously basic to
Hymenaei, all acting to compliment the King.

Given the centrality of the compliment to the masque,
Milton's unifying of Comus around the compliment to the
Earl of Bridgewater, a fact which we will establish
throughout the rest of this paper, unquestionably places
the work within the tradition of the Jonsonian masque. In
appreciating Milton's achievement in Comus, therefore,
considerations such as Samuel Johnson's complaint that it lacks dramatic probability, are irrelevant. Instead, we must respond to *Comus* in terms of its compliment. But two problems arise in considering a compliment in terms of artistic, specifically poetic, achievement.

The first of these problems is whether or not a masque compliment can bear the weight of richly imagistic poetry such as we inevitably expect from so great a poet as Milton. Robert Martin Adams thinks that the masque is not the proper genre for such poetry: "Simplicity wedded to elegance - this was the style at which the most successful writers of masques generally. . . aimed." Samuel Johnson did not see any inappropriateness in Milton's use of intricate imagery in *Comus*, but then he viewed *Comus* as a play, though masques and plays have much in common. An examination of Jonson's masques, in light of Adams's comment, however, might better resolve the problem, especially since Jonson was the most successful of all masque writers.

It is true that Jonson's language in his masques is usually simple, at least in the sense that it lacks complex imagery. But there is good reason for this lack of imagery in his masque poetry: Jonson, in collaboration with the great stage architect, Inigo Jones, conveyed much of the masque content visually, through the imagery of costumes and stage-machinery, both of which were very elaborate.
Orgel shows that the elaborateness did not exist merely for its entertainment value: "Allegory, symbol, and myth are the substance of masques. Courtiers are seen as heroes, kings as gods, actions as emblems, and meaning in this form is, in both the figurative and literal senses, dependent on how things appear. A viewer's understanding of the masque, moreover, depended on his ability to read what he saw." A simple example of the need for the viewer to "read" what is visually presented in the Jonsonian masque is seen in the costuming of Reason in Hymenaei; Jonson's stage-directions are as follows:

Hereat Reason, seated in the top of the globe (as in the brain, or highest part of man), figured in a venerable personage, her hair white and trailing to her waist, crowned with lights, her garments blue and semined with stars, girded unto her with a white bend filled with arithmetical figures, in one hand bearing a lamp, in the other a bright sword, descended.

Though Jonson explains in his printed text part of the meaning of this imagery, he expects his educated courtly audience to understand when it sees this figure that reason, because it is a product of the brain, seated at the highest point of the human body and thus closest to God, is the most important, most noble, human faculty; it is pure, having white hair, and, through its ability to comprehend the stars, allies itself with the mathematical order it finds there; reason is thus impowered, symbolized by the sword, to control the less noble parts of the human
organism, symbolized by Reason's descent.

Jonson's masques are weighted with such imagery. Sometimes the imagery is part of the poetry, resulting in a pattern of images that coalesce into one controlling image for the whole masque. Such is the case, e.g., in *The Golden Age restored*, in which, as Furniss thoroughly demonstrates, images relating to the qualities of gold in contrast to those of iron permeate the poetry.43 Admittedly though, the style of Jonson's poetry is always far less ornate than Milton's, whose style in *Comus* was probably, as critics have frequently noted, far more influenced by Shakespeare than by Jonson.44 But Jonson's allegories really are not very different from Milton's verbal imagery; as Rosemund Tuve has shown, "The odd but definite pleasure we take in the double reality of scenes and of persons in a masque is simply a variant upon the usual pleasure in metaphor, where two ways of seeing things to be 'true' are constantly and delightfully present, and yet seem as one."45

Thus, in the following chapters, the examination of the meaning and the effectiveness of the compliment in *Comus* will generally be based on an analysis of imagery. In fact, the richness of the poetry contributes to the compliment, since the existence of the richness is a result of the Earl's patronage. As Roger B. Wilkenfeld says of *Comus*, "The power of the masque ultimately derives from the closely textured, dramatically compact verbal
design which provides weight, support, and energy for the serious ends of the poem."

The second problem arising from a consideration of the artistic merit of the masque compliment is whether or not any serious purpose can be served by even the most poetic of compliments. The direct compliment of King James in *Hymenaei* illustrates the problem: the King is compared not only to the sea, which binds England and Scotland together, but also to God, perhaps more specifically to Christ, in the reference to James's "sacred pain."

Actually, as sycophantic as this passage from *Hymenaei* is, compared with those in many of Jonson's other masques, it is very restrained. Ernest William Talbert argues that such compliments are not really sycophantic, but are the means whereby "Jonson meant to raise his courtly entertainments to a level that would make them worthy of the consideration of posterity." Jonson apparently believed that his compliments really served a didactic purpose, an argument closely resembling that of Francis Bacon relative to panegyrics: "by telling men, what they are, they represent to them, what they should be." And John C. Meagher says that Jonson's compliments describe royalty and nobility in a way "so idealized... as to be almost unrecognizable historically. But the accuracy of historical correspondence is essentially irrelevant. Their ideal images... are worthy of imitation, by [those complimented]
themselves as well as others." Nevertheless, in Jonson's masques it is difficult to distinguish between the didactic and the sycophantic.

Our study of the relationship between Comus and the masque genre has revealed bases for genuinely appreciating Milton's achievement in his masque: not only should we examine Comus in terms of how the poetry helps create a complex compliment of the Earl of Bridgewater, but perhaps even more importantly we should examine the compliment in terms of how well it unifies the masque, whether or not it avoids the sycophantic, and how well it lends itself to a didactic purpose. The remainder of this paper will consist of just such an examination.
Chapter Two

The Earl of Bridgewater

In examining the device of the compliment in *Comus*, the obvious place to start is with the direct compliment to the Earl of Bridgewater, particularly as it relates to his inauguration as Lord President of Wales. The direct compliment is made near the beginning and again near the end of the masque. In his opening address to the audience, the Attendant Spirit says:

Neptune, besides the sway
Of every salt Flood and each ebbing Stream,
Took in by lot 'twixt high and nether Jove
Imperial rule of all the Sea-girt Isles
That like to rich and various gems inlay
The unadorned bosom of the Deep;
Which he to grace his tributary gods
By course commits to several government,
And gives them leave to wear their Sapphire crowns,
And wield their little tridents; but this Isle,
The greatest and the best of all the main,
He quarters to his blue-hair'd deities;
And all this tract that fronts the falling Sun
A noble peer of mickle trust and power
Has in his charge, with temper'd awe to guide
An old and haughty Nation proud in Arms;
Where his fair offspring nurs't in Princely lore,
Are coming to attend their Father's state
And new-entrusted Scepter.

(1. 18-36)

In a variation of the above passage, the Attendant Spirit says to the Earl's three children, after the Lady is freed from the spell of Comus, the following:

Let us fly this cursed place, . . .
Till we come to holier ground.
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide,
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Father's residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wish't presence, and beside
All the Swains that there abide,
With Jigs and rural dance resort.

These passages seem hardly to contain much of a compliment, especially when compared with even the relatively simple direct compliment of James I in *Hymenaei*; Milton's lines clearly avoid the sycophantic but are they sufficiently flattering for the occasion? They tell us straightforwardly that the Earl has much authority, that he respects the territory that he is to rule (the first passage actually heaps far more praise on Wales than on the Earl), that he has many friends who have wanted him to become Lord President, and that he provides good entertainment. All of this is rather homely, far more homely than is Jonson's treatment of even the nobles in his masques as god-like creatures. The Earl's estate is called "holier ground," but what place would not be when compared to Comus's "cursed place"? There is a hint that the local inhabitants are happy that the Earl is now their ruler, since "all" of them have come to the celebration; but perhaps they all turn out at any opportunity for a good time. A major part of this compliment is the implication that the Earl is a great man because he has been chosen to rule over so important a territory as Wales. Maybe the homeliness of
the compliment is meant to reflect humility in the Earl.

Actually, the most important phase of the direct compliment has been pointed out by Franklin R. Baruch: most of the first speech establishes a hierarchy of leadership extending from God (as Jove) through Neptune to the tributary gods and finally to the Earl; thus, the Earl's "rule is made part of the harmoniously moving universe itself."¹ In this respect, the compliment follows the movement we have seen in Jonson's compliments from the real to the ideal, from the descriptive to the didactic. But even this phase of the compliment is modest considering that Jonson conveys the idea that James I rules in concert with the harmony of the universe by equating him with the Olympians, not by making him subservient to them (as we have seen, James is Pan in Pan's Anniversary). What is striking about Milton's outline of the hierarchy of leadership is not its manner of praising the Earl, but rather its omission of one step of the hierarchy that one would expect to see in Renaissance England: there is no mention that the Earl's authority is subordinated to that of the king. Perhaps this omission indicates that Milton sought deliberately to avoid the sycophantic: had he mentioned the king at all in a masque, how could he have tactfully avoided at least a measure of the Jonsonian hyperbolic compliment? (Of course, the omission may have derived from the beginnings of republican sentiment in Milton, a
possibility supported by the Lady's comment that courtesy is not to be found in prince's palaces - 1. 321-6.) That such avoidance of the sycophantic is indeed a principle of Comus is indicated by the fact that the masque villain, Comus, is a flatterer; in fact, his flattery of the Earl's sons sounds distinctly like a typically Jonsonian direct compliment: "Their port was more than human, as they stood; I took it for a faëry vision Of some gay creatures of the element That in the colors of the Rainbow live And play i' th' plighted clouds" (1. 297-301). The fact that Comus delivers this compliment in the hope of receiving the favors of the Lady seems to indicted the motivation behind the traditional masque compliment.

Though Milton avoids the sycophantic, he does not thereby diminish the ability of the masque to deliver a compliment replete with the didactic. He achieves this effect by relying even more on the indirect compliment than did Jonson. Much of Milton's indirect compliment is based on the use of Jonson's most important contribution to the masque, the antimasque, which, as we have seen in Hymenaei, implies that whatever vices or defects are characteristic of the antimasque figures are counterbalanced by virtues in the ruler. That such is Milton's technique is indicated through imagery in the direct compliment to the Earl: the description of the territory under his authority as fronting "the falling Sun" (1. 30) not only indicates that the
territory is the western part of England, Wales, but also prepares us symbolically for the antimasque by implying that there exists a struggle between the forces of light and of darkness. This image acts as an implied compliment to Bridgewater and serves a didactic purpose ideally suited to the masque occasion: the existence of such a struggle is an indication of the need for good government, presumably to be provided by the Earl, who, in the immediately preceding lines, which depict the hierarchy of leadership, is linked with the forces of good. By virtue of this implied struggle, aspects of the direct compliment become more meaningful. E.g., relative to the passage in which the Attendant Spirit speaks of the Earl's estate as "holier ground" and speaks of the Earl as "Father" (1. 947), William G. Madsen argues that Milton is really identifying the Earl very closely with God. Thus, Milton's indirection creates a very high compliment to the Earl, as warranted by the occasion, while avoiding the sycophantic.

Given Milton's method of indirection, to explore the concept of good government as part of the didactic aspect of the compliment, Milton must indicate that the forces of evil maintain a government. In fact, Milton develops in the world of the antimasque the existence of a government, under the leadership of Comus, which parallels good government in form but is really a parody of it. In so doing, Milton develops an antimasque world that is far more useful
for didactic purposes than are any of Jonson's antimasques, particularly because of the lush imagery of *Comus*.

That bad government in *Comus* formally parallels good government is shown by the fact that the hierarchy of leadership which establishes the Earl's authority finds its counterpart in a hierarchy leading ultimately to Comus. Thus, in the first six lines of the first direct compliment, the Attendant Spirit describes the distribution of power in the universe among the three brother gods, Jove, Neptune, and Pluto. The Spirit refers to the last of the brothers as "nether Jove," the repetition of *Jove* indicating that Pluto in some respects parallels Jove, and the introduction of depth associated with Pluto and, by implication, of height with Jove (height and depth become a major pattern of images throughout the masque) indicating that Pluto is in some respects an inversion of Jove. That Neptune is named and Pluto is not emphasizes the difference in their relationship with Jove: Neptune's rule, as the passage describing the hierarchy of leadership leading to the Earl makes quite clear, is an extension of the authority of Jove, but in *Comus*, Pluto's rule is a parody of Jove's.

Pluto's parody of the rule of Jove is developed further later in the masque. Harry F. Robins explains Comus's reference to the Deep (1. 732-6), a term obviously relating to the height-depth imagery of the masque, as "the realm of Pluto" and shows us that the Attendant Spirit
identifies this realm with hell when he speaks of "rifted Rocks whose entrance leads to hell. . ." (1. 518). Robins says that the inhabitants of the Deep are "the evil, hell-dwelling spirits, demons, and monsters of classical mythology." When Comus later says that "th' unsought diamonds Would so emblaze the forehead of the Deep, And so bestud with Stars, that they below would grow inur'd to light. . ." (1. 732-5), he gives an indication that the geography of hell parallels that of the universe ruled over by Jove and Neptune. Robins explains:

If the earth is a hollow sphere, a shell, and light from diamonds in the ground can be seen from the center of the sphere, where must the diamonds be located? . . .they must be located on the inner surface of the shell of the sphere. This inner surface, therefore, is "the forehead of the Deep." . . .To an observer situated in the interior of a hollow sphere, diamonds jutting from the inner surface would have not only the appearance but also the position of stars as dwellers on the earth see them.

That the passage indicates that Pluto's realm is a parody, not a parallel, of Jove's is shown by the fact that Pluto's stars are diamonds. Since diamonds do not project their own light, Pluto's realm is symbolically associated, as has already been implied, with the forces of darkness. Moreover, in contrast to the indication in the opening of Comus that stars house "aerial Spirits" (1. 1-4), diamonds are lifeless, spiritless matter, symbolizing that Pluto's realm is
spiritedally dead.

That Comus is clearly identified with a hierarchy of leadership headed by Pluto is certain. First, several of the allusions to hell mentioned above are made by Comus, indicating that he knows the region well. His natural tendency is to relate his own experiences to events in hell; e.g., when he feels fear, he compares it with the times when "the wrath of Jove Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus To some of Saturn's crew" (1. 803-5). Comus is several times associated with the Biblical symbol, the snake, of the king of hell, Satan; Comus himself says that "Baited with reasons not un plausible, [1] Wind me into the easy-hearted man, And hug him into snares" (1. 162-4), and we are told that the chair in his palace in which he seats the Lady, is "venom'd" (1. 915). But nowhere in the masque do we find Comus referring directly to Pluto; instead, Comus reveals his allegiance to Cotytto and then to Hecate (1. 128-36). If we agree with J. W. Saunders that Comus is "in fealty bound to Cotytto and Hecate. . . .,"7 then it seems clear that the world of the antimasque truly contains a hierarchy of leadership. Obviously, the hierarchy of leadership in the antimasque world is so distasteful that the compliment to Bridgewater by virtue of his association with the hierarchy headed by Jove is intensified.

Deriving his "authority" from the hierarchy of leadership headed by Jove, Comus follows Pluto's lead.
Thus, as Pluto's realm substitutes diamonds for stars, Comus thinks of himself in terms of light that is superior to that of the stars: "We that are of purer fire Imitate the Starry Choir..." (1. 111-2). Comus's desire to proclaim himself a creature of the light leads to the even more hyperbolic comparison of himself to Apollo (1. 659-62). But Comus succeeds in creating only cheap imitations of natural light. Thus, at one point in the masque, Comus throws into the air "dazzling spells" (1. 154), apparently some substance, perhaps, as dazzling implies, a tinsel-like confetti, which would simulate the specks of light that stars seem to be in the night sky. Comus is responsible for other cheap imitations; we are told in a stage-direction that Comus's followers wear "glistering" apparel (p. 92) and that they carry torches, which in the performance may have been very smokey, considering the fact that Comus calls them a "secret flame" (1. 129). In fact, not only are Comus's imitations of natural light imperfect, but they are also deceptive. E.g., Comus's dazzling spells have "the power to cheat the eye with blear illusion;" since the primary meaning of blear is "dimmed," Comus pretends to create light while he really creates darkness. This mocking of light seems to indicate that Comus hates it. Milton even tells us that Comus has chosen to live in an especially dark region, having left the open fields of sunny Southern Europe for the darkest imaginable forest
in Wales: Comus, "ripe and frolic of his full grown age, Roving the Celtic [i.e., French] and Iberian fields, At last betakes him to this ominous Wood, ... in thick shelter of black shades imbow'r'd. . ." (1. 59-63). And Madsen speaks of Comus's "saucy irreverence" for the sun in referring to "the telltale Sun" (1. 141). Appropriately, as if by his magic, no starlight shines in his forest until Comus is routed, at which point "the Stars grow high. . ." (1. 956). In fact, when Comus is there, the forest is doubly dark, with its "double night of darkness and of shades. . ." (1. 335). Interestingly, in his rejection of the sun, Comus actually rejects his own heritage, since his mother is "...Circe The daughter of the Sun" (1. 50-1). The didactic content of the indirect compliment to the Earl inherent in the antimasque includes a rejection of governing by concealment and deception.

One other aspect of Comus's rule over his followers relates to one of the dominant themes in Milton's poetry, the theme of freedom. Comus's spell-throwing is virtually an emblem of his method of governing his subjects: he makes glittering promises that prove to be illusory. Specifically, he promises total freedom, anarchy; this promise of anarchy is found in his invitation to his followers to dance:

Meanwhile welcome Joy and Feast, 
Midnight shout and revelry, 
Tipsy dance and Jollity.
Braid your Locks with rosy Twine  
Dropping odors, dropping Wine.  
Rigor now is gone to bed,  
And Advice with scrupulous head,  
Strict Age, and sour Severity,  
With their grave Saws in slumber lie.  

(1. 101-10)

This speech is soon followed by the antimasque dance; because it was in Jonson's masques a kind of free-form dance (in contrast, the main masque dances were highly patterned, sometimes apparently even spelling words or forming symbolic geometric patterns), most critics interpret it as verifying Comus's claim that he institutes anarchy. But Tuve suggests that the dance was "not a cavorting, but... aped courtliness." More importantly, Wilkenfeld points out that the dance shows Comus's tyrannical control over the dancers, since he manipulates exactly when their dancing begins and when it ends (1. 143-5), a fact symbolized by the cordial in Comus's cup, which "dances in his crystal bounds" (1. 673). Wilkenfeld elaborates: "life with Comus is a life of imprisonment. Despite their apparent freedom of movement, the anti-masquers are deeply constrained. ... The anti-masquers constitute a herd. ... Their dance is the dance of slaves. They dance only at Comus's call." As animal-headed creatures, they are more easily manipulated than are human beings; in keeping with their animal heads, Comus opens to his followers a world that is essentially the enclosure of an animal pen, "a sensual sty" (1. 77). And
to get a person to follow him into this sty, Comus must "hug him into snares" (1. 164), feigning love while using force. In fact, as Baruch shows, Comus thinks of people, animals, all of nature in terms of a gross materialism: referring to the concept of the Chain of Being, central to Milton's thinking, Comus reveals that he himself thinks that "From stones to man, the scale is present - but there is no spirit, no soul. . . . Comus's powers can operate only when things of the spirit are suppressed." Comus's metaphysical materialism is clearly seen in his speaking of the Lady's beauty as "workmanship" (1. 747). This metaphysical materialism readily leads to economic materialism, illustrated by other comments about the Lady's beauty: "Beauty is nature's coin, must not be hoarded, But must be current. . . ." (1. 739-40). Associated with Comus's materialistic denial of spirit are images of death: "His references to the Wood are filled with death, not life," says Terry Kidner Kohn, who emphasizes Comus's references to shrouds (1. 147) and the raven (1. 251-2), the bird of death. And D. M. Rosenberg speaks of the Lady's entrapment in Comus's chair as a "ritual. . . temporary death. . . ." Comus's denial of freedom to his followers, his suppression of their spirit deriving from his economic and metaphysical materialism, is shown in images of confinement and imprisonment throughout the masque. But the most
thorough treatment of his denial of freedom occurs in the scene of Comus's attempt to enlist the Lady as one of his followers. Milton imbues this scene with irony, much of which has been overlooked by critics. Most of them see the scene as an expression of the illicit nature of Comus's sexual behavior, but such critics ignore the fact that Comus, moved by the Lady's Song to Echo, says, "she shall be my Queen" (1. 265). Of course, if Comus were to marry the Lady, the marriage would be sanctified by the forces of darkness under which Comus serves, which supports the charge that his sexual advances to the Lady are illicit. But the chief irony in the scene is its illustration of the fact that the closer one gets to Comus, the less freedom one has. Comus's subjects are allowed to dance, but the Lady is immobilized in the enchanted chair. This chair is the seat of Comus's power, i.e., his throne, but it is a parody of true thrones, such as those of "the enthron'd gods on Sainted seats" (1. 11), since it traps the Lady "In stony fetters fixt and motionless. . ." (1. 819). Actually, the only other fixture of Comus's "kingship" can also be used to fetter the Lady; Comus says of his wand, which Purvis E. Boyette calls "the inversion of Bridgewater's scepter," the following: "if I but wave this wand, Your nerves are all chain'd up in Alabaster, And you a statue. . ." (1. 659-67). Comus's fixtures of office are symbolic of his tyranny.
Comus's tyranny extends beyond mere control of the body. Thus, his desire to make the Lady his wife is an expression of more than a desire to possess her sexually. Because of his magic wand, Comus can apparently do with the Lady's body whatever he wants. What Comus really wants is control over her mind; thus, he tries to persuade her to consent to his advances. This attempted "rape of the mind" makes the significance of the animal heads on his subjects abundantly clear.

By seeking the Lady's consent, Comus acknowledges that his materialism is an insufficient view of the universe, since materialistic philosophies are almost bound to deny the existence of free will. This acknowledgment is only one of a number of indications that Comus's approach to leadership is not only unjust to his followers but also unfulfilling for Comus. E.g., his dissatisfaction is shown in his insistent desire to increase the size of his following, "Off'ring to every weary Traveller His orient liquor in a Crystal Glass. . ." (1. 64-5). Apparently, he is desperately seeking an emotional bond with others, though he does not know how to achieve it; accordingly, he desires "mutual. . . bliss" with the Lady (1. 741). John T. Shawcross conjectures on the basis of this desire that Comus's life with his herd is unfulfilling even sexually: Shawcross suggests that the "gums of glutinous heat" (1. 916) smeared on the seat under the Lady is semen.
resulting from Comus's masturbation. But the clearest indication that Comus cannot possibly be fulfilled is revealed by the Attendant Spirit: Comus is not free, even though he has total control over his subjects, but is "Immur'd in cypress shades" (1. 521). He indicates his own recognition that he is not free by running away from his own palace when two little boys rush into it.

Milton's use of the antimasque as a means of indirectly complimenting the Earl of Bridgewater is brilliant: the antimasque is clearly unified, through a fascinating network of images, with the direct compliment to the Earl, and through the figure of Comus, Milton delivers an elaborate, but not sycophantic, compliment. But the most impressive aspect of the use of the antimasque is the profundity of didacticism that attaches to the compliment. Particularly profound is the delineation of the close relationship between anarchy and tyranny and of the isolation that comes to both tyrant and subject.

We should not conclude that Milton's indirect compliment to the Earl is found only in the antimasque. The following chapters will examine other means by which Milton unfolds his compliment.
Chapter Three

Henry Lawes

One element of *Comus* that needs to be considered in relation to the compliment to Bridgewater is the figure of the Attendant Spirit, played by Henry Lawes. Milton's use of the character is rather unusual. Several passages in the masque were apparently designed so that the audience would be aware not only of the portrayal of the Spirit, but also of the fact that Lawes was the one playing the role. A look at one of these passages is necessary; for example, the Spirit says the following in his opening speech:

> But first I must put off
> These my sky robes spun out of Iris' Woof,
> And take the Weeds and likeness of a Swain
> That to the service of this house belongs,
> Who with his soft Pipe and smooth-dittied Song
> Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
> And hush the waving Woods, nor of less faith,
> And in this office of his Mountain watch
> Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid
> Of this occasion.

(1. 82-91)

The response of the audience to this passage must have been very complex. Lawes was playing what critics have interpreted as either a Platonic daemon\(^1\) or a Christian angel.\(^2\) On-stage, this being assumes the role of a character whose marvelous musical talent, service in the Earl's household, and care for the Earl's children (we soon enough learn that such is the Spirit's meaning in his reference to "the occasion") are suggestive of Lawes's own situation. But
the character played by the Spirit is portrayed in terms of both the pastoral tradition, from which comes his name, Thyrsis, and the myth of Orpheus. Part of the audience's response must have been the recognition that the passage is highly flattering to Lawes, since he is identified with virtually divine beings, Orpheus and the Attendant Spirit. One might well wonder if such flattery so directed is not improper in a masque, which exists to flatter royalty or nobility.

Milton, in complimenting Lawes, does not commit any impropriety because the compliment, technically (and technicalities are important at courts and palaces), is a direct statement to, as well as about, its subject, who is seated in the audience. Obviously, Milton's praise of Lawes compliments the musician indirectly, since Lawes, who was not in the audience nor present in his own person, but was on-stage playing a character, could not be spoken to directly. Furthermore, Milton apparently pretends to obscure Lawes's identity (that Milton is pretending is shown by the fact that, as we have seen, he elsewhere makes it clear that statements made about the character played by Lawes are really statements about Lawes himself); the "obscuring" results from Lawes's playing the part of a character, the Attendant Spirit, who plays a character, Thyrsis.

In fact, Milton's indirect compliment to Lawes is not
without precedent. In Ben Jonson's court productions, musicians like Alfonso Ferrabosco, who wrote the score for and played instruments in some of the productions, are frequently praised. E.g., in Oberon, the musicians are dressed as fays and are on-stage with the masquers as members of the nation of fays, ruled over by Oberon, King of the Fairies, i.e., Prince Henry. Associated thus with the masquers, though always subordinated to them, the musicians share in the indirect compliment Jonson delivers to the courtiers in his masques. John Meagher defines the nature of this indirect compliment: "the masquers are representative of the earthly order and either have an encounter with a higher power or are represented as performing under its aegis - [in either case, the masquers are] excellently suited for the depiction of the penetration of the human order by a transcendent order."¹

There are, however, two major differences between Jonson's indirect compliment to his musicians and Milton's to Henry Lawes. First, Jonson treats his musicians as vague abstractions so that he is really praising music, not any particular musician; in contrast, Milton praises Henry Lawes as an individual. Secondly, Jonson's direct compliment to the king is so elaborate that all indirect compliments to others are clearly secondary. In contrast, Milton's direct compliment to Bridgewater is homely; therefore, an elaborate indirect compliment to Lawes can in a
real, rather than merely technical, sense compete with the compliment to the Earl. Milton at least partially avoids this real impropriety because the indirect compliment to Lawes can be subsumed as part of the compliment to the Earl, whereas the opposite is not true: the Earl is complimented for being wise enough to choose Lawes to serve at Ludlow and educate the three children. However, some readers of *Comus* may feel that this link between the two compliments is not explicit enough to suggest that the compliment to Lawes should be subsumed as part of that to the Earl, particularly since the Attendant Spirit is the servant of God, not of Bridgewater, though Thyrsis "to the service of this [the Earl's] house belongs" (1. 86).

Milton's use of Lawes contributes significantly to the construction of a compliment to the Earl which measures up to the criteria we have established to evaluate masque compliments. First, to the extent that Milton avoids real impropriety, *Comus* is unified into one great compliment to the Earl. Secondly, by indirectly complimenting Bridgewater through the indirect compliment to Lawes, Milton clearly avoids the sycophantic. Furthermore, his use of Lawes informs the compliment to the Earl with considerable didactic content. The essence of this content is that more important than all the advisors, attendants, and other hangers-on to rulers are great artists because, through their art, as revealed in the passage quoted above
in which Thyrsis calms the winds, they show that man can establish and maintain order in the sublunary world. Implicit in the comparison of Lawes to Orpheus is the message that rulers should be especially wary of those given to riotous behavior, since such were those, the Maenades or Bacchantes, who killed and dismembered Orpheus.

The emphasis in *Comus*, though, is not on the vulnerability of the musician but on the power of music. Milton emphasizes the power of Lawes's music by repeating his comparison of Thyrsis with Orpheus: Thyrsis's "artful strains have oft delay'd The huddling brook to hear his madrigal, And sweeten'd every musk rose of the dale" (1. 494-6). However, Milton would never merely repeat himself; in this passage, the Orphic music takes the form of a love-song, implying that the production of music is a labor of love. It is no wonder that music has the power to establish order. But the power of music derives principally from its association with the heavenly music of the spheres, what the Attendant Spirit calls "the Sphery chime" (1. 1021). Earthly music emulates the music of the spheres, enabling man to sample the serenity of heaven. That music necessarily contains a spark of heaven is indicated by the fact that the singing even of villains like Circe and the sirens "would take the prison'd soul, And lap it in Elysium. . ." (1. 256-7). That Lawes's music is especially divine is shown by his playing the role of the Attendant
Spirit. Milton thus indicates that the comparisons of Lawes-as-Attendant-Spirit-as-Thyrsis with Orpheus are more than empty hyperbole: Milton wants us to believe that there is literally more than human power in music which can delay "The huddling brook," just as he insists throughout his poetry that the divinely-inspired poet has powers more than human. No wonder that Milton had only Lawes, among those complimented in the masque, play a character who manifests heavenly powers on-stage; in Jonson's masques, the king, all the courtiers in the production, some of the actors, and sometimes the musicians are quasi-divine figures.

Music in Comus not only has the power to establish and maintain order; music is a symbol of order. In fact, throughout Milton's poetry, music symbolizes harmony, no surprise in an age in which the use of chords was a new invention. There is a close connection between musical harmony and social harmony, at least if, as often during a masque production, singing is involved: the creation of sung chords requires the cooperation of several musicians. Singing occupies an especially important place in Comus. Some critics believe that a considerable portion of the production of Comus was sung, possibly far more than just those passages designated in the texts as songs. Singing is also important to the plot of Comus: it is a means whereby people communicate with each other, as when the
Lady seeks out her brothers with the Echo Song; her singing attracts Comus and leads to the crisis in the masque; and singing brings about the freeing of the Lady from Comus's spell, since the Spirit invokes Sabrina, whose magic reverses the spell, with "warbled Song" (1. 854). The social harmony resulting from singing is paralleled in the masque whenever there is dancing, for dancing is almost always coordinated with music. In summary, Lawes, as collaborator in the creation of Comus, as singer in the production, and in his role as Thyrsis, brings music and dancing to Ludlow Castle, thereby creating an example for, and actually contributing to, the Earl's maintenance of social order.

But the compliment to Lawes does not refer to him only as a musician: Comus portrays the Attendant Spirit as a shepherd-priest, indicating that Lawes apparently felt great concern for the Earl's children. That the Attendant Spirit is shepherd-like is shown by the fact that Thyrsis derives from the pastoral tradition and that the Spirit thinks of the Lady as a lost sheep (1. 497-9). That the Spirit can also be thought of as a priest derives from interpreting his donning of the clothing of Thyrsis as a mythological type of the incarnation of Christ.

But by far the most complex aspect of the compliment to Lawes remains to be discussed. This discussion arises out of a consideration of a problem deriving from the
nature of the compliment to Lawes already discussed: if Lawes is a musician of Orphic power and a shepherd-priest from on-high, why does he act seemingly against the best interests of the children who are in his care? He searches for the two Brothers instead of rescuing the Lady himself from Comus; he lags behind the two small boys instead of helping them as they break in on Comus's attempted seduction, thereby enabling Comus to escape; and the Spirit fetches Sabrina to free the Lady from Comus's spell instead of freeing her himself. Part of the solution to this problem derives from the nature of the Spirit's task as defined by Jove: he is to defend and guard the Earl's children because they are young (1. 40-2), but his task is not to shelter them from reality. This limitation enables Milton to compliment Lawes as the teacher of the Earl's children, since the Spirit is a teacher of the children rather than manipulator of their fate. Baruch says that the Spirit's apparent failures are really a teaching method: "As a good Renaissance teacher, he wants practical experience to help the process of learning succeed." This technique not only enhances the effectiveness of the Spirit's teaching, but by letting the children act on their own, the Spirit acts in accordance with Milton's concept of freedom we have discussed in the second chapter.

Coming from the realm of light (1. 1-2), the Attendant
Spirit is superbly qualified to bring enlightenment to the children; his doing so considerably expands the didactic content of the compliment in *Comus*. Appropriately, the Spirit ends the masque with a summary of the lesson inherent in the practical experience to which he has exposed the children:  

> "Mortals that would follow me [back to the heavens], Love virtue, she alone is free, She can teach ye how to climb Higher than the Sphery chime; Or if Virtue feeble were, Heav'n itself would stoop to her" (1. 1018-23).

This exhortation is a development of the concept explored in the second chapter of this paper that freedom is not anarchy. We saw that those who pursue anarchy inevitably subject themselves to tyranny; in the Attendant Spirit's lesson, we see another side of the same paradox: true freedom results from choosing to adhere to the dictates of virtue.  

It should be obvious that the lesson taught by Lawes-as-Attendant-Spirit supports the Earl's maintenance of social order in Wales.

A detail of the lesson not included in the Attendant Spirit's summary is a definition of what virtue is. Perhaps the Spirit feels no need to summarize the definition because he presented it very effectively in the actual lesson by using a visual aid, haemony. As the Spirit prepares the two Brothers to free the Lady, he gives them "a small, unsightly root... of divine effect" (1. 630-1) to protect them from Comus's enchantment. Much scholarship
has been devoted to an explication of the symbolic significance of this root. A large number of critics, regardless of their often acrimonious disagreements concerning other aspects of Comus, agree in interpreting haemony as an expression of the Socratic dictum that virtue is knowledge. (There is no need to get side-tracked here into a discussion of divergent interpretations, especially since Adams effectively disposes of them.) Their methods of arriving at this conclusion are varied. John M. Steadman uses etymology, claiming that haemony means "skilful," in the sense that the word pertains to "wisdom, prudence, knowledge, or instruction." Consequently, the Spirit says that the plant enables him to see through the illusory spells cast by Comus (1. 638-45). Steadman also treats the physical description of the plant: "The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it. But in another Country, . . . Bore a bright golden flow'r, but not in this soil. . . ." (1. 631-3). This description may, says Steadman, "be emblematic of St. Paul's antithesis between the partial and obscure knowledge attainable on earth and its perfection in heaven. . . ." referring to the passage in I Corinthians, Chapter 13 (a chapter that, we have seen earlier, has otherwise influenced Comus) in which Paul says, "Now I see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." Using source studies, Jayne identifies the plant specifically as philosophic wisdom. And Adams, on the basis of Milton's
comparison of haemony to moly (l. 636-7), a protective
plant in the Circe myth, specifies this philosophic wisdom
as temperance; thus, the haemony protects the Brothers,
and, in a sense, the Lady (since Comus is forced to flee in
the middle of his attempted seduction) from Comus's carnal-
ity. (Incidentally, Adams also links haemony to Lawes by
suggesting that Milton may have used the term as a pun on
harmony; Adams identifies it with the Lady by suggesting
that the term is a pun on "hymen, guardian of virginity."

It is very fitting that Lawes, a teacher, give
haemony to the Brothers. However, the Attendant Spirit's
summary of his lesson in the final lines of the masque
indicates that man's pursuit of virtue (i.e., temperance)
is not necessarily sufficiently powerful to overcome the
forces of evil, which have supernatural power in Comus;
but the Spirit assures his students that if virtue fails,
"Heav'n itself would stoop to her." This comment obviously
has profound metaphysical and religious implications, and
since the line between the ethical and the metaphysical is
difficult to draw, a consideration of these implications is
necessary if we are to understand Milton's use of compli-
ment as a moral tool. Furthermore, Milton, unlike Jonson,
includes the metaphysical as part of the didactic content
of the masque compliment; the didactic content of Jonson's
masques is essentially restricted to the ethical. Milton's
development of the didactic potential of the compliment is
a result of the fact that Milton was a more profound thinker than Jonson.

A. S. P. Woodhouse interprets the Spirit's comment as a reference to the Christian concept of the order of grace, as distinguished from the order of nature. Woodhouse defines the two as follows:

To the realm of nature belongs not only the whole physical world, but also man himself considered simply as a denizen of that world. The rule of its government is expressed not only in the physical laws of nature, but in natural ethics. . . ., and even in natural, as opposed to revealed, religion. This order is apprehended in experience and interpreted by reason; and it has its own wisdom, for upon the simple law of nature, by experience and reason, is erected the ethical system of a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Cicero. . . . To the order of grace belongs man in his character of supernatural being, with all that concerns his salvation and the two dispensations, the old and the new. The rule of its government is the revealed Law of God, received and interpreted by faith, which includes a special kind of experience, called religious experience.

The Attendant Spirit's final comment, then, indicates that if human beings following a temperate life according to the dictates of natural law do not thereby overcome evil, which has more than human power, then God will use the realm of grace to aid these human beings.

This explanation of the Attendant Spirit's summary of the didactic content of Comus aids our understanding of the
later events of the masque considerably. We have seen that the Brothers and the Lady are protected from Comus's carnality by haemony, i.e., wisdom in the form of temperance. But while the Brothers succeed in routing Comus, they fail to release the Lady from his spell, not through culpability but through circumstances apparently beyond their control. Milton is very vague in his stage-directions as to how this failure occurs: the Brothers are told to seize Comus's wand and use it to reverse his spell on the Lady, but the stage-direction says that "The Brothers rush in with Swords drawn, wrest his Glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground; his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in; The attendant Spirit comes in." At this point, the Spirit indicates that all is not lost. He summons the water nymph Sabrina, a well-known character from Welsh history, who, by sprinkling water on the Lady and the chair, reverses the spell. Woodhouse interprets Sabrina's role as follows: "the sprinkling of pure water... symbolizes an infusion of divine grace... And lest we should fail to realize the significance of Sabrina's intervention... the Attendant Spirit is made to exclaim (938-39): 'Come, Lady, while Heaven lends us grace, Let us fly this cursed place. ...' "

Woodhouse's interpretation of these events (we will consider other phases of his argument later) is the most persuasive available. The only really fully explicated
alternative is Sears Jayne's interpretation of *Comus* as a Neo-Platonic allegory. Jayne argues that the Lady symbolizes the human soul, which, according to Renaissance Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino, has three stages of existence: in the first, the soul leaves its natural home with God and descends to earth, where it becomes imprisoned in the body; then the soul struggles with the flesh; finally, the soul renounces the flesh and returns to God. *Comus* deals essentially with the second of these stages. The Lady's rejection of Comus is the soul's determination to return to its home in God. The Lady's entrapment in the chair is the soul's imprisonment in the body. More specifically, Jayne says that the paralysis in the chair is Milton's narrative equivalent for saying that the soul which has banished physical temptation has lost its emanation toward the flesh, has stopped its downward motion. In order to begin its ascent to God (to rise from its seat) the soul must be raised by the Mens, which is represented in the Mask by the figure of Sabrina.

Understanding the nature of the Mens is vital if we are to see the major difference between the views of Jayne and Woodhouse. Jayne defines the Mens as "the higher part of the soul [which] leads the soul back to heaven. The primary function of the Mens is to preserve the memory of divinity which the soul brings with it into this world." Jayne makes explicit his major departure from Woodhouse: since Sabrina symbolizes the Mens,
Sabrina does not represent the supernatural power of Grace, but a natural power; as goddess of the river she is an agent of Neptune, or a power provided by natural providence, with the permission and instrumentality of divine providence. The achievement of the virtue which Milton is talking about is the soul's achievement, not God's.  

Jayne believes that his interpretation of the Sabrina episode more fully accounts for its details than does Woodhouse's. Thus, "The distinctive characteristics of the Mens part of the soul are its immateriality, its immortality, and its memory [of the soul's life with God]. Like the Mens, Sabrina is both immaterial [l. 897-9] and immortal [l. 837-42]." Concerning the Mens's memory, Jayne says, "Sabrina knows how to turn the soul toward God primarily because she remembers having done it before; the soul is able to turn towards God because it retains a memory of God from having gone through the process of achieving chastity in a previous incarnation."  

Jayne's interpretation is not without difficulties. The greatest of these is pointed out by Richard Neuse: "It is difficult to see how Comus' action of paralyzing the Lady can come to represent her act of rejecting him. . . . [Moreover,] her paralysis appears to the Brothers and the Attendant Spirit as an unforeseen contretemps." Furthermore, there is no indication in the masque before the Lady is trapped in the chair that she, as the soul, is attracted to or dominated by things of the
flesh. Also, Woodhouse anticipates Jayne's objection that Sabrina, associated closely with nature in the masque, should not be thought of as an agent of the realm of grace; thus, Woodhouse refers to the parallel between Sabrina's freeing of the Lady and baptism: baptism is a function of the realm of grace, yet it operates through the agency of a natural element, water. As Woodhouse goes to great lengths to show, the realms of nature and grace should not be thought of as mutually exclusive; in fact, Woodhouse emphasizes that the two realms overlap.28 One might even argue that the mixture of natural and supernatural attributes belonging to Sabrina parallels that belonging to ultimate expression of Christian grace, Christ, who is both man and God.

Anyone who still objects to Woodhouse's interpretation of the Sabrina episode because it stresses so heavily her connections with the natural world will do well to remember the complimentary nature of the masque genre. Because the story of Sabrina associates her with the Severn River (1. 825), an association which accounts for the natural aspects of her portrayal, Milton identifies her with the boundary of Wales and therefore with the Earl's power;29 thus, her rescue of the Lady becomes part of the indirect compliment to the Earl. In any case, as we have implied, the ethical content of the Sabrina episode, as Woodhouse interprets it, is consistent with the Attendant
Spirit's summary at the end of the masque: man need never despair at his weakness in the face of evil because, as long as he actively pursues virtue, the realm of grace will ensure his success. The ethical implications of Jayne's interpretation of the Sabrina episode are not only not consistent with the Attendant Spirit's summary, but are very unpalatable: Jayne implies that, using only natural faculties, man must seek to triumph over the supernatural power of evil, represented in the masque by Comus.

That Milton was concerned with the palatability of the Attendant Spirit's lesson, summarized at the end of the masque, is indicated by the Spirit's promising of a reward for applying the lesson: the reward consists of following the Spirit into the heavenly realms described in 1. 976-1011. Explication of specific details of this description is a favorite pastime of Comus scholars. These explications frequently rest on complex allusions to details in Spéner.30 If we examine Comus on its own terms, we probably must be content to agree with John Arthós that Milton vaguely refers to a hierarchy stretching from earth, through Classical visions of paradise, to the Christian heaven, "Higher than the Sphery chime" (1. 1021).31 Such a synthesis of Classical and Christian thought is entirely in keeping with the Christian humanism permeating Comus, seen in our discussion of the relationship between nature and grace. If the masque, especially in the portrayal of
paradise, seems to emphasize the Classical at the expense of the Christian, we need only recognize that Milton converts the pastoral world of the masque genre into "a pagan world reaching out to Christianity. None of its paganism is rejected... but there is a Christian overtone."  

We have seen that Milton expands and intensifies the didactic content of his compliment to the Earl by creating an antimasque world which is a parody of the Earl's world. Since Lawes is part of the Earl's world, not surprisingly Comus parodies all the major facets of the portrayal of the Attendant Spirit. Baruch says that Comus "becomes the false-teacher-priest," and, he might have added, the false musician. That Comus claims to be a musician is seen in the speech quoted in the second chapter that shows him pretending to be a giver of light: "We that are of purer fire Imitate the Starry Choir." (1. 111-2). The claim here is that he imitates the music of the spheres, that model for all earthly music, but nowhere in the masque does this uncreative creature sing or play a musical instrument. Actually, Comus and his followers are associated with noise, as indicated by the Lady (1. 170). The Attendant Spirit describes Comus's noise as a disruption of harmony: "The wonted roar was up amidst the Woods, And fill'd the Air with barbarous dissonance." (1. 549-50). A further indication of Comus's disruption of harmony is his inability
to effect a coördination of the arts: his dancing, "Tipsy dance" (1. 104), is clumsy, perhaps the result of drunkenness; the clumsiness necessarily prevents Comus from harmonizing his movements with the rhythm of any accompanying music, if there be any. If, as we have seen, harmony in music and dancing imply social harmony, Comus's disruption of harmony implies that he and his followers are not bound to each other by any ties other than Comus's tyranny. Gale H. Carrithers, Jr. points out that "Appropriately, the figures in the rout, albeit a sort of group, are visibly disaffiliated by heads resembling disparate beasts." These creatures apparently even lose all desire for social contact, since they "all their friends and native home forget, To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty" (1. 76-7).

Comus also parodies those attributes that make the Attendant Spirit a shepherd-priest. Both characters put on the clothing of a shepherd, but Comus does so for the purpose of concealment, not as a kind of incarnation. Disguise for the sake of concealment, as we have seen in the second chapter, is a way of life for Comus, as the Lady comes to recognize when she describes his talk as "false rules prankt in reason's garb" (1. 759). Instead of being a shepherd, Comus is symbolically the wolf that the shepherd offers protection against; thus, the Spirit says that the Lady is Comus's "wish't prey" (1. 574). As a false shepherd, Comus tends those in his care very neglectfully,
leading to their "foul disfigurement" (1. 74). That Comus parodies the priestliness of the Attendant Spirit is indicated by the large number of religious images associated with him; e.g., in what is at least a doubly ironic passage, Comus speaks of his illicit activities as following "the cannon laws of our foundation..." (1. 808). That he is a false priest is obviously indicated by the fact that he leads his rout in worship of Cotytto and Hecate in rites that must be performed under the cover of darkness. Comus's real attitude towards worship is revealed by his purported response to the Lady's brothers quoted earlier: "I was awe-struck, And as I past, I worshipt; if those you seek, It were a journey like the path to Heav'n To help you find them" (1. 301-4). Comus very easily "steps into a posture of religious awe," at least when he thinks he has something to gain by doing so.

Most importantly, Comus parodies the attributes which make the Attendant Spirit a teacher, which contributes significantly to the didactic content of the compliment. Comus plays teacher throughout the masque, but particularly in the scene of his attempted seduction of the Lady. Milton's choice of a debate format for this scene (the debate actually is a commonplace in the pastoral tradition, as in the idylls of Theocritus) is one means by which Comus is shown to be a false teacher: debaters, like student and teacher, formally exchange ideas; but debaters are peers,
while a teacher and student are not. That Comus is a false
teacher is also indicated by his use of questionable teach-
ing methods: as we have seen, he relies heavily on
restraint, and though his lesson deals to a great extent
with nature, he fails to use visual aids, enclosing the Lady
inside his palace instead of "teaching" her in the woods.

But the clearest indication that Comus is a false
teacher is the fact that he teaches a false lesson. The
essence of his lesson is that nature's example invites man
to wantonness. We should realize, as the Lady does, that
Comus is not a spokesman for nature but a perverter of
nature: his leadership does not reduce men to animals, as
Circe's did in Classical mythology, but to "ugly-headed
Monsters" (1. 695), neither men nor animals; this unfortu-
nate condition is the result of drinking Comus's "cordial
Julep" (1. 672), which, rather than having the medicinal
effect associated with julep, demonstrates that Comus lacks
the Attendant Spirit's knowledge of nature's "simples"
(1. 627) like haemony. Numerous other evidences that Comus
is not a spokesman for nature have been implied throughout
this paper.

It is no surprise, then, that in teaching his lesson,
Comus's reasoning is fallacious and his conclusions hypo-
critical (in his use of bad logic to tempt people into sin,
Comus, of course, anticipates all of Milton's tempters).
Tuve attacks Comus's essential argument, claiming that the
link between nature's plenitude and human self-indulgence is a non sequitur.\textsuperscript{37} Tuve also finds Comus's argument that drinking water is unnatural (1. 720-4) especially illogical.\textsuperscript{38} Woodhouse points out that Comus argues that sexuality is only nature's way of providing gratification, when in fact sexuality exists for the replenishment of life.\textsuperscript{39} B. Rajan deals with another example of bad reasoning: Comus's strange proposition that the wild exuberance of nature can only be pruned by an exuberance of impulse among its curious tasters opens to a paradox of betraying dimensions. Those who teach temperance are "nature's bastards," the children of the excess which they avoid; and those who teach wantoness are the true sons of nature's discipline.\textsuperscript{40}

The fullest measure of Comus's hypocrisy is the fact that he argues from the fecundity and growth of nature, yet he himself, as we have seen, is a death-figure.

That Comus perverts, rather than represents, nature confirms Woodhouse's description of Milton's Christian humanism in the masque: since nature and grace overlap, this humanism can not preach that nature must be categorically rejected for the soul to be reunited with God, the view of nature that Jayne attributes to Renaissance Neo-Platonists like Ficino. (It is worth noting here that according to Jayne's portrayal of Neo-Platonists, their thought contains a major contradiction: they espouse
contempt for nature, yet they claim that the faculty which enables man to return to God, the Mens, is a natural faculty.) The issue of the attitude towards nature in Comus bears directly on the character of the masque genre because, if nature, including the human body, is to be viewed with contempt, then it seems to follow that Comus must reject the revels, which apparently Comus in fact did not do.

But one must wonder how consistent Milton is in presenting this view of nature in Comus. One of the most glaring problems arises from the Attendant Spirit's opening description of earth: "My mansion is... Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot, Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care, Strive to keep up a frail and Feverish being." (1. 2-8). The Spirit's language not only reflects Neo-Platonic contempt for this world, but in doing so uses images of darkness, filth, confinement, depth, and disease, which, because they are used throughout the masque in reference to Comus, imply that Comus truly is a representative of nature. Given that the Spirit's word is presumably infallible, since he is an agent of God, one can only conclude that Milton is inconsistent in his treatment of nature in Comus, particularly since the Spirit himself closes the masque by blending the natural world indistinguishably with the Christian heaven (1. 976-1023). If Milton truly is inconsistent in his delineation of the
Attendant Spirit's attitude towards nature, we need only remember what the essence of the masque genre is to imagine how the inconsistency came about: the Spirit's final speech is a logical culmination of the action of the masque; the opening speech is a result of Milton's desire to establish immediately his lavish compliment of Lawes by utterly divorcing the Spirit from this mundane world. This explanation is especially likely, since the same kind of reasoning can be used to explain difficulties relative to other elements of the compliment in *Comus* that will be discussed in the next chapter of this paper.
Chapter Four
The Earl's Three Children

In a real sense, the preceding discussion of the various ways in which Milton indirectly compliments the Earl of Bridgewater has been peripheral, since as Thomas A. Calhoun emphasizes, the plot of the masque does not deal with the investiture of the Earl, nor does it focus on the role of the Attendant Spirit, but it deals with the reunification of the Earl's family after the Lady in the masque, i.e., the Earl's daughter, has resisted Comus's attempted seduction. Thus, the most important way in which Milton indirectly compliments the Earl is through complimenting his daughter.

While, as we have seen, it might be argued that the compliment to Lawes is not sufficiently unified with that of the Earl, Milton links the daughter's compliment very closely with the Earl's. First, the Lady's resistance to Comus indicates that the Earl has raised his daughter well, which is possibly an indication that the Earl will be an effective ruler. A further link is the fact that as the compliment to the Earl refers essentially to his position of ruler over men, the compliment to his daughter is expressed in terms of her ruling - the metaphoric rule of her reason over the "lower" components of her personality, resulting in her "well-govern'd and wise appetite" (1. 705). This link between the two kinds of ruling is emphasized by the Attendant Spirit's reference to the "crown of deathless
Praise" (l. 973) she has earned by triumphing over Comus; significantly, a crown, the one insign of kingship that Comus lacks, is a circle, a symbol of perfection, resting on the head, the seat of reason, man's "highest" faculty. Milton's metaphoric link between the two kinds of ruling would have been readily grasped by the audience at Ludlow Castle because, as E. M. W. Tillyard has shown, this link was a commonplace in Renaissance thought: the universe was pictured as consisting "of a number of planes [of existence], arranged one below another in order of dignity but connected by an immense net of correspondences."^2

But a problem arises from the fact that the Lady identifies the principle according to which her reason governs her appetite variously as the "holy dictate of spare Temperance" (l. 767), "the Sun-clad power of Chastity" (l. 782), and "the sage And serious doctrine of Virginity" (l. 786-7). One might conclude that, since the masque encourages the Earl to avoid both tyranny and anarchy in his rule over his subjects, and since the Attendant Spirit teaches the children temperance, as indicated by our interpretation of the haemony passage, Milton probably thought of temperance, rather than something more stringent, as the principle by which the Lady rules her appetite. That the Lady is temperate, not ascetic, can be supported by considerable evidence from the masque. Even in her debate with Comus, when we might assume that she is under
duress, she seems to enjoy the bounties of nature; thus, she calls nature a "good cateress" (1. 764). It is certainly difficult to claim that she is consistently a Neo-Platonist, espousing in the debate the rejection of the natural world, since she specifically calls nature "innocent" (1. 762), and claims to be so closely attuned to the natural world that if she really were to try to convince Comus of her own correctness, "dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize, And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake, Till all thy magic structures rear'd so high, Were shatter'd into heaps o'er thy false head" (1. 796-9). In fact, the Lady's rejection of Comus results at least partially from her recognition that he is a mere imitator of nature; e.g., she speaks of his "dazzling fence" (1. 791), thereby identifying him with the cheap imitation of natural light (we discussed Comus's "dazzling spells" in the second chapter).

The evidence elsewhere in the masque that the Lady does not, like the Neo-Platonists described by Sears Jayne, categorically reject nature, is extensive. E.g., Barber compiles an account of eroticism and sensuousness associated with the Lady; e.g., her Song to Echo extols the "love-lorn Nightingale" (1. 234), and it contains much lush imagery. The Attendant Spirit's identification of the nightingale as the Lady herself (1. 562-7) considerably strengthens Barber's claim. Furthermore, the Lady's role in the masque
demands that she not be an ascetic: she must both sing and dance. The dancing is especially significant because it indicates that her rule over her appetite is not tyrannical: the masque dance that she is part of, the revels, was traditionally "formally ordered and restrained, but not constrained." Moreover, the Lady seems to think in accordance with Woodhouse's claim that in *Comus* the realms of nature and of grace merge into each other, as shown in her personification of the evening as "grey- hooded. . . Like a sad Votarist in Palmer's weed. . ." (1. 188-9) (it is true that the Lady continues this passage by personifying the night as "thievish" in 1. 195 and as pursuing a "felonious end" in 1. 196, but this personification can be explained as a reflection of her fear as a result of losing her brothers with the coming of night, not as a general accusation against night and nature as a whole).

The Lady's kinship with nature enables her to counter Comus's false argument from nature deftly. When he argues that nature's unrestrained fertility is evidence that man should not restrain himself, she skilfully rejects his notion that human temperance leads to "waste fertility" (1. 729) in nature: "If every just man that now pines with want Had but a moderate and beseeming share, . . . Nature's full blessings would be well dispens'd In unsuperflous even proportion And she no whit encumber'd with her store. . ."
Especially nice is her use of imagery in refuting Comus's invitation to excess: she says that "swinish gluttony Ne'er looks at Heav'n amidst his gorgeous feast..." (1. 776-7), picturing intemperance metaphorically as the lowering of the head, which should be the seat of restraining reason, of a non-reasoning animal as it eats. No wonder that the last words of Comus in the masque are an admission of defeat: "... I feel that I do fear Her words set off by some superior power..." (1. 799-800).

But if we conclude that the Lady espouses and practices temperance, we have to explain why Milton also has her speak of "the Sun-clad power of Chastity" and "the sage And serious doctrine of Virginity." The problem is compounded by the fact that the Lady claims to be visibly attended by "pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope, ... And [the] unblemish't form of Chastity..." (1. 213-5); since the passage is an obvious paraphrase of St. Paul's enunciation of the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity in I Corinthians, Chapter 13, a Biblical passage having considerable influence on Comus, why does the Lady substitute chastity for the less stringent charity? John Arthos claims that Milton borrowed his concept of chastity from Ficino's commentary on Plato's Charmides. Arthos claims that the Greek term charmides roughly translates into English as chastity, but really
represents a broad range of virtues, including control of one's sexual passion. Thus, "Milton associates chastity with temperance, prudence, wisdom, the power of contemplation..." i.e., the Lady's chastity is representative of virtue, or temperance, in general. Arthos disposes of the problem of the revised Christian virtues as follows:

Milton "will not treat primarily [in Comus] of theological matters, but he will show how the key virtues of Christian theology have a parallel and support in the powers of virtue, and particularly when that is supported by reasoning and philosophy."  

This explanation of what the Lady means when she speaks of her "well-govern'd and wise appetite" is generally convincing except for one major obstacle: the Lady speaks not of virginity, in addition to chastity, but of "the sage And serious doctrine of Virginity." Woodhouse believes that this expression refers to the specifically Christian notion of a life-long abstention from sexual relations as a means of fulfilling the Biblical dictum that "the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body." If he is correct, then the Lady's virginity is clearly distinguished as more stringent than chastity, which is presumably a temporary state, lasting only until marriage. To a large extent because of this distinction between the Lady's references to chastity and virginity, Woodhouse relates the Lady's formulations of the principle according
to which she controls her appetite to his analysis of the relationship in *Comus* between nature and grace:

coupled with the doctrine of chastity (not identified with it as a careless reader might suppose, but coupled with it) are two others: a doctrine of temperance and continence... and a doctrine of virginity... When these facts are brought in relation with the intellectual frame of reference, we must observe that temperance and continence are virtues on the natural level; that chastity, the central virtue of the poem, moves in an area common to nature and grace; and that the doctrine of virginity belongs exclusively to the order of grace, which in the poem it is used to illustrate and even symbolize.10

By explaining the Lady's various designations for her virtue in terms of his general interpretation of the masque as a treatment of the relationship between the realms of nature and grace, Woodhouse explains the need for the different designations. But the explanation, as Woodhouse acknowledges, emphasizes that Milton's treatment of the Lady contains a contradiction: she generally has a high regard for nature, but her doctrine of virginity, at least as Woodhouse defines it, is a repudiation of nature.11 Why did Milton associate such an austere principle with the realm of grace and with the Lady, since both seem otherwise to be in harmony with nature?

This contradiction parallels the contradiction, discussed in the third chapter, that results from the opening speech of the Attendant Spirit. The contradiction
in the portrayal of the Lady can be explained in the same way that we dealt with the previous one: both result from heightening the compliment of the people involved by associating them with a world utterly divorced from earth, though the metaphysics of the masque denies the existence of any such world. Milton's desire to lavish praise on Lawes, an artist of great stature, even at the expense of consistency, is understandable. Milton's reason for doing the same with the Lady is obscure, having been uncovered by critics only recently. Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk explains that the Earl of Bridgewater, in the interval between his nomination as Lord President of Wales in 1631 and his actual inauguration in 1634, was associated with one of the most widely-known sexual scandals in English history. The scandal resulted from a court trial establishing the gross misconduct of the Earl of Castlehaven, who was married to Bridgewater's sister-in-law. The effects of the scandal touched even Bridgewater because "Before his execution at the Tower, on May 14, 1631, Castlehaven did his best to degrade the character of Lady Anne [Bridgewater's sister-in-law] and her family, ... and Egerton's appointment was postponed." Barbara Breasted shows that the basic subject of the masque, the Lady's overcoming of Comus's sexual advances, is directly linked to the compliment to the Earl: Comus "may ... have been intended to help repair the reputation of the entire family by making
the last unmarried Egerton daughter act out her resistance to dangerous sexual temptation."¹⁴ Given such a background to the Earl's inauguration, it is no wonder that Milton made so much of the Lady's virginity, converting a fact about the Lady into the association of her, and thus of the Earl's immediate family, with a realm of unimpeachable purity. In fact, through the masque, the Lady and her immediate family become disassociated from the evils of other family members just as Comus becomes disassociated from the goodness that belongs to his grandfather, the Sun (1. 50-1). That the reference to the "doctrine of Virginity" was not contained in the performance of Comus, though a passage calling her a virgin was (1. 855-7), does not invalidate this line of reasoning. Since, as Mundhenk argues, the printed version of the masque would reach a larger audience than did the production version, and since this larger audience may well have known about the scandal associated with the Earl but not about his daughter's virginity, which the audience at the production would have known about, Milton emphasizes, or rather exaggerates, the significance of virginity in the later versions.¹⁵

This explanation of the Lady's reference to the "doctrine of Virginity" is supported by details of the Sabrina episode. Obviously, the insistence on Sabrina's virginity (1. 826) links her to the Lady. But several critics have noted that Milton's version of the Sabrina
story ignores an important detail of her life, a detail found in *The Historia Regum Britaniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, a book that Milton knew: Sabrina was "the child of illicit and unsanctified love." R. Blenner-Hassett believes that Milton avoids the "symbolic incongruity" of having a creature of such origins be the protectress of virginity through suppressing the details of her origins. But the critic offers no way of responding to the possibility that members of the audience of *Comus* knew this detail about the life of Sabrina. Actually, this detail functions in *Comus* as part of the compliment to Bridgewater's family because it shows "that goodness, virtue, purity, and the like can arise from a less than impeccable background."

The Sabrina episode mitigates the austerity of the Lady's "doctrine of Virginity." As Gale H. Carrithers shows, Sabrina, though virginal, because of "water-imagery, pastoralism, and neo-Ovidian metamorphosis [is identified] with... natural fertility... Service to the wife of the sea-god would seem a considerable endorsement of... fertility...," as is the Attendant Spirit's citing of Sabrina's long ancestry.

Because of the unusual circumstances attending the Earl's inauguration, Milton may well have felt a need to impart excessive significance to the Lady's virginity. But apart from this, Milton's compliment to the Lady is rather experimental: as her not wearing a mask indicates,
the Earl's daughter plays an extension of herself that is realistic, instead of playing one of the idealized quasi-gods that were typical masquing roles in Jonson's productions. This realism results in Milton's attributing human limitations to the Lady: she is duped by Comus into thinking that he is a well-intentioned shepherd, and she becomes trapped in his chair, unable to free herself. Imparting some relatively unflattering characteristics to a figure complimented by the masque is not especially radical, since, as we have seen, Jonson first presents his masquers in *Lovers Made Men* as false lovers until they become metamorphosed by Mercury. Milton's experiment humanizes the Lady without attributing culpability to her; Jonson's experiment does not really attempt to humanize his masquers (despite the title, they are treated throughout as allegorical abstractions), but he does seem to attribute a measure of culpability to them. Milton's humanization of the Lady adds to the didactic content of the compliment: the limits arising out of the Lady's humanity lead to the Attendant Spirit's moral lesson about the availability of grace to good men, whether or not this grace is related to virginity as a Christian doctrine.

If the Earl of Bridgewater is indirectly complimented by the fact that his daughter is presented in a highly favorable light, he is similarly complimented by the presentation of his sons in a favorable light. In fact,
essentially the same characteristics of the compliment to the Earl's daughter are found in the compliment to his two sons. That the sons are presented favorably is shown by the willingness of the Brothers in the masque to defend the Lady against Comus and by the sophistication of the philosophical discussion between mere children.

Milton's treatment of the Brothers is especially noteworthy because it extends the realism of the compliment to the Earl's daughter: even more than the Lady, the Brothers are humanized, individualized. Milton makes it clear that he is individualizing the Brothers, since they talk extensively about their own personalities; thus, the Elder Brother distinguishes himself from the Second by saying, "my nature is That I incline to hope rather than fear, And gladly banish squint suspicion" (1. 411-13). This distinction in the characterization summarizes the content of the first two pages of the Brothers' discussion.

But the discussion moves to a more philosophical level as the Elder Brother expounds his concept of the nature of chastity. Woodhouse claims that this exposition helps support his analysis of the metaphysics of Comus: the Elder Brother describes the realm of nature, describes the overlapping of nature and grace, and hints at the realm of grace. Thus, the Elder Brother refers to the realm of nature when he expounds the Classical notion that chastity is its own protection: "What was that snaky-headed Gorgon
shield That wise Minerva wore, unconquer'd Virgin, Wherewith
she freez'd her foes to congeal'd stone, But rigid looks of
Chaste austerity. . . ?" (1. 447-50). He refers to the
overlapping of grace and nature when he says the following:

So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried Angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal. . . .

(1. 453-63)

And the Brother hints at the realm of grace when he implies
"the doctrine of Eternal Providence" in speaking of
"that power Which erring men call Chance. . . ." (1. 586-7).

Woodhouse may well be right that his description of
the metaphysics of Comus is supported by the Elder Brother's
philosophizing. But Woodhouse wisely rests his case on far
more convincing evidence than this, for Milton's humaniza-
tion of the Elder Brother allows the Brother to make
mistakes. That he can make mistakes is clearly demonstrated
by the fact that his belief that he can drive off Comus
with his sword is gently corrected by the Attendant Spirit:
"I love thy courage yet and bold Emprise, But here thy
sword can do thee little stead. . . ." (1. 610-1). Therefore,
we must consider if the Brother's philosophizing is not
also mistaken. What Woodhouse interprets as the Elder's
references to the various levels of nature and grace seem
to be less an expression of a Renaissance synthesis of Classical thought and Christianity than outright inconsistency. Thus, he seems to shift arbitrarily in the passage referred to above from claiming that goodness can defeat evil without help to claiming that goodness prevails because it is aided by heaven; he even adds a third claim, that goodness prevails because evil defeats itself: "But evil on itself shall back recoil, And mix no more with goodness. . ." (1. 593-4). It is as if he has almost learned the lesson that the Attendant Spirit teaches through the events of the masque and summarizes at the end but has misconstrued the subtleties of the lesson so much that he needs to go through the events of the masque to learn more effectively the teachings of the Attendant Spirit. That Lawes-as-the-Attendant-Spirit-as-Thyrsis-as-Lawes has earlier taught the philosophy that the Elder Brother distorts in his discussion with the Second Brother is implied by the latter's description of the philosophy as "musical as is Apollo's lute. . ." (1. 478). This impression of the incorrectness of the Elder Brother's philosophizing is reinforced by Madsen's analysis of the tone and style of his philosophizing: "The young scholar takes advantage of the occasion to practice the art of declamation and impress his younger brother with the range of his knowledge - mythological, literary, and philosophical. The patronizing tone, the superabundance of mythological reference, the
irrelevance of all this to the Lady's situation, the
diction itself, all suggest the imaginative but inexperi-
enced schoolboy."

If such is the nature of Milton's experimental
compliment to the Earl's three children, that they are
"pointed out as excellent young ones, but young neverthe-
less, . . . still in need of teaching," the experiment can
not be considered an unqualified success, especially when
coupled with the inconsistency we have seen in Milton's
compliment to the daughter. The realism of the compliment,
of course, prevents the sycophantic. And the compliment of
the children leads nicely to that of Lawes as a teacher.
But the experiment makes for great difficulty, as we have
seen, in determining the significance of many passages in
the masque. Particularly difficult are the following lines
of the Elder Brother: "when lust By unchaste looks, loose
gestures, and foul talk, But most by lewd and lavish act
of sin, Lets in defilement to the inward parts, The soul
grows clotted by contagion, Imbodies and imbrutes till she
quite lose The divine property of her first being" (l. 463-
9). This passage seems to express a Neo-Platonic contempt
for nature by indicating that as a result of corruption the
soul turns into body, though elsewhere the Brother identifies
evil as unnatural, as when he describes the symbolic black-
ness of the forest ruled over by Comus as "damm'd up With
black usurping mists. . . ." (l. 336-7). Are we to interpret
the apparent Neo-Platonism as the real metaphysical basis of the masque, despite the enormous evidence to the contrary compiled throughout this paper? Or, since the passage is part of the Brother's discussion of chastity, are we to interpret it as supporting that aspect of the compliment to the Lady which identifies her with a realm of unimpeachable purity so that the Earl's immediate family can be freed of the onus of scandal? Or are we to interpret the passage as an example of the Elder Brother's floundering philosophizing?
Conclusion

Our examination of the compliment to the Earl of Bridgewater in Milton's *Comus* enables us genuinely to appreciate it as a masque: *Comus* is a great, but certainly not a perfect, work of art. Obviously, its poetry is magnificent, a fact which few from Samuel Johnson's time to our own have bothered to question. But more to the point, Milton clearly avoids the sycophantic in his compliment to the Earl by relying primarily on the indirect compliment, much of which is very indirect indeed. This indirectness, particularly that resulting from the treatment of the Earl's daughter, is especially appropriate insofar as *Comus* helps clear Bridgewater of association with the Castlehaven scandal.

On the other hand, Milton's treatment of Henry Lawes is seriously flawed. While those elements in *Comus* which are flattering to Lawes can be thought of as belonging to the compliment to the Earl, one can not help feeling that Milton cared more about the musician than about his patron, since the Earl is presented as only a good mortal in a position of authority whereas the Attendant Spirit, representing Lawes, is supernatural and, donning the weeds of Thyrsis, only plays at being subordinate to the Earl. Milton's overly elaborate treatment of Lawes prevents *Comus* from being unified as one great compliment to the Earl. In
terms of its unity, then, Comus is inferior to a few of Jonson's masques, e.g., Pan's Anniversary, in which all that happens on-stage is subordinated to the compliment to King James.

But there is no comparison between Milton's development of the didactic aspect of the compliment in Comus and Jonson's in his court masques. Not only is the ethical content of Comus more profound than that of Jonson's masques, especially since Milton develops the antimasque villain far more than Jonson ever does; but also Milton's use of the compliment as a means of exploring metaphysical considerations, even though, as we have seen, apparently not handled with complete consistency, makes the masque a far more significant literary form than a look at Jonson's works would lead us to suspect the masque could ever be.

Lastly, Milton's experimentation in Comus is far more significant historically than is Jonson's. Milton's use of realism in his treatment of the Earl's children foreshadows, in a genre peculiarly suited to an aristocratic view of life, England's movement from a heroic view of its ruling class, manifested especially in the concept of the divine right of kings, to a more democratic view of man.
Notes
Chapter One


3 Johnson, p. 168.


9 Demaray, p. 24.
10 Demaray, p. 8.

11 Orgel, p. 4.


14 Welsford, p. 184.

15 Orgel, p. 99.


17 Welsford, p. 316.

18 Welsford, pp. 316-7.

19 Welsford, p. 38.

20 Orgel, pp. 33-4.

21 Orgel, p. 68.

23 Welsford, p. 317.

24 Leishman, p. 191.

25 Ibid., p. 191.

26 Welsford, p. 319.

27 Leishman, pp. 192-3.

28 Orgel, p. 6.


32 James G. Taafe, "Michelmas, the 'Lawless Hour' and the Occasion of Milton's Comus," English Language Notes, 6 (June, 1969), p. 261.

33 William B. Hunter, Jr., "The Liturgical Context of Comus," English Language Notes, 10 (September, 1972), pp. 12-14

34 Orgel, p. 62.

36 Jonson, p. 89.

37 Welsford, p. 184.

38 Orgel, p. 35.

39 Jonson, pp. 79-80.


42 Jonson, pp. 79-80.

43 Furniss, pp. 120-4.

44 Leishman, p. 242.


48 Talbert, p. 458.

49 Meagher, p. 161.
Notes

Chapter Two


4 Ibid., p. 427.

5 Ibid., p. 426.


8 Milton, p. 93, n. 154.

9 Milton, p. 91, n. 60.

10 Madsen, p. 192.
11 Demaray, p. 12.

12 Taafe, p. 260.

13 Tuve, p. 145.

14 Wilkenfeld, p. 188.

15 Wilkenfeld, p. 179.

16 Baruch, p. 301.


20 Boyette, p. 43.

21 Tuve, p. 141.

22 Shawcross, p. 98.
Notes
Chapter Three


3Milton, p. 92, n. 86.


5Haun, p. 224.

6Barber, p. 38.

7Baruch, p. 290.

8Ibid., p. 298.

9Baruch, p. 306.

11 Adams, pp. 10-18.


13 Ibid., pp. 206-7.

14 Jayne, p. 177.


16 Ibid., p. 11, n. 4.

17 Woodhouse, p. 70.

18 Ibid., p. 48.


21 Jayne, pp. 165-87.

22 Ibid., p. 178.

23 Ibid., p. 173.

24 Ibid., p. 182.

25 Ibid., p. 181.

26 Ibid., p. 181.


29. Barber, p. 62.


35. Tuve, p. 128.

36. Carrithers, p. 50.

37. Tuve, p. 126.

38. Ibid., p. 127.

Notes

Chapter Four


3 Barber, pp. 52-4.

4 Wilkenfeld, p. 186.

5 Ibid., p. 196.


7 Ibid., p. 263.

8 Ibid., p. 274.


10 Ibid., p. 49.

11 Ibid., p. 61.

13 Ibid., pp. 142-3.


15 Mundhenk, p. 151.


17 Ibid., p. 315.


19 Carrithers, pp. 39-40.

20 Baruch, p. 297.


23 Ibid., p. 58.


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VITA

Phillip L. Bodey, son of Rev. and Mrs. Allen Z. Bodey, was born in Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania, on October 10, 1940. He graduated from Liberty High School, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1958 and received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1962 from Lafayette College. He taught English in high schools in Pennsylvania and California, and was a teaching assistant in the English Department at Lehigh University in the spring of 1976. Mr. Bodey is presently the Chairman of the English Department of Saucon Valley High School.