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THE SERPENT-DRIVING FEMALES IN BLAKE'S COMUS 4

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A female figure driving a serpent-team through the treetops appears in both versions of Blake's watercolor designs for Milton's *Comus*, Scene 4--the earlier series now in the Huntington Library (cited below as H) and the later series in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (B).¹ Despite striking differences between the two sets,² and specifically between the two female figures in this scene, between their serpent-teams, and the darkness of the night, commentators almost never consider both versions when discussing Blake's visual interpretations of the masque. As a consequence, they generally regard the two females as the same character. Irene Tayler, taking into account only the H series in her pioneering essay on the designs, refers to the "draped female overhead" as "the strange dragon or snake-lady," "that veiled tyrant of women" whom Blake might intend to suggest "the moon-goddess Cynthia" or maybe Medea.³ Commenting on the B series only, Marcia R. Pointon calls the woman above the trees "Diana, goddess of the moon" (p. 139). More recently, Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr. labels the females Blake's personification of Jealousy,⁴ and Stephen C. Behrendt follows Pointon in calling the figures Cynthia-Diana.⁵

Compounding this confusion concerning the figures is the repeated assertion that they cannot be found in the standard versions of *Comus* at all, but are Blake's invention.⁶ Wittreich cites as Blake's source for these figures several lines about a dragon that were cancelled in the Trinity (College) Manuscript of the masque, but first published in

1798 and thus available to Blake. Certain details of Wittreich's argument are persuasive, but his fundamental assertion that the cancelled lines constitute Blake's primary source for the serpent-teams and the female figures is essentially unconvincing.⁷ These figures, to the contrary, are identified in the standard published texts of *Comus* in circulation during Blake's day.⁸ In addition, a matching of text and design reveals that Blake's females in this scene, one in each version, are not variations of the same person, but are two different persons.⁹

Blake's fourth scenes, in which the Attendant Spirit dressed as the shepherd Thyrsis shows the brothers the magic herb *huesmony*, illustrate lines 617-58 in the Todd and the Hughes editions. However, Milton describes much earlier in the masque the serpent-ladies that Blake places in the treetops. During *Comus*'s initial appearance as the forest enchanter-seducer, he calls upon his retinue, partially transformed into beasts, to join him in a libidinous ceremony:

Come, let us our rights begin,
'Tis only day-light that makes sin,
Which these dun shades will ne'er report.
Hail, Goddess of nocturnal sport,
Dark-veil'd Cotytto! t'whom the secret flame
Of midnight torches burns; mysterious dame,
That ne'er art call'd, but when the dragon woom
Of Stygian darkness spetts her thickest gloom,
And makes one blot of all the air;



Detail, Scene 4: "The Brothers Meet the Attendant Spirit in the Wood." Huntington at top; Boston, below.

In the following pages, the Huntington set of *Comus* designs is reproduced courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library & Art Gallery, San Marino, California. The Boston set (gift of Mrs. John L. Gardner & George N. Black) is reproduced courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,
Wherein thou rid'st with Hecat', and befriend
Us thy vow'd priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out.

(125-37)

Certainly this invocation to "Dark-veil'd Cotytto" is Blake's primary source for the darkly draped female in H 4. This Thracian goddess of licentiousness, worshipped only on the darkest (or Stygian) nights, appears in Blake's dark scene riding through a treetop gloom that obscures sky, stars, and moon.¹⁰ Since *Comus* and his monsters begin their rites to the goddess five hundred lines before Scene 4, we might be surprised by her appearance here instead of in Blake's first scene, that of *Comus* and his revelers. But the text does not specify that she actually appears in response to the invocation,

probably because the chaste Lady's approach interrupts the rites at their beginning. *Comus* directs his rabble to hide (147-48), enchants the spot (150 ff.), and entices the Lady who enters to proceed with him to his cottage (244 ff.), where unknown to her he obviously plans to reinitiate the rites to Cotytto. Thus Blake's choice to portray Cotytto in H 4, riding through the same forest in which she was earlier invoked, is logical even though the text does not specify her presence here. Seemingly she is enroute to the castle for the rites, which Blake suggests by her direction toward the right margin, forward to the next scene inside the castle.

Milton alludes metaphorically to a dragon in this Cotytto-Hecate passage (131) and later to a dragon guarding the Hesperian Tree in the regions whence the Attendant Spirit has come (395); but Blake's primary source for the serpent-team is probably the dragon-team traditionally associated with Hecate's car (in Ovid, for instance, and mentioned elsewhere by Milton¹¹). Blake's red and blue scaled beasts in H 4 might most accurately be labeled crested snakes or serpents rather than dragons, as they have no legs or wings.¹²

Hecate, however, with whom Milton's Cotytto rides, does not appear in H 4, nor in H 1. Because Milton aligns Cotytto so closely with her, because the Attendant Spirit claims that *Comus* frequently performs rites to her (535), and because she does appear in Blake's B series, consideration should be given to Hecate's role in Blake's H interpretation.



Surely Blake does not intend her to be hidden in the gloom beside Cotytto in H 4. Does he interpret Milton's line ("Wherein thou rid'st with Hecat'") to mean that Cotytto sometimes rides with Hecate, but not always? Or has he in mind the Attendant Spirit's claim to the brothers during this scene that as their father's shepherd he has often heard Comus and his revelers performing rites to Hecate and hence is drawing attention to the duality of nocturnal rites performed by Comus--some to Hecate as goddess of witchcraft, and on the darkest nights, other rites (or additional rites) to Cotytto as a goddess of lechery? If this is Blake's intent, H 1 would not represent rites to Hecate only, as a reader might presume from the Attendant Spirit's assertion, but rites either to Hecate (but preliminary to Cotytto rites on this Stygian night) or rites to Cotytto, the noise of which the Spirit has interpreted as Hecate rites, and over which Hecate ultimately presides. But if H 1 and H 4 involve Hecate, where is she?

I believe her absence from the scene can be explained satisfactorily in terms of a logical presence elsewhere in the forest. Is it not reasonable to conceive of Hecate being involved, not directly in H 1, but in H 2? Although she is not invoked this particular night, she is Comus's reigning deity and ostensibly his ultimate source of enchanting power. So when he enchants the spot that Blake depicts in H 2, as well as himself, with "dazling spells" (154) and "magic dust" (165), then leads the beguiled Lady from the place through the forest to his castle, might not Blake have intended Hecate to preside over this spell that continues through the forest trek, according to the text, until the Lady is seated inside the castle in Scene 5? Though Blake does not depict Hecate visually in H 2, and though the text does not specify her appearance or direct involvement, her presence in the scene is logical. If H 2 is viewed in this manner, and if we consider carefully the chronology of the masque, Hecate would be journeying to the castle (and the rites) with Comus and the Lady at the same time Cotytto rides there in H 4.

If we consider the details of Cotytto worship, we will quickly comprehend the aptness of Milton's allusion to her in *Comus* and the aptness of Blake's inclusion of her in H 4. A Greek goddess of wantonness, Cotytto was not well known in Milton's day or in Blake's. Milton does not mention her elsewhere, and Blake never refers to her by name. Milton associates her with the better-known Hecate, goddess of the underworld and witchcraft, presumably because both were said to originate in Thrace. There is historical evidence of Cotytto worship in Corinth, perhaps in Athens, and with great license in Rome.¹³

Scene 1: "Comus with his Revellers." Huntington at top left; Boston, lower left.

Scene 2: "Comus, Disguised as a Rustic, Addresses the Lady in the Wood." Huntington, top right; Boston, lower right.

The longest account of Cotytto worship appears in Juvenal's Second Satire, "Moralists without Morals," with which Milton was familiar (Osgood, pp. 24-25). Juvenal associates the goddess with orgiastic rites conducted by priests that were secret, nocturnal, torchlit, gluttonous, accompanied by dancing, and chiefly sodomistic. The orgiastic elements in *Comus* approximate these closely, with the possible exception of sodomy: Comus calls together his followers in secret, at night; they carry torches; they later feast at a banquet; and they "knit hands, and beat the ground / In a light fantastic round" (143-44). Also similar to elements in *Comus* are Juvenal's references in Cotytto worship to metamorphoses (in *Comus*, the monsters); Stygian blackness (in *Comus*, 132); a cup or glass used in the rites (in *Comus*, the crystal goblet with enchanting liquid); and the initiation rite (in *Comus*, the drink). In view of Barbara Breasted's recent discovery that Milton wrote *Comus* in the wake of a notorious sex scandal that included rape, incest, and sodomy among relatives of the *Comus* Bridgewater family--and the masque thus being an attempt to help re-establish the family's integrity--Cotyto's presence in the masque is doubly appropriate.¹⁴ Blake probably did not know of the Castlehaven Scandal, and he may not have been familiar with all the details of Juvenal's account of her, but he surely was familiar with her role as a goddess of lechery, an identification provided in Thomas Newton's and Todd's annotations to *Comus*.¹⁵ And he obviously detected in the masque a central theme of the conflict between chastity and perversity.



Cotyto's serpents in H 4, or more precisely Hecate's serpents, which Cotytto is driving, are typical Blake serpents: crested, mouths open, tongues out, and thus active. For Blake, serpents represent (among other things) hypocrisy, corrupt priesthood, and sexuality.¹⁶ Indeed, one can conceive a close similarity between the attempt by Comus to force the Lady into sexual experience (particularly if one remembers the serpent above Comus's wand in B 5) and the theme of Blake's "I saw a chapel all of gold": that forced and undesired acts of sex are perversions of real love.¹⁷ In addition, the serpent-team represents the spiritual-moral warfare that constitutes the foundation of the masque:¹⁸ the struggle of the brothers with each other, the Lady with Comus and with herself, Comus with himself, and the brothers with Comus and his monsters. We should note that these conflicts are essentially dissolved, rather than overcome, by the magic herb *haemony* that Blake portrays in this scene.¹⁹ Also worth noting is Blake's placing of the herb, held by the Spirit, almost directly below Cotytto's triangular, scale-shaped skirt.²⁰ Possibly this juxtaposition of herb beneath the scale is Blake's way of drawing attention to the importance of the herb's function in eliminating the stalemates in the masque.²¹



In the second *Comus* series, Blake makes significant changes in Scene 4. The figure driving the serpent-team in B 4 is also female, as denoted by her flowing hair, but she wears a light-colored garment, has no hood or veil, and rides under a crescent moon.²² Clearly this female cannot be "Dark-veil'd Cotytto," who appears only on the darkest nights. Because of her light-colored cloth-



ing and the general brightness of the scene, she cannot be Night, who is personified in the masque (195-200). The most convincing identification of this figure is Hecate, Cotytto's companion in the masque. Evidence supporting this is that Blake has portrayed Hecate's companion with Hecate's serpent-team in H 4; and thus, when serpents (albeit not the same serpents) reappear with a new driver, the sensible identification would be their mistress Hecate. More evidence of the figure's identity is the Spirit's reference (cited above) to having heard Comus and his rabble performing rites to Hecate earlier in the night; consequently, her appearance in B 4 is as logical as Cotytto's presence in H 4. Third, in classical authors Hecate (but not Cotytto) is frequently associated with the moon, as she is here with the moon above her head. Originally she was a moon goddess (Osgood, p. 29); Plutarch, for example, labels the moon Hecate's province (*Cess. of Oracles*, 13). Blake refers to Hecate by name a number of times, and he did several versions of a color-printed drawing of Hecate as the triform goddess.²³

Hecate's identity proliferates in the later Classical poets, whose view Milton follows (Osgood, p. 29). She is identified as Artemis, Apollo's twin sister and daughter of Zeus and Leto, and is said to possess three identities: Selene (or Luna or Cynthia) in the sky, Artemis (or Diana) on earth, and Proserpina (or Hecate) in hell and on the earth at night.²⁴ She later becomes identified with malignant divinity, witchcraft (Osgood, p. 29), and terror.²⁵ Moreover, she represents choice and

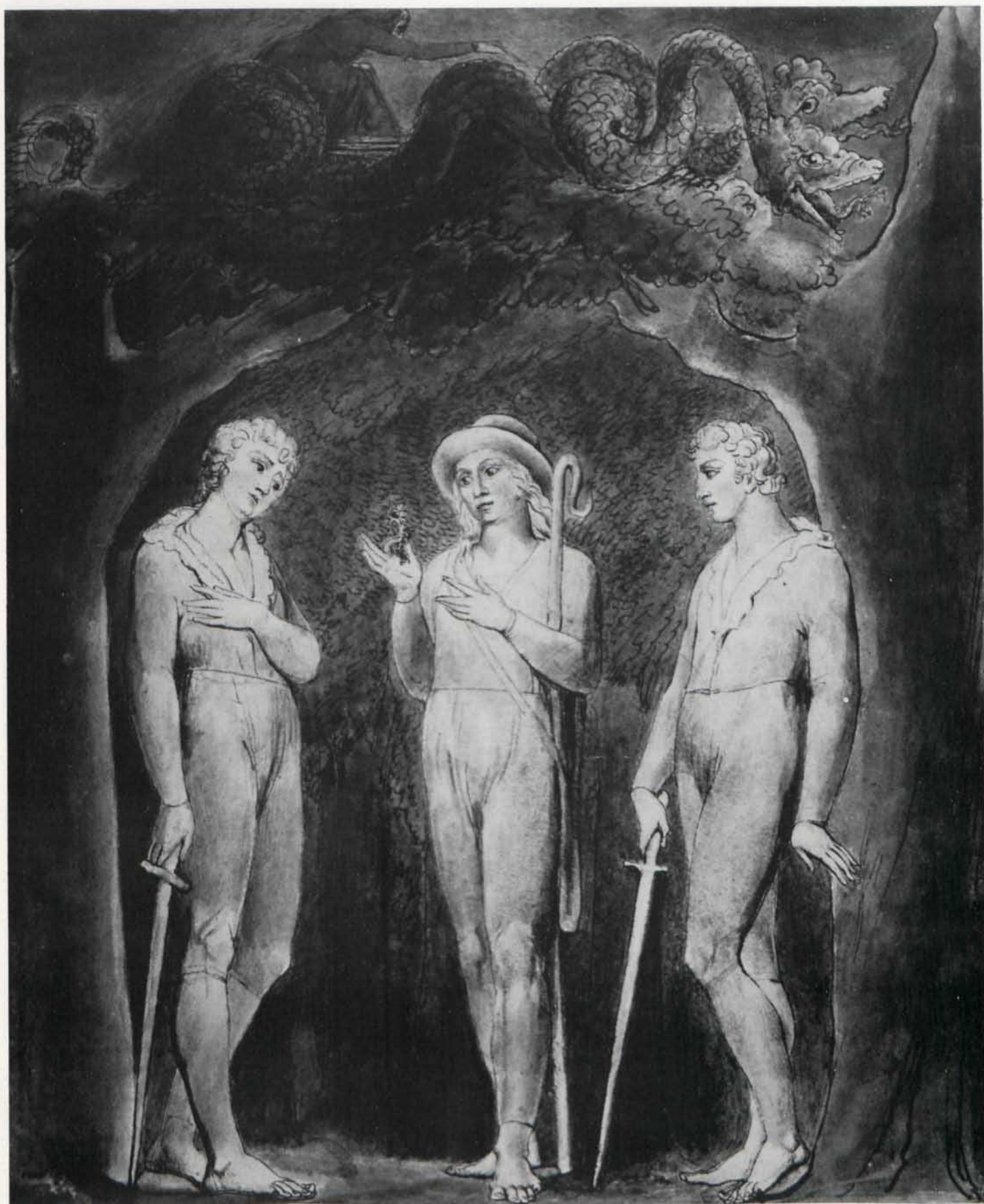


uncertainty: "She was associated with deeds of darkness, the Goddess of the Crossways, which were held to be ghostly places of evil magic. . . . In her is shown most vividly the uncertainty between good and evil which is apparent in every one of the divinities" (Hamilton, p. 32).

Blake's decision to switch Cotytto for Hecate in B must be regarded as a significantly different view of the masque--a second interpretation that does not necessarily supersede the first. If Hecate now rides to attend the Banquet of B 5, she would appear to supersede Cotytto as the reigning evil deity over this and other B scenes, leaving Cotytto's whereabouts a puzzle. If we consider the masque again chronologically, she cannot be attending Comus in B 1 during the events of B 4 because both B 1 and B 2 are past when B 4 occurs. Perhaps Blake thought of her as switching roles with Hecate and present but not visible in B 2. The text, as discussed above, emphasizes the sorcery (and by extension, Hecate) in the second scenes; yet in B 2 Blake does not include (as he does in H) the visual emblem of

Scene 3: "The Brothers Observed by Comus Plucking Grapes." Huntington, top left; Boston, top right.

Scene 4: "The Brothers Meet the Attendant Spirit in the Wood." Huntington, right.





magic, the *haemony*, and thus appears to de-emphasize the elements of enchantment.

Hecate's visual presence in the B designs draws attention away from the themes Cotytto represents as it emphasizes the importance of sorcery and the supernatural: the Attendant Spirit, Comus's wand, the cup with transmogrifying liquor, the monsters, the spells on the travelers and later on the Lady, the enchanted herb, and Sabrina's counter-spell releasing the Lady. As Goddess of the Crossroads, Hecate also reinforces the theme of choice, of the difficulty of making decisions in a deceptive world. A cross-examination of all sixteen designs in terms of these motifs reveals a general consistency: the H series usually emphasizes sensuality and the threat of sexual force, as well as a strict virginity opposing that threat, rather than the elements of witchcraft, deception, and choice. In the B series, the emphasis is generally the reverse.

Scene 4: "The Brothers Meet the Attendant Spirit in the Wood." Boston, left.

Scene 5: "The Magic Banquet with the Lady Spell-Bound." Huntington, lower left; Boston, lower right.



In H 1 a stress on sexuality is apparent in the nudity of Comus and the wolf-headed monster; in B all the figures are clad. Comus's body is more muscular than in B, and therefore more sexual and more threatening. The Lady clasps her hands between her breasts (even more pronounced in H 5 where she folds her hands protectively over her breasts), highlighting the theme of defensive virginity; in B 1 her hands are unclasped and held away from her body. Elements of sorcery in B are suggested by the attention Blake affords to the cup with the magic potion: Comus holds it high and appears to be casting a spell over it with his powerful wand; in H, however, the cup is not nearly so conspicuous in the hand of the hog-monster. Also, the right foot of this female monster is cloven, suggesting the demonic; but in H it is not.²⁶

In H 2 the sexuality-virginity emphasis continues with an aged but still muscular Comus in disguise: his neck and right arm are bullish, his frame solid; in B Comus is noticeably younger and his build slighter. The Lady in H appears distressed, fearful, anxious, and holds her upraised hands close to her body; in B she displays no such worried expression, and her upraised hands are away from her body in a less-threatened, more relaxed pose. Seemingly inconsistent with Blake's emphasis in H, as noted previously, is the appearance of *haemony* in the Spirit's hand, an emblem of the supernatural.

Neither version of Scene 3 stresses sexuality over sorcery. The H Comus now appears younger, the





B Comus older (as shown by the lines in his face and neck).

H 5 continues the muscular Comus; the B Comus is delicate, effeminate. However, both are clothed, although thinly. Yet Comus in H is barefooted, with his right foot close to the Lady's and the big toe oddly short and raised toward her. The H Lady covers her breasts in defense of her virginity, and she sits in a chair with carvings of three bare-breasted female figures entwined apparently with serpents; the carvings plainly embody the sensual temptation that Comus is offering the Lady, and they contrast well with the Lady's defensive posture. The carved figures are absent in the B chair, and the Lady's hands are relaxed on her thighs. An emphasis in B on sorcery can be seen in Blake's positioning of the magic cup. Just as in B 1, Blake in B 5 draws attention to it: Comus holds it high enough to outline it clearly against the plain column behind; in H, Comus holds it so low that its lines blend with those of Comus's arm, hand, cape, the bird-monster behind, and the covered dish below, which repeats the triangular shape of the cup's pedestal, reverses the shape of the cup itself, and therewith obscures it. Also highlighting the sorcery in B is the visionary and amazing serpent above Comus's wand; clearly designed to represent the spell Comus is casting over the Lady, the snake has no body apart from that suggested by the lines of a nearly invisible two-layered cloud over the Lady. Finally, the oddly shaped carafe held on a platter by the strange dwarf, to which Comus points his wand, seems to reinforce the element of magic. The cat-monster

Scene 6: "The Brothers Driving out Comus."
Huntington, upper left; Boston, lower right.

Scene 7: "Sabrina Disenchanting the Lady."
Huntington, lower left; Boston, upper right.

to the Lady's left also holds an unusual container apparently containing transforming liquid. Perhaps with the cup and these two containers Blake is amplifying the text in providing Comus with several choices for the Lady.

In H 6 Comus is again more muscular than in B, and naked (as in H 1); the B Comus is still clothed. Again the Lady in H tightly covers her breasts as she sits in the carved chair; in B her hands still rest on her thighs. Suggestions of sorcery are present in both versions: in B the four vanishing faces below Comus's wand are evil and demonic, especially the lowest one; in H the faces, from bottom up, are a point-eared human face that seems to be breathing red flames toward the brothers (Milton's stage directions after line 813 specify that the monsters give a show of resistance); a bird-monster like that in B 5 (nearest the Lady); another human face, this one with stubby horns; and above the wand, a long-eared horse head (from lines 553-54?).



Neither seventh scene emphasizes sensuality. B suggests Sabrina's magic power more than H: she is covered by a bright rainbow at the end of which sits the Lady; and Sabrina's magic drops to purify the Lady are emphasized visually by the shell in which she carries the liquid.²⁷ In H she merely holds her hand over the Lady's head.

Neither eighth scene emphasizes sensuality. But the magical is clearly the highlight of B, wherein the departing Attendant Spirit is executed with a delicacy and a translucence complementing the brightness of the scene and giving the sensation that one can almost see through him, that he is dissolving into the air.

Blake's two series for *Comus*, then, are considerations of the masque from different viewpoints. The masque itself is particularly rich in connotations of both the sexuality-virginity theme and the theme of witchcraft, magic, and the supernatural. The visual representatives of these themes--the reigning powers of this particular night during which the chaste Lady is in serious danger of seduction--are Cotytto in H and Hecate in B. Blake's use of these two pagan goddesses to represent themes he accentuates fairly consistently throughout the two series not only illuminates the masque by focusing attention on Milton's themes, but also highlights Blake's own perception that Cotytto and Hecate as powers of evil are at the very center of Milton's drama in which good and evil clash openly and forcibly, and in which both Milton and Blake ultimately assert the necessity of making a proper choice between the two.

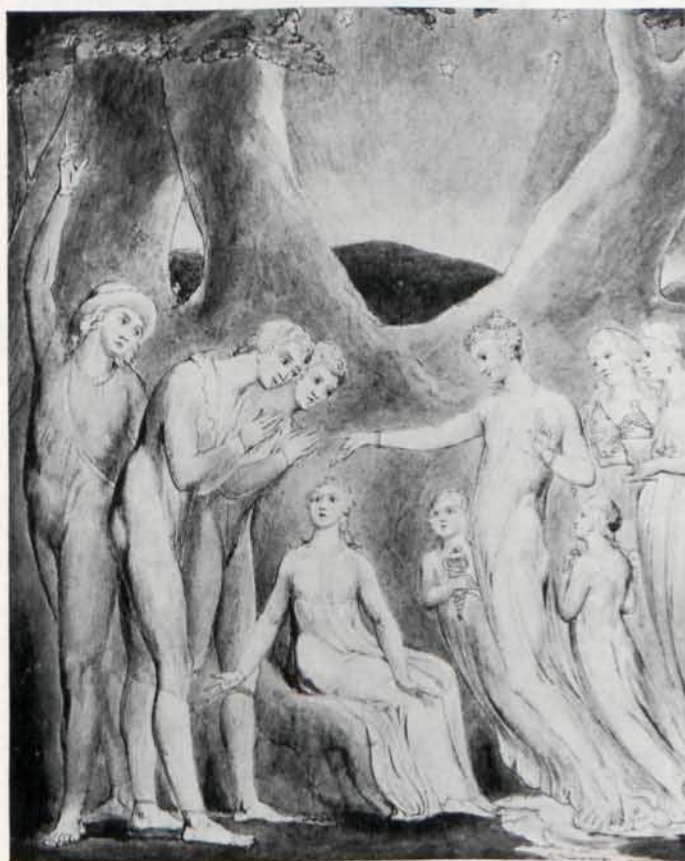


¹ The two series, although of the same scenes or combination of scenes in *Comus*, are considerably different (see n. 2 below). The date of the Huntington set of eight is probably about 1801-1802, as Blake refers to the unfinished designs in a letter to John Flaxman dated 19 October 1801 (Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966], p. 810). The date of the Boston series of eight is less certain. Marcia R. Pointon suggests that they were done "probably a little later" than the first set (*Milton & English Art* [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970], p. 139); Angus Fletcher dates them between 1805 and 1810 (*The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton's "Comus"* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971], p. 253); Joseph A. Wittreich, Jr. proposes 1809 (*Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1975], p. 80); and more recently David Bindman asserts that they were done "probably about 1815," although he offers no evidence for so late a date (*Blake as an Artist* [Oxford: Phaidon, 1977], p. 186). The important question of whether the B series was completed before or after Blake's *Milton*, the date of which is also open to question, thus remains unresolved. Both sets are reproduced in color by A. Fletcher, but the H series in the copies of Fletcher I have seen is badly printed and potentially misleading. Having examined the originals of both sets, I am impressed that a quality reproduction of them in color is sorely needed. For kind permission to reproduce these two sets of designs, I wish to thank the Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, Calif., and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

² A few of the differences are discussed by A. Fletcher, who credits Diane Christian for much of the analysis (pp. 253-56); by Wittreich, *Angel of Apocalypse* (pp. 81-86); and by Bindman (p. 186).

³ Irene Talyer, "Blake's *Comus* Designs," *Blake Studies*, 4 (Spring 1972), 45-80; citations above come from pp. 48, 51, 76, 48 (to which cf. p. 75n). The reference to Medea is on p. 237 in her expanded version, "Say First! What Mov'd Blake? Blake's *Comus* Designs and *Milton*," in *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on "The Four Zoas," "Milton," and "Jerusalem,"* ed. Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), pp. 233-58.

⁴ *Angel of Apocalypse*, p. 83.



⁵ "The Mental Contest: Blake's *Comus* Designs," forthcoming in *Blake Studies*. I am much obliged to Professor Behrendt for allowing me to read those portions of his manuscript that relate to this study, and for offering perceptive suggestions regarding my analysis.

⁶ Tayler, "This strange figure is not in Milton's masque" ("Blake's *Comus* Designs," p. 48; see also, "Say First!" p. 237); Pointon, "Above the trees rides the moon-goddess . . . a figure which does not feature in Milton's poem" (p. 139), even though Blake is "precise in following details of the text" (p. 138); Behrendt, "The figure in the dragon-car above the trees is unmentioned in Milton's [standard] text."

⁷ The heart of Wittreich's argument is as follows: "Charles Lamb reminds us that the following lines, 'not printed in the common editions of Milton' and not 'generally known to belong to that divine "Masque", were printed in both the 1801 and 1809 editions by Henry John Todd, having first been published in Todd's 1798 edition of *Comus*. The Attendant Spirit, descending and entering, explains that his mansion is 'Amidst th' Hesperian gardens . . . / . . . on whose faire tree / The scallie-harrest dragon ever keeps / His uninchaned eye.' A few lines later we read of the 'jealous ocean' winding his 'farre extended armes, till with steepe fall / Halfe his wast flood the wild Atlantique fills.' The scaly dragon derives from these lines, and so does the figure of jealousy, which is transformed by Blake into the 'female' riding the dragon. The arching trees, creating a den-like place, may also be explained by turning to the cancelled lines that speak of 'this arched wood' and its 'yawning dens' (*Angel of Apocalypse*, pp. 82-83). That the single dragon in the cancelled lines is 'scallie,' 'harrest,' and that the trees of the forest are 'arched' and form 'yawning dens' coincide with elements in Blake's illustrations--the H serpents (but not the B) are scaled, in both series they are harnessed, and the trees are noticeably arched, particularly in H. But Blake's dragons are a team, they are not keeping watch over precious fruit, and they are driven by female figures (not male, like Milton's Jealous Ocean) who ostensibly have no direct connection with the Attendant Spirit or with the Hesperian Gardens from whence he comes. The cancelled lines are discussed by John S. Diekhoff, who points out that the central images in this cancelled passage (the Hesperian tree, the dragon guarding the fruit with 'uninchaned eye') are inserted by Milton further on in the masque and thus appear in all standard versions, including those Blake most likely used ('The Text of *Comus*, 1634 to 1645" [1937; rpt. as an appendix to *A Masque at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's "Comus"*, ed. Diekhoff, Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1968, pp. 251-75; the discussion of these cancelled lines appears on pp. 265-66]). For a discussion of the versions of *Comus*, see n. 8 below.

⁸ Of the five important versions of the masque, Blake probably was familiar with a reproduction of the 1645 or the 1673 version. Thomas Warton's ed., which is a mixture of both these versions, appeared in 1785 and 1791 ("A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634" in *Poems upon Several Occasions* [London: J. Dodsley]). Henry John Todd's ed. of *Comus* in 1798 follows the 1645 version, although like Warton's it updates the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (*A Masque . . . With Notes Critical and Explanatory* . . . [Canterbury: W. Bristow, et al.]; rpt. as part of Todd's edn. of Milton's *Poetical Works* in 1801, 1809, 1826, etc. The passages I cite, which do not vary significantly from version to version, come from Todd's 1798 ed. Because Todd reproduces the 1645 version, his line numbers are the same as those in the more accessible modern ed. by Merritt Y. Hughes, who also reprints the 1645 edn. (*Complete Poems and Major Prose* [Indianapolis, Ind.: Odyssey, 1957]).

The five versions of the masque are: (1) the Trinity Manuscript, a transcript in Milton's hand made sometime after the original and reproduced in part in 1861, in full in 1899; (2) the "expurgated" and shortened Bridgewater Manuscript, apparently a stage copy, transcribed and printed by Todd in 1798; (3) the first published version (anonymous), 1637, based on the Trinity Manuscript early in its correction stage; (4) the 1645 ed., authorized by Milton; and (5) the 1673 ed., set from the 1645 ed. Facsimiles and discussions of all five versions appear in Harris F. Fletcher's ed., *John Milton's Complete Poetical Works, Reproduced in Photographic Facsimile* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1943), vol. 1.

Corrupted stage adaptations of *Comus* were performed frequently during 1738-1850, but Blake's designs show no evidence that he followed an adaptation over the standard texts. The first major adaptation, that of John Dalton in 1738, adds scenes,

shortens speeches, and inserts additional characters: a second attendant spirit, Philidel, is to watch over the Lady in the forest; Euphrosyne adds to *Comus*'s argument at the castle; and a spirit assists Sabrina late in the masque (*Comus, a Masque . . . As Alter'd from Milton's Masque* . . . [London: R. Dodsley, 1738]). Blake does not include these figures: H 2 portrays Milton's Attendant Spirit (so identified because he holds the magic herb, as he later tells the brothers, 638-47). H 5 and B 5 do not include a female persuader. Dalton's adaptation, incidentally, does include the Cotytto-Hecate passage cited previously; but its successor, that by George Colman in 1772, shortens the passage and omits all reference to Cotytto, rendering the lines nonsensical (*Comus: A Masque, Altered from Milton* . . . [London: T. Lowndes, et al.]). For further analysis of the stage adaptations, see Alwin Thaler, "Milton in the Theatre," *SP*, 18 (July 1920), 269-308.

⁹ After completing this study, I came upon an apparent but very brief corroboration of the identifications I present below in John E. Grant and Robert E. Brown's "Blake's Vision of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: A Report and an Anatomy," *Blake Newsletter* 31, 8 (Winter 1974-75), 64, n. 5, wherein the authors refer to the dragons "that pull the cars of Cotytto-Hecate in *Comus* 4." This identification, so far as I have been able to determine, is not expanded elsewhere.

¹⁰ The sky is not visible partly because the woman rides through rather than above the foliage. In the B series, the female rides atop the trees, the night is clear, and the sky and moon are plainly visible. The gloom Blake portrays in H is consistent with numerous allusions by the masque characters to the absolute darkness of the night, caused by heavy clouds (e.g., 193-96; 203; 330-38; and so forth). The only light to appear during these early forest scenes, according to the text, is a momentary glimmer in the clouds detected by the Lady (220-24).

¹¹ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a dragon-drawn chariot descends in answer to Medea's prayer to Hecate (VII. 218-19). Milton alludes to the dragon-team in his Latin elegy "In Obitu Praesulis Eliensis" ("On the Death of the Bishop of Ely"), ll. 56-58, which antedates *Comus* by six years.

¹² David V. Erdman, for instance, maintains the distinction in *The Illuminated Blake* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor / Doubleday, 1974). "Serpents" or "snakes" elsewhere in Blake that bear close resemblance to these harnessed creatures are the similarly harnessed serpents in *Thel* 61 (Erdman, p. 40) and *America* 11N (Erdman, p. 149). In contrast, a Blake "dragon" (to use his own term) with forelegs and wings is pictured in *America* 4N (Erdman, p. 142) and a variation in *America* b (Erdman, p. 393).

¹³ Charles Grosvenor Osgood, *The Classical Mythology of Milton's English Poems* (1900; rpt. New York: Gordian, 1964), pp. 24-25.

¹⁴ Barbara Breasted, "Comus and the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Studies*, 3 (1971), 201-24.

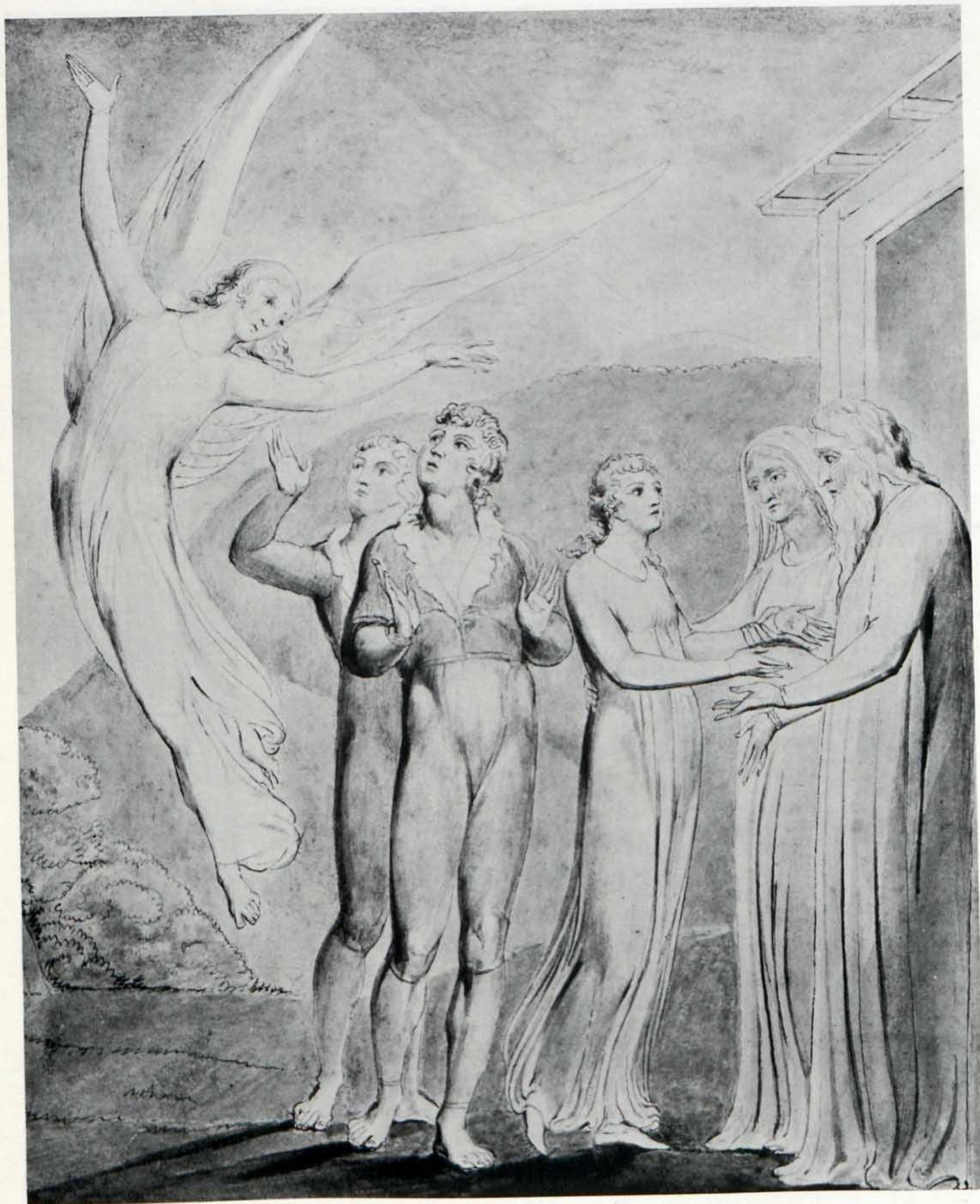
¹⁵ Todd's annotation to "Dark-veil'd Cotytto" (129) includes material from Newton's earlier note: "The Goddess of wantonness. . . . Dr. Newton observes, that 'she was originally a "strumpet, and had midnight sacrifices at Athens, and is there-fore [sic] very properly said to be dark-veiled.' Her orgies were celebrated also by the Thracians, Chians, Corinthians, and others. Her rites were termed *Cotyttia*, and her priests *Baptae*. See Juvenal Sat. ii. v. 91. Milton makes her the companion of Hecate, the patroness of enchantments, to whom *Comus* and his crew v. 535 'do abhorred rites: 'her mysteries requiring the veil of that darkness, over which Hecate presided' (p. 23n). Thomas Newton, ed., *Paradise Regain'd . . . To Which Is Added . . . Poems upon Several Occasions* . . . (London: J. & R. Tonson, & S. Draper, 1752).

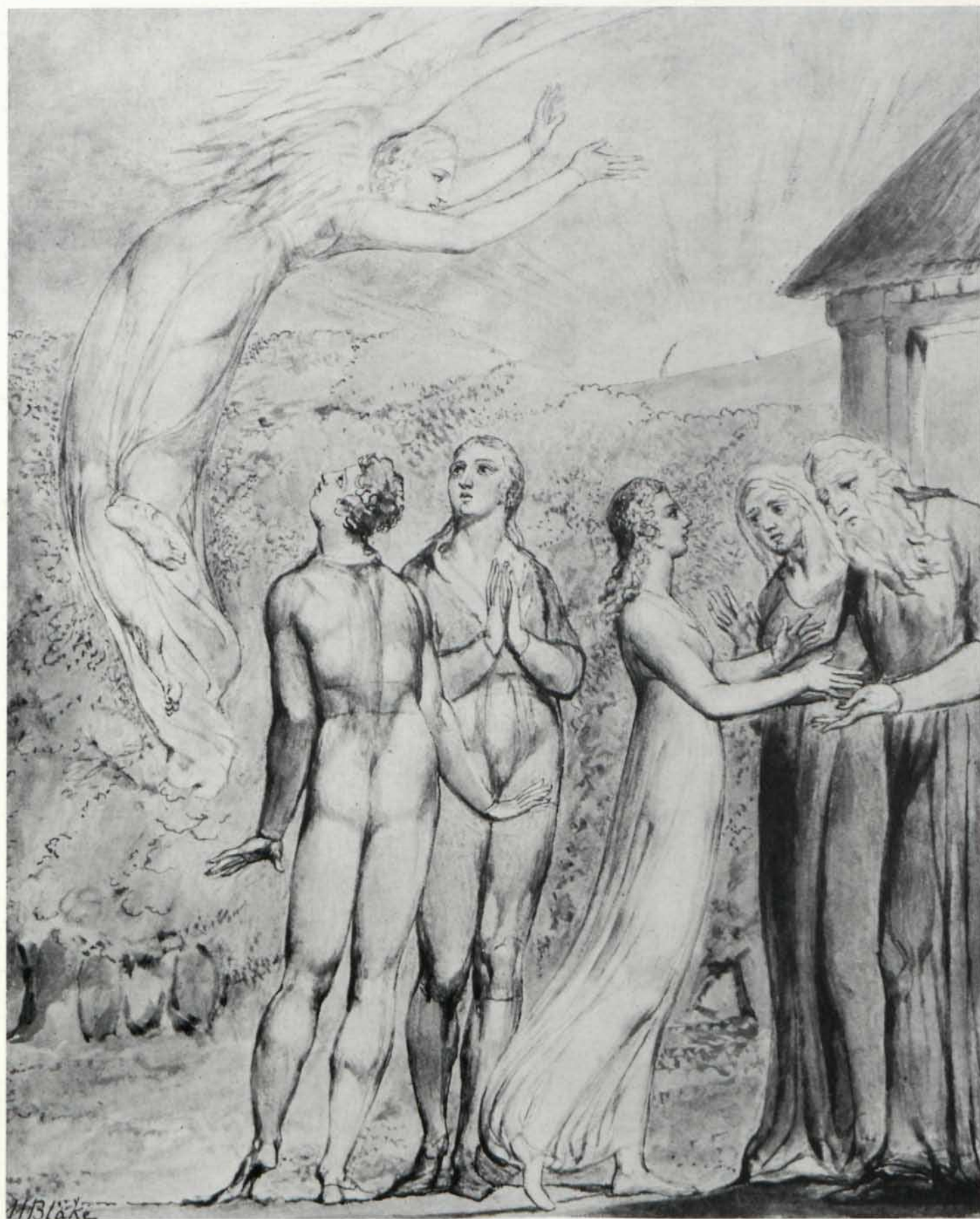
¹⁶ See S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence, R. I.: Brown Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 365-66.

¹⁷ Blake's "I saw a chapel" comes from his Note-Book and was written about 1793. Below are the first two stanzas:

I saw a chapel all of gold
That none did dare to enter in,
And many weeping stood without,
Weeping, mourning, worshipping.

I saw a serpent rise between
The white pillars of the door,





And he forc'd & forc'd & forc'd,
[Till he broke the pearly door *del.*]
Down the golden hinges tore. (*Complete Writings*, p.163)

¹⁸ See Damon under "Dragon," p. 107.

¹⁹ Milton's *haemony* as an emblem representing legitimate vs. illegitimate sexual experience is a thesis I present in "An Anglo-Saxon Etymology for Milton's *Haemony*," *American Notes & Queries*, 14 (October 1975), 18-19.

²⁰ In the original one can plainly see that the triangular design is created by folds in Cotytto's dress. But in reproductions, especially A. Fletcher's, the configuration might be taken as a car or chariot. Vertical lines directly beneath the triangular skirt, however, do imply a platform on which Cotytto is riding.

²¹ In *Paradise Lost* the scale constitutes a key symbol, where Libra's position in the Zodiac between Virgo (Eve) and Scorpio (Satan) is a striking and profound image (III. 558; cf. IV. 997). Blake may also be including the scale image in his fifth *Comus* scenes, the Banquet: in both versions, he includes hanging lamps, triangular and scale-shaped, one almost directly over the seated Lady. And in H 6, a lamp is visible below the second brother's sword, where it looks more like a hanging scale (in connection with the sword) than a lamp. It seems significant that the notorious cup, wrenched from the sorcerer's hand by the nearest brother, is directly below the lamp-scale.

²² A similarity worth observing exists between this female figure and one in the watercolor version (done for Thomas Butts) of Plate 14, "The Morning Stars Sang Together," of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*; the similarity is pointed out by Pointon, who claims erroneously that the figures are the same person (p. 171, n. 102). The female in *Job* also leads a red, blue, and scaled serpent-team much like Blake's H serpent-team, and also rides under a crescent moon. However, the female figure has wings. For a color reproduction, see Kathleen Raine, *William Blake* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 165.

²³ Blake's references to Hecate are on the following pages in the *Complete Writings*: 41, 840, 849, 855 (three references). Versions of Blake's *Hecate* are in the Huntington Art Gallery, the Tate Gallery, and the National Gallery of Scotland. Raine provides a black and white reproduction of the Tate version (p. 86); the Huntington version is reproduced in black and white as "The Triple Hecate" in the Library's *Catalogue of William Blake's Drawings and Paintings in the Huntington Library*, C. H. Collins

Baker, enl. and rev. R. R. Wark (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1969), pl. XXXV; it is also reproduced in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 18 (May 1955). Blake refers to a Hecate "drawing" or "cartoon" (*Complete Writings*, p. 855) by George Romney in his possession in 1804 (p. 849) and which he claims was both well executed and well known (p. 855). This Romney *Hecate* may have influenced his own portrayals of the goddess; certainly it must bear a relationship to the *Comus* Hecate, for Blake describes it as "the figure with the torch and snake" (p. 840). I have been unable to locate Romney's drawing, despite the able assistance of Shirley Martin of the Univ. of Maine library at Farmington, who has made inquiries for me at Yale and Princeton, which hold major Romney collections, and at Huntington, Frick, Courtland, and Tate. Jean H. Hagstrum kindly referred my inquiry to his former student Warren Jones, who is currently working on the Blake color-printed drawings of 1795; Jones made inquiries of Martin Butlin and of Ann Crookshank, a leading Romney authority. Jones thinks Blake may have owned it, Butlin believes that it probably belonged to Hayley, and Miss Crookshank surmises that it is probably lost among the numerous Romney drawings scattered throughout the world.

²⁴ Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (1940; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 31; see also Alastair Fowler's note, *The Poems of Milton*, ed. John Carey and Fowler (London: Longman, 1968), p. 26.

²⁵ Charles M. Gayley, *The Classical Myths in English Literature*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Ginn, 1894), p. 84.

²⁶ This detail, apparent in the original, is not so visible in reproductions: my copy of A. Fletcher's color reprints fails to show the clearly differentiated toes of the H female's left foot, making it appear cloven, and his reprint of B is not sufficiently clear to show the figure's seemingly cloven left foot. The reproduction of H in the Huntington catalog cited above is much clearer.

²⁷ Sabrina's purification rite (910-21) does not mention a shell, but much earlier the Lady alludes to one in her lovely song, song, "Sweet Echo":

"Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph that liv'st unseen / Within thy airy shell / By slow Meander's margent green . . ." (230-32). Blake's shell in B 7 thus stresses visually Sabrina's identity as a water nymph; but more important, it ties Sabrina to the Lady's early plea to the Nymph Echo for assistance in finding her brothers, consequently involving Sabrina from the very beginning of the Lady's confrontation with evil.