Soul, Seed, Species: William Blake and the Language of Preformationist Biology

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Abstract

This thesis discusses how Blake transformed biological images of birth and regeneration into complex symbols of spiritual, political, and artistic rebirth. Situating Blake against key developments in the eighteenth-century life sciences, it finds Blake resisting evolutionary materialism and its rationalist preference for material progress and self-preservation over the spiritual values of redemption, self-sacrifice, and renewal. Blake juxtaposes two biological paradigms— preformation and epigenesis—throughout his corpus. The former emphasises the continuity and heredity of form, while the latter emphasises self-organisation and plasticity. Working against recent criticism, this thesis aligns Blake with preformationist thinkers such as Charles Bonnet and Johann Kaspar Lavater. Insisting on the importance of reading Blake's organic symbolism in the context of his unorthodox Christian views, it argues that Blake saw epigenesis as a materialist conception of life masquerading as a vitalist one, and saw preformation as a model more sympathetic to his spiritual conception of vitality.

Examining works across Blake's corpus, chapter 1 argues that preformation science offered Blake potent symbols with which to address the soteriological and eschatological nuances of regeneration. Chapter 2 discusses the political dimensions of Blakean regeneration. Reading the Urizen Books and *The Four Zoas* against Blake's neglected *The French Revolution,* it contests assumptions in recent Blake criticism that the poet found images of freedom in biological self-organisation. Engaging with eighteenth century materialist neurophysiology, chapter 3 argues that *The Four Zoas* registers a deep dissatisfaction with the autopoietic nature of life and language. Chapter 4 examines Blake’s engagement with the organicist cult of original genius, arguing that Blake uses preformationist symbolism in *Milton* to emphasise prophetic tradition over individual originality. Finally, discussing engravings such as the *Laocoön* reproduction alongside Blake’s pronouncements against the classics, chapter 5 argues that Blake uses preformationist language to undermine neoclassical values of formal autonomy and cultural autochthony.

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'You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of the work.'

- Bhagavad Gita

Introduction: Redefining Vitality with William Blake

Bursting the Shell: Generation and Regeneration

"O what is Life & what is Man. O what is Death?"[1]

In *Night Thoughts* (1742-1745), a sombre poem reflecting on human mortality, Edward Young uses an organic metaphor to express an idea which, though sounding gloom-ridden to modern ears, was offered as a source of comfort to Young's readers: that death, by removing our 'gross impediment of clay,' could free the soul and 'make us, embryos of existence, free.'[2] Firmly grounded in the zeitgeist of the mid-eighteenth century was not only the Christian orthodoxy contained in this metaphor, but also the picture of the organic presented within it. The immortal soul lodged in the mortal body, suggests Young, is like an unborn foetus encased in the egg. Just as the hatching of the egg is the beginning of the creature's life proper, so does the death of the body mark the birth of the immortal soul:

> Embryos we must be, till we burst the shell,
> Yon ambient azure shell, and spring to life,
> The life of gods, (O transport!) and of man.[3]

Speak of the organic in embryonic terms, and the twenty-first century reader might reasonably expect motifs of gestational development and evolutionary change. However, Young's metaphor implies not the emergence of something new and different but the unfettering of

[1] William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, foreword and commentary by Harold Bloom, newly revised edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 169; all further references to Blake's works are to this volume, with the letter 'E' signifying Erdman's page numbers.
[2] Edward Young, *Night Thoughts by Edward Young, D.D. With the Life of the Author, and Notes Critical & Explanatory* (London, 1798), bk. 1, lines 127–28.
[3] Young, *Night Thoughts*, 1.132–134.

something already pre-existent. The soul was already perfect from the moment of its creation, just as, according to a popular belief of the time, the embryo was fully developed from its inception. Young's description of the embryo sleeping in its parent ('From real life, but little more remote/ Is he, not yet a candidate for light,/ The future embryo, slumb'ring in his sire'), alludes to the spermist version of this theory of generation, namely that the future organism is perfectly formed as a minute, dormant animalcule in the father's seminal fluid.[4] The soul is already perfect. Only by bursting the corrupt body encasing it, however, can it unfold in its full beauty.

Embedded in a brief passage in Young's poem of more than 10,000 lines, this embryo metaphor is easily overlooked. However, read alongside Young's later work, it offers an insight into the ways in which the life sciences were undergoing a profound shift in the eighteenth century. In *Night Thoughts*, Young found in the organic world what seemed to be an apt metaphor for the ancient concept of the pre-existence of the soul. In *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), however, published more than a decade after *Night Thoughts*, Young presents a very different use of the organic metaphor.

In this influential essay on individual genius, Young advocates for inventiveness over imitation by aligning human creativity with nature's power of generation. For Young, genius was beyond acquired skill: it seemed to 'partake of something Divine.'[5] At the same time, the work of genius was also a work of nature:

> An *Original* may be said to be of *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*: *Imitations* are often a sort of *Manufacture*

[4] Young, *Night Thoughts*, 1.129–131.
[5] Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (London, 1759), 27.

> wrought up by those *Mechanics*, *Art*, and *Labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own.[6]

Genius itself was a quasi-natural force: it was the "vital root" of human creativity. Contributing to a wider shift in aesthetic values away from neoclassicism's interest in propriety and formal polish towards the vigour and force of what Alexander Gerard calls 'real natural genius,' Young, as Hazard Adams writes, is at the forefront of literary criticism when he shifts its emphasis 'from discussion of rules and conventions of literary statement to interest in originality and innate "genius".'[7] This reorientation towards originality is supported by a reconceptualisation of nature itself: as James Engell writes, the new paradigm dictated that 'the artist should imitate the inworking, creative, and organizing spirit of nature, the *natura naturans*, rather than copy or imitate nature's outward form and appearance, the *natura naturata*.'[8] Young's vision of the organic no longer assumes the persistence of pre-existent forms. Instead, what characterises the vegetable world, and by analogy, the aesthetic, is growth, development, and evolution.

This change is not limited to Young's work. Rather, it reflects a broader, more profound change in the European conception of vegetable nature and human nature alike over Young's lifetime. This thesis concerns itself with changing perceptions of the organic in the long eighteenth century, and in doing so seeks to illuminate an important yet difficult aspect of the work of a poet who illustrated *Night Thoughts*: William Blake. What I am interested in is how Blake assimilated the latest ideas from embryology into his own work, transforming various

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[6] Young, *Conjectures*, 12.
[7] Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (London, 1774), 9. Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 337.
[8] James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 83.

images of physical birth and regeneration into complex symbols of spiritual, political, and artistic rebirth.

Two Paradigms: Preformation and Epigenesis

As this thesis will show, two very different biological paradigms are constantly held in tension in Blake's works, paradigms which, as the examples from Young evince, manifested themselves in opposing theories of generation. Much of eighteenth-century embryology concerned itself with a simple question: was the embryo pre-formed, or did it organise itself in the womb?[9] For proponents of preformation, a theory which was widely accepted in the eighteenth century, all living creatures past, present, and future were created by God as germs at the dawn of Creation, and simply awaited the right conditions in which to develop and grow into maturity.[10] When a seedling sprouted or a chick developed, what one observed was the expansion and unfolding of a creature which was already fully formed in miniature. This is the theory which informs *Night Thoughts*.

For proponents of epigenesis, however, new embryos progressively developed from undifferentiated matter. Though it appears in Young's later *Conjectures*, the idea is an old one, dating back to Aristotle. William Harvey, writing in his 1651 *Exercitationes de generatione animalium*, supported this ancient idea with new observations, writing that 'the generation of the chick from the egg is the result of epigenesis' since 'all its parts are not fashioned

[9] The key monographs on this topic are Joseph Needham, *A History of Embryology*, 2nd edn, rev. with the assistance of Arthur Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), Elizabeth Gasking, *Investigations into Generation, 1651-1828* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), and Shirley A. Roe, *Matter, Life, and Generation: Eighteenth-Century Embryology and the Haller-Wolff Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[10] For a sympathetic account of why preformation was as appealing as it was in its heyday, see Clara Pinto-Correia, *The Ovary of Eve* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1997).

simultaneously, but emerge in their due succession and order.' [11] Its structure is not preformed; rather, 'its form proceeds simultaneously with its growth, and its growth with its form.'[12] I argue that Blake juxtaposes these two models of life throughout his corpus. He saw epigenesis as a materialist conception of life masquerading as a vitalist one, and saw preformation as a model better aligned with his spiritual conception of vitality, which emphasized the importance of the universal "human form divine" as the ultimate source and prototype of life for each unique living being.

Blake's attitude towards the organic world was complicated, to say the least. Nature, for him, could be a cruel world of corruption and death, yet it also bore images of Eternity in the lion and the fly, in the oak and the lettuce. Blake's ambivalence is, indeed, evident in the different ways in which words such as 'organic' and 'organized' appear in his works. As a synonym to 'natural,' the adjective 'organic' is at times used by Blake to describe a dull earth-bound reality generated by the physical body alone. As he writes in his early work *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), 'None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions' (E2). Blake's use of the term registers unease around the limitations embodiment imposes on our ability to perceive reality in its imaginative wholeness: 'The desires & perceptions of man untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense' (E2). Our spiritual nature is expansive, open, communal. To be organic is, in contrast, to be bound into distinct bundles of organs, cut off from the wider imaginative world to which we are native. Thus, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), the prophet Isaiah distinguishes

[11] *The Works of William Harvey, M.D.: Translated from the Latin with a Life of the Author by Robert Willis, M.D.*, (London, 1847), 336. The original reads: 'Animal autem, quod per *epigenesin* procreatur, materiam simul attrahit, parat, concoquit, & eadem utitur: formatur simul & augetur.' *Excercitationes de Generatione Animalium* (Amsterdam, 1651), 251.
[12] Harvey, *Works*, 336.

between organised and infinite perception: 'I saw no God,' he says, 'nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing' (E38). Nonetheless, Blake registers the irony in the fact that physical embodiment, imposing limitations on the imagination, occurs through open-ended, self-driven processes of growth and development: in *The Book of Los* (1795) it is the rudimentary 'Branchy forms' of the emerging self which are seen 'organizing the Human/ Into finite inflexible organs' (E92). At other points, however, Blake insists on the necessity of organization as a guard against the indefinite. As he warns in *Jerusalem* (1804-1820), 'Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars/ And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power' (E205). In this sense, however, to be organised is not to be isolated but to be an integral part of a larger organic whole. As he explains later in *Jerusalem*:

> he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
> Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Organized & not as thou
> O Fiend of Righteousness pretendest; thine is a Disorganized
> And snowy cloud: brooder of tempests & destructive War. (E251)

The visionary world is an organised whole, minutely articulated in its parts while also preserved in its integrity.

How do we account for the co-existence of two very different attitudes towards organisation in Blake's works? The answer lies in the fact that Blake uses "organization" in two different senses: to be formed and to be embodied. The two are not to be confused. Form is ideal, virtual: spiritual existences possess form. As Blake writes in his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809), 'A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce' (E541). In fact, things in the spirit are more distinctly organised than

anything in nature: Blake insists that 'all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organized than any thing seen by his mortal eye'; 'Spirits,' indeed 'are organized men,' though they can be seen not with 'the mortal perishing organ of sight' but only with 'imaginative and immortal organs' (E541). Thus in the ideal sense, to be organised is to have a definite form, to be a distinct and integral part of the organic whole of imaginal nature. As Blake writes in a letter to Thomas Butts, as spiritual beings we are 'organized by Divine Providence for Spiritual communion' and not for 'Natural Bread' (E724). Yet while the soul has a timeless *telos* aligned with the spiritual community of which it is a part, the body, organising itself, has its own self-centred agenda. Branching into cancerous forms, the material body deviates from the organic whole of which it was originally a part, closing itself off from its spiritual ecosystem which offers it true life.

Blake's body-soul dualism, arising in the context of a paradigmatic shift in the European life sciences, thus has a hybrid nature that is not necessarily obvious to current-day readers. This hybrid nature is worth understanding, however, not only because it is fascinating in itself, but also because it forces us to examine our own assumptions about the nature of life. Over the last two decades, the question 'What is life?' has persistently preoccupied literary critics interested in uncovering the ways in which developments in the life sciences led poets such as Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Blake, and Wordsworth to give 'serious thought to scientific attempts to establish what life is, serious thought that often informed their poetry in numerous ways.'[13] In the hands of an experimentalist, life seemed electric, dynamic, protean – no wonder, then, that

[13] Ross Wilson, 'Introduction', in *The Meaning of "Life" in Romantic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Ross Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-12 (4). See, also, Nicholas Roe, ed., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Robert Mitchell, *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

critics have accordingly characterized Romantic vitality in similar terms. Few critics have made this characterization more brilliantly than Denise Gigante, who, drawing attention to the late eighteenth-century shift in the life sciences from a preformationist outlook towards a fascination with the powers of self-formation, writes that various Romantic writers 'were all committed to defining and representing the incalculable, uncontrollable—often capricious, always ebullient—power of vitality.'[14] Living form was 'protean, procreative,' a monstrous plastic power of self-creation which resisted formal restraints and served as a model for art.[15] However, for many eighteenth-century biologists, the elusive quality of life was often attached not to the protean powers of self-organization, but to the ability of the species to perpetuate itself as an eternal type through the ravages and accidents of time. The persistence of form was the true mark of life; evolution and change, conversely, threatened it.

Carmen Kreiter drew attention to traces of proto-Darwinian concepts in Blake's work back in 1965, and decades after her article there has been a recent burst of interest in Blake's proto-evolutionary and embryological imagery.[16] As valuable as this work has been, Blake criticism has nonetheless neglected the theological contexts in which the concepts of generation and regeneration were entrenched. Stefani Engelstein's 2000 article on the "Regenerative Geography" of Blake's texts reveals much about Blake's 'double obsession with the artistic production and biological reproduction of the human body,' but it also leaves unexplored the biological and theological contexts in which *regeneration*, her key term, is embedded.[17] In *Sweet Science* (2018), Amanda Jo Goldstein insightfully asks whether '[w]e have too quickly

[14] Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3. See also "Blake's Living Form," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63, no. 4 (2009): 461–85.
[15] Gigante, *Life*, 4.
[16] Carmen S. Kreiter, "Evolution and William Blake," *Studies in Romanticism* 4, no. 2 (1965): 110–18.
[17] Stefani Engelstein, "The Regenerative Geography of the Text in William Blake," *Modern Language Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000): 61-86 (62).

seized upon *epigenesis*—loosely construed as the vital, dynamic refutation of deistic, mechanical predetermination—as Romanticism's fit, provocative, and progressive life science.'[18] However, inasmuch as she questions existing readings of Blake, Goldstein shares Gigante's characterization of preformation as a theory bespeaking predestination, and as so argues that while Blake 'satirizes one powerful model of epigenesis,' he nonetheless 'invites us to reconstruct another.'[19] Placing Blake in dialogue with Erasmus Darwin and Jean-Baptise Lamarck, she argues that Blake demolishes the vitalist depiction of life as the power to self-organise. Instead, Blake often shows living bodies as bodies of matter which are codetermined by their milieu. I share Goldstein's scepticism of the association between life and self-organization. However, I believe that Goldstein's dismissal of preformation, like Gigante's, limits our understanding of Blake's works. Meanwhile, Annika Mann argues in 2019 that the 'paradoxical womb imagery' in *The Book of Urizen* (first composed in 1794) 'in its impossibility goes far beyond that of preformationism or epigenesis, challenging the view that Romantism was committed to vitalist and individualist poetics.[20] However, limiting her chapter to *Urizen*, Mann does not note how Blake, in works such as *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, draws upon preformationist imagery in differentiating generation from regeneration, and thus perpetuates an ongoing critical dismissal or neglect of preformation as a relevant conceptual framework for reading Blake.[21]

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[18] Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2017), 38.
[19] Goldstein, 40.
[20] Annika Mann, "Writing Generation: Revolutionary Bodies and the Poetics of Political Economy," in *Systems of Life: Biopolitics, Economics, and Literature on the Cusp of Modernity*, ed. Richard A. Barney and Warren Montag (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 154.
[21] For other recent works on Blake and the life sciences, see also Tristanne J. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Chris Bundock and Elizabeth Effinger, eds., *William Blake's Gothic Imagination: Bodies of Horror* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

Blake, however, had use for preformation. Throughout his works, Blake appropriated images of preformation and epigenesis from the life sciences and mapped them onto a Christian soteriological scheme. Scenes of generation re-enact the fall from innocence (which in material terms is the fall into embodiment) while scenes of regeneration depict in symbolic terms the perpetuation and eventual liberation of the soul from its prison of flesh. As such, he associated epigenesist imagery with fallen embodiment and preformationist imagery with the overcoming of the vicissitudes of matter in the reassertion of eternal identity in Christ (who claims 'I am […] the life,' John 14:6). Contrasting preformationist theology against epigenesist biology, the true vitality of the soul against the false vitality of the flesh, Blake emphasized the idea that to vitalize nature was to humanise it, to recognise the living subjects residing within this world of wilful flesh and fickle matter. Thus as important as it is to show how there was never a strict division between science and poetry in the Romantic period, it is equally important to remember that life, as a concept, was hardly confined to the life sciences. For William Blake, life had an undeniable Christian significance, a significance which disrupts any critical attempts to define Romantic vitality in terms of the organic body alone. Before we trade in a conceptual currency which invests in the phenomenon of self-organisation the positive values of freedom, creativity, potency, dynamism, and power, we might engage in a deeper study of how generation was variously understood in the eighteenth century in order to interrogate the symbolic value we attach to the concept of epigenesis. The vegetable powers of self-organization may be protean and procreative. However, they are not, according to Blake, truly vital.

Vindicating Preformation

To understand why Blake found use for the theory of preformation, an attempt must be made to rescue it from its critics, particularly those who characterize it as a deterministic

doctrine. Gigante writes that 'to Blake the idea of a preformed world, static and bereft of internal power, was abhorrent.'[22] Arguing that *Jerusalem* participates in what she calls an "epigenesist poetics," Gigante implies that the adjective *epigenesist*, for Blake and others, might well be synonymous with *vital* or *organic*. Just as Blake's illustrations blend human, animal, and vegetable forms, so does *Jerusalem*, informed with unpredictable powers of vitality, seem to burst forth like the totipotent embryo.[23] Gigante thus associates epigenesis with plastic vitality, but the history of science here is more nuanced.

Epigenesis, evoking laws, forces, and principles, displays an undeniable mechanistic inheritance.[24] Ralph Cudworth, in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), notably differentiated living organisms from non-living objects by their self-directed tendency towards organisation, a tendency motivated by an immanent force—a certain *plastic power*. As the idea of a plastic vital power gained scientific attention, however, philosophers borrowed the prestigious Newtonian concept of invisible forces to account for the nature of this *vis vivae*. One of epigenesis's key proponents, Pierre Louis Maupertuis, invoked the Newtonian concept of attraction as well as the chemical concept of affinity when he formulated his theory of generation in *Vénus physique* (1744). He further postulated the existence of 'some principle of intelligence, something similar to what we call *desire, aversion, memory*' which resides in matter, organising it into living form; this principle of growth, however, also guided the

[22] Gigante, "Blake's Living Form," 466.
[23] *Totipotent:* 'Capable of developing into or generating a complete organism: said of a cell. Also, able to differentiate into any other related kind of cell.' (*OED)*
[24] Indeed, when the language of self-organization gained currency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by no means was it exclusive to the life sciences. It also entered fields as diverse as physico-theology, economics, and political theory, where it was often developed through mechanical metaphors. See Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2015).

formation of crystals, and was not exclusive to living organisms.[25] And though Maupertuis allowed for the spontaneous development of accidental morphogenic variances in offspring, since the mechanisms of development were subject to constant laws, ultimately, he maintained, these mechanisms produced and maintained the fixity of species.

Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, author of the *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-1788), was another eminent epigenesist who drew on a language of mechanism. Early in his career he embraced an ovo-vermist theory of generation, but he later introduced the idea of the "internal mould" (*moule intérieur*) to explain how minute organic units were assembled into larger organic structures.[26] For Buffon, a living being was composed of smaller units, being 'an assemblage of germs of minute individuals of the same species,' just as 'a grain of sea-salt, as we distinctly perceive by the microscope, is a cube composed of an infinite number of smaller cubes.'[27] When separated from the mother organism, these minute particles, being organised in part like the complete animal, were able to grow and form adult individuals by assimilating foreign matter and imposing its own organisation upon it. Buffon's interpretation of epigenesis, presenting the living organism as a 'fortuitous assemblage of organic particles,' was very much a corpuscularist one.[28] It is unsurprising, then, that Charles Bonnet, a supporter of preformation, should deride epigenesis for suggesting that living organisms organised themselves through chance chemical interactions guided by forces that could not be empirically observed:

> Mais, ce qui doit nous étonner, c'est de voir des Physiciens qui, dans un Siècle aussi éclairé que le nôtre, se ressaisissent de ces erreurs, & déployent toute la force de leur genie pour nous persuader qu'un Animal se forme comme un Cristal, & qu'un amas

[25] Cited in David Beeson, *Maupertuis: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1992), 209.
[26] Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie, 9 vols (Edinburgh, 1780), 2.33.
[27] Buffon, *Natural History*, 2.17.
[28] Buffon, 2.267.

> de Farine se convertite en *Anguilles*. On a rappellé les Qualités *occultes* que la bonne Philosophie avoit bannies de la Physique. On a eu recours à des *Instincts*, à des *Forces de rapports*, à des *Affinités chymiques*, à des *Molécules organiques* qui ne sont ni Végétal ni Animal, & qui forment par leur reunion le Végétal & l'Animal.
>
> (What should astonish us is to see naturalists who in a century as enlightened as our own take up once more these errors and deploy all the force of their genius to persuade us that an animal forms itself like a crystal and that a mass of flour will transform itself into weevils. They revive the *occult* qualities that good philosophy banished from natural philosophy. They take recourse to *instincts*, to *forces of attraction*, to *chemical affinities*, to *organic molecules* that are neither vegetable nor animal and that form by their combination the vegetable and the animal.)[29]

This did not stop some of epigenesis's proponents from conjuring a vitalist interpretation of epigenesis through the transformative powers of language. Herder, for instance, describes the immanent principle of growth and development as 'the one organic principle of nature, which we term here *plastic*, there *impulsive*, here *sensitive*, there *artful*.'[30] This pseudo-Newtonian force is animated, even anthropomorphized, through a rhetorical sleight-of-hand. Under Herder's pen, the 'different forces of attraction, union, dissolution and repulsion' discovered by modern chemistry become 'a thousand living, manifold forces' at work in animated matter.[31] As John Zammito writes, 'What Herder was suggesting as the proper sense of epigenesis was a fertile and unpredictable creativity in nature, a sweeping notion of its pervasive fundamental "genetic force."'[32] Herder's vitalizing powers of description are on full display when he describes the spectacular inception of an embryo:

> How must the man have been astonished, who first saw the wonders of the creation of a living being! Globules, with fluids shooting between them, become a living point; and from this point an animal forms itself. [. . .] What would he who saw this wonder

[29] Charles Bonnet, *Considérations Sur Les Corps Organisés* […] (Amsterddam, 1762), 1.171-2. Translation taken from John H. Zammito, *The Gestation of German Biology: Philosophy and Physiology from Stahl to Schelling* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2018), 120.
[30] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (London, 1800), 62.
[31] Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, trans. Frederick K. Burkhardt (New York: Veritas Press, 1940), 105.
[32] Zammito, *Gestation of German Biology*, 184.

> for the first time call it? There, he would say, is a *living organic power*: I know not whence it came, or what it intrinsically is: but that it is there, that it lives, that it has acquired itself organic parts out of the chaos of homogeneous matter, I see: this is incontestable.[33]

Seeing is believing, and the vivified phenomenon of self-organization appears as a wondrous miracle that can seemingly be affirmed by ocular proof.

Blake might not contest the existence of some organic power driving the organization of matter, but he hardly seems to agree that it is a force to be celebrated. Compare Herder's passage with Blake's description of epigenesis in *Jerusalem*: 'in terrors & pains of Hell & Eternal Death, the/ Trembling Globe shot forth Self-living & Los howld over it' (E162). If life is to be 'born to feed the hungry ravenings of Destruction' (E169), then is life not in fact death? In *The Four Zoas,* epigenesist embodiment is described as a fall from eternal life:

> Los felt the stony stupor & his head rolld down beneath
> Into the Abysses of his bosom the vessels of his blood
> Dart forth upon the wind in pipes writhing about in the Abyss
> . . . . . .
> Thus in a living Death the nameless shadow all things bound
> All mortal things made permanent that they may be put off
> Time after time by the Divine Lamb who died for all
> And all in him died. (E383)

The power of self-organization, described by Blake in Aristotelian terms as a 'Vegetative power' (E108), appears in Blake's works as a force which generates a temporal semblance of vitality through devouring other forms of life and recasting them as globes, pipes, and vessels. Time and again Blake destabilizes what it means, in an earthly sense, to live, as the vitality of the flesh is painted in tinctures of the sinister.

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[33] Herder, *Outlines*, 177.

Blake's discomfort around epigenesis is evident in the way the polypus, a creature which sat at the centre of epigenesis research, appears in his works. The strange regenerative power of this small aquatic animal was not discovered until 1740, when the Genevan naturalist Abraham Trembley (1710–1784) thought to cut a polyp in half.[34] Less than half an inch long, tube-like in shape, and adorned with a crown of tentacles, the creatures had aroused Trembley's curiosity when he observed them contract, extend, and take steps with a slow somersault motion. The creatures Trembley had assumed were plants were imbued with unusual qualities of movement and plasticity. As an early translation of Trembley's observations states: 'From the different Degrees of Extension, Contraction, and Inflexion, which the Body and the Arms of the *Polypus* admit of, results a great Variety of Figures, which they can form themselves into.'[35] These protean creatures challenged the imagined boundaries separating vegetables and animals. Intrigued, Trembley cut them into pieces, only to find, to his astonishment, that a whole new organism could regenerate from a single cutting. This shapeshifting animal had the ability to endlessly proliferate, a quality hitherto thought to be possessed only by plants. The polypus seemed to be plasticity reified.

Blake did not value the kind of plasticity exemplified by the polypus. In *Jerusalem*, Blake describes 'a vast Polypus/ Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing/ A self-devouring monstrous human death' (E134). When one creature strives towards organization, it leads to the disorganization of another. Vegetative life, from the perspective of Eternal life, thus perpetually lives towards death. Unlike Herder, Blake did not distinguish the

[34] See Howard M. Lenhoff and Sylvia G. Lenhoff, "Trembley's Polyps," *Scientific American* 258, no. 4 (1988): 108–13, and Virginia P. Dawson, *Nature's Enigma: The Problem of the Polyp in the Letters of Bonnet, Trembley and Réaumur* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1987).
[35] Abraham Trembley, "Observations and Experiments on the Fresh-Water Polypus, by M. Trembley, at the Hague. Translated from the French, by P.H.Z. F. R. S." *Philosophical Transactions* 42 (1743): i-xvii (iv).

celebration of the autopoietic powers of living matter from the celebration of materialism. The polypoid model of growth and development takes on a particularly Satanic form elsewhere in *Jerusalem* as Satan grows out of 'a white Dot' from which 'branches out/ A Circle in continual gyrations' (E175). As Blake's passage continues, this dot becomes a hydra-headed heart:

> From which sprang numerous branches varying their motions
> Producing many Heads three or seven or ten, & hands & feet
> Innumerable at will of the unfortunate contemplator
> Who becomes his food such is the way of the Devouring Power. (E175)

This Satanic embryonic form embodies the unchecked development of a materialist *vis essentialis* which perverts growth into devouring. Trembley himself describes polypi as 'voracious Animals' which ensnare their prey.[36] In fact, the polypus might well be all stomach, for 'the whole Body of a *Polypus* forms only one Pipe, a sort of Gut, or Pouch' into which its tentacles direct the insects unfortunate enough to encounter it.[37] This image of a Satanic cancer which knows no bounds is hardly a regenerative symbol for Blake. In contrast, Blake writes in *On Homers Poetry* (1822) that 'Living Form is Eternal Existence' (E270), which, when read in the context of Blake's statement that 'Eternal Image & Individuality never dies' but 'renews by its seed' (E555), suggests that Blakean living form does not suggest developmental plasticity so much as formal continuity. The poet who, over the course of his career, insists time and again that 'Man is Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown' (E656) sounds more like a preformationist than an epigenesist.

[36] Trembley, v.
[37] Trembley, x.

Where Contrarieties are Equally True

This is not to say that Blake was a preformationist in the way a natural philosopher would have been a preformationist. The scientific validity of these various theories of generation is of relative unimportance to Blake, for his use for them rather lies in their possible metaphysical implications. Thus while he borrows the language of preformation to describe how the soul participates in eternal life, Blake also borrows from the language of epigenesis to describe how the material body participates in growth and decay. Blake's myth thus incorporates opposing biological theories into one significative framework. The mythical space of Blake's poems is like his mythical Beulah: it is a place where 'Contrarieties are equally True' (E129). Beulah is the place of ambivalence, a place where opposites can be married without cancelling each other out (*Beulah*, in Hebrew, means "espoused"). Yet while 'Contrarieties are equally true,' they are not necessarily true of the same thing. In this case, the logic of epigenesis is true of generation, of mortal life and the physical body, but the logic of preformation is true of regeneration, of immortal life and the spiritual body. Working within the mythical mode, Blake is able to synthesize two competing biological paradigms within one complex field of concepts.

Subject to constant revision, Blake's myth undergoes constant renovation, never settling upon a final form or achieving a full reconciliation of opposites, and yet at its heart the tension between the spiritual and the material remains a key organising force. I agree with Leo Damrosch when he notes that 'potent contradictions lie at the heart of Blake's system and that the never-ending struggle to reconcile them gives his work its peculiar energy and value.'[38] But

[38] Leopold Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3.

as Damrosch demonstrates, even as the moving parts within this system shift and change, the contradictions around which his system is structured maintain their relevance over time. Hence I also agree with Damrosch's view that when it comes to interpreting Blake, '[w]hat is needed is a metacommentary that examines the conceptual bases of his system and seeks to explain the difficulties that underlie the specific points around which commentary ordinarily swirls.'[39] This thesis is, in part, aimed at adding to this project of building a Blakean metacommentary by examining how Blake navigates the tension between immanence and transcendence through his use of organic metaphors and biological symbolism. For Blake, mortal life is immanent because it springs from matter, yet because it acts against God, it cannot be said to participate in true vitality. This is the story told in *The Four Zoas*, when Enion, Tharmas's emanation, a representation of the 'Generative Instinct,' witnesses this fallen form of life spring from within the material world she weaves:[40]

> Wondring she saw her woof begin to animate. & not
> As Garments woven subservient to her hands but having a will
> Of its own perverse & wayward. (E302)

The idea of that spiritual death is caused by resistance to the divine is embodied in the form of the Spectre, a symbol, in Blake's works, of self-centeredness and defensive rationality. In *Jerusalem*, the Spectre takes his position as a force of death in opposition to God, who is life. As the Spectre says:

> Life lives on my Consuming: & the Almighty hath made me his Contrary
> To be all evil, all reversed & for ever dead: knowing
> And seeing life, yet living not; how can I then behold

[39] Damrosch, 5.
[40] S. Foster Damon, "Enion," in *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, updated edn, with a new foreword and annotated bibliography by Morris Eaves (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013).

> And not tremble; how can I be beheld & not abhorrd. (E154)

If life is God and resistance is death, the self-organizing powers of matter are deadly inasmuch as they resist the transcendent energies of life which temporarily reside in the flesh. In contrast, true life is the life of immortality, and we only participate in this life of the spirit when we cease to resist the vibrant life of Christ acting through us. The notion that only God is the source of life is asserted in a passage of Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (1763) bracketed by Blake:

> Man is only a Recipient of Life. From this Cause it is, that Man, from his own hereditary Evil, reacts against God; but so far as he believes that all his Life is from God, and every Good of Life from the Action of God, and every Evil of Life from the Reaction of Man, Reaction thus becomes correspondent with Action, and Man acts with God as from himself. (E604)

This guiding contrariety is so fundamental that the conventional meanings of the terms 'Good' and 'Evil' shift to align with it. As Blake comments, 'Good & Evil are here both Good & the two contraries Married' (E604). Thus even when Blake reevaluates values and redefines terms, his association of life with the eternal spirit and death with the self-organising body remains ever relevant.

The ready dismissal of preformation found in recent Blake criticism has thus resulted in a misunderstanding concerning the relationship between generation and regeneration in Blake's work. Los's exclamation, 'O holy Generation! [*Image*] of regeneration!' (E150) might seem to suggest that 'ultimately the biological processes of vegetation and generation were to serve as models for the regenerative activity of reading in organizing the poem.'[41] Blake, however,

[41] Gigante, *Life*, 109.

scratched out the word “image”.[42] Evidently, he was not satisfied with the idea that generation was a model for regeneration.

Broadly speaking, in the biological context, while generation referred to the inception and gestation of new young, regeneration referred to the healing of adult organisms.[43] Naturalists keenly carried out empirical observations of the spectacular regrowth of lost appendages in newts and salamanders, and these wondrous powers of renewal and restoration led at least one naturalist (Lorenzo Spallanzani) to wonder whether ‘obtaining this advantage for ourselves’ might not be considered ‘entirely as chimerical.’[44] The English physician Charles White seemed to answer this question when he described his attempts to amputate a child’s extra thumb. To his astonishment, the thumb grew back with a fresh nail. Cases like this led White to the conclusion that each part of the human body could be regenerated in its own kind. This regenerative principle was one of restoration and design, rather than protean growth. Living organisms, as he writes, are ‘wonderfully living machines, differently wrought, yet so completely fashioned, and all tending to one great point, the preservation of themselves and their species;’ as he continues, ‘these admirable fabrics cannot have proceeded from chance, but must have been the work of an Omnipotent Creator, who has formed them with the most

[42] This thesis follows Erdman’s edition of Blake’s works in using italics within square brackets to indicate words or letters deleted, erased, or written over. Angle brackets enclose Blake’s additions to the text.

[43] Indeed, animal regeneration had been an object of study for millennia (Aristotle, for instance, had made note of the lizard’s ability to regenerate its tail). The study was revived in 1686 when the French amateur scientist Melchisedech Thevenot demonstrated a lizard undergoing tail regeneration to the Paris Academy of Sciences. Thevenot’s demonstrates were followed two years later by Claude Perrault’s dissertation on the broader topic. In 1712 the French entomologist René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur (who would later be in correspondence with Trembley on the fresh-water polyp) published a paper on the regeneration of parts in crayfish, sparking yet new interest in the field. Regeneration was established as a topic of inquiry in its own right. See Charles E. Dinsmore, “Animal Regeneration: From Fact to Concept,” *Bioscience* 45, no. 7 (1995): 484–92, and Dinsmore, ed., *A History of Regeneration Research: Milestones in the Evolution of a Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[44] Lazzaro Spallanzani, *An Essay on Animal Reproductions*, trans. Matthew Maty (London, 1769), 86.

perfect wisdom, and attention to their several interests and situations'.[45] The essential powers of life were not powers of change but of conservation.

In a spiritual context, regeneration, a cornerstone of Protestant theology, was explicitly placed in opposition to generation, just as salvation was juxtaposed against the fall. For Anglicans, regeneration was often identified with the ritual of baptism, a ritual of rebirth. As Jesus insisted, '[e]xcept a man be born again', 'born of water and *of* the Spirit', rather than through his mother's womb, 'he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3–5). Moreover, regeneration entailed entrance into God's church. In the Anglican rite of baptism, the infant's regeneration involves being reincorporated into the body of the church. As the priest announces, 'We yield thee most hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate *this infant* with thy holy Spirit, to receive *him* for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate *him* into thy holy church.'[46] Evangelical and nonconformist theologians however, distinguished regeneration from baptism (or, indeed conversion), for simply joining a congregation was not enough. One had to go through a gradual and transformative inner experience through receiving Christ into one's heart and exchanging the life of the flesh for the life of the spirit. As the Presbyterian clergyman Thomas Gouge writes, 'by the work of Regeneration Flesh is turned into Spirit, that is, *the carnal corrupt disposition of man is changed and alter'd into a renewed and sanctified disposition.*'[47] Describing regeneration, the Calvinist preacher Thomas Boston used a bodily metaphor highly reminiscent of Blake's myth (according to which Albion disintegrates with the fall and is reorganised through regeneration): 'Man is, in respect of his

[45] Charles White, *On the Regeneration of Animal Substances* (Warrington, 1785), 17–18.
[46] *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*. Ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 418.
[47] Thomas Gouge, *A Practical Discourse of Regeneration* […], (London, 1718), 17–18.

spiritual state, altogether disjointed by the fall; every faculty of the soul is, as it were, dislocate: in regeneration the Lord looseth every joint, and sets it right again.'[48] Extended to a religious context, the term *regeneration* described a kind of spiritual healing and rejuvenation which restored us to our original state.

For Blake, if generation entailed self-organization, regeneration entailed its opposite, the restoration of the self to a state of spiritual union, which can only be carried out through Christ's intervention, not the innate powers of the individual.[49] If generation was the image of regeneration, it was its mirror image, an image in reverse. As Thomas Frosch observed in *The Awakening of Albion* (1974), Blake presents us with the dangers of fixating on the material manifestations of spiritual phenomena. As Frosch elaborates, central to the theme of *Jerusalem* is the notion that the egotistical, lustful love of Vala, who represents the powers of Nature, is 'irresistibly like' the selfless love of Jerusalem, who represents Spiritual Society.[50] But while Jerusalem's love liberates humanity, Vala's love, a 'false/ And Generating Love,' entraps it, acting as 'a pretence of love to destroy love' (E161). I believe that the relationship between generation and regeneration should be understood according to this very logic. Generation may seem to resemble regeneration, but this resemblance is a misleading one. Regeneration is not generation perfected. Rather, it is its polar reversal, just as the wheels-within-wheels of

[48] Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* […], A New Edition (Falkirk, 1787), 132.
[49] Indeed, regeneration, in its theological sense, was mostly used in the eighteenth century in the passive, describing believers who were regenerate or regenerated. Christians could not regenerate themselves. They could only be regenerated through divine will. To quote an evangelical pamphlet, 'In this new birth, man is not the agent but the receiver. It is God that adopts or regenerates, like as it is God that justifies.' John Hume Spry, *Reflections Upon the Tendency of a Publication, Entitled, Hints to the Public and the Legislature, on the Nature and Effect of Evangelical Preaching* (London, 1809), 36. Similarly, in Jerusalem Blake attributes all agency to the Divine, writing that 'We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep' (E145).
[50] Thomas R. Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion: The Renovation of the Body in the Poetry of William Blake* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 84.

Ezekiel's Chariot do not perfect the logic of the wheels-within-wheels of industry, but rather reverse it. If generation suggests infinite plasticity, divergence, and mutation, regeneration suggests its inverse: the restoration, perfection, and perpetuation of eternal types through its expression in the individual.[51] And it is the tension between the two which gives Blake's myth so much of its force.

Species and Individual

In investigating the tension between immanence and transcendence in Blake's mythos, this thesis thus also investigates a related pair of oppositional concepts: the type and the individual. I have contrasted preformation and epigenesis, but the two were in constant dialogue in the complicated arena of eighteenth-century thought. Epigenesis ultimately gained ascendance, but not without assimilating elements of the preformationist idea of species. Radical thinkers of the Enlightenment such as Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Diderot, and Baron d'Holbach sought to attack natural theological arguments from design by depicting the universe as a space of random material interactions out of which living forms arose fortuitously and precariously reproduced themselves through purely mechanical means. However, this bold materialism itself did not gain a steady foothold. Chance did not seem to adequately explain the persistence of forms in nature. One of the main problems with epigenesis was that it could not explain the inheritance of characteristics. Albrecht von Haller, for instance, cuttingly questioned Wolff's concept of the *vis essentialis*: as he asks, why does this single force:

[51] For all his insight, Frosch himself does not pay attention to the theological aspects of the renovation of the body in Blake's works. Frosch's book 'is a study of Albion's resumption of consciousness and of Blake's participation in the Romantic spirit of a complete human renewal, a spirit, fundamentally secular, that asserted the possibility of man's imaginative primacy over his conditions' (9). This spirit, as it manifests itself in Blake, however, is not fundamentally secular at all.

> which is unique, form the parts of the animal, which are so different, always in the same place and always according to the same model, if organic matter is susceptible to change and capable of assuming all sort of forms?[52]

How, in other words, does a new organism manage to preserve the form of the species as it assembles itself out of foreign matter? Haller, the Swiss naturalist who famously demonstrated the qualities of irritability (in the muscles) and sensibility (in the nerves), was originally a proponent of epigenesis, believing that there existed an attractive force which not only guided the formation of ice, crystals, and metals, but also of moss spores, threads of flax, and even animal muscle, bone, and limbs. He later converted to preformation, partly because it allowed him to answer the question of heredity. Adapting the Buffonian *moule intérieur*, Haller argued that 'Nature does not herself furnish the form in M. de Buffon's way of conceiving it, she merely copies already-created molds.'[53] God provided the archetypes; nature merely produced copies of them.

Eighteenth-century biology was heavily invested in the idea that species were fixed, albeit flexible. In the medieval and early modern period, nature seemed to be a world of mutability from which life forms spontaneously sprang. Male seed seemed to give form to living matter, which otherwise produced mere monsters; as Montaigne suggests, even human women, 'all alone,' can 'produce mere shapeless masses and lumps of flesh.'[54] 'Amid this tangle of forms,' writes François Jacob, 'there is no place for the species, as this is to be understood in

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[52] Albrecht von Haller, *Elementa Physiologiae Corporis Humani*, 8 vols. (Lausanne, 1757–1766), 8 (1766):117. Cited in Shirley A. Roe, "The Development of Albrecht von Haller's Views on Embryology," *Journal of the History of Biology* 8, no. 2 (1975): 167–90 (189).

[53] Haller, *Réflexions Sur Le Systéme de La Generation de M. De Buffon* (Geneva, 1751), 66. Cited in Roger, *The Life Sciences in Eighteenth-Century French Thought*, ed. Keith R. Benson, trans. Robert Ellrich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 495.

[54] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 20.

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries–namely, a persistence of the visible structure through succeeding generations.'[55] Indeed, '[o]nly towards the end of the eighteenth century did the word and the concept of reproduction make their appearance to describe the formation of living organisms. Until that time living beings did not reproduce; they were engendered.'[56] Seventeenth century thinkers, however, came to believe that the universe was rationally ordered by intelligent design. Works such as John Ray's *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691) argued that there were boundaries between species which could not be crossed. Nature might produce variations, but essentially the same forms were reproduced generation after generation. Influenced by natural theological thinking, eighteenth-century naturalists sought to maintain the fixity of species while acknowledging the possibility and evidence of change in form over time. As such, they predominantly 'conceived of the real species as an ideal morphological type, from which individuals deviated in a variety of superficial ways. The species was thus quite definite and immutable; the variations, evanescent and insignificant.'[57] Buffon, who defined the species as one whose members could produce fertile offspring, insisted that species were the constant units amidst the otherwise infinitely variable phenomena of organic nature. [58] 'Each species having been originally created, the first individuals served as a model to their descendants,' and though variations occur, 'the impression of each species' is essentially 'engraven in characters which can never be effaced.'[59] After all, 'the greatest miracle is not exhibited in the individual. It is in the successive renovation, and in the continued duration of the species, that Nature assumes an aspect altogether inconceivable

[55] François Jacob, *The Logic of Life: A History of Heredity, And The Possible and The Actual* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 23.
[56] Jacob, 19.
[57] Bentley Glass, "The Germination of the Idea of Biological Species," in *Forerunners of Darwin: 1745-1859*, ed. Bentley Glass, Oswei Temkin, and William L. Straus (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 35.
[58] Buffon, *Natural History*, 2.10.
[59] Buffon, 7.95, 97.

and astonishing.'[60] That said, Buffon did acknowledge the fact that similar creatures spread across the globe (such as equine mammals) seemed to have diverged from the same original species. In a section of the *Histoire Naturelle* titled 'Treatise of the Degeneration of Animals,' Buffon describes these variations within species as a result of 'degeneration' caused by changes in external factors such as climate.[61] The appellation of adaptation as "degeneration" nonetheless insinuates that a species can be regenerated, restored to a state better resembling its original, pristine form.[62] While Buffon was an epigenecist, as Arthur Lovejoy writes, '[t]his sort of rhetoric is not the dialect of an evolutionist; it is almost that of a Platonist.'[63]

As the concept of preformation grew in sophistication, the concept of the primordial germ became increasingly abstract, until it came to designate a pre-existent pattern, a blueprint for successive generations, rather than a particular germ containing within it the preformed bodies of all of its future offspring. Bonnet, for instance, at first suspected that the germ represented the individual with all its minute peculiarities, but he soon decided that the germ characterized only the species, individual variations being produced by external factors. In *La Palingénésie philosophique* (1769) he describes the germ in more abstract terms as a 'primordial foundation,' a 'representation' of the organic whole.[64] It might designate 'any kind of *original preformation, from which an organic whole can result as from its direct principle*.'[65] Thus while

[60] Buffon, 2.2.
[61] Buffon, 7.392–452.
[62] Disputing the conventional characterization of Buffon as one who introduced historicity into the concept of species, J. H. Eddy Jr argues that 'Buffon was no more a forerunner of historicism than he was a precursor of evolutionism' J. H. Eddy Jr, "Buffon's Histoire naturelle: History? A Critique of Recent Interpretations," *Isis* 85, no. 4 (1994): 644–61 (645). For Buffon, 'species, although manifesting themselves in temporal succession, remain single living wholes, that is, reproductions of prototypes and independent of time' (650).
[63] Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Buffon and the Problem of Species," in *Forerunners of Darwin: 1745-1859*, ed. Bentley Glass, Oswei Temkin, and William L. Straus (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959), 101.
[64] Cited in Roger, *Life Sciences*, 503-4.
[65] Cited in Roger, 508.

the concept of preformation preserved the distinction of species, with some modification it could also allow for individual variation. Species were fixed, but nonetheless underwent changes through time, gradually modifying under pressure from external influences. As he writes, 'I am easily persuaded that if we could see a horse, a hen, a serpent in their initial form, in the form they had at the time of Creation, it would be impossible for us to recognize them.'[66] Thus Bonnet admits historicity and dynamism into the preformationist outlook. According to Gigante, 'to Blake the idea of a preformed world, static and bereft of internal power, was abhorrent.'[67] However, a preformed world was hardly a static one. As Jacques Roger writes, proponents of preformation in fact possessed a 'pre-romantic sensibility' which led them to reject the perceived mechanical aspects of epigenesis.[68]

The theory of epigenesis, which did not truly become dominant until the beginning of the nineteenth century, had to concede to preformation's abstracted view of species.[69] Part of this conceptual work was carried out by Immanuel Kant, who inspired the "epigenetic turn" in German *Naturphilosophie* around 1800.[70] The concept of self-organisation played a key role in his teleological biology. In his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Kant endorsed Blumenbach's "formative force," attributing a self-formative force to the living organism.[71] At the moment when biology was just emerging as a distinct branch of science, Kant defined the organism, the

[66] Cited in Roger, 507.
[67] Gigante, "Blake's Living Form", 466.
[68] Roger, 515.
[69] By Blake's time there had been significant cross-fertilisation between the theories of preformation and epigenesis. As Peter J. Bowler argues, Buffon and Bonnet 'were working within an essentially similar framework, and that this produced a surprising amount of similarity between their solutions to the problems they envisaged.' "Bonnet and Buffon: Theories of Generation and the Problem of Species," *Journal of the History of Biology* 6, no. 2 (1973): 259–81, 259.
[70] Helmut Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature Around 1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
[71] See Timothy Lenoir, "Kant, Blumenbach, and Vital Materialism in German Biology," *Isis* 71, no. 1 (1980): 77–108.

quintessential subject of this new field, as 'an organized and self-organizing being,' defining it against the artificial machines which would come to transform society over the Age of Industrialisation.[72] Whereas a machine is designed by a human agent for a certain end, the organism forms its own organs (the Greek root *organon* meant 'tool') for its own purposes. As such, what defines the organism is the principle according to which 'everything is an end and reciprocally a means,' for in such an organism nothing 'is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature.'[73] That said, the notion of a teleological lifeforce was only a heuristic one, and to understand the organization of creatures, one had to assume that living beings possessed a purposive design. He described his system as 'generic preformationism,' arguing that 'the productive capacity of the progenitor is still preformed in accordance with the internally purposive predispositions that were imparted to its stock, and thus the specific form was preformed *virtualiter*.'[74] In other words, individual organisms grow out of undifferentiated matter, but their development is guided by certain laws based upon the permanence of the species as a virtual form. The 'hidden inner predispositions' which allow creatures to adapt themselves to diverse climates 'creates the semblance of new kinds' which are in reality 'nothing other than variations and races of the same species.'[75] Many supporters of epigenesis similarly preserved a belief in the essential existence of types.[76] Herder thought that there were impassable chasms between species: 'in consequence of the fundamental laws of creative

[72] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245.
[73] Kant, 246–47.
[74] Kant, 291.
[75] Kant, *Anthropology, History and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 89.
[76] For instance, though Schelling's ascending dialectical understanding of nature presented the phenomenal world as something which emanates out of the absolute and gradually progresses towards more complex and perfectly individuated creatures, he maintained that the essential forms of species remained atemporal, though varieties within species could develop. See Robert J. Richards, *The Meaning of Evolution: The Morphological Construction and Ideological Reconstruction of Darwin's Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1992), ch. 3.

nature, and the genetic essential type of each genus, neither a centaur, nor a satyr, neither a Scylla, nor a Medusa, is within the sphere of procreation.'[77] Even for Herder, who lauded the plastic powers of nature, vitality precluded monstrosity.

Even when natural history shifted from a descriptive, classificatory pursuit towards a study of genealogical development (Lovejoy calls this the "temporalisation of the chain of being"), there was still an intense interest in types.[78] This interest in types guided Goethe's search for the *Urpflanze*, the original symbolic plant which formed the urtype from which various plant species developed and diverged.[79] Goethe, as Zammito writes, conceived of species as 'an empirical *actuality* behind and within every individual instance' (nonetheless, Schiller insisted that 'That is no experience, that is an idea!').[80] Goethe's understanding of the relationship between type and individual bears some resemblance to Blake's. As Eckart Förster writes, for Goethe, the generic leaf is:

> neither any existing leaf, nor is it a generalization from all existing leaves, like a Lockean "abstract idea." Nor is it a primitive natural ancestor of the present plant from which the latter has evolved in a Darwinian manner. Rather, it is (comparable to Hegel's Idea) a concrete universal.[81]

Blake's Oak and Lettuce are similarly concrete universals. However, Blake diverged from Goethe, and from Romantic biology more generally, in maintaining a view of species that was prevalent in Bonnet and Buffon's generation. *Naturphilosophie* had inherited epigenesis's

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[77] Herder, *Outlines*, 183.
[78] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936). See also Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970).
[79] See Peter Hanns Reill, "Bildung, Urtyp and Polarity: Goethe and Eighteenth-Century Physiology," *Goethe Yearbook* 3, no. 1 (1986): 139–48.
[80] Zammito, *Gestation of German Biology*, 292. Schiller cited in ibid., 289.
[81] E. Förster, "Goethe and the 'Auge des Geistes'," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 75, no. 1 (2001): 87-101 (97–98).

preoccupation with Newtonian laws and principles. What drove Goethe on his search for the archetypal plant was the expectation that he would find the underlying laws of organic development which were applicable to all things that live. As Zammito writes, Goethe drew:

> a crucial distinction between the German term *Gestalt*, which meant for him a discrete, static shape, and *Bildung*, which always contained within its connotative range not only *form* but the process of *formation*, a temporal-developmental course toward that form. […] Just as, synchronically, every instance exemplified its type, so, diachronically, each momentary manifestation exemplified its normal developmental path: the quest was for a principle or law of developmental form.[82]

Blake shared Goethe's interest in forms (or *Gestalt*), believing that while generic form is only revitalized through individual existence, the individual itself is ultimately an instance of its type. Blake, however, was not interested in the laws or principles by which form developed (i.e., *Bildung*). It seems that Blake, more than his contemporaries, insisted that the 'Eternal Image & Individuality' of a species is restored and renovated in each new generation against the vicissitudes of time:

> The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is considerd as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies. but renews by its seed. (E555)

While ostensibly discussing the nature of the Imagination, Blake, in using the metaphor of the oak seed, betrays the preformationist view of species which colours his reception of the Neoplatonic doctrine of forms.[83]

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[82] Zammito, *Gestation of German Biology*, 293.

[83] Damrosch draws a parallel between the seed metaphors in this passage and in a passage by the fifteenth-century bishop Nicholas Cusanus, whose studies in Neoplatonic thought 'evolved a very Blakean theory of knowledge.' *Symbol and Truth*, 20. Meditating on a nut tree, Cusanus draws attention to the wonderful form of the generic nut tree expressed in 'the marvellous might of that seed, wherein the entire tree, and all its nuts, and all the generative power of the nuts, and all trees, existed in the generative power of the nuts.' Nicholas de Cusa, *The Vision of God*, trans. Emma Gurney-Salter (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1928), 28. Cusanus attributes this power which 'enfoldeth

Goethe's aim was to reconstruct the historical development of organic forms through empirical data, and in doing so, reach at the fundamental logic of organic development. Blake's task, however, was to regenerate, through imaginative perception, the original Eternal Forms which strive to express and unfold themselves in degenerate nature. After all, 'Nature has no Outline: but Imagination has' (E270). The material world is subject to accident and change. And yet the perceptive eye can perceive the germinal essences manifesting themselves in the world of actuality. As Blake writes:

> How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline? How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements? What is it that builds a house and plants a garden, but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions. Leave out this l[i]ne and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist. (E550)

The imagination is the faculty which allows us to see the eternal forms residing in a changeable, protean material world, a faculty which reveals our own divine nature. As Lavater writes:

> The greatest of characters, no doubt, was he, who, free of all trifling accidental helps, could see objects through one grand immutable medium, always at hand, and proof against illusion and time, reflected by every object, and invariably traced through all the fluctuation of things.[84]

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the virtual tree' (29) to God. The remarkable similarity between this comment by Cusanus and the "Russian Doll" version of preformation reveals the power of the plant seed's ability to evoke a vision of vitality which emphasises the continuity, not variety, of life in individual form.

[84] Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Aphorisms on Man: Translated from the Original Manuscript of the Rev. John Caspar Lavater, Citizen of Zuric.*, trans. Henry Fuseli (London, 1788), 8.

In spite of vital matter's distorting powers one man was nonetheless able to identify the unity behind natural appearances. This, writes Blake in his annotations to Lavater, 'was Christ' (E584).[85]

Nature Humanised

Blake's comment on Lavater's aphorism can also be read differently. Lavater imported into his physiognomic science ideas from the *imago dei* tradition. Lavater sought to distinguish people's individual characters by their external features, but he ultimately believed that, underneath these features, all people are variations of a divine prototype, i.e. Christ himself.[86] In *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (1768-78), Lavater describes Christ as the germ of humanity, 'das Urbild des Menschen,' the archetype of humanity.[87] Adam himself was a copy of Christ, and though Adam fell, humanity still has the capacity to develop and attain closer resemblance to this originary form. As he writes in *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789-98), 'in every human countenance, however debased, humanity still is visible; that is, the image of the Deity.'[88] It

[85] Sibyl Erle argues that *The Book of Urizen* undermines Lavater's belief in the visibility of the divine prototype in the individual: 'That the creation story is about a divine original which is neither perfect nor stable is a provocative thought; the implication is that it is impossible to identify divine likeness in human beings. Lavater's search, in other words, is a vain one.' *Blake, Lavater and Physiognomy* (London: Legenda, 2010), 188. Thus 'the body in Urizen' emerges 'as a positive factor, that is, a component of self-creation as well as self-determination' (201). However, it seems to me that Urizen's tortured body is precisely an example of what results when mortal flesh insists on organising itself until the Human Form Divine cannot be seen in its structure.

[86] This divine prototype was especially visible at the moment of death: 'Has not every one of us, I have often reflected in silence, a primitive physiognomy, the origin and essence of which must be divine? Must not this fundamental physiognomy have been disturbed, and, if I may be allowed the expression, submerged, by the flux and reflux of events and passions? And may it not gradually re-establish itself in the calm of death, as muddy water works itself clear, when it is no longer stirred?' Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy, for the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind*, trans. Thomas Holcroft (London, 1789), 3.180.

[87] Cited in Karl Pestalozzi, "Lavaters Utopie," in *Literaturwissenschaft Und Geschichtsphilosophie: Festschrift für Wilhelm Emrich*, ed. Helmut Arntzen et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 286.

[88] Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, 2.12.

seems that for Blake, Christ is not only he who can see the reality underneath trifling appearances; he is this reality itself.

As Blake, after the Revolution, increasingly turned towards Christianity and its values of forgiveness and redemption, Christ himself appeared ever more often in Blake's mythos, identified as the Human Form Divine, or the ur-type of all Creation. Coleridge, meanwhile, saw Nature as moving in a more-or-less linear progression from undifferentiated chaos to cosmic order, culminating in the supremely differentiated individual.[89] Coleridge defined life '*absolutely*' as 'the principle of unity in *multeity*,' perceiving in the living world 'the *principle of individuation*' striving towards differentiation, reaching its summit in the man of genius.[90] All of creation is on an evolving scale, and 'at the apex of the living pyramid' is the human being. As he writes:

> In Man the centripetal and individualizing tendency of all Nature is itself concentred and individualized – he is a revelation of Nature! Henceforward, he is referred to himself, delivered up to his own charge; and he who stands the most on himself, and stands the firmest, is the truest, because the most individual, man.[91]

Coleridge's vision of humanity as the teleological end-goal of nature's development echoed the ideas of German biologist Lorenz Oken, who described man as the 'summit, the crown of nature's development, and must comprehend everything that has preceded him, even as the fruit includes within itself all the earlier developed parts of the plant.'[92] What distinguishes Blake's

[89] Even then, Coleridge's belief that life was the product of polar forces meant that the most individuated organism is never detached from the whole: 'As the ideal genius and the originality, in the same proportion must be the resignation to the real world, the sympathy and the inter-communion with Nature.' Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Hints Towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life* (London, 1848), 86. 'Man himself,' ultimately, 'is a syllepsis, a compendium of Nature–the Microcosm!' (ibid).
[90] Coleridge, 42.
[91] Coleridge, 86.
[92] Lorenz Oken, *Elements of Physiophilosophy* (London, 1847), 2.

thought from that of Coleridge and Oken was his insistence on the human form as not only the *telos* but also the origin of all forms.

Indeed, Coleridge's conception of life as a tendency towards individuation was not only influenced by the work of comparative anatomists such as Lorenz Oken, Georges Cuvier, Junter Hunter, and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, but also based on Boehme's conception of nature as a movement from chaos to cosmos.[93] Arguing that the universe is held in a dynamic tension between Divinity and Creation, the theosophical philosophers, such as Boehme and Oetinger, had an important influence on German Romanticism.[94] This dialectic involves on the one hand the emanation of the divine *ens manifestativum sui* into the diverse forms of creation and, one the other hand, the return of these articulated forms into original unity through identity with God. The latter process was called "evolution". In explicating the importance of the Fall, Boehme introduced the concept of the *Ungrund*, 'the state of undifferentiated oneness that precedes the cycle of the divinity's self-generation; it is God as potentiality or as Nothing,' and 'to attain self-knowledge, the divinity must divide itself, must go out of itself and become object as well as subject.'[95] As Lucinda Martin writes,

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[93] As Wouter J. Hanegraaf writes, 'pre-Enlightenment esotericism and post-Enlightenment romanticism shared a very similar "holistic" and organicist worldview,' and 'both applied this orientation to nature.' Wouter J. H Hanegraaf, "Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection," in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Wouter J. H Hanegraaf and Roelof van den Broek (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 257–58). On Coleridge's reception of Boehme, see James D. Boulger, "Coleridge: The Marginalia, Myth-Making, and the Later Poetry," *Studies in Romanticism* 11, no. 4 (1972): 304–19. See also Kristine Hannak, "Boehme and German Romanticism," in *Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, ed. Sarah Apetrei and Ariel Hessayon (New York: Routledge, 2014), 162–79, and Elizabeth Engell Jessen, "Boehme and the Early English Romantics," in *Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, ed. Sarah Apetrei and Ariel Hessayon (New York: Routledge, 2014), 180–95.

[94] See Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1983).

[95] Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 21–22. 'From the Romantics' point of view, this cosmogony had several attractions. It presented important parallels to Fichtean idealism and at the same time alternatives to those very features of Fichte's system to which the Romantics objected. It derived everything, matter as well as spirit, from a divine first principle that was dynamic rather than static perfection' (25).

> Literally the "un-ground," the *Ungrund* is God's lack of knowledge or certainty, a primal state in which matter is still unfixed in any definite form. According to Boehme, the forms of plants, animals, and minerals only become fixed when the divine Will "births itself" out of the divine Sophia.[96]

Thus at the core of Boehme's theosophical system is the notion of the self-generating divinity which manifests itself and evolves in and through creation, gradually differentiating itself into separated, distinct phenomena. Whereas Coleridge took to Boehme's conception of the *Ungrund*, the abyssal chaos out of which the Deity emanated as Creation, Blake firmly rejected the idea that chaos preceded creation. As he writes in *A Vision of the Last Judgement*:

> Many suppose that before [*Adam*] <the Creation>All was Solitude & Chaos This is the most pernicious Idea that can enter the Mind as it takes away all sublimity from the Bible & Limits All Existence to Creation & to Chaos To the Time & Space fixed by the Corporeal Vegetative Eye […]. Eternity Exists and All things in Eternity Independent of Creation which was an act of Mercy. (E563)

For Blake, all things pre-existed in their spiritual form prior to the creation of the material world.[97] Hence Blake's insistence on depicting 'those who are in Eternity' in figural form. Form is eternal. Creation is not a progress from chaos to form, but instead makes possible the degeneration of form into chaos. Blake's personal Godhead is not the primeval "Nichts," the originary all and nothing.

While Goethe and Coleridge were interested in Nature's linear trajectory towards increasing individuation, Blake's mythical preformationist universe, staging a redemptive

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[96] Lucinda Martin, "Jacob Boehme and the Anthropology of German Pietism," in *Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, 120-141 (129). One might recall a line by Cusanus, according to whom the ultimate order is God, 'because He is Himself the Absolute Ground, in which all otherness is unity, and all diversity is identity.' de Cusa, *The Vision of God*, 13.

[97] It seems to me that in his monograph on Blake and Boehme, Kevin Fischer overstates Blake's participation in Boehme's concept of the *Ungrund*, and hence overstates Blake's interest in potentiality as plastic energy. Kevin Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit: William Blake, Jacob Boehme, and the Creative Spirit* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004).

history of division and reunion, idealises the regeneration and renewal of the eternal Human Form Divine. As Morris Eaves writes:

> what Coleridge and the German Romantics would call organic and describe in metaphors of vegetation and nature naturing, Blake calls physiognomic to emphasize its human aspect, its origin in intellectual activity (the head), and its liberation from natural law. […] Blake develops a contrast between "natural or organic" and the "form of Man," and makes that identification the basis of "the forms of all things," which "are derived from their Genius."[98]

For Blake, it is thus not the *urpflanze* or the *urtier* but the human form which is at the root of all morphology. Thus to regenerate it is to "humanize" it, to recognise that the 'Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle Dove, Fly, Worm,/ And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich array' can all 'Humanize/ In the Forgiveness of Sins' (E258). For Blake, to "humanize" Nature is to perceptually work against its tendency towards division and separation, to recognise the spark of humanity (which is divinity) in everything, even minerals and rocks. Thus all human forms are ultimately not individuated but "identified," recognised as simultaneously distinct and yet sharing the same identity in Christ:

> All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all
> Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied
> Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing
> And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality. (E258)

Moreover, this human ur-form, unlike the *urpflanze*, is not a suprasensual construct, a mental scientific tool or object produced by the work of comparative anatomy. It is a living subject, something which lives and sees as the sentience in all things:

> So Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast
> Collecting up the scatterd portions of his immortal body

[98] Morris Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 65.

Into the Elemental forms of every thing that grows. (*The Four Zoas*, E385)

It is not Creation which originally divided itself into disparate forms but rather a lapse in human perception that led to the separation of all things. It is rather humanity's idealisation of its own Selfhood as distinct from Creation which 'separated the stars from the mountains: the mountains from Man/ And left Man, a little grovelling Root, outside of Himself' (E162). To humanise Nature, therefore, we must once more recognise it as human. Hence *Jerusalem* ends with a hopeful image of intersubjective recognition: 'every Word & Every Character/ Was Human,' and they 'walked/ To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen/ And Seeing' (E258).

Lavater's understanding that each person possesses a distinct and immutable character as a variation of a predetermined human template nonetheless provides a counter force to this universalising tendency, a force which enters Blake's work to form an ethics which respects individual difference while also maintaining our common identity in Christ. As Lavater explains at the beginning of *Aphorisms on Man* (1788), while all people are essentially the same, they do differ in the expression of this prototypical form: 'Know, in the first place, that mankind agree in essence, as they do in their limbs and senses' and that, in the second place, 'Mankind differ as much in essence as they do in form, limbs and senses — and only so, and not more.'[99] This Blake treated as 'true Christian Philosophy far above all abstraction' (E584). Here, too, themes from preformation prevail, as Lavater's assumption, that fixed character traits manifested themselves in certain physical features, is shaped by the preformationist idea that, as Annette Graczyk puts it, the essential form of an organism "in both its species-specific and

[99] Lavater, *Aphorisms*, 1.

its individual aspects, manifests itself holistically in the smallest detail of the body."[100] (Lavater was explicitly influenced by Charles Bonnet). As he writes in his *Essays on Physiognomy*: 'Each trait contains the whole character of man, as, in the smallest of the works of God, the character of Deity is contained. […] Every minute part has the nature and character of the whole.'[101] Using an organic metaphor, he compares the human body to a plant: 'each part has the character of the stem.'[102]

For Blake, this preformationist idea supports his ethics of individual genius. In his *Descriptive Catalogue*, he identifies character with 'stamina.' Lamenting the blurring of distinct outlines in the Venetian and Flemish schools, he asserts that such work 'loses all character, and leaves what some people call, expression: but this is a false notion of expression; expression cannot exist without character as its stamina; and neither character nor expression can exist without firm and determinate outline' (E549). The emphasis on the physical outline as the expression of inner character reveals Blake's interest in physiognomy, but the reference to 'stamina' also reveals an underlying preformationist influence. In Blake's time, *stamina* referred to 'those simple, original Parts, which existed first in the Embryo, or even in the Seed; and by whose Distinction, Augmentation and Accretion, by additional Juices, the human Body, at its utmost Bulk is supposed to be form'd.'[103] Character is the preformed germinal essence of a person; art's task is to capture this sense of character.

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[100] Annette Graczyk, "Constructs of Life Forms in Lavater's Physiognomy," in *Life Forms in the Thinking of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Jenna M. Gibbs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 164.
[101] Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, 2.31.
[102] Lavater, 2.94.
[103] Ephraim Chambers, 'Stamina', *Cyclopedia: Or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* […], 2 vols (London, 1728). One definition given by the *OED* for 'stamina' is 'The native or original (as distinguished from the adventitious) elements and constitution of anything; the nature, structure and qualities of an organism, as existing potentially in its nascent state; the rudiments or germs from which living beings or their organs are

As Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression' (E44). The firm distinction between species, their different needs and abilities, appears time and again in Blake's work as an analogy for differences between personalities. In his annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds, he insists on individuality in artistic style: 'I do not believe that Rafael taught Mich. Angelo or that Mich. Ang: taught Rafael., any more than I believe that the Rose teaches the Lilly how to grow' (E643). This sentiment can be traced back to Lavater; as the physiognomist writes, 'two men of extraordinary genius may have countenances the most opposite.'[104] Blake's stance, embracing individual identity, is thus one against pluripotency. Each one of us is an expression of an archetype, drawn from the same perennial source. The self is not fashioned but given: our only task is to become who we already are.

Regeneration: From Politics to Aesthetics

This thesis will be chiefly thematic in its approach, examining the soteriological, political, and aesthetic senses of the Blakean concept of regeneration. It finds Blake resisting evolutionary materialism and its rationalist preference for material progress and self-preservation over the spiritual values of redemption, self-sacrifice, and renewal. While it takes the dialectical tension between epigenesis and preformation as a starting point, and finds it highly relevant throughout its argument, it is more broadly interested in the dynamic relationship between developmental and ideal paradigms in Blake's works. As such, it often draws upon other concepts and developments in eighteenth-century biology in order to understand how these two different

developed.' The earliest example given for this usage is from M. Hale's *Primitive Originat. Mankind* (1677): 'The greater and more comprehensive Rudiments and Stamina are laid..before the lesser and derivative parts are formed and compleated; as we shall have occasion to observe when we come to consider the *processus generationis* of Man and Brutes.'

[104] Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, 1.34.

versions of the organic interact in his corpus. I will be referring to works across Blake's corpus even as my discussion proceeds in a loosely chronological manner through Blake's literary career. As Northrop Frye writes:

> His principles he held with bulldog tenacity all his life. The lyrics of his adolescence, the prophecies of his middle period, the comments which blister the margins of his books he read on a sickbed at seventy, are almost identical in outlook.[105]

As much of an overstatement this may have been, the tension between generation and regeneration did indeed remain a preoccupation of Blake's throughout his life.

Chapter 1 discusses the soteriological nuances of Blakean regeneration. It is more specifically concerned with the question of our "future state," or life after death. Generations of theologians discussed the possibility of the resurrection of the same body. Blake, instead, emphasised the regeneration of the soul. This chapter first addresses Blake's body-soul dualism, revealing how Blake's Pauline differentiation between the spiritual and physical body enabled him to envisage the persistence of the soul beyond the death and decay of the flesh. It then discusses how preformation science offered Blake potent images for the relationship between the soul and the body. The seed in the husk and the larva in the chrysalis are particularly vivid symbols of the soul temporarily trapped in its mortal casing. I identify Charles Bonnet's concept of palingenesis as a highly relevant soteriological scheme for Blake: the soul is like a germ which unfolds in its full glory after its husk perishes in the dark earth. Finally, this chapter turns towards the wider eschatological implications of Blake's preformationist myth. If Christ is the vine and we are the branches, the regeneration of the human soul is not an individual affair. Instead, it involves the reincorporation of the individual into Christ's spiritual body. As such,

[105] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 13.

the regeneration of the human requires not necessarily the abdication of the body but rather the resignation of the individual Self with which it is identified.

Chapter 2 addresses the concept of political regeneration. During the French Revolution, it had become apparent that the conventional metaphor of the body politic, framed around a stable hierarchical relationship between the monarchical head and the subservient body, was no longer fit for purpose. Indeed, in the late eighteenth century, medical understandings of the body were far more sophisticated than ever before. This chapter puts Blake in intimate dialogue with Burke, Sieyès, and other revolutionary and reactionary writers who evocatively updated the body politic metaphor to describe a radically changing political landscape. Reading the Urizen books against Blake's neglected, unpublished *The French Revolution*, this chapter demonstrates how Blake's biological myth, though obscure, was deeply embedded in contemporary revolutionary discourse. In doing so, this chapter contests assumptions in recent Blake criticism that the poet found images of freedom in the organic phenomenon of epigenesis (a logic of form taken up in Burkean conservatism), emphasizing instead Blake's indebtedness to the Hunterian doctrine of vital heat. Having discussed Blake's critical attitude towards political self-organisation, this chapter then discusses the further connotative development of the word "organization" in *The Four Zoas*, which picks up on the use of the term in British responses to France's imperialist military project in the Revolutionary Wars. Like France, Urizen attempts to "organize" the world according to his own rational principles. Ultimately, Blake suggests that such utopian projects should be discarded. Jerusalem is to be built through spiritual regeneration, not legislative construction.

Chapter 3 explores how motifs of liquid neurophysiology in *The Four Zoas* show how Blake was fascinated and troubled by the evolutionist idea that human intelligence and culture

emerges from fluid matter imbued with the powers of self-organisation. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a vitalist cognitive science, emphasizing the dynamic functionalities of a sensitive nervous system, had arisen to challenge the mechanistic science of mind established by Descartes and Locke. As the editors of *Distributed Cognition in Enlightenment and Romantic Culture* (2019) argue, 'only when the heirs of associationist philosopher David Hartley – literary authors from Blake to Coleridge and Wordsworth – grappled with dilemmas about matter yielding itself to mechanical analysis versus fluid spirits flowing through all bodies did a new post-Lockean – and many would also claim post-Humean – cognitive pathway follow.'[106] *The Four Zoas* shows Blake engaging with these materialist theories of mind, particularly with ones which posit the existence of fluid, sensitive animal spirits coursing through the self-building organic networks of the nervous system. Moreover, it further draws connections between this epigenecist anatomy and Erasmus Darwin's fluid-rich descriptions of the origins of life and the development of the brain, revealing how the poem is deeply interested in how intelligence emerges from liquid matter. Particular attention is paid to the watery figure of Tharmas, setting him against Darwin's evolutionist theory that organic intelligence arose out of primeval liquid media. Since a mind that has evolved can also devolve and disintegrate, our state as sentient beings rests on unstable ground. Though *The Four Zoas* does not overthrow or negate evolutionist theories, it does suggest that the materialist approach to the question of our origins, by denying or sidelining our divinity, produces a reductive view of our mental faculties, turning our gaze away from the spiritual nature of human consciousness.

[106] Miranda Anderson, G. S. Rousseau, and Michael Wheeler, "Introduction," in *Distributed Cognition in Enlightenment and Romantic Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 19.

This chapter also addresses the formal nature of *The Four Zoas* as an unfinished manuscript, arguing that the poem registers in its very form a deep dissatisfaction with how the instability of language is coextensive with the instability of matter. From early on in the creation of his mythic works Blake had been keen to underline the material nature of the text. Working directly on the copperplate with no preliminary or transfer drawings, in the making of his illuminated books Blake always showed a profound 'a sensitivity to the mind forming itself outside the body and inside the medium.'[107] It is in *The Four Zoas*, however, that Blake becomes most concerned with how the text's autopoietic tendencies can undermine Vision. Thus the poem culminates in the staging of its own apocalyptic destruction, liberating Vision from the entanglements of fallen language.

The final two chapters share an interest in Blake's mythographic theory of originality and genius. Comparing literary creation against biological ontogenesis, chapter 4 explores how different models of generation provide a framework for juxtaposing inspired and uninspired creativity in *Milton*. While late eighteenth-century criticism cultivated an organicist concept of original genius based on the logic of organic development, Blake illustrated his idea of poetic genius with preformationist symbolism to deemphasize individual originality and emphasize participation in a prophetic tradition. Blake used sexual reproductive and parthenogenesis imagery to depict the workings of a narcissistic Satanic genius compelled to propagate its own selfhood. In contrast, prophetic influence is cast in homoerotic terms, the poet being moulded by and into an image of the Human Form Divine. Reading *Milton* against developments in eighteenth-century mythographic studies which placed fertility and the reproductive drive at the heart of universal mythology and religion, I argue that Blake's poem is a call to transcend the

[107] Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 43.

biological instinct (the Female Will) which drives us to reproduce our own image and instead embrace a self-annihilating model of poetic activity through spiritual identity with Christ.

Finally, chapter 5 discusses Blake's theory of art. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the injection of organicist language into aesthetics produced a new cult of original genius. This chapter sees Blake undermining the idea of originality and unity. Taking two short texts from 1820, 'On Homers Poetry' and 'On Virgil,' as a starting point, it shows how Blake was sceptical of the neoclassical values of formal autonomy and cultural autochthony. It particularly situates Blake against Winckelmann, who idealised Greek autarky and organic unity. While Winckelmann produced a developmental history of art, Blake insisted on the common source of all art in the "wonderful originals" of the divinely inspired art of the Hebrews. As Blake's engraving of *Laocoön* evinces, creative copying is central to Blake's artistic practice. Winckelmann encouraged the modern artist to become, like the Greeks, "inimitable." According to Blake, however, the artist's task is to regenerate art not by creating something wholly new but by giving new life to the preformed archetypal visions found in works of old.

In sum, this thesis does more than to reveal the powerful tension between preformationist and epigenesist paradigms in Blake's corpus. It does more than to show how preformation and epigenesis provided the visionary poet with a language with which to engage with the new temporalities of change and development that were emerging in the eighteenth century. Breaking with recent criticism, this thesis aligns Blake with preformation and its emphasis on the continuity of divinely ordained form over time. Amidst the ongoing popularity of contemporary criticism which embraces open-ended becoming, amidst the rise of philosophical movements which draw attention to the phenomena of self-organisation and

emergence, it has perhaps become difficult to read as exuberant a poet as Blake as a poet who emphasises ontology over ontogeny, being over becoming. But as this thesis will show, Blake's preformationist worldview, grounded in his unorthodox Christian beliefs, was hardly static or stultifying. Rather, it enabled him to formulate radical ideas about the possibilities and conditions of human freedom, about the perennial potential for the regeneration of the human subject in a fallen world.

1) The Germ of the Soul: Blake's Preformationist Eschatology

Introduction: Our Seminal Part

On Easter-Sunday in 1733, a certain Samuel Johnson, minister of the parish church in Great Torrington, Devon, delivers a sermon on an old and thorny eschatological question: the resurrection of the same body. At the Day of Judgement, will we be raised with the same body that died and entered the grave? The subject matter may have been well-worn, but Johnson's approach was not. Citing the research of the Dutch microbiologist Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, who had died just over a decade before in 1723, Johnson imports the latest discoveries in natural philosophy into his address. Johnson assures his churchgoers that our resurrection-bodies will be identical to our earthly bodies, in 'quality' if not in 'quantity'.[108] The matter constituting our risen bodies will not be the same, but the body itself will appear just as it did before death. This is because the body contains 'a certain *Stamen*, a root, a Principle, or Seed of Life, placed there Originally by the Creator,' which preserves the frame and form of the person even when the corpse disintegrates.[109] This *stamen* will unfold again at the resurrection, restoring us to our physical bodies.

Johnson's argument is based on Saint Paul's famous metaphor from I Corinthians which compares the mortal body to wheat which must be sown into the ground and go under the earth in order to rise again regenerated; Christ was the resurrected 'firstfruit' of us all' (15:20). But Johnson's term, *stamen*, reveals a more contemporary influence as well. The opinion, writes Johnson, that though the 'whole humane Body, like a Stalk of Wheat, may drop or be lain in the

[108] Samuel Johnson, *The Resurrection of the Same body, as Asserted and Illustrated by St. Paul* (London, 1733), 14.
[109] Johnson, 14.

Earth,' the '*Seminal* or *Radical* Part' will remain 'entire and unalterable' and eventually '*rais'd in Power and Glory*,' is supported by the medical idea that:

> every humane Body hath an original and immutable *Stamen*, which is only swell'd up, and fill'd by a Quantity of extraneous Fluids and fleshy Substance, and the Blood, the Flesh, and all the grosser Parts, are only consifer'd as Cloathing to the finer *Stamina*, which only are the *real humane Body*.[110]

This preformationist view of the human body is supported by 'certain and demonstrative Experiments' which show that 'all Vegetables […] contain in their Seed compleat organized Trees in miniature.'[111] Supplementing this organic metaphor, Johnson supplies a more artificial image to articulate the difference between form and substance: 'Suppose an Artificer in Silver were order'd to melt down in the same *Crucible* or Furnace a *Flagon*, a *Chalice*, and a *Patten*, and to cast them again into their *primitive Form*; is it possible to discover, or *conceive* any *Difference* of Particles in the *flowing Metal*?'[112] Preformationist biology here is plainly used to reconcile the doctrine of the immortality of the soul with the resurrection of the body by articulating the idea that there exist certain seminal blueprints in nature which maintain continuity of form amidst discontinuity of matter.

Johnson's opinion was not a fringe opinion.[113] In his Boyle lectures of 1704-1705, Samuel Clarke similarly argued for the resurrection of the same body. As he explains, each body contains a seminal principle:

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[110] Johnson, 11, 18.
[111] Johnson, 19.
[112] Johnson, 26–27.
[113] Similar arguments are presented, for instance, in Bernard Nieuwentyt, *The Religious Philosopher: or, The Right Use of Contemplating the Works of the Creator*, 3rd edn (London, 1724), 564–70, and Richard Cosway, *A Miscellaneous Metaphysical Essay: or, An Hypothesis Concerning the Formation and Generation of Spiritual and Material Beings,* […] *To Which Is Added Some Thoughts* […] *Upon Pre-Existence* (London, 1748), 89–90. See Fernando Vidal, *The Sciences of the Soul: The Early Modern Origins of Psychology*, trans. Saskia Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2011), 325–50.

> the *original Stamina*, which contains all and every one of the solid Parts and Vessels of the Body, not excepting even the minutest Nerves and Fibres, are themselves the *entire Body*; and that all the *extraneous Matter*, which, coming in by way of Nourishment, fills up and extends the minute and insensible Vessels […] is not strictly and properly *Part* of the Body. Consequently, while all this *extraneous Matter*, which serves only to the swell the Body to its just magnitude, is in *continual Flux*, the *original Stamina* may continue *unchanged*; and so no Confusion of Bodies will be possible in Nature.[114]

This seminal principle, writes Clarke, persisting in spite of the death of the body, supplies the basis of our bodily resurrection just as the grain produces the corn:

> as in every Grain of Corn there is contained a minute insensible seminal Principle, which is itself the entire future Blade and Ear, and in due Season, when all the rest of the Grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly into that Form; so our present mortal and corruptible Body may be but the *Exuviae*, as it were, of some hidden and at present insensible Principle, (possibly the present Seat of the *Soul*,) which at the Resurrection shall discover itself in its proper Form.[115]

The concept of seminal principles or seeds, combining the Lucretian notion of material seeds with the Stoic and neo-Platonic notion of the immaterial *logoi spermatikoi*, was 'extremely common across a broad spectrum of seventeenth-century writers.'[116] As one historian writes, 'The notion that a seed from the old body would provide a foothold for the new, regenerated body was to mesh neatly with the related theories of embryological pre-formation and insect metamorphosis which were dominant in the second half of the seventeenth century.'[117] In the following century, as this chapter will show, preformationist ideas were often drawn from biology to theology to speculatively explain the psycho-physical reunion of the soul with the

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[114] Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, 9th edn (London, 1738), 360.
[115] Clarke, 361.
[116] Peter R. Anstey, "Boyle on Seminal Principles," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 33, no. 4 (2002): 597–630 (602).
[117] Peter Harrison, "Scaling the Ladder of Being: Theology and Early Theories of Evolution," in *Religion, Reason and Nature in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Robert Crocker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 207.

body after death. The images used in these discourses, from the organic images of the germ of wheat and the worm in the chrysalis to inorganic images of the mould and the furnace, provide useful keys into Blake's own organic symbolism, revealing the ways in which Blake's preformationist tendencies underwrite his belief in the immortality of the soul. This chapter examines this symbolism as it appears across Blake's corpus, from early works such as *The Book of Thel* and *Vision of the Daughters of Albion* to later works such as *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem.* I identify Charles Bonnet, the entomologist who developed his preformationist ideas into ambitious eschatological speculations, as a particularly relevant figure for reading Blake's germ symbolism. The last section then takes a wider view, demonstrating how the ecological implications of the preformationist paradigm further provide Blake with the vocabulary to articulate how life after death is ultimately a communal affair. If we are all members of Christ's body, branches on Christ's vine, our ultimate regeneration entails the reincorporation of the individual soul into the wider life of the Human Form Divine.

Blake's Dualism

In 'To Tirzah,' a poem appearing in the *Songs*, Blake asserts the belief that something within us survives after death. In fact, the poem frames death as a moment of liberation allowing us 'to rise from generation free' and leave behind our bodies of 'senseless clay' (E30). Trapped within a mortal body, the senses and the imagination are dulled, requiring conscious purification to overcome the gross powers of the flesh. The syntax implies that the organs of sense pre-existed before the speaker was entrapped, for Tirzah 'Didst bind my Nostrils Eyes & Ears./ Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay' (E30). The preformed spiritual body, lodged within a moulded body, ultimately seeks liberation from the body of flesh it finds so alienating. The illustration accompanying the poem, however, is ambiguous with regards to the nature of our

resurrection. An old man waters a fallen naked body as if it were a withered plant, suggesting that the physical corpse itself will be revived. Down the old man's legs, however, are two lines of text reading 'It is Raised/ a spiritual Body' (figure 1). Perhaps the physical body would not be raised after all. When the fallen body rises, it may look superficially the same, but all will be changed: it will no longer be a body of flesh.

Like Clarke and Johnson, Blake seems to have believed that each living being possesses a certain immortal seminal part which guarantees its regeneration. However, Blake did not necessarily believe that the physical body itself would be resurrected. The soul's immortality and the resurrection of the body were in fact two ideas, with distinct lineages, which were brought together into Western Christianity with a degree of awkwardness. The doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, identifying the person with the body, was monist in its origins. Believing that our resurrected state would be modelled after Christ's, Tertullian and other second-century church fathers argued that even the smallest details of each person's body would be reproduced and revived at the day of judgement. Another school of thought, meanwhile, influenced by the Greek conception of the soul as a kind of bodily entity, held that the resurrection would entail the raising of the soul without the flesh. Paul, for one, believed that perishable 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50). To enter heaven, the human must 'put on' metaphorical garments of immortality. Notions of resurrection and immortality are thus conceptually different, with different implications for the afterlife. As one historian of Christianity writes:

> The resurrection logically belongs to the collective hope for an earthly kingdom, the survival of souls to the expectation of a direct transfer of individuals to heaven. The natural location for resurrected bodies is a space-time world. On the other hand, it

> would seem natural that the souls that have reached heaven would stay there, no longer needing to return to the earth.[118]

No wonder Christians continually found difficulty with reconciling both views. Certain English Protestants, for instance, were particularly drawn to the "soul-sleeping" doctrine, the idea that souls died or slept until they were revived along with the body on the day of judgement.[119] The tension between the immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body was still evident in Blake's time. 'Far from resolving such antagonisms or leaving them in the past,' writes Dustin Stewart, 'the rowdy intellectual and social climate of the Enlightenment brought them into sharper relief.'[120] Blake himself seemed to find his own compromise, believing that heaven itself is not a realm separate from the everyday world, but rather describes a spiritual community which is always present but often obstructed and divided by earthly powers.

Central to Blake's beliefs is the idea that that the soul is, in fact, a kind of body, albeit an immaterial one. Like Swedenborg, Blake disagreed with the idea that spirits were ethereal beings without form.[121] In an annotation to Berkeley's *Siris*, Blake writes that '[t]he Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body' (E664), alluding to St Paul's distinction between the *soma psychikon* and the *soma pneumatikon*: we may be 'sown a natural body' but we will be eventually 'raised a spiritual body' (15:44). The natural body, complicit with the

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[118] Heikki Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 132.
[119] Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).
[120] Dustin D. Stewart, *Futures of Enlightenment Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3.
[121] 'From all my experience […] I can declare and affirm, that angels, as to form, are in every respect men; that they have faces, eyes, ears, a body, arms, hands, feet, and that they see, hear, and converse with each other; in short, that they are deficient in nothing that belongs to a man, expect that they are not super-invested with a material body.' Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders, and Hell: From Things Heard and Seen* (London: Dent, 1909), 35. Swedenborg notes, however, that these spiritual bodies can only be seen with the 'eyes of the spirit which is within man' (35). It seems that this is the state in which we too shall be resurrected, for 'it was thus that the Lord was seen by the disciples after his resurrection' (35-6).

fractionating powers of the material world, was, for Blake, a hindrance to the spiritual body, which was similar in form but different in substance. Reading Blake's Devil (who declares in *Marriage* that 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age,' E34), critics have assumed that Blake was in opposition to body-soul dualism. However, once we realise that *body*, for Blake, does not necessarily denote the flesh body, the Devil's statement is fully compatible with the dualist view.

Blake's works have always expressed a certain dualism. In his early illuminated book, *The Book of Thel* (1789), the nonhuman inhabitants of the Vales of Har appreciate their role in a material world in which individual entities dissipate and die to give other beings life. In this eternal cycle, life itself is never destroyed. Just as images on the surface of water shift and transform while the water itself remains untouched, material life circulates in perpetual change without destroying the vital current itself. Thel, on the other hand, represents the soul, which, unlike the Lily or the little Cloud, is immortal. Thel's fear, that she will fade 'like a watry bow' (E3) is therefore ironic, for unlike her interlocutors, she in fact will not disappear after death, but will be confined to the hellish 'couches of the dead' (E6). *The Book of Thel* thus puts two different visions of life into play: the alchemical view, which joys in the mutability of living matter, and the Platonic/Christian view, which sees the individual soul as an eternal form which does not die with the body.[122]

Four years later, in *Vision of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Blake uses vegetative imagery not to present the alchemical view but rather to assert the immortality of the soul.

[122] See Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), I:166–179.

Oothoon, wandering on the threshold of experience, turns to the 'bright Marygold of Leutha's vale' (E45) for reassurance before she enters into sexual life. Projecting her maidenhood onto the Marygold, Oothoon expresses her apprehension towards the prospect of forgoing her virginity ('I dare not pluck thee from thy dewy bed!', E46). The Marygold comforts Oothoon. 'Pluck thou may flower,' says the Marygold to the maiden Oothoon, 'Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight/ Can never pass away.'(E46) The Marygold represents a kind of sexuality which, defying the assumptions supporting the fetishisation of virginity, cannot be depleted or destroyed by experience. Analogically, the Marygold also represents the soul which cannot be destroyed by the death of the body. Marygold may seem to be another Lily or Matron Clay, but unlike these natives of Har she asserts her endurance against the threat of destruction. At the same time, fearing no grave, she is no Thel. Personified as a 'Golden nymph,' the Marigold is a symbol of regenerative abilities of the 'soul of sweet delight' which might persist even when the body, like Oothoon, is subject to the abuses of earthly power.

Not everyone shared Blake's vision. In 1805, Blake was commissioned to produce illustrations for Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*. The first reviews were unsympathetic. Whereas Fuseli lauded Blake for aiming to 'connect the visible and the invisible World, without provoking Probability, and to lead the Eye from the milder Light of Time to the Radiations of Eternity,' the first public review, appearing in the Examiner, responded to designs such as *The Reunion of the Soul & the Body* (figure 2) with scorn:

> How "the visible and the invisible world" can be "connected" by the aid of the pencil without "provoking probability," nay even without outraging it, none but such a visionary as Mr Blake, or such a frantic as Mr Fuseli, could possibly fancy.[123]

According to a hostile reviewer in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*:

> The beings of another world when depicted on the same canvas as earthly bodies, should be sufficiently immaterial to be veiled by gossamer, and not, as they are here designed, with all the fullness and rotundity of mortal flesh.[124]

Sufficiently immaterial: evidently the reviewer's resistance is one of degree, not of kind. Surely, however, to depict invisible spirits as gossamer-veiled forms is no more realistic than to depict them as substantial bodies. Indeed, for Blake, who was influenced by Berkeley's idealism, it is the physical body which is hazy and insubstantial relative to the spiritual body. In 'The Little Black Boy,' for instance, the body is 'but a cloud, and like a shady grove' which will 'vanish' upon death and reveal the soul's true form (E9). Besides, as Lessing argues in his famous *Laocoön* (1766), art must have its licence in the depiction of the immaterial. The ancients, for instance, depicted invisibility by covering the figure in a thin cloud, 'a hieroglyphic, a purely symbolic sign' comparable with 'the rolls of paper with sentences upon them, which issue from the mouth of personages in the old Gothic pictures.'[125] Art speaks to the imagination, which is perfectly able to understand that the immaterial can appear to the mind's eye in corporeal form.

The old Christian orthodox doctrine which held that the fleshly body would be resurrected at death is nonetheless present in Blair's *Grave*, a fact which Blake himself had to navigate.

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[123] Robert Hunt, "'Blake's Edition of Blair's Grave', The Examiner (7 August 1808)," in *William Blake: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. E. Bentley Jr. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 119.
[124] "Review of The Grave, The Antijacobin Review (November 1808)," in *William Blake: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. E. Bentley Jr. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 127).
[125] Gotthold Lessing, *Laocoön. An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (Boston, 1874), 80, 81.

According to Blair, while the corpse initially becomes a shadowy mass, a 'disabled pitcher of no use,' at Judgement, this body will be revived and restored.[126] The 'burial-earth' will:

> give back it's [sic] long committed dust
> Inviolate: and faithfully shall these
> Make up the full account; not the least atom
> Embezzled, or mislaid, of the whole tale!
> Each soul shall have a body ready furnish'd;
> And each shall have his own.[127]

God will 'reassemble the loose scatter'd parts' until the body posses 'a new elegance of form,' but the body will nonetheless be recognisably continuous with the earthly body, for the soul, 'amidst the crowd/ Singling it's other half, into it's arms/ Shall rush with all th' impatience of a man/ That's new come home'.[128]

Blake adds his own commentary to this view. In his frontispiece for the poem, he depicts a veiled skeleton being awakened with 'loud diffusive sound from brazen trump,' suggesting that the mortal body will indeed be resurrected at death.[129] The spirit summoning the body, however, is depicted as a lean muscular form, impressive in its corporeality. The soul is similarly substantial in Blake's illustration which depicts *The Reunion of the Soul & the Body* as the embrace between the female soul and the risen male body. Classical depictions of the departing soul typically showed anonymous souls, often with bird or butterfly wings, while medieval images depicted of the soul as small human anonymous figures, often infants, escaping through the corpse's mouth.[130] (Responding to *The Reunion of the Soul & the Body*,

[126] Robert Blair, *The Grave: A Poem* (London, 1808), 10, 17.
[127] Blair, 31.
[128] Blair, 31–32.
[129] Blair, 28.
[130] Moshe Barasch, "The Departing Soul. The Long Life of a Medieval Creation," *Artibus Et Historiae* 26, no. 52 (2005): 13–28.

reviewer Robert Hunt seems to be adapted to this convention: 'if this aperture [the mouth] is to admit the body, I beg pardon, the soul above, it is somewhat too small, as it is no longer than the mouth of the upper figure, or soul!!')[131] But the soul, for Blake, is not formless or generic. Nor was it for his hero, Michelangelo. In his *Last Judgement*, the Italian master depicts Saint Bartholomew's soul as an intact body carrying its own flayed skin as a visceral identifying symbol. In contrast, Marco d'Agrate (*Saint Bartholomew Flayed*, 1562) and Matteo di Giovanni (*Saint Bartholomew Flayed*, 1480), depict him as a raw flayed body holding its own skin. Unlike medieval *Last Judgements*, Michelangelo's fresco depicts each immortal soul as a vibrant, unique individual by using corporeality to present 'the powerful emotions motivating each person, emotions as unique as his personhood, and not susceptible to generalization.'[132] Similarly, even as they illustrate Blair's belief in the resurrection of the body, Blake's illustrations for the *Grave* strongly assert the palpable bodily presence of the soul distinct from the physical body itself.

It is easy to take for granted the idea that Blake rejects Pauline dualism. Kevin Hutchings has suggested that 'Blake's reinstatement of the body is part of his famous critique of dualism and related ascetic practices,' while Laura Quinney has similarly conflated dualism with asceticism, reading 'To Tirzah' as a poem which 'demonstrates the rage and paralysis of the ascetic estranged from the body by body-soul dualism.'[133] Damrosch has presented a compromised position, believing that 'Blake is a dualist who wishes he were a monist.'[134] I

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[131] Hunt, *120.*
[132] Marcia B. Hall, "Michelangelo's Last Judgment: Resurrection of the Body and Predestination'," *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 1 (1976): 91.
[133] Kevin Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 57; Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 37.
[134] Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 166.

argue that the idea that Blake should be a thoroughgoing dualist does not contradict Blake's evident respect for sensual enjoyment.

The Incorruptible Germ

In 1793, Blake produced a small intaglio volume titled *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*. The frontispiece shows, in symbolic terms, humanity's birth into fleshly life as a slumbering worm-like form swaddled in its leafy casing. As the antiquarian Richard Payne Knight writes in his *Worship of Priapus* (1786), insect metamorphosis functioned in ancient myth as a symbolic parallel for the human transition from life to death and to rebirth. The grub "crawling upon the Earth, and feeding upon the leaves of Plants" was:

> aptly made the emblem of Man, in his earthly form, in which the aethereal vigour and activity of the Celestial Soul, the *divinæ particula mentis*, was supposed to be clogged and incumbered with the material body. When the Grub was changed to a Chrysalis, its stillness, torpor, and insensibility seemed to present a natural image of Death, or the intermediate state between the cessation of the final releasement of the soul by the fire, in which the body was consumed. The Butterfly breaking from the torpid Chrysalis, and mounting in the air, was no less natural an image of the celestial Soul bursting from the restraints of Matter, and mixing again with its native Æther.[135]

Swinburne recognised the idealist meaning of this work: 'The pre-existent spirit here,' he writes, 'well-nigh disappears under stifling folds of vegetable leaf and animal incrustation of overgrowing husk.'[136] But there is hope that death shall free the sleeping soul:

> death in the end shall enlighten all the deluded, shall deliver all the imprisoned; there, though the worm weaves, the Saviour also watches; the new garments of male and female to be there assumed by the spirit are so woven that they shall no longer be as

[135] Richard Payne Knight, *An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus* (London, 1786), 172.
[136] Algernon Charles Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868), 19.

> shrouds or swaddling-clothes to hamper the newly born or consume the newly dead, but free raiment and fair symbol of the spirit.[137]

In 1818, Blake changed the title to *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (figure 3), and added three new text plates at the end to explicate the emblematic designs: death shall reveal the 'immortal Man that cannot Die' (E269) hidden within the worm-woven 'Sexual Garments sweet' (E268). This immortal form shall rise like a butterfly from the chrysalis of the body. As he writes in the address preceding Chapter II of *Jerusalem*, the immortal soul always lies dormant within its corrupted casing, ready to burst its withered flesh:

> He witherd up the Human Form,
> By laws of sacrifice for sin:
> Till it became a Mortal Worm:
> But O! translucent all within.
>
> The Divine Vision still was seen
> Still was the Human Form, Divine
> Weeping in weak & mortal clay
> O Jesus still the Form was thine. (E173)

Although embodied man is a weeping worm-like form, the translucent Human Form Divine is perpetually ready to burst this fleshly body and unfurl the wings of the spirit.

Many preformationists in fact thought that the adult butterfly was already present within the pupa. By immersing chrysalids in warm water or alcohol, Swammerdam, for instance, was able to make visible the future butterfly formed and hidden inside, concluding that "one clearly sees the fully formed butterfly."[138] (To quote Blake, thus does 'The wondrous work flow forth

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[137] Swinburne, 22.

[138] Jan Swammerdam, *Histoire générale des insects* (Utrecht, 1682), cited in Roger, *Life Sciences*, 267. A phenomenally skilled microscopist, Swammerdam's observations of folded structures of the future adult inside the larva were not entirely wrong. As Pinto-Correia argues, Swammerdam had discovered what scientists now call the imaginal discs of insects. These imaginal discs are epithelial sheets present as undifferentiated clusters of cells positioned in specific regions of the larvae as they await the signals which cue differentiation. When the larva

like visible out of the invisible,' E321). René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur later affirmed Swammerdam's observations,[139] as did Bonnet, who used the language of sheaths and folds to describe the process of metamorphosis as divestment:

> [During metamorphosis] new organs were lodged in the old ones, as in so many cases or sheaths. In changing its skin, the caterpillar had occasion only to draw them away, and drew them away accordingly, because the cases proved too strait.[140]

As Bonnet writes, "in Nature there is no true generation; but we improperly call *generation* the beginning of a development that makes visible to us what we previously had not been able to perceive."[141] While the chrysalis dries and hardens, turns horny and opaque, a supple, translucent winged creature lies patiently within, preparing to shed its encrusted exterior.[142]

Suggesting that the human worm in its degenerate form contains within it the potential for regeneration, Blake also updates ancient metaphysics with modern biology. On the title page of *Jerusalem* (figure 4), the flexible symbol of the butterfly is adapted to represent both the soul unfurled in full beauty as well as the soul falling to the vegetative powers of the body. The plate

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pupates, almost all larval tissues degenerate, while these disks transform into the external structures such as the head, wings, and limbs. Correia, *The Ovary of Eve*, 29–32.

[139] Roger, *Life Sciences*, 303.

[140] Charles Bonnet, *The Contemplation of Nature*, 2 vols (London, 1766), 1.245–46.

[141] Bonnet, *Considérations Sur Les Corps Organisés*, 1.169. Cited in Roger, *Life Sciences*, 501.

[142] As a point of comparison, insect metamorphosis supplied preformationist imagery for Coleridge. In a letter to his nephew Edward (1826), Coleridge argues by the 'Analogy of inferior Life' that just like the insect larva which seems to prepare for its adult form, or like 'the living Stem that will itself expand into the flower,' so does the human soul possess traces of the higher faculties into which it will grow: 'The Larva of the Stag-beetle lies in it's Chrysalis like an infant in the Coffin of an Adult, having left an empty space half the length, it occupies – and this space is the exact length of the Horn that distinguishes the perfect animal, but which, when it constructed it's temporary Sarcophagus, was not yet in existence. Do not the Eyes, Ears, Lungs of the unborn Babe give notice and furnish proof of a transuterine, visible, audible, atmospheric world? – We have eyes, ears, touch, taste, smell. And have we not an answerable World of Shapes, Colors, Sounds, and sapid and odorous bodies? But likewise – alas for the Man, for whom the one has not he same evidence of Fact as the other! – the Creator has given us spiritual Senses and Sense-organs – Ideas I mean! the Idea of the Good, the Idea of the Beautiful, Ideas of Eternity, Immortality, Freedom, […] and must not these too infer the existence of a World correspondent to them?' *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 6: 1826–1834*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: University Press, 1971), 595.

is gorgeously ornamented with women adorned with huge insect-like wings. These wings, decorated with astronomical motifs, seem to morph into veined leaves. Though Gigante interprets these lepidopterous figures as sumptuous displays of how vitality transgresses accepted categories of biological organization, they might alternatively be read in terms of the ancient mythical tropes of spiritual regeneration outlined by Knight, according to whom ancient artists represented the Butterfly-Soul as young women with wings.[143] As mentioned earlier, classical death-bed scenes typically depicted the departing soul as a butterfly or winged human, illustrating the belief that the soul, previously trapped in the flesh, was released upon death.[144] Read in this context, the title page presents two contrary states of the soul. At the top of the plate can be seen two butterfly-women flying through the air with delight, representing the liberated psyche. At the bottom of the plate, however, their naked sister lies spread out in torpor. Having failed to use her wings and return to her native Aether, she has instead fallen into deathly sleep, her wings of immortality degenerating into vegetative forms. Two other butterfly-women mourn the fate of the woman lying supine at their feet. At the very incipit of *Jerusalem*, then, the poem seems to warn us against succumbing to the vegetative powers and the false semblance of vitality they produce. The fallen butterfly-woman is an analogue of Albion himself, who similarly lies prostrate at the bottom of plate 19, surrounded by weeping onlookers (figure 5). Another horizontal sleeping figure appears at the bottom of plate 33 (figure 6), her garments draped over her body in folds resembling leafy veins as she vegetates into the rock supporting her. In contrast, the pale nude figure at the top of the plate is being revived in the embrace of Christ, who shines with the light of eternal life. Acting as an exemplary beacon, Christ, who

[143] Gigante, *Life*, 113-15.
[144] Erasmus Darwin, in his notes on the Portland vase, also discusses the emblem of the butterfly as Psyche. *Botanic Garden*, pt. 1 (56-57).

overcame the fate of the flesh himself, reveals the possibility of regeneration. 'Vala produc'd the Bodies. Jerusalem gave the Souls' (E163). From the seed to the insect, various Blakean images draw on preformationist ideas to juxtapose the immortality of the soul against the false vitality of the mortal body.[145] Contrasting preformationist theology against epigenesist biology, Blake promises that while the products of Vala organise themselves into fleshly form, the souls preformed by Jerusalem will not be immured in Vala's traps forever.

The preformationist argument was more sophisticated than the idea that an adult organism was trapped in the egg. Preformation has been caricatured as a theory which asserted that all germs were contained, like Russian dolls, in the first seeds and eggs. This version of preformation was supported by Nicholas Malebranche and Jan Swammerdam, the latter arguing that 'all men were contained in the organs of Adam and Eve,' and that when the 'stock of eggs is finished, the human race will cease to be.'[146] A more expansive version of preformation proposed by Bonnet, seems, however, to be more pertinent to Blake's understanding of generation and regeneration. When Trembley informed Bonnet of his discovery of the polyp's ability, when sectioned, to reproduce complete wholes from each piece, Bonnet, like most of his contemporaries, was astounded. As he writes, 'Everything that I knew in natural history seemed like almost nothing compared to the polyp. It overthrew all my ideas and put my head, so to speak, into combustion.'[147] Unable to procure these polyps himself, he performed similar experiments on creatures at hand such as tapeworms and earthworms, observing how they regenerated themselves when cut into sections. At the age of 23, he published his work in a

[145] Indeed, the final plate of *Milton* unites the wheat and butterfly symbolism, juxtaposing human ears of wheat, wrapped up as if in chrysalis form, against a naked woman triumphantly casting off her shroud/encasement.
[146] Cited in Needham, *History of Embryology*, 170.
[147] Cited in Lorin Anderson, *Charles Bonnet and the Order of the Known* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1982), 5.

letter to the Royal Society entitled 'An Abstract of some new Observations upon Insects,' gaining admittance to the Society in the same year. The worms he examined were composed of a series of membranous rings, lined by muscles which contracted and relaxed as the creature crawled along. Bonnet describes a remarkable vessel which extends itself along the back in 'Folds and Doublings' through which a kind of liquid is pushed through the continual systolic and diastolic motions.[148] Cutting writhing worms in two, he notes that each part creeps about with "a sort of Will of its own" and "extreme Nicety" of feeling, until it is eventually able to grow into a new worm.[149] Musing upon his findings, Bonnet wonders how this is possible:

> Where then does the Principle of Life reside in such Worms, as, after having their Heads cut off, still shew not only the same Motions, but even the same Inclinations? […] This wonderful Reproduction of Parts, is it only a natural Consequence of the Laws of Motion? Or does it rather depend on a Chain of minute Buds and Shoots, a sort of little Embryos, already formed, and lodged where the Reproductions are to begin?[150]

The nature of worm reproduction posed questions about the fundamental nature of life. Had he discovered a sort of vital force, a vibrant impulse of life driving matter towards self-organization? But instead of taking the polyp and the worm as symbols of the raw vitality and plasticity of organic form, he drew, in his later works, a different conclusion: that cutting simply allowed pre-existing germs, the "little Embryos" speculated about in the letter to the Royal Society, the opportunity to grow and expand.

Imbuing the seed or germ with Christian meaning, Bonnet used this model of the preformation of germs to argue analogically for the existence of life after death. Like Trembley,

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[148] Charles Bonnet, "An Abstract of Some New Observations upon Insects: By M. Charles Bonnet of Geneva. Communicated in a Letter to Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. Late President of the Royal Society, &c. Translated from the French by P. H. Z. Esq; F. R. S," *Philosophical Transactions* 42, no. 462-471 (1742): 470.
[149] Bonnet, 473.
[150] Bonnet, 479–80.

Bonnet was a pious Huguenot who held a firm belief in a Creator God and insisted on the immortality of the soul. Bonnet's eyesight deteriorated while he was still relatively young, leading him away from first-hand observational work towards speculation on the metaphysical implications of animal reproduction. According to Bonnet's speculations, on earth, the physical germ must wait for its eventual generation and growth. Only after the death of this physical body does the spiritual germ begins to unfold and regenerate. Citing scripture, Bonnet writes that '*Man is sown corruptible; he will rise incorruptible and glorious*; these are the words of the *apostle* and philosopher: the covering of the seed perishes; the germ subsists, and assures man of immortality.'[151] As he argues, while the mortal body is subject to disintegration and death:

> there is another, which is not liable to it, whose incorruptible germ is supposed already to exist, that will one day disclose itself, and which the soul will eternally inhabit, agreeably to the most express and repeated declaration of holy writ. It is then only this corruptible body which is as a prison for the soul, and not the *incorruptible* and *glorious* body opposed to it by *revelation*.[152]

He speculates that the 'germ of that *spiritual* and *glorious* body' resides hidden in the brain, and that the '*resurrection*, then, will only consist in a prodigiously rapid infolding of this germ, which actually lies hid in the callous body.'[153] Bonnet expands on this theme in the last of his principal works, his *Palingénésie philosophique*. The term *palingenesis*, originally derived from the Greek *πάλιν* (again) and *γένεσις* (birth), referred to the supposed regeneration of living organism from ashes or putrefying matter (OED).[154] On this point, Blake and Bonnet, in line

[151] Bonnet, *Contemplation*, 1.72.
[152] Bonnet, 1.li.
[153] Bonnet, 1.73.
[154] For seventeenth-century natural philosophers such as Robert Boyle, plant palingenesis, the alchemical regeneration of plants from their ashes, provided a clue to the resurrection of the body after death. See William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2004), 227–32.

with many of their contemporaries, diverge from the older Christian belief that resurrection after death entailed a bodily resurrection.[155] Combining the biological concept of preformation, the Christian theme of the immortality of the soul, and an anti-Calvinistic belief in the possibility of salvation for all, Bonnet argues that the resurrected soul was a perfected version of its mortal equivalent. Bonnet's entire biological schema was continuous with his theological system. Physical generation and Christian regeneration were inextricably bound up into the same question.

Blake may have encountered Bonnet's ideas through Lavater, who translated Bonnet's *Palingénésie philosophique* and wrote on the topic of the continued existence of the soul in his *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (4 vols. 1768–78). Encouraged by Bonnet's writings, Lavater set out to find empirical evidence for the soul, leading to his influential work on physiognomy, for which Blake produced engravings.[156] Even if Blake never encountered Bonnet directly, the poet and the biologist could be placed within a loose intellectual tradition in which themes from preformation flourished. Like Bonnet, Blake presents the soul as a germ or seed which lies dormant within the mortal body. In *The Four Zoas*, for instance, the embodiment of souls is described as the encasing of souls within seed-husks:

> In cruel delight [Los's nets] trap the listeners, & in cruel delight
> Bind them, condensing the strong energies into little compass
> Some became seed of every plant that shall be planted; some
> The bulbous roots, thrown up together into barns & garners. (E319)

[155] On the waning of this belief, see Lloyd Strickland, "The Doctrine of the 'Resurrection of the Same Body' in Early Modern Thought," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 2 (2010): 163–83.
[156] See Sibylle Erle, "'On the very Verge of legitimate Invention': Charles Bonnet and William Blake's illustrations to Robert Blair's The Grave (1808)," in *The Gothic and Death*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 34–47.

The human soul is a seed sown in a body of earth, waiting to be liberated when human grains of wheat are gathered up during the apocalyptic harvest. Later in the manuscript poem, Urizen represents the human soul when he falls into the body like a seed falls onto the earth:

> The ever pitying one who seeth all things saw his fall
> And in the dark vacuity created a bosom of clay
> When wearied dead he fell his limbs reposd in the bosom of slime
> As the seed falls from the sowers hand so Urizen fell & death
> Shut up his powers in oblivion. then as the seed shoots forth
> In pain & sorrow. So the slimy bed his limbs renewd
> At first an infant weakness. (E348)

Urizen's soul falls like a seed into his bosom of clay. The slimy bed of the flesh, the soul's temporary dwelling place, develops into Urizen's fleshly limbs. All this time, however, Urizen's soul remains shut up and forgotten like a seed hidden in the dark depths of the earth. The physical body stretches forth its limbs, but the soul must await its eventual unearthing. In the apocalyptic Night the Ninth, Urizen becomes the sower of the seeds himself, preparing human souls for the universal harvest. First 'Urizen commanded & they brought the Seed of Men/ The trembling souls of All the Dead stood before Urizen' (E394). 'Then he began to sow the seed he girded round his loins/ with a bright girdle & his skirt filld with immortal souls' (E394). These immortal souls fall from his hands onto 'the unproducing sands & on the hardend rocks' but soon Urizen is able to view 'the human harvest springing up' (E394).

Man is cast like a seed into the earth. Ultimately, however, he becomes ripe for the harvest, and soon 'Nations were threshed out & the stars threshd from their husks' (E402). The use of a winnowing metaphor to describe the separation of the soul from the body is an old one, as is the notion that at death the life springing from the soul is separated from the life springing from the body. Knight discusses these ideas in his *Worship of Priapus*, which is more broadly a

discussion of ancient myths around fertility and generation. As he writes, when Hercules died, 'The active principle of Thought and Perception returned to its native Heavens, whilst the Passive, or merely Sensitive, remained on Earth, from whence it sprung.' [157] As he continues, it was from producing this kind of separation between active and passive principles of life that:

> the Universal BACCHUS, or Double APOLLO, the Creator and Destroyer, whose essence was Fire, was also called Λιχνιτης, the Purifier, by a metaphor taken from the Winnow, which purified the Corn from the Dust and Chaff, as Fire purified the Soul from its terrestrial Pollutions.[158]

In Knight's account, the ancient Greek symbolism of winnowing elucidated the purification of the soul after death. The soul is divorced from the body just as a seed is separated from the worthless husk. Each person in their earthly form is a union of distinct vital principles, the celestial and the earthly. Death winnowed one from the other.

In fact, in the Ninth Night, *The Four Zoas* does stage the resurrection of the same body, but, as a stage which precedes the great harvesting of souls, it is not a moment of regeneration and glory but a brief revival of earthly strife. The resurrection of the earthly body is a dire event, filled with pain and suffering:

> rivn link from link the bursting Universe explodes
> All things reversd flew from their centers rattling bones
> To bones join, shaking convulsd the shivering clay breathes
> Each speck of dust to the Earths center nestles round & round
> In pangs of an Eternal Birth in torment & awe & fear. (E392)

All ranks of human life are brought back to life, bearing the physical traces of their former lives: 'all the marks remain of the Slaves scourge & tyrants Crown' (E392). As 'every one of the dead

[157] Knight, *Worship of Priapus*, 170.
[158] Knight, 170–71.

appears as he had livd before' (E392), old enmities are revived and those who were oppressed 'sieze the opressor' in vengeance without mercy. Blake thus uses the resurrection of the same body to emphasise in contrast how the final harvest, which does away with mortal bodies, is a great leveller. The forgiveness of sins makes us all anew, purified under the flail.

The symbol of the seed in *The Four Zoas* is polysemic. Never at rest, it is charged with oppositional expressive meanings. The seed is the wriggling spermatozoa, the developing egg. The seed is also the preformed germ of the soul. Look into the labyrinthine channels of the loins, and you find 'the Caverns of the Grave & Places of human seed' (E363). Look past the material forms of things, however, and you find the human soul which 'looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast,' waiting to overcome the confines of the flesh and burst into life, just as 'the seed waits Eagerly watching for its flower & fruit' (E385). Blake, however, brings the spiritual signification of a symbol to its logical extreme, purging the symbol of its more earthly meaning. As Damrosch has argued, 'developed Blakean myth has no place for the upward spiral that absorbs each preceding stage, emphasizing instead that the spectral or Satanic must be expelled utterly.'[159] Just as the Manichaean 'twofold' man, having 'one part capable of evil & the other capable of good,' is capable of 'regeneration,' which 'turns the evil to good. by casting out the evil by the good' (E594), so is the symbol capable of being regenerated in its spiritual sense. At the end of *The Four Zoas* the earthly sense of the symbol is purged, leaving its spiritual sense to develop. For Urthona takes this human corn and bakes it in his ovens, producing the 'Bread of Ages' (E406). While the flesh seed germinates, the soul seed is ultimately transformed by divine labor into something greater. Instead of sprouting its own will, it is transubstantiated, made into the body of Christ, the Bread of Life. As seed becomes bread, the symbol itself

[159] Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 179.

undergoes metamorphosis. Each soul, incorporated into the bread of spiritual community, is brought into a higher form of life beyond the life of the individual grain, brought into a form of life which sustains other life, no longer feeding upon death to flourish in selfishness.

The Branch and the Vine

Do we need to physically die in order to be born to eternal life? Is it necessary to shed the mortal body in order to unfold in our full spiritual glory? The image of the baking of the bread occurring at the end of *The Four Zoas* suggests that this is not the case. The beginning of spiritual life seems to be identified not so much with the death of the mortal body as the death of the Selfhood which is so strongly attached to the flesh. It seems that our spiritual regeneration can be brought about even in this life as soon as we forsake our individual interests and partake in the shared life of the spirit.

Preformationist theology concerns itself with more than the fate of the individual soul. Christianity builds itself around community, describing Christ's followers as the members of his body: 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and the members in particular' (1 Cor. 12:27); 'I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing' (John 15:5). Thus Samuel Johnson, speaking to his parish on Easter Sunday, applies the germ metaphor to humanity as a whole, comparing the human race to a tree which unfolds in time:

> The Rise and Progress of Christianity is compared by our Savior to a *Grain of Mustard-seed,* which is the *least of all Seeds, but when grown up becomes a great Tree*. This is true in the *natural* as well as *spiritual* Sense. This little Ball of Earth, no other than a *Point* or Speck in comparison of the Universe, is ordain'd by the great Creator as the *only Colony* (we know of) to furnish a Supply of new Inhabitants for the immense Regions above, and to fill up the vacant Seats of fa'n Angels. The greater World is compriz'd and circumscrib'd in the *lesser* One MAN; and even in this

> complete but *little World*, there is a much less included, shut up in the Compass of a *Grain*, a *Stamen*, or Seminal Principle (wherever placed) that contains no less than the whole material World in Miniature.[160]

Johnson's language of organic unity articulates the totality of universal providential history, which gradually unfolds according to God's preordained plan. Christian history is a history of the preservation and regeneration of the entire human race; during the devastating Flood, for instance, '[a]ll the Inhabitants of this terraqueous Globe were once inclos'd in an *Ark of Gopher-wood*,' preserved from destruction like a plant enclosed in a seed.[161]

Blake's vision of humanity as one great man Albion is indebted to this preformationist discourse. 'All things,' writes Blake, 'are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour the True Vine of Eternity The Human Imagination' (E545). The regeneration of the individual always meant for Blake the reintegration of the individual into the communal. In *Jerusalem*, it is Albion's turn away from communal life which marks the beginning of his fall into sickness. 'I am in you and you in me mutual in love divine,' exclaims Christ, who lives in 'Fibres of love from man to man thro albions pleasant land.' But Albion, 'perturbed,' 'turns down the valleys dark,' saying (in deleted lines): 'We are not One: we are Many' (E146).

The preformationist imagery of unity in multeity is so powerful because it coincides with much older Christian symbols of union and regeneration, lending fresh imaginative force to rich symbolic traditions, particularly, in Blake's case, the tradition of Protestant mysticism and its strong micro-macrocosmic theme. Describing his visions, Swedenborg, for instance, writes that

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[160] Johnson, *Resurrection of the Same body*, 46.
[161] Johnson, 47.

'heaven, taken collectively, is in form as one man,' and conversely, that the individual contains within them the entire plan of heaven.[162] Boehme, meanwhile made use of the botanical image of unity, writing that 'our whole Religion consisteth' in learning to 'come forth from Disunion and Vanity, and to enter again into that one Tree, Christ in us, out of which we are all sprung in Adam.'[163] As John Stoudt writes, for Boehme, in order to be reborn in the spirit, 'the human egotistical will towards ego-centric passion must be completely broken and resigned to the Lord.'[164] The comparison between the death of the body and the germination of the seed or burning of organic matter is further presented in Edward Taylor's explication of Boehme. Christ regenerates humanity as an ingrafted branch to a tree, as 'leven levening the whole,' as 'a sparkle enkindling the whole,' and:

> as in a germination of a Seed, the gross matter (given it from the Elements) dieth, or as of the burnt Sacrifice the Elementary part is by the fires of the Altar, separated into a Vapour and Salt: Just so Christ entred the corrupt Man, and leading it through Death, became the true Separator.[165]

The image of Christ-as-tree is important because it represents a form of community maintained by spiritual ties rather than kinship. Containing all of humanity, it is far more comprehensive than the genealogical tree. Albion's stubborn rejection of the fibres of brotherhood only find him trapped in Enitharmon's fibres of generation: turning away from spiritual confraternity, he becomes instead enmeshed in struggles between earthly powers. In *Jerusalem*, this emphasis on communities being mental rather than biological is evident in how the cities of Albion come to play a vital role in his regeneration. It is significant that Blake chose as Albion's members

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[162] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders*, 33.
[163] Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ Discovered* (Manchester, 1752), 217–18.
[164] John Joseph Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 156.
[165] Edward I. Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* […] (London, 1691), 184.

Britain's urban centres, cosmopolitan spaces where 'all the Nations of the Earth were seen' (E235) as opposed to the rural Druid sites associated with Britain's ancient past. These twenty-eight cities become the seeds of Albion's renewal. As Los exclaims, 'The land is markd for desolation & unless we plant/ The seeds of Cities & of Villages in the Human bosom (E242). Seeing in 'the hills & valleys of Albion' the 'Cities not yet embodied in Time & Space,' Los calls on the Daughters of Beulah: 'plant ye/ The Seeds O Sisters in the bosom of Times & Spaces womb/ To spring up for Jerusalem' (E244). This is our life's *telos*: to be 'Mutual each within others bosom in Visions of Regeneration' (E170).

Of course, these ideas were articulated without the use of organic metaphors as well. During his early alchemical period, Boehme understood spiritual regeneration in terms of the alchemical transmutation of elements. He used image of fire, the agent of change, to signify the vital purgative element which brings about new birth. The German theosopher Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, a reader of Boehme, found evidence of spiritual forms in chemical experiments: extracting oil from balm leaves, he was surprised to see the oil appear in the shape of the leaves on the surface of the water. As Ernst Benz writes,

> There for him, was the demonstration of the essence of the plant's spiritual body, of the leaves' essential form, which remains even after the total destruction of the plant's material form. In his *Biblisches Wörterbuch*, he took this experiment as proof of the resurrection, which, according to him, is nothing more than "essentification," the simplification of the essence of man, including his corporal form.[166]

Blake himself used the alchemical image of fire to articulate his own ideas about regeneration. Drawing on Biblical images of the furnace, but also possibly drawing on Boehme's work, Blake describes Albion throwing 'himself into the Furnaces of affliction' (E256). This act of self-

[166] Benz, *Mystical Sources*, 52.

sacrifice however transmutes the furnace itself, which changes into a Christ-symbol, the fountain of eternal life: 'the Furnaces became/ Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine' (E256), thus illustrating Boehme's point that regeneration can only be effected when we allow the heat of God's 'Love-Fire' to begin 'devouring all *Egoity,* or that which thou callest *I* and *Me,* as standing in separate Root, and divided from the Deity, the Fountain of thy Being.'[167]

What the preformationist paradigm further offers is the sense that the entire world is an intimate ecological whole in which every single thing, organic or inorganic, and however minute, has its place. For instance, rather than firmly separate the organic and inorganic world, Bonnet believed in a chain of nature in which organised stones and simple organisms were joined on a scale, though the links were at present undiscovered by science. Blake similarly includes apparently inorganic matter in his understanding of life. As he writes in *Jerusalem,* Creation includes not only 'the wooly lamb & downy fowl & sealy serpent' but also 'The tree: the plant: the flower: the rock: the stone: the metal:/ Of Vegetative Nature' (E228); the poem ends with 'All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone' (E258). And just as, in his *Auguries of Innocence*, Blake asks the reader to 'see a World in a Grain of Sand/ And a Heaven in a Wild Flower' (E490), Bonnet suggests that the whole universe is organised in infinite series of *emboîtements*: 'Who can tell, but that in the center of one of these worlds, there may not yet be a vortex that has a sun, planets, satellites, and inhabitants? Who can tell, but that in the center of one of these little planets, there is a proportionable vortex?'[168] Bonnet, like Blake, believed that 'every thing has its / Own vortex' (E109):

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[167] *The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonick Theosopher*, 4 vols (London, 1764-1781), 4.96.
[168] Bonnet, *Contemplation,* 1.12.

> Every being has an activity peculiar to it, whose sphere has been determined by the rank appointed for it in the universe. A mite is a small moveable creature, which acts in concert with others, whose activity extends to much greater distances. These spheres thus enlarging themselves more and more, this amazing progression rises by degrees from the vortex of amber to the solar vortex; from the sphere of a mite to that of an angel.[169]

Bonnet's universe, wherein 'those minute productions of nature' such as the mushroom or the mite 'are as essential parts of it as the cedar or elephant,' where '[t]here is nothing then by itself,' bears some similarity to Blake's visionary world in which 'the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand' (E114) is an inalienable part of the whole.[170]

This allows Blake to reconcile his Pauline dualism with an anti-ascetic appreciation for life on earth. Since Blake is well aware that we do not need to shun earthly life to access the life of the spirit, his elevation of the spiritual over the material does not entail the denial of the flesh. Placing the source of Christian comfort in the superiority of our future state, Johnson tells his parish that '[t]he Corruption of the Grain' is 'a proper and necessary Preparative, to its rising again'[171] Unlike the sober speaker in the pulpit, however, Blake understands that eternal life is already present on earth when 'everything that lives,/ Lives not alone, nor for itself' (E5). The world is 'all alive' where selfhood is annihilated and 'every particle of dust breathes forth its

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[169] Bonnet, 1.16.

[170] Bonnet, 1.16. There are, nevertheless, significant differences between Bonnet and Blake's ideas. For Bonnet, our future state is not merely spiritual but physical. The preformed germ is not, as it is for Blake, a symbol for the immortal soul, but is in fact a never-perishing physical part of the individual, lodged in the brain, which survives natural catastrophe after natural catastrophe to unfold time and again, epoch after epoch, each time ascending higher up the chain of nature than the last. As Lorin Anderson writes, for Bonnet 'the future state no longer represents difference but an ongoing progression from the present so that "the present life is the first rung of a chain lost in eternity."' *Charles Bonnet*, 24. While Blake and Bonnet's thoughts on the afterlife differ literally, however, Blake could have inherited from Bonnet the idea that future happiness can unfold not in some distant heaven but on earth itself.

[171] Johnson, *Resurrection of the Same body*, 11.

joy' (E60). Regeneration can occur in this life when we understand that our life is not ours alone.

2) Vital Heat and the Organised Body: Blake and the French Revolution

Introduction: A New Body Politic

While organic symbols such as the Tree of Liberty and the Hydra of Tyranny gained great currency during the French Revolution, the fundamental principles of the Revolution, as they were discussed in more intellectual and theoretical contexts, were framed by a subtler metaphor – the organicist body politic.[172] During the Revolution, it had become apparent that the conventional metaphor of the body politic, framed around a stable hierarchical relationship between the monarchical head and the subservient body, was no longer fit for purpose. The medical picture of the body had itself become far more sophisticated than ever before. Discovering how the body was sustained by myriad complex and dynamic chemical processes such as digestion and respiration, physiologists brought renewed attention to how the body was more than an architectural assemblage of limbs and organs.[173] This new sensibility allowed writers to flexibly adapt the metaphor of the state-as-body to describe a radically altered political imagination. For instance, if energy was the proper stuff of life, the democratic body politic metaphor might rather be based on the relationship between vital energy and the body which is

[172] The Tree of Liberty was not only disseminated as an icon of the Revolution in engravings, speeches, and writings, but was also planted in the thousands all over the country as a living symbol of the Republic's fertility, longevity, and geographical spread. See Giulia Pacini, "'La Tige Monarchique [Et] l'Arbre de La République': Trees and the Body Politic in Revolutionary France," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 407–25. The hydra was an ancient mythological beast, and famously for every head chopped off the monster could regrow two new ones in its place. During the French Revolution, however, the fresh new image of the fresh-water hydra or polyp was compounded into this ancient image of regenerative monstrosity to articulate the importance and difficulty of the Herculean task of destroying the oppressive ruling classes. See Jonathan Taylor, "The Hydra of Tyranny, The Fall of Robespierre and the Early Demise of Robert Southey's Revolutionary Enthusiasm," *Romanticism* 25, no. 2 (2019): 143–56.

[173] Everett Mendelsohn, *Heat and Life: The Development of the Theory of Animal Heat* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964).

organised around it. This, indeed, is how Burke reinterprets the body politic metaphor in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790):

> You see, Sir, by the long letter I have transmitted to you, that, though I do most heartily wish that France may be animated by a spirit of rational liberty, and that I think you bound, in all honest policy, to provide a permanent body, in which that spirit may reside, and an effectual organ, by which it may act, it is my misfortune to entertain great doubts concerning several material points in your late transactions.[174]

Here, the organism is composed of a delocalised animating spirit and a body which is subsequently organised around it to sustain its activities, just as revolutionary politics is analysed into the new spirit of freedom spreading through the country and the political institutions which might give permanence to political change.

Burke used this new inflection of the trope of the body politic to suggest that revolutionary politics were inherently self-defeating. Unrestrained by the body, vital energy was a dangerous force. Horrified by the enthusiasm of the mob, he describes liberty as an unrelenting spirit which spreads through the body, ravaging the country along the way:

> The spirit transmigrates; and, far from losing its principle of life by the change of its appearance, it is renovated in its new organs with the fresh vigour of a juvenile activity. It walks abroad; it continues the ravages; whilst you are gibbeting the carcass, or demolishing the tomb.[175]

The same energy which has the power to animate a new body politic also has the power to disintegrate it. When Blake uses vital energy as a symbol for political ferment in his Urizen Books, however, the idea that vital energy could be at odds with bodily organization has rather different implications. This chapter is concerned with how Blake's works, in contrast to Burke's

[174] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.
[175] *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–2015), 8.190.

writings, suggest that if political life thrived in the form of spontaneous political action, then the establishment of new legislative and administrative bodies might be superfluous or even restrictive. Translated into mythic terms in *The Book of Los* (1795) for example, the dynamic revolutionary energy of the masses gradually dies out as it is forced into physical form. Described initially as 'Intelligent, organiz'd,' the sea of flames which 'Rag'd with curses and sparkles of fury' (E91) is a vibrant but dangerous force with which to be reckoned. As Los forges it into something more solid, however, it falls into a rigid form of flesh. Whereas Burke considered dissident energy as something which jeopardized the integrity of the state, for Blake it was the organizing powers of the state which threatened the dynamic forces of life. 'The creative blacksmith who seizes the molten stuff of terror and shapes it into living form on the cosmic anvil must employ dread power as well as daring and art,' writes David Erdman, 'but the dread, Blake hopes, will be sufficient unto the day.'[176] However, as the creative blacksmith's attempts to shape molten terror into living form end in the creation of Urizen's ossified body and the extinction of revolutionary energy, this new creation ultimately signals the death of liberty.

Debates over whether it was vital energy or physical organization which was truly essential to life remained highly relevant – fierce, even – throughout the most important years of Blake's career. The noted surgeon John Hunter, for one, put forth a vitalist interpretation of life based on the concept of vital heat, a concept whose roots could be traced as far back as Aristotle and Galen and which played an important part in the European medical tradition. In his posthumous work *A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-shot Wounds* (1794),

[176] David V. Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire; a Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times (1954)*, 3rd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 196.

explicating material he had begun to lecture on from at least 1770, Hunter described the red hot blood pulsating through the body as a 'living fluid' which is 'endowed with life'; if life is liquid, then organization and life 'do not depend in the least on each other."[177] Not everyone accepted this argument. Explicitly rejecting Hunter's views, the radical poet and orator John Thelwall provoked intense interest in the topic when he delivered a paper on the subject on six successive nights to the Physical Society of Guy's Hospital in 1793.[178] Deemphasizing the importance of any 'vital principle,' Thelwall viewed the living creature as an 'organized body' and life as the sum of its activities, arguing that an organised body must exist before life could arise. The body, he writes, must attain a specific organization '*previous to the existence of life*,' and life only arose when 'a perfect organization of the animal substance' was able to respond to a 'specific stimulus by which life may be excited.'[179] For Hunter, life was a hot liquid out of which body parts developed and upon which the entire frame of the body depended. Thelwall, however, represented the view that there can be no life prior to the organization of the body. As Sharon Ruston and others have shown, this topic remained relevant through to the 1810s in the form of the Lawrence-Abernethy debates.[180] (Both surgeons, Abernethy took the Hunterian stance, claiming that some "living principle" was essential to life, while Lawrence retorted that life was simply the result of bodily organization). Already in the 1790s, however, the tension between vital energy and physical organization was available as a metaphorical framework for thinking about revolutionary politics.

[177] John Hunter, *A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds* (London, 1794), 77–78.
[178] See Roe, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life*, 1–6.
[179] John Thelwall, *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (London, 1793), 39.
[180] Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*.

Ironically, by describing the forging of a new government as the hammering of flesh into form, Blake himself seems to be expressing his own nascent doubts about the course of the Revolution in Burkean imagery. In *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), published in response to Charles James Fox's denunciation of the *Reflections*, Burke defends reforming existing institutions over creating new polities *ab initio*. 'It must be shewn,' writes Burke, that an institution is 'right though imperfect; that it is not only by possibility susceptible of improvement, but that it contains in it a principle tending to its melioration.'[181] Burke then ventriloquizes the revolutionaries defending their constitution with naïve ambition:

> Have we not produced it ready made and ready armed, mature in its birth, a perfect goddess of wisdom and of war, hammered by our blacksmith midwives out of the brain of Jupiter himself? Have we not sworn our devout, profane, believing, infidel people, to an allegiance to this goddess, even before she had burst the *dura mater*, and as yet existed only in embryo?[182]

The French have obstinately crafted a new state on the anvil, presuming to have produced perfect laws founded on universal principles of reason. This combination of uterine and manufacturing imagery is startlingly reminiscent of Blake's combination of the forge and the womb in the Urizen Books. What is Los if not such a "blacksmith midwife" binding the embryo of Urizen into rigid form? Metaphors of embryonic growth and violent birth were evocatively employed in speeches and writings on both sides of the Channel to work through questions concerning how the new Republic might replace the moribund structures of the *ancien régime*. Could France be spontaneously regenerated now that the masses were enlightened? Or were

[181] Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4.384.
[182] Burke, 4.384.

new-forged constitutions and declarations required to ensure that the Revolution did not end in miscarriage?[183]

This chapter situates *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794) and the other Urizen Books within a vibrant revolutionary and reactionary discourse in which medical metaphors were creatively adapted to talk about a startingly new political landscape. In focusing on *The Book of Urizen*, I sidestep the Continental Prophecies, *America* (1793), *Europe* (1794), and *The Song of Los* (1795), whose revolutionary themes have already been discussed at length by other critics. Engaging with myths of creation, *Urizen* appears to be at a greater remove from contemporary politics. While the Prophecies are organised around millenarian moments of revolutionary apocalypse, in the Urizen Books mythological characters find themselves set within a disorientating void, far from specific temporal or spatial reference points. Political thinking, however, is not absent from these books; as David Worrall writes, '[d]espite their apparent preoccupation with religious themes,' the Urizen Books 'are Blake's most politically interventionist works of the 1790s.'[184] Though *Urizen*, a book of Blake's "Bible of Hell," seems to concern itself most ostensibly with destabilising organised religion and scriptural authority, references to the French Revolution abound, even if they are submerged in obscure medical and organic images. These images, when read in the light of the body politic metaphors flourishing in the writings and speeches of the 1790s, reveal a concealed and yet rich engagement with contemporary debates over the processes by which politics are organised. As Saree Makdisi has argued, Blake's works are by no means 'opposed to or irreconcilable with the historical, the

[183] After all, Paine thought that political revolution was no more than the "consequence of a mental revolution priorly existing in France," for since "the mind of the nation had changed beforehand," "the new order of things has naturally followed the new order of thoughts." Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 93.
[184] William Blake, *The Urizen Books*, ed. David Worrall (Princeton: William Blake Trust/ Princeton University Press, 1995), 19.

political, the real,' and moreover, his sympathy with revolutionary values did not prevent him from finding serious errors in radical discourse.[185]

Urizen has been difficult to interpret as a political work precisely because it critiques both revolutionary and reactionary standpoints at the same time through its organic symbols. In the decades since Carmen Kreiter's 1965 article on Blake and evolution, Blake's engagement with contemporary biological debates, particularly with those concerning embryogenesis, has become the fruitful subject of recent critical interest. However, critics have differed over whether freedom, in Blake's works, might be found within or outside of biology. Reading Blake in the context of the late-eighteenth-century shift in the life sciences from a preformationist outlook towards a fascination with self-generating form, Denise Gigante suggests that Blake, like other Romantic poets, believed that life resided in the ebullient power of self-formation. Reading *Jerusalem*, she suggests that, seeing the epigenetic self-shaping powers of life as a source of liberatory regenerative energy, Blake 'ultimately reappropriates the 'mighty Polypus' as a symbol of revolutionary power.'[186] In other words, the revitalization of the nation could be affected through open-ended, plastic models of 'system making and unmaking.'[187] However, as Gigante seems to admit, *The Book of Urizen* seems to present the self-shaping powers of organic life in a rather different light: 'Whereas in *Jerusalem* human forms vegetate in the manner of plants from epigenetically prolific extremities, Urizen's hands and feet are the unprolific endpoints of his bodily organization.'[188] Gigante seems to resolve this tension by suggesting that *Urizen* 'constitutes a dystopian vision, the vivisection and hence destruction of a primordial

[185] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 2.
[186] Gigante, *Life*, 129.
[187] Gigante, 148.
[188] Gigante, 148.

organic form.'[189] Surely, however, *Urizen* presents a dystopian vision of the self-driven development, not destruction, of organic form. *Urizen* seems to contradict her reading of *Jerusalem*, for in this text self-organization brings limits to spiritual freedom.

Indeed, Burke had himself used the vitalist concept of self-organization to support his reactionary politics. Invoking Ralph Cudworth's vitalist concept of "plastic nature," the very concept which preceded the later eighteenth-century epigeneticist concepts discussed in Gigante's work (namely Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *Bildungstrieb* and Caspar Friedrich Wolff's *vis essentialis*), Burke present his organicist vision of how political institutions should be gradually reformed rather than violently dismantled. As he writes in his *Reflections*:

> It is from this view of things that the best legislators have been often satisfied with the establishment of some sure, solid, and ruling principle in government; a power like that which some of the philosophers have called plastic nature; and having fixed the principle, they have left it afterwards to its own operation.[190]

Political systems should be patiently left to improve and correct themselves over time. As Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman note, commenting on Burke's passage:

> If laws, government, social institutions, and political constitutions evolve slowly and imperceptibly from a multitude of human actions, without design, forethought, and overall plan directing them toward this outcome […] then self-organization is inherently conservative.[191]

Urizen's body is self-organizing, like Burke's conservative state. It is also artificially wrought, like the French revolutionary government. Urizen's body is the locus in which civilisation and

[189] Gigante, 144.
[190] Burke, *Reflections*, 170.
[191] Sheehan and Wahrman, *Invisible Hands*, 279.

nature conspire in the construction of mind-forged manacles and the narrowing of human perception.

Makdisi has similarly assumed that Blake understands life as ideally 'an open-ended process of becoming.'[192] Makdisi notes how the law, for Blake, is something which tends to 'constitute, determine, control, enclose, and regulate life, rather than leaving life free to determine its own ever-changing forms.'[193] He accordingly makes the assumption that life's self-organizing powers are therefore liberatory. Makdisi distinguishes between 'the organism that unilaterally controls and determines the action of the organs' and 'the organs that recombine to produce a new organism.'[194] However, it is evident that *The Book of Urizen* shows how both processes ultimately cooperate to bind life into fallen form. Indeed, in recent years, Blake criticism has increasingly noted how Blake's depictions of generation disclose a deep-held suspicion towards the phenomenon of self-organization and the illiberal body politics it might imply. Tilottama Rajan considers the fleshy, nervous body in Blake's Lambeth Books as a model for the vexed self-reflexivity of Blake's poetic projects. Taking 'the grotesque body of Urizen as an autoreferential figure for Blake's own corpus and the dis-figuration of its idealistic ambitions,' she argues that the Blakean "body without organs" 'allows us to think of systems or organization in a new, if traumatic, way.'[195] She observes that the 'auto-gestation of texts and characters,' far from regenerative, continually produces disfiguration and contortions.[196] Amanda Jo Goldstein is similarly sceptical of the idea that biology is liberatory in Blake's works. The truth presented in Blake's works is that the life of the body co-produces and

[192] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 278.
[193] Makdisi, 280.
[194] Makdisi, 89.
[195] Tilottama Rajan, "Blake's Body Without Organs: The Autogenesis of the System in the Lambeth Books," *European Romantic Review* 26, no. 3 (2015): 357–58.
[196] Rajan, 363.

perpetuates restrictive discursive, epistemic, and political structures of power and meaning despite Urizen's attempts to embody the 'heroic, idealist myth of autonomous self-generation.'[197] The law does not, as Makdisi argues, 'attempt to appropriate life's endlessly proliferating creative energies and to confine being into limited forms.'[198] Rather, the laws of biology conspire with our man-made laws against us. After all, Urizen's deadly nets are organically evolved. Blake forcefully demonstrates how he is suspicious of the tendency to idealize organic form and appeal to nature in the support of conservative ideologies.

Instead, in the Urizen books Blake locates true vitality in the energy or heat which organic structures seek to contain and thereby disable. Proper life, for Blake, was not a matter of organization, imposed or self-directed. In these early works, vitality seemed rather to lie in energy, which defies organization. After all, as Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790): 'Energy is the only life' (E34). Mentions of Blakean "Energy" are, of course, ubiquitous in Blake scholarship. However, as the concept has remained somewhat nebulous, there is much to be gained from addressing the medical contexts which shaped one of the most critical and yet enigmatic terms in Blake's corpus. Part of this chapter's aim is to draw attention to how Blake was indebted to the idea that the source of the body's vitality lay in innate heat. Indeed, Blake was interested in the medicalised metaphor of revolutionary heat well before he developed his interest in the phenomenon of self-organization.

This chapter concerns itself with Blake's Urizen Books, but it begins with a discussion of Blake's neglected earlier work *The French Revolution* (1791), and ends with Blake's later work, *The Four Zoas*. The first book of *The French Revolution* was set in type by the radical

[197] Goldstein, *Sweet Science*, 50.
[198] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 281.

publisher Joseph Johnson but ultimately none of the books were published. (In February 1791, Johnson had similarly decided against publishing the first volume of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*). *The French Revolution* discusses the events of the Revolution in symbolic terms, but key events and individuals such as Louis XVI and the Bastille are still clearly identified. Over the next few years harsh censorship laws and political persecution (including the 1792 royal proclamation against seditious writings and the 1794 Treason Trials involving Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall) increasingly discouraged Blake from openly putting radical thought into print. As E. P. Thompson writes, '[a]s the Jacobin current went into more hidden underground channels, so [Blake's] prophecies became more mysterious and private.'[199] Since this text shows Blake's earliest engagements with the body politic metaphor, and since it is here that the vital heat metaphor for revolutionary politics is at its most explicit, the text serves as a useful entry point for the oblique biological myth of the Urizen Books. Meanwhile, having explored the political implications of biological organization in the Urizen Books, this chapter finally argues that organic images in *The Four Zoas* reflect the use of 'organization' to describe imperialist expansion in anti-French writings during the Revolutionary Wars.

Vital Heat and Revolutionary Flames

Whether in the heated debates of salons, clubs, committees, and assemblies, or in the spontaneous activity of violent mobs and celebratory crowds, it was undeniable that the French Revolution had unleashed a tremendous amount of volatile energy. As Mary Fairclough has argued, as a source of vigour and renewal which nonetheless threatened to disorganise the body, the medical image of vital energy was something writers frequently turned to in the attempt to

[199] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 175.

describe the powerful volatility of a politicized citizenry.[200] For Burke, this 'dreadful and portentous energy,' this 'vicious and distempered energy' was immensely dangerous, only a semblance of proper life.[201] In a metaphor which reflects the growing eighteenth-century interest in the chemistry of putrefaction, Burke describes the French state as a rotting corpse which produced bursts of noxious activity as it decayed:

> *One* thing, and *one* thing only—but that one thing is worth a thousand—they have *energy*. In France, all things being put into an universal ferment, in the decomposition of society, no man comes forward but by his spirit of enterprize and the vigour of his mind.[202]

In Blake's works, however, the energy coursing through revolutionary France was not the product of metabolic destruction so much as the rekindling of a regenerative vital flame. This flame symbolized the potential of spontaneous, grass-roots revolutionary activity to throw off the ossified organised body of the state and raise a new body flowing with desire. On the surface, the image of rolling flames comes straight out of the Biblical Apocalypse. Other works of the time extravagantly alluded to the Book of Revelation in commenting on the events in France. The Scottish dissenting minister Alexander Pirie, for instance, associated this 'flame which wastes the strength of nations' with the fourth vial of John's apocalypse, through which 'power was given [to the sun] to scorch men with fire' (Revelation 16:8). 'Tyranny, like the fabled Phoenix,' writes Pirie, 'may kindle a fire of popular fury which consumes herself, yet out of the ashes a more vigorous and fiercer tyranny never fails to sprint.'[203] Occupied with the language

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[200] Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 59–121.
[201] Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 8.480.
[202] Burke, 8.480.
[203] Alexander Pirie, *The French Revolution Exhibited in the Light of the Sacred Oracles; or, A Series of Lectures on the Prophecies Now Fulfilling* (Perth, 1795), 202.

of embodiment, however, Blake elides the scriptural connotations of regenerative flames with a fundamental concept in Galenic medicine, innate heat.

The idea that internal heat was the essence of vitality was a widely influential idea in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In his important work on the circulation of the blood, the English physician William Harvey described this *calidum innatum* as a vitalistic force which animated organic matter. As Harvey writes, 'the blood without heat or spirit is no longer blood, but cruor or gore.'[204] '[L]ike an animal,' this figurative flame is 'self-motive, self-nutrient, self-augmentative, and is the symbol of our life.'[205] Descartes, who had read *De motu cordis* and supported Harvey's theories, similarly believed that life was sustained by 'the heat of the fire burning continuously in its heart.'[206] (It is worth noting that in centuries of medical discussions on innate heat, the distinction between heat and fire was often blurred). The idea that life was heat was widely propagated in works such as William Salmon's *Ars Anatomica* (1714), which described this "living Flame" as no less than the human soul, '*an immaterial living Principle, whose Substance is a pure AEtherial Fire*' kindled and lit up by the heart, which is in turn analogous to 'Sol in the Microcosm' and functions as the 'Fountain of the Vital Spirits and Heat, the very Primum Mobile of our Body.'[207] Through John Hunter, the concept of vital heat remained highly relevant in Blake's lifetime. Hunter, like Harvey, was drawn to the analogy between combustion and animal respiration, considering life as 'Animal Fire,' which, like 'common fire,' 'wants a constant supply, without which it would be extinguished.'[208] Fascinated by the particular ways in which different living organisms could produce heat and maintain

[204] Harvey, *Works*, 502.
[205] Harvey, 506.
[206] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991), 1.108.
[207] William Salmon, *Ars Anatomica, or the Anatomy of Humane Bodies* (London, 1714), 500.
[208] John Hunter, *Essays and Observations*, 1.113.

regular temperature levels, Hunter conducted a variety of experiments involving warming and cooling different plants and animals to learn about the nature of the vital energy which preserves and regulates the internal machine. He recounts an experiment he conducted in which he froze a living egg and a dead egg respectively. Only the freshly laid egg had the power of 'resisting heat, cold, and putrefaction' –- somehow, heat and life were mysteriously intertwined.[209] According to Hunter, 'Whatever Life is, it most certainly does not depend upon structure or organization'; in fact, he goes so far as to say that '[i]n contradiction to organization being a cause, we find in general that the least organised are the most tenacious of life.'[210] Blake was evidently acquainted with Hunter, who appears in his prose satire *An Island in the Moon* as the surgeon Jack Tearguts, as well as his brother the obstetrician and anatomist William Hunter.[211] Hunter is therefore a likely source of the Blakean idea that life is found in 'a Pulsation of the Artery' (E127) rather than in the organised frame of the body.

Blake explores the power of the vital heat metaphor as early as *The French Revolution*. The book as a whole is framed as the desperate struggle between cold, sickly despotism and fiery, salutary liberty. As the poem begins with Europe shrouded in dark pestilential fog, the royal armies gather 'breathing red clouds of power and dominion' (E287) while a deathly chill from Louis XVI's shoulder 'Runs aching cold into the scepter too heavy for mortal grasp' (E286).[212] The monarchical body is diseased, and the ferocious heat of its military arm lacks the

[209] Hunter, *Treatise on the Blood*, 1794, 80.
[210] Hunter, *Essays and Observations*, 1.114.
[211] Both brothers occasionally employed Blake's engraving master James Basire. Kreiter, "Evolution and William Blake," 113–14. At one point John Hunter and Blake lived in the same vicinity, and it is likely that Blake would have attended William Hunter's lectures on anatomy at the Royal Academy. See Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire; a Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times (1954)*, 101–2; Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 35.
[212] See Tocqueville's description of the old regime: 'One might say that human institutions resemble man himself in that, quite apart from the organs that fulfil the various vital functions, there is an invisible central force, which is the very principle of life. When that life-giving flame is extinguished, the organs may appear to function as

vitality required to make a warm body out of a cold one. '[L]ike the sun of old time quench'd in clouds," the king stands in darkness, watching 'his vast armies spread over the hills,/ Breathing red fires from man to man' (E289). Louis has a formidable opponent, 'For the bars of Chaos are burst; her millions prepare their fiery way' (E292). Lafayette stands before the National Guard 'Like a flame of fire' (E298). The 'soul of Voltaire' shines 'fiery' (E298) over this new citizen's militia, which is armed with the weapons it took from the storming of the Bastille. 'A faint heat from their fires reviv'd the cold Louvre; the frozen blood reflow'd' (E299): a new source of vital heat, coming from the 'limbs' of the political body, promises to revive the rest of France.

By imagining France as a unified body circulating with revolutionary fire, Blake discards the hierarchical framework in which the conventional interpretation of the body politic was embedded. Unnerved, the French nobles gather to discuss the upcoming threat against their ancient privileges. The nobles are described as flaming beacons of aristocratic honor and chivalric violence: as the gothic prisons and towers of the old order 'shook and trembled,' 'the Commons convene in the Hall of the Nation; like spirits of fire in the beautiful/ Porches of the sun' (E288). The Duke of Burgundy enters 'Cloth'd in flames of crimson' (E290), emanating 'an odor of war' (E289), while his peers 'Rose inflam'd' (E293), anxious to guarantee that 'the ardor of noble souls quenchless,/ May yet burn in France' (E294). The Duke of Orleans, however, extends this language of flame to the commoners as well. The historical Orleans was a supporter of the Revolution (in 1792 he went so far as to change his name to Philippe Égalité).

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before, yet in vain, for everything withers at once and dies.' Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, ed. Jon Elster, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 77.

Addressing his fellow noblemen, he delivers a remarkable speech calling for liberty and equality for the people:

> Fear not dreams, fear not visions, nor be you dismay'd with sorrows which flee at the morning;
> Can the fires of Nobility ever be quench'd, or the stars by a stormy night?
> Is the body diseas'd when the members are healthful? can the man be bound in sorrow
> Whose ev'ry function is fill'd with its fiery desire? can the soul whose brain and heart
> Cast their rivers in equal tides thro' the great Paradise, languish because the feet
> Hands, head, bosom, and parts of love, follow their high breathing joy?
> And can Nobles be bound when the people are free, or God weep when his children are happy?
> Have you never seen Fayette's forehead, or Mirabeau's eyes, or the shoulders of Target,
> Or Bailly the strong foot of France, or Clermont the terrible voice, and your robes
> Still retain their own crimson? mine never yet faded, for fire delights in its form.
> But go, merciless man! enter into the infinite labyrinth of another's brain
> Ere thou measure the circle that he shall run. Go, thou cold recluse, into the fires
> Of another's high flaming rich bosom, and return unconsum'd, and write laws.
> If thou canst not do this, doubt thy theories, learn to consider all men as thy equals,
> Thy brethren, and not as thy foot or thy hand, unless thou first fearest to hurt them. (E294)

In a healthy body, every function burns with salutary desire. Addressing his fellow noblemen as 'princes of fire, whose flames are for growth not consuming' (E294), Orleans implies that the state could be revived if the nobles and the commoners joined their energies together.[213] Like Hunter, Blake locates vital heat not so much in the heart of the body, as Galen did ('the heart is, as it were, the hearthstone and source of the innate heat by which the animal is

[213] Blake would have encountered the juxtaposed metaphors of growing and consuming flames as virtuous and selfish love respectively in Swedenborg's Conjugal Love (1768). In this work, Swedenborg identifies love with vital heat: "Love therefore is the heat of the life of man (hominis), or his vital heat; the heat of the blood, and also its redness, are from this source and no other; this is an effect of the fire of the angelic sun, which is pure love." Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Delights of Wisdom Concerning Conjugial Love: After Which Follow the Pleasures of Insanity Concerning Scortatory Love* (London, 1794), 41. This heat could also develop into more dangerous emotions: "man is enkindled, grows warm, and is set on fire, whilst his love is exalted into zeal, anger, and wrath" (362). The difference between good and evil desire is that while the one sustains and unites, the other consumes. '[T]he zeal of evil love is as an infernal flame, which of itself bursts forth, and rushes on, and is desirous to consume another." (349). Conversely, virtuous love brings us together, and "considered in itself [it] is nothing else but a desire and consequent tendency to conjunction" (43).

governed'), but in the blood which circulates throughout it.[214] Nerves and veins, flowing with hot vital fluid, connect the brain and the heart to the limbs and the loins. Just as health in the limbs is health for the entire body, freedom and joy among the lower orders brings prosperity for the whole of France. However, if Orleans initially seems to suggest that the monarchy and aristocracy constituted the head or heart of the system, and the common people, the limbs, he proceeds to reject this model by assembling a new body out of the body parts of the revolutionaries. Lafayette's forehead, Mirabeau's eyes, Target's shoulders, Bailly's feet, and Clermont's voice combine to create a body in which every part is equal. What to the upper orders appears as anarchy and chaos is actually vibrant activity organised from below.

Orlean's language is ever-shifting, however, and he then discards the metaphor of the body politic altogether. Blake employs the vital heat metaphor to articulate an alternative not only to the state-as-body model which sets up the aristocracy as its head, but also to an apparently democratic version of the same which prioritizes the will of the people over individual desire. It seems that neither conventional nor revolutionary versions of the body politic metaphor, both of which subordinate the part to the whole, were satisfactory for Blake. Each person is a nonreducible source of vibrant energy. Challenging the nobles to enter another body's labyrinthine brain or flaming bosom, Orleans declares that one cannot subjugate another human being by reducing them to a subordinate part of the social body. One should respect the distinctiveness and autonomy of another's body, and consider him a brother, not a foot or a hand.[215] '[U]nless thou first fearest to hurt them,' that is. Sceptical of the liberatory power of

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[214] Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. M. Tallmadge May, 2 vols (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), 262.

[215] C.f. the anti-Jacobin pamphlet *Topsy Turvy*, which bitingly ventriloquises revolutionaries attempting to upset the natural order of things: 'Ever since, where the Head stood of late,/ We've erected the Tail in it's [sic] place!' George Hiddesford, *Topsy Turvy: With Anecdotes and Observations Illustrative of Leading Characters in the Present Government of France* (London, 1793), 7,

Orleans' rhetorical sleight-of-hand, Andrew Lincoln ironically notes that '[t]he Nobles may, it seems, continue to regard others as their hands or feet as long as they are sensitive to the others' feelings'.[216] Blake, Lincoln argues, 'reveals the limited vision of those who promote revolution and casts some doubt on their ability to escape the hierarchical power structures with which they contend.'[217] Indeed, Orleans' qualification does seem to mitigate his radical rejection of the body politic metaphor, but what he is doing is drastically changing the conditions by which the metaphor might apply. The level of empathy he demands is achieved only by going 'into the fires/ Of another's high flaming rich bosom.' To fear to hurt them, the nobility must first undertake full imaginative incorporation with the passions and pains of the other orders.

In 1791, Blake saw the revolution as a regenerative process proceeding from sickness to health. By 1794, however, Blake had begun to understand revolution as a grotesque birth rather than the rejuvenation of an ailing body, as generation rather than regeneration. Casting the body politic metaphor in more pessimistic terms, he had become increasingly concerned with the tension, rather than the sympathy, between vital heat and physical organization. While writers such as Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Thelwall and Helen Maria Williams seemed to describe nervous energy as a subtle force which ran through a pre-existing bodily frame, for Blake, the energies of life could thrive independently of the body which only served to confine it. As Helen Maria Williams writes in her *Tour of Switzerland* (1798), revolutionary energy requires a 'conductor' to travel abroad:

> The governments of Switzerland, placed within reach of the electrical fire of that Revolution, flashing around all their borders, behold the subtle spark, which finds a

[216] Andrew Lincoln, "Politics and Desire in Blake's The French Revolution," in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. Jackie Disalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson (London: Routledge, 1998), 190.
[217] Lincoln, 188.

> conductor in the human heart, escaping beyond its prescribed limits, and feels its strong concussion in every agitated nerve.[218]

In *The Book of Urizen*, however, rivers of bloody fire distinctly precede the formation of Urizen's body. The sound of a trumpet heralds Urizen's separation from Eternity, and at this moment 'vast clouds of blood roll'd/ Round the dim rocks of Urizen' (E71). After Urizen announces his independence, 'Rage, fury, intense indignation [appear]/ In cataracts of fire blood & gall' (E72). There is no doubt that fire and blood are heavily associated with one another: 'roaring fires ran o'er the heav'ns/ In whirlwinds & cataracts of blood' (E73). The fires are too strong for Urizen, so he seeks to build a physical body to contain and quench these blood-flames:

> And a roof, vast petrific around,
> On all sides He fram'd: like a womb:
> Where thousands of rivers in veins
> Of blood pour down the mountains to cool
> The eternal fires beating without
> From Eternals; & like a black globe
> View'd by sons of Eternity, standing
> On the shore of the infinite ocean
> Like a human heart strugling & beating
> The vast world of Urizen appear'd. (E73)

Urizen builds a heart in order to regulate and cool the bloody flames surging around him, and Los later collaborates with Urizen by beating these flames into manageable globules of blood. But by doing so Urizen is ''Cut off from life & light frozen/ Into horrible forms of deformity' and 'Los suffer'd his fires to decay' (E77). Gone is the fiery optimism of *The French Revolution*. In its stead is the fear that attempts to organise revolutionary energy into embryonic structures

[218] Helen Maria Williams, *A Tour in Switzerland*, ed. Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygave, vol. 3, Women's Travel Writings in Revolutionary France (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), 6–7.

of government have led to the production of new forms of oppression – fears which led Blake to establish gestation as a mythical counter-force to the energies of regeneration.

The Book of Los, similarly begins with the cataclysmic appearance of vibrant fire before the body ever appears:

> Raging furious the flames of desire
> Ran thro' heaven & earth, living flames
> Intelligent, organiz'd: arm'd
> With destruction & plagues. (E91)

By describing vital energy as a flame, rather than an electrical force or an abstract principle, Blake not only dissociates it from the kind of nervous energy identified by Fairclough, but also from the abstract Lebenskraft, expressed as a rational "organizing energy" by Georg Ernst Stahl or a "formative drive" by Blumenbach. Rather than presenting this energy as something which organises matter into form, these 'living flames' rage and roll as 'Rivers of wide flame' (E91). Los, however, 'hurls his chains' (E91), binding this liquid life into form. Through Los's arduous labour a body begins to grow: 'there grew/ Branchy forms: organizing the Human/ Into finite inflexible organs' (E92). But as the liquid flames become stifling waters, as material form replaces unbound energy, the Polypus appears. While all other parts lie 'formless,' the 'Shiv'ring' lung heaves 'incessant':

> clinging around like a cloud
> Dim & glutinous as the white Polypus
> Driv'n by waves & englob'd on the tide. (E93)

The organs shoot out like roots, intricate pipes branch out into an 'immense Fibrous form' (E93). The liquid fires begin to circulate through the system as blood. Los, beating these fires into a heart on his anvil, produces momentary sparks of light, but this is merely a 'glowing

illusion,' and soon the light fades away, leaving the brain 'in a rock' and the material heart as a 'fleshy slough' of 'four rivers' obscuring the true, living heart, the 'immense Orb of fire' (E94). The heart becomes a mere pump, a parody of the four rivers of Eden. Vital energy devolves into a materialist version of internal heat. The transient light shed by Urizen's fiery orb soon fades away, and what is left is a static sun which issues heat but not light, violence but not liberty. This heart-like orb of fire on the anvil is equated with the sun, which 'Stood self-balanc'd,' just as the earth, in Milton's Paradise Lost, having been created out of 'Matter unformd and void', 'self-ballanc't on her Center hung'.[219] It becomes an orb of Miltonic fire without light:

> But no light from the fires all was
> Darkness round Los: heat was not; for bound up
> Into fiery spheres from his fury
> The gigantic flames trembled and hid. (E91).[220]

Vital flames were already a liquid force in *The French Revolution* ('her millions prepare their fiery way,' E292), and in *Los,* these 'living flames' rage and roll as 'Rivers of wide flame' (E91) before Urizen's fallen body organises itself into form. With the formation of the body, the universe falls into coldness and obstruction. Bodily organs, 'formless/ Shiv'ring' (E93), begin to organise themselves from cold waves. When Los seizes what is left of the fires and begins

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[219] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* in The *Poetical Works of John Milton,* ed. by Helen Darbishire, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-1955), I (1952): 7.233, 7.242.

[220] Helen Maria Williams had discussed the Montagnard manipulation of the crowd with a similar astrological metaphor. Hitherto, writes Williams, the French 'have only proved to the world, that the passage from despotism to liberty is long and terrible—like the passage of Milton's Satan from hell to earth.' Helen Maria Williams, *Williams's Letters: Letters from France: Containing a Great Variety of Interesting and Original Information Concerning the Most Important Events That Have Lately Occurred in That Country, and Particularly Respecting the Campaign of 1792,* 2nd edn (London, 1796) , 72. The Montagnards had 'assumed as many Protean forms as suited their purpose,' and had taught the people that 'the insurrection of a mob was no less glorious than the mighty insurrection of the whole nation, when with one consent it overthrew despotism, and asserted its just rights', ibid., 50. They had misled the people and abused the energy of the revolution. 'As well might they have compared the sun advancing in his majesty, chasing the pestilential vapours from his orb, and spreading light over the horizon, to the angry and transient meteor which flashes across the sky, and which rises and sets in darkness.' Ibid., 50, 51. And indeed, by 1794, the leader of the Montagnards had fallen, to quote Coleridge and Southey, '[i]n splendor gloomy, as the midnight meteor,/ That fearless thwarts the elemental war.' Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, *The Fall of Robespierre. An Historic Drama* (Cambridge, 1794), 1.

'beating incessant, condensing/ The subtil particles in an Orb' (E94), he produces momentary sparks of light, but this is merely a 'glowing illusion,' and soon the light fades away, leaving the brain 'in a rock' and the material heart as a 'fleshy slough' of 'four rivers.' The living flames, beaten into an 'immense Orb of fire' (E94), are all but quenched by the body built upon it.

The Book of Los may lack explicit references to the Revolution, but seeing as the astronomical symbols are very much in the same vein of those found in *America: A Prophecy* (1793), *The Book of Los* should be read as an obscure continuation of the same theme found in *America*. On the surface, *America* welcomes the French Revolution by hailing it as an extension of the inspired revolutionary project begun in the American Revolution. As a retrospective prediction, Blake sees the fires of revolt spreading from the Atlantic shores to 'France Spain & Italy' (E57), burning through their 'law-built heaven' (E58) to free the European Continent from oppression and despair. But the Revolution's violent side was already evident by 1793. In the 1792 September Massacres, for instance, which arose shortly after the overthrow of the monarchy and took place amidst rising panic at the prospect of foreign invasion, hundreds of prisoners were removed from the prisons and executed in a matter of days. The merciless exhortations by Marat in the polemical *L'Ami du peuple* to liquidate counterrevolutionaries, aristocrats, churchmen and traitors had resulted in blood on the streets.[221] This was just the beginning. By 5 September 1793, Bertrand Barère would announce 'la terreur' as 'l'ordre du jour.'[222] In the same year Blake saw the events in France as a 'terror' flying in like a comet, or like the planet Mars, having displaced the sun, releasing comets of violence from its control

[221] Jonathan I. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 270.
[222] *Réimpression de l'Ancien moniteur: Depuis la réunion des États-Généraux jusqu'au Consulat* 17, no. 251 (September 8, 1793), 531.

('like the planet red/ That once inclos'd the terrible wandering comets in its sphere./ Then Mars thou wast our center,' E53). Orc is a spectre which 'glowd his horrid length staining the temple long/ With beams of blood' (E5). 'Swelling' and 'belching' from the Atlantic's deeps come forth 'red clouds & raging Fires' (E53). This 'Zenith' of terror grows as 'human blood shooting its veins all round the orbed heaven,' becoming 'vast wheels of blood' (E53). The gory organic image, through the introduction of the image of the wheel, slides into the industrial, as the 'Human fire fierce glowing' is compared to 'the wedge/ Of iron heated in the furnace' (E53), producing the kind of 'heat but not light' which reappears in *The Book of Los*.

Popular insurrection, impulse-driven action, spontaneous cooperation and emergent organisation might have seemed anarchical to many, but to Blake this kind of political activity was imbued with vital energy. The Jacobin government, however, had manipulated this revolutionary energy to create an oppressive state based on an interpretation of the general will which called for the purgation of any individual it declared disobedient. While Burke had imagined the Revolution as the result of intricate extensions of local sympathetic ties being dissolved into a 'homogenous mass,' the Terror was a result of Jacobin attempts to organise the revolutionary energies of the crowd for its own ends.[223] While Marat called for an uncompromising '*dictateur suprême*' to eliminate traitors and bring unity, Robespierre and his faction 'envisaged the will of the people as indivisible and collective, a unitary abstract with an unchallengeable executive.'[224] The inspired vital flame of revolution was abused, allowing the

[223] Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 8.238. Many of the seemingly spontaneous atrocities committed by the mob were encouraged and orchestrated by Jacobin leaders. Though Marat, Robespierre, and Danton had insisted on the popular spontaneity of the September Massacre, Girey, Roland, and other Brissotans 'more accurately labelled the 2-5 September atrocities a systematic, planned conspiracy, methodically perpetrated by just a few dozen people. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 270. Robespierre had cunningly manipulated his popular base, filling the galleries of the Jacobin club with hundreds of sansculottes paid to cheer, or hiss on command, turning the club 'into a well-oiled machine attuned to his autocratic will' (283).
[224] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 358.

Montagnards, in the words of Louis Sebastien Mercer (who denounced Robespierre as a "Sanguinocrat"), to 'immolate human victims on the altar of liberty.'[225] 'It is not for any individual, or minority to diverge from the *volonté générale*,' declares Jérôme Pétion, one-time supporter of Robespierre, 'or there is no more society.'[226]

The State in Embryo

The term *volonté générale* in fact originates in Rousseau's political writings, and as this section shall show, Rousseau's ideas about political organisation form an important background to *The Book of Urizen*, a work which further frames political epigenesis as the death of vital energy. *Urizen* begins with the announcement of Urizen's sudden birth ('Lo, a shadow of horror is risen/ In Eternity!') as an 'unknown, abstracted/ Brooding secret' (E70), a hidden thing of pure potentiality without form. One of the issues Blake works through in *Urizen* is how structure seems to evolve after initial existence, an issue which also arises in Rousseau's influential *On the Social Contract* (1762). Inspired by Newtonian physics, writers such as Montesquieu had found it fashionable to describe the state as a rationally constructed, well-balanced machine, its checks and counter-checks on power resembling the weights and counterweights in a well-crafted clock.[227] Rousseau broke with the fashion by describing the state as an organic body, replacing this dehumanizing language of mechanisms and balances with a humanizing metaphor in tune with his own preference for the natural over the artificial. Rousseau's social contract is formed when a number of people spontaneously come together, pooling their individual interests to create an organic whole. As Rousseau writes, the social contract can be summarized

[225] Louis Sebastien Mercier, a member of the Convention who denounced Robespierre as a "Sanguinocrat," cited in Israel, 280.
[226] Cited in Israel, 306.
[227] Peter V. Conroy, "Rousseau's Organic State," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1979): 1–13.

in the following terms: '*Each of us puts his person and his full power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole*.'[228] Thus, on the grounds of *la volonté générale*, disparate individuals come together as a single political body. As he continues:

> At once, in place of the private person of each contracting party, this act of association produces a moral and collective body made up of as many members as the assembly has voices, and which receives by this same act its unity, its common self, its life and its will.[229]

The political body is formed when each individual member loses his or her individuality in becoming a part of a greater whole. In the place of a cold political machine, Rousseau presents a personified body politic with its own "life" and "will." The moment the people come together as sovereign, the body politic is born and infused with life. However, as this general will is then expressed through laws, this instantaneous birth of the Republic must be followed by its embodiment through the gradual establishment of a concrete legislative framework. Similarly, Urizen, a thing of pure will, is born in an instant, a demonic form of Rousseau's sovereign *volonté générale* which now has the power to organise itself a body.

The organic metaphor allowed Rousseau to imagine a state which has existence before it has organization, to have life before it has viable limbs and organs. According to Rousseau, by the social contract 'we have given the body politic existence and life: the task now is to give it motion and will by legislation. For the initial act by which this body assumes form and unity still leaves entirely undetermined what it must do to preserve itself.'[230] Rousseau's temporal

[228] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, trans. Victor Gourevitch, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 52.
[229] Rousseau, 52.
[230] Rousseau, 68.

sequence of life before organization, birth before development, later re-emerged in political discourse when the French Revolution 'burst[s] forth,' in the words of Thomas Paine, 'like a creation from a chaos.'[231] The conflict between instantaneous birth and gradual constructive growth was implicit in the 1789 debates on the drafting of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. The Marquis de Mirabeau, who played an important role in this drafting process, claimed that these rights already lay dormant, and argued that simply publicly declaring that these rights existed would be equivalent to slicing away moribund parts of the body politic, allowing the body to be regenerated in an instant.[232] The new order simply needed first to be declared; its political institutions could be built afterwards. As Jonathan Israel writes, '[w]here the American Declaration declares natural rights inherent in British constitutional liberties, the French Declaration invokes rights enshrined in laws yet to be made.'[233]

Radical Enlightenment philosophy saw existing laws as an organised system of injustice, and as a consequence demanded that completely new laws, simple, just, and natural, be drawn up to create a rational system of government rooted in the kind of materialism drawn from d'Holbach's *Système de la nature* (1770). These abstract laws stipulated by the 'eternal reason that regulates the universe' found their expression in documents such as the Declaration, which Mirabeau thought ought to be more abstract and philosophical than the American Declaration to appeal more explicitly to reason.[234] Eliminating feudal rights to declare that all are born and remain free and equal, this death certificate of the Old Regime (note how Urizen's tablets resemble tombstones) was also ostensibly the birth certificate of a new age of liberty.

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[231] Paine, *The Rights of Man*, 93.
[232] Suzanne Rameix, "Corps Humain Et Corps Politique En France Statut Du Corps Humain Et métaphore Organiciste de l'État," *Laval Théologique Et Philosophique* 54, no. 1 (1998): 53.
[233] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 84.
[234] Jonathan I. Israel, "Philosophy, Religion, and the Controversy about Basic Human Rights in 1789," in *Self-Evident Truths?: Human Rights and the Enlightenment*, ed. Kate E. Tunstall (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 115.

However, as the Revolution proceeded into tyrannical terror and rationalized violence, the *Declaration*, which argues that the guarantee of rights 'necessitates a public force' and relies on the rule of law to express the general will, seemed to have become, for Blake, a much more suspect document. Even during its conception, it exasperated most of the Assembly, who preferred to avoid being engaged in 'metaphysical battles' over 'abstract' rights.[235] Written by an antinomian who believed in Christian brotherhood rather than atheistic citizenship, who believed in rejecting the Ten Commandments and acting 'from impulse: not from rules' (E43), *Urizen* presents this kind of document as an entirely superfluous object, sprouting out of a Urizenic drive to rivet liberty into law.[236] Where people once owed obedience to the will of the king, now they owed it to the state. As Urizen reveals his 'books formd of metals' inscribed with the 'secrets of dark contemplation', the Constitution and the *Declaration* prove to be new attempts to bind a 'Book/ of eternal brass' which issue 'One command, one joy, one desire,/ One curse, one weight, one measure/ One King, one God, one Law' (E72). Ironically, this new political project has merely recreated a new body of oppressive laws. Where people could once be arrested and detained by arbitrary administrative orders, now it was the law which had the power to curtail their freedoms. The *Declaration* rather resembled the legalistic declaration of a moralizing priest, rather than the liberating declaration of an inspired prophet.

Glimpses of the 1789 *Declaration* can be found throughout *Urizen*. The *Declaration* was widely depicted as a pair of Abrahamic tablets, an image which saturates Blake's work. A 1793 print (figure 7) makes the comparison explicit, showing a tablet inscribed with the dual titles of 'Droits de L'homme' and 'Constitution de 1793' set amidst fiery clouds of lightning.

[235] Israel, 116.
[236] Not for nothing has Blake been discussed as a proto-anarchist in Peter Marshall, *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (London: Freedom Press, 1988).

The inscription beneath the image reads: 'La Constitution Republicaine, semblable aux tables de Moyse, sort du sein de la Montagne au milieu de la foudre.' The *Declaration* had become monumental, sacred. The image became so ubiquitous that Gillray later satirizes this hyperbolic presentation of the *Declaration* in *The Apotheosis of Hoche* (1798, figure 8), a print which frames the tablets inscribed with a hellish commandment ("Thou shalt Murder") with a glory of daggers, bayonets, and monsters. The Title Page of *Urizen*, showing its eponymous figure writing his laws in books of metal while sitting in front of two Abrahamic Tablets (figure 9), plays into the Abrahamic resonances surrounding the Declaration. In fact, the visual form of the *Declaration* is subtly woven into the very design of Blake's book. Jerome McGann has drawn comparisons between the presentation of text in Urizen and the dual-column layout of the Bible.[237] But given that it was conventional to depict the full text of the *Declaration* as two columns of numbered paragraphs divided by a central division (e.g. figure 10), the *Declaration* can be seen as another model for the *mise-en-page* of *Urizen*.

A careful observation of the illustrations in Blake's text further reveals that the shapes of the Tablets of the Law are reproduced in the bodies of various figures in the work. For instance, the shape of these tablets from Sinai (a diptych form, each panel possessing a concave upper edge) reappears in the backs of the figures on plate 17 and plate 27 respectively (figure 11 and 12). The figures in *Urizen* become what they behold as their bodies reproduce the very shape of two Tablets of the Covenant. The laws of the constitution are to be engraved not in marble or bronze but in the very body of its citizens, through which these laws are reproduced and preserved through the generations. If Los is the zealous revolutionary, Urizen is the legal

[237] Jerome J McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes," *Studies in Romanticism* 25.3 (1986), 303-324 (304).

document forged to bind people into new systems of reason, especially since Urizen is so evocatively identified with the material book itself, with the 'Book/ of eternal brass' (E72). As Nelson Hilton points out, the typographic presentation of Urizen's declaration 'Here alone I in books formd of me-/-tals' (plate 4, line 24) suggests that Urizen's book 'not only concerns, but is made of himself: The Book of Urizen.'[238] In *Marriage*, the production of books is a process where hot metals, as 'living fluids' (E40), are cast into cold, solid form, echoing the sequential priority of the existence of hot blood before the formation of the body. Urizen, described as 'surging sulphureous,' has been identified as the metal plate which is then dipped in acid (Mann 52); the 'pitch & nitre' in which Urizen rages refers to stop-out varnish and nitric acid involved in the etching process.[239] Illuminated printing is a labour-intensive process. At the same time, its images are (mentally) pre-formed, and Blake also describes print-making as a process of 'melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid' (E39). Like the Declaration, Urizen-as-book is both 'written' and 'unfold[ed]' (E72), both crafted into being and born ready-formed.[240]

Burke had already raised his concerns over the utopian project of revolution and the bold production of declarations several years before Blake wrote *The Book of Urizen*. In his *Reflections*, Burke had asserted the preferability of the gradual regeneration of age-old political institutions, rather than the drastic death of the old regime and its replacement by the rushed

[238] Nelson Hilton, *Literal Imagination: Blake's Vision of Words* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 250–51.
[239] Paul Mann, "The Book of Urizen and the Horizon of the Book," in *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, ed. Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler (Berkeley: California Univerisity Press, 1986), 52; Lisa Kozlowski, ""Resonating Resins: 'Listning to the Voices of the Ground' in William Blake's 'Book of Urizen," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2001): 419.
[240] As Tristanne Connolly writes, "The 'secret' character of the contents of Urizen's books may be related to the appearance of the developing child as seen by the preformationists, its fully-formed parts initially invisible to the limited human eye." Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 82.

birth of the new. The English constitution guaranteed the perpetuation of the political body. Even the Glorious Revolution only effected a renewal in a portion of the political machinery without causing 'a decomposition of the whole civil and political mass, for the purpose of originating a new civil order out of the first elements of society.'[241] During both the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, writes Burke, England 'regenerated the deficient part of the old constitution through the parts which were not impaired,' for the state had 'acted by the ancient organised states in the shape of their old organization, and not by the organic moleculae of a disbanded people.'[242] In contrast, to attempt to organise a new political order from first principles was to rebuild a Frankenstein body out of fragmentary pieces of human tissue. It was bound to fail.

Burke was particularly sceptical of the abbé Sieyès's rationalist three-layer model of representation. Dividing the French nation into 83 departments and 720 districts, each with nine cantons, this model redrew the nation into legally equal units with Urizenic mathematical precision.[243] According to Sieyès's plan, the vitality coursing through the republican body politic was neither localized nor hierarchical.[244] Hence the choice to divide France into 83 departments was carefully made to guarantee a relation of interdependence among divisions, such that each part of the political body could only find life in the whole rather than operate as a self-sufficient unit.[245] Burke, however, was dubious about the projected unity of this new body

[241] Burke, *Reflections*, 21.
[242] Burke, 22.
[243] This Urizenic trait was picked up by his critics. As one pro-Jacobin pamphlet puts it, 'Profond métaphysicien, né avec tous es moyens de jouer le premier role dans la nouvelle organisation du gouvernement Français; l'abbé Syeyes fut Presque inutile à l'assemblée nationale.' *Le véritable Portrait de Nos législateurs* (PAris, 1792), 51.
[244] As the editors to Sieyès's essential political writings observe, in Sieyès's thought, "[i]t is circulation itself, not the head or heart, which defines the life of a state. Sovereignty is not a matter of hierarchy, but collaboration." *Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès: The Essential Political Writings*, ed. Oliver W. Lembcke and Florian Weber (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 23.
[245] Rameix, "Corps Humain Et Corps Politique" 53.

politic. The old France was divided into provinces, each possessing peculiar historic rights and laws. This new polity, organised by rational principles, would not be able to cohere into one body. As Burke asks, how are 'three or four thousand democracies' to be 'formed into eighty-three,' and 'by some sort of unknown attractive power, be organized into one?'[246] The division of France into departments seemed to him to be rather an act of dismemberment, the work, one might say, of a Urizen dividing himself and his world alike according to rational principles ('Times on times he divided, & measur'd/ Space by space in his ninefold darkness,' E70).

A careful study of Blake's use of organic imagery can reveal how he obliquely articulates the fear that the new civil order organised out of the organic molecules of revolution precisely reproduced the old forms Burke defended. Burke thought that the new polity would end in dissolution, that if the rights of state do not supersede the rights of its transitory members then society will consequently 'crumble away, be disconnected into the dust and power of individuality.'[247] As Makdisi has argued, Blake also departs from the radical liberal position (taken up by Paine and others) which, opposing Burke, bases the concept of freedom on the primacy of the 'unitary, self-contained, and self-regulating individual.'[248] However, Blake's scepticism towards the declaration of individual rights is not motivated by a fear of social dissolution, but of its opposite: he fears the new polity would bind its citizens even more forcefully than before.[249] Burke warns the revolutionaries against 'destroying at their pleasure

[246] Burke, *Reflections*, 55.
[247] Burke, *Reflections*, 96.
[248] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 7.
[249] His fears were not unfounded. As the social scientist Theda Skocpol has argued, the 'most striking and enduring accomplishment' of the French Revolution is 'the rationalization, bureaucratization, and further centralization of state power in France.' Theda Skocpol, "Reconsidering the French Revolution in World-Historical Perspective," *Social Research* 56, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 58. C.f. Tocqueville's analysis: 'the reason why centralization did not perish in the Revolution is that it was in itself the beginning of the Revolution as well as its sign. And I would add that when a people destroys the aristocracy in its midst, it propels itself toward centralization.' Tocqueville, *The*

the whole original fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them, a ruin instead of an habitation.'[250] For Burke, the French Revolution was dangerous because it tore apart the social fabric woven from the traditions and conventions kept alive from generation to generation. Towards the end of *Urizen*, however, precisely the opposite becomes the case as Urizen produces a cold 'Net of Religion' which, like a 'spiders web' (E82), binds society into a shrunken existence. This 'Net of Urizen' (E83) is 'twisted like to the human brain' (E82); converting the society-as-fabric metaphor into an organic metaphor, Blake turns Burke's conservative organicism against him to suggest that the real danger was that an oppressive social fabric might form once more. As Mona Ozouf writes, while Desmoulins, Condorcet and Mirabeau believed that once societal mores had been regenerated, there was hardly any need to effect change through legislation, a good number of other revolutionaries believed that regeneration required 'painstaking labor': first to purge the nation of the old order, through violence if necessary, followed by the process of surrounding 'each individual with a web of myths, rituals, and beliefs as restrictive as possible and as confining as what had gone before.'[251] Urizen evidently has something in common with this latter camp.

After the ousting of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor (July 27) 1794, the organic metaphor would gain a rather different nuance. Robespierre had become another hydra-headed tyrant, and the Constitution of 1793, which had been designed by Robespierre and Louis Saint-Just to replace the constitutional monarchy of 1791, had to be discarded. In a speech submitted to the National Convention on the Eighteenth Thermidor (August 5), Sieyès argued for the

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Ancien Régime, 61. The French Revolution marked the birth of the modern state. Out of the seeds of revolution, a new Tree of Mystery grows.

[250] Burke, *Reflections*, 95.

[251] Mona Ozouf, "Regeneration," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 784–85.

improvement of the constitution 'piece by piece' (171). A constitution, as 'a body of binding laws,' should not be abandoned to 'uphold itself from the moment it is born.'[252] A constitution should be allowed to slowly improve and grow. As he argues:

> The constitution of a people would be imperfect unless it contained within itself a principle of conservation and of life, like every organism (*être organisé*). But should one therefore compare a constitution to an individual who is born, grows, declines, and dies? I do not think so. Should one instead compare it to a species, and thus to a chain of successively existing individuals? I do not believe that either.
>
> Like any organism, the constitution must be able to assimilate the materials needed for its proper development. We must therefore allow it to continually draw on the knowledge and experience of the past so that it can meet the needs of the present. Its true nature lies in its capacity for increasing perfection, not in periodic recreation.[253]

Echoing Burke, Sieyès was arguing for a model of politics based on gradual evolution and improvement. Despite Sieyès's speech, the Constitution of the Year III, a new, more conservative constitution, was adopted by the Directory on 22 August 1795. By the time Blake was printing *Urizen*, French politics, confused and bloody, had fallen again and again into different blocs and cliques. It had become apparent that establishing a new utopia was not as simple as merely declaring it so. As Dorinda Outram puts it, while much of the political culture produced by the Revolution was aimed at 'redistributing various attributes of the king's body through the new body politic,' the Revolution continually failed to construct a 'modern state,' instead evolving into 'a series of transformation scenes, in which forms of government and ruling factions succeeded one another with bewildering rapidity.'[254] What is The Book of Urizen if not a series of transformation scenes, 'Rifted with direful changes' (E74)? Burke had written in his *Reflections* that '[b]y this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much,

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[252] Sieyès, *Essential Political Writings*, 171.
[253] Sieyès, 176–77.
[254] Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3–4.

and in as many ways as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the other.'[255] Blake depicts this 'periodic recreation' in *Urizen* through rendering organic this chain which binds generations. Los continually attempts to 'burst' the 'tight'ning girdle' binding his chest (E80). Each time, however, a new girdle grows, and the ones he has broken off form an ever-lengthening 'iron Chain' (E80). Hardly supportive of institutions, Blake paints this chain in blood; at the same time, the image of Los's girdle suggests that it is periodic rebirth, rather than conservatism, which adds new links to the bloody chain of history. Nicholas Williams argues that Blake saw revolutionary action as something which occurred instantaneously, and that the problem merely lay in 'constructing the 'Moment' of revolutionary crisis as a believable rupture in the fabric of historical time.'[256] But the confused and repetitive narrative development of *Urizen* shows spontaneous birth followed by the vexed process of subsequent development. In the case of the French Revolution, the new polity seemed to be infused with life, but as the revolutionaries, like Los, 'bound every change/ With rivets of iron & brass' (E75), the new France soon found itself trapped within a dismal, changing body.

In his works produced after the tumultuous 1790s, Blake, like Sieyès, increasingly began to imagine a kind of society which could regenerate itself from broken parts, rather than utterly reorganise itself from disorganised atoms. Unlike Sieyès, however, he did not turn to the metaphor of evolution, returning instead to the metaphor of sickness and healing he had used in *The French Revolution*. Beginning with *The Four Zoas* (composed c. 1796-1807), he invested heavily in the myth of Albion's fall into deathly fragmentation and his regeneration into original

[255] Burke, *Reflections*, 95.
[256] Nicholas M. Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24.

unity, contrasting Albion's resurrection against the organic development of Urizen. Much remains to be said on how Blake's mature works configure political change according to a biological paradigm which emphasises rejuvenation and recovery. Moreover, to read Blake's later interest in renovation and healing as a development out of his dissatisfaction with French politics and its ill-fated tireless striving towards form is an opportunity to produce a new understanding of Blake and the imagination. Critics such as Makdisi have presented Blakean creativity in open-ended, generative terms. This version of Blake affirms life 'as an infinitely prolific number of re-makings, re-imaginations, re-becomings, the joyous life of pure potential, of endless striving, of élan vital.'[257] Just as his books comprise 'a ceaseless bundle of relations' in verbal and visual terms, so does human society comprise 'ever-changing bundles of relations articulated by our infinite desires.'[258] However, if we instead viewed the illuminated books as the artisanal embodiments of the Urizenic drive towards form, a drive which produces direful change and rifted confusion, we might instead realise that for Blake, creative production, like political action, is contaminated by matter's drive towards organization. Perhaps the generation of art must be followed by its regeneration – by the work of finding, receiving, and transmitting the original, eternal salutary flame of inspiration which gave the work its life – just as the work of utopian politics is to restore the animating spirit of liberty. Only then can we melt apparent surfaces and ever-changing structures away, displaying the infinite which was hidden.

[257] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 318.
[258] Makdisi, 321, 318–19.

Organizing Violence in *The Four Zoas*

In the apparently ceaseless expansionist Revolutionary Wars, "organisation" takes on further semiotic weight. France does not formally declare war on Great Britain till 1793, but war is already foreshadowed in *The French Revolution*:

> Gleams of fire streak the heavens, and of sulpur the earth, from Fayette as he lifted his hand;
> But silent he stood, till all the officers rush round him like waves
> Round the shore of France, in day of the British flag, when heavy cannons
> Affright the coasts. (E298)

Lafayette is presented as a heroic figure in this poem, but already the vital heat of inspired revolt begins to manifest itself in the form of the sulphurous blast of musket and cannon powder. As the Revolution continued, popular insurrection soon led to popular mobilisation 'to secure the virtuous defence of the revolution against its treasonous, conspiratorial enemies at home and abroad.'[259] The flame of the populace is beaten on the anvil of organisation, industry, and regimentation into a brimstone machine of war as the Wars saw the birth of modern conscript armies to fuel the Republic's devotion to 'perpetual, expansionist warfare, carrying French rule and ideals as far as possible across the face of continental Europe.'[260] In revolutionary France 'every citizen ought to be a soldier and every soldier a citizen.'[261]

In *The Four Zoas*, Blake identifies the Urizenic impulse as the primary cause of militant expansion. By 1797, the year he begins the manuscript, Blake is able to distil the internal tension with the French Revolution as one between the Orc-like compulsion to dismantle the existing

[259] Skocpol, "Reconsidering the French Revolution in World-Historical Perspective," 61.
[260] See Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2007).
[261] John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 64.

order, to burn through the shackles of law and free men from restrictive moral and political structures, and the Urizenic compulsion to build a new utopia based on new legal systems, to bind people to 'fundamental' rights based on reason and nature, and to spread this 'universal' ideology across the nations. The contest between Urizen and Orc sits at the heart of this manuscript. Orc is born in Night the Fifth; feeling the disruption Orc has caused, Urizen spends Night the Sixth exploring his hellish dens until his Satanic journey brings him face-to-face with a monstrous Orc. The next Night presents a disputation between the two before war between them finally commences in Night the Eighth. This war only comes to an end when Urizen, in Night the Ninth, 'no longer curbs [Orc's] rage' (E390), allowing an unbound Orc to commence the Apocalyptic harvest of nations, after which humanity is renewed. Orc, allowed to burn, 'consumd himself in Mental flames' (E395) rather than physical warfare, returning to his divine form, Luvah. Peace is restored. The 'Regenerate Man' takes Luvah and Vala and puts them in Urizen's hands, saying that the fiery pair, which, in their fallen form, represents desire corrupted into violence and bloodlust, must regain their original vitality:

> They must renew their brightness & their disorganizd functions
> Again reorganize till they resume the image of the human
> Cooperating in the bliss of Man obeying his Will
> Servants to the infinite & Eternal of the Human form. (E395)

Orc had originally been perverted by Urizen, just as revolutionary energy had corrupted by the mental wars of ideology among the various factions of the Revolution. As Orc says, 'I well remember how I stole thy light & it became fire/ Consuming' (E356). Orc received Urizen's philosophy 'as a poisond Cup Recieves [sic] the heavenly wine' (E356). The over-intellectualisation of the Revolution turns 'affection into fury & thought into abstraction,' becoming 'A self consuming dark devourer rising into the heavens' (E356). If Orc was

corrupted and dehumanised ('the Serpent Orc/ Fold without fold encompasses [The Eternal Man] And his corrupting members/ Vomit out the Scaly monsters of the restless deep,' E384), it was because he had imbibed Urizen's metaphysics.

In *The Four Zoas*, Urizen is identified as the 'first author of this war & the distracting of honest minds' (E390), and Blake language of authorship gives us a hint as to why he thought that Urizen's Enlightenment rationality was the cause of the warlike nature of revolutionary France. For those against the revolution, the Terror was inherent in the principles of 1789.[262] To its critics, the Enlightenment principles fundamental to the Revolution were instruments of disorder and disorganisation. As William Cobbett writes in *The Bloody Buoy* (1797), a work which collects multiple gruesome scenes of violence from the Revolution, it was the 'Disorganizing and blasphemous principles' of the Revolution, and the system created by them, which 'gave birth' to the horrendous deeds of the terror.[263] However, these very same principles also led the French to launch warfare against other countries to spread its universalising ideology. Calling for war against France, Pitt, in February 1793, attempts to articulate this very idea to the House of Commons. The chaos seen across the Channel, he argues, is the 'natural effect of the principles maintained in France; principles that rested upon grounds utterly subversive of all order.'[264] Arguing that the French ironically 'organized every thing by a disorganizing principle,' Pitt frames the French decision to declare war in order to "reorganise" other states according to their apparently rational principles as merely a pretext for imperial expansion. The project of '[o]rganizing every other power, in order to make them in substance,

[262] See, e.g. Augustin Barruel's *Memoires Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797), and Joseph de Maistre's *Considerations on France* (1797). Published in the same year The Four Zoas was begun, both conservative writers interpreted the bloody events of the Revolution as results of the sins of the Enlightenment.
[263] William Cobbett [Peter Porcupine, pseud.], *The Bloody Buoy*, 3rd edn (London, 1797), xiv-xv, v.
[264] *The Senator* (London, 1973), 6.245.

if not in form, a part of France,' places other states afterwards 'at the mercy of the Jacobin Society, and to be governed by principles of pretended freedom.'[265] 'It became England therefore not to wait till they should have swallowed up one State after another.'[266] This language of organisation was not limited to those unsympathetic to the Revolution. Helen Maria Williams, for one, derides the 'romantic project' pursued by the revolutionaries of 'throwing aside all arts, all commerce, all but war, and of marching.'[267] As she writes,

> Instead of attempting to disorganize the systems of government which prevail in other countries, they will begin by organizing their own—and before they desire other nations to throw off the sovereignty of kings, they will be careful to demonstrate that there is no tyranny in the sovereignty of the people.[268]

A 1799 account of Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars would frame Bonaparte's campaigns in Egypt and Syria in similar language, describing the act of colonisation as one of organisation: 'It is certain, that by seizing and organizing these countries, they would be enabled to extend their view still farther; to annihilate, by degrees, the English East India trade, enter it with advantage themselves; and, finally, get into their hands the whole commerce of Africa and of Asia.'[269] Setting up its many sister-republics (including the Dutch or Batavian Republic of 1795, the 1796-97 Cisapline and Ligurian Republics in Italy, the 1798 Helvetic Republic in Switzerland, and the 1789-99 Roman and Neapolitan Republic in Italy), France extends its

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[265] *The Senator*, 249–50.
[266] *The Senator*, 250.
[267] *Williams's Letters*, 53. In light of this, Blake's description in America (1793) of the American revolutions (prototypes for the French counterparts) casting down the pen, throwing down the hammer, dropping their anchors and closing their books (E56) takes on an unexpected prophetic nuance.
[268] Williams, 71–72.
[269] James Murray, *An Impartial History of the War* (Manchester, 1799), 523.

control over the continent, organizing 'public authority,' as one historian puts it, 'according to its own principles and through the medium of its own adherents.'[270]

Blake's symbols can be read on multiple levels, but against this context, Blake's descriptions of Urizen's webs and nets spreading across the nations should be read as a depiction of Revolutionary France's attempts to spread its abstract philosophy across the nations 'Like a spiders web, moist, cold, & dim' (E82) to divide and bind the world until the children of the world form their own universal 'laws of prudence.' All fall under the Net of Urizen, the 'disorganiz'd Immortal' (E87). Urizen is simultaneously 'disorganizd[,] rent from Eternity,' and 'in chains of the mind lockd up' (E336) – in fact, the more disorganised he is from within, the more he attempts to organise the world according to his will. Writing in 1791, Pierre Victor Malouet noted the Urizenic flavour of revolutionary ideals:

> Il y a eu dans cette revolution un caractere qui n'appartient à aucune autre, c'est d'en généraliser les principes, de les rendre applicables à tous les peuples, à tous les pays, à tous les gouvernemens; c'est un veritable esprit de conquète, ou plutôt d'apostolat, qui a saisi les esprits les plus ardens, et qui cherche á se répandre au dehors.[271]

As enlightenment principles were understood to be universal, it became imperative to impose them upon nations far and wide. And as principles supposedly derived on rational grounds seized the most ardent of spirits, the spirit of the revolution gained Orc-like fervour. As the Eternal Man says to Urizen, 'war is energy Enslavd' (E390) by Urizen's religion of abstraction.[272] As the Revolution's Urizenic 'labours vast' begin to 'Order the nations

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[270] Robert Roswell Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: a Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, With a new foreword by David Armitage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 387.
[271] *Gazette nationale, ou le moniteur universel* 123 (3 May 1791). 'There was in this revolution a characteristic which does not belong to any other, and that is to generalize its principles, to make them applicable to all peoples, to all countries, to all governments; it is a true spirit of conquest, or rather of apostolate, which has seized the most ardent minds, and which seeks to spread outside.' My translation.
[272] In fact, Blake originally wrote 'honest energy Enlaved,' further exculpating Orc.

separating family by family' (E390), the project of universal rights swiftly becomes a project of universal empire.

Ironically, however, the French had initiated their wars to prevent internal dissolution. The French *guerre universelle*, uttering the decree offering "aid and fraternity to all peoples wishing to recover their liberty," had in fact been motivated by more domestic concerns. While Louis hoped that French military defeat would allow Austria to restore his monarchy, and the monarchists hoped that the war might reveal the incompetence of the new government, the more fervent Jacobins planned to exploit the conditions of military emergency to enact stricter, more extreme political measures, while the constitutional monarchists hoped that war would unite the nation against a common external threat and give them the excuse to supress radicalism.[273] Writers in Britain described the uniting effect of the war making use of the metaphor of the furnace. Thomas Erskine (1750-1823), a British lawyer and politician who defended Paine against the charge of seditious libel for the second part of his *Rights of Man*, published a work which argued that the French were driven to war because the British refused to acknowledge the new Republic and provide it the protection that would have allowed it to develop into a peaceful constitutional monarchy. Hence France's need to artificially create unity through war. Describing war as a furnace, which amalgamates France into one, Erskine writes:

> Heterogenous bodies having no principle of union capable of constituting a substance, and which if left to themselves, would separate and disperse, may be bound together by external force, and be passed through the furnace till they unite and corporate. This was precisely the case with France. She was rent asunder by the internal divisions of her own people; but cemented again by the conspiracy of Kings.

[273] Palmer, *Democratic Revolution*, 284–85.

Ironically, writes Erksine, warlike Pitt was 'the guardian angel that hovered over France, and the sole creator of her ominous and portentous strength.'[274] John Gifford (1758-1818), the loyalist founder of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, and John Bowles, who wrote profusely against the French Revolution, published swift responses against him. Bowles directly rejected Erskine's use of the furnace metaphor, writing that the urge to war sprang out of France's chaotic state of volatility. Anarchy is the active principle setting off the chemical reaction. Heterogeneous bodies 'consisting of inert and passive matter':

> can neither jump into the crucible, nor blow the furnace, by the heat of which they may be incorporated; but that, on the contrary, anarchy is a subtle, active, and potent principle, and fully capable of exciting that external action, which is necessary to produce a state of cohesion.[275]

For Bowles, the principles in which the Revolution was founded are 'as certainly fatal to the body politic, as the most deadly poison to the body natural,' and like 'an universal solvent,' can dissolve the bonds of society by 'filling the mind with notions of absolute and impracticable equality.' They leave 'no other means for the preservation of order than the influence of terror, and the exertion of force.'[276]

Blake seems to have understood the perverse organisational power of violence by the time he writes *Jerusalem*, for he shows Los's utopian Golgonooza ironically powered by the Furnace of Affliction. Revolution is fuelled by violence; Los's workshop is a workshop of war. He:

> Condens'd his Emanations into hard opake substances;
> And his infant thoughts & desires, into cold, dark, cliffs of death.

[274] Palmer, 55.
[275] John Bowles, *French Aggression, Proved from Erskine's "View of the Causes of the War"* (London, 1797), 100.
[276] Bowles, 104.

> His hammer of gold he siezd; and his anvil of adamant.
> He siez'd the bars of condens'd thoughts, to forge them:
> Into the sword of war: into the bow and arrow:
> Into the thundering cannon and into the murdering gun. (E152)

'Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems' (E154), Los's project is analogous to the attempt to deliver individuals from the ancient regime by building a new Republic. Yet this utopian city is surrounded by death, and is filled with 'Looms & Mills & Prison & Work-houses' (E157). As he labours 'day and night,' he laments the fact that he is to continually behold 'the soft affections/ Condense beneath my hammer into forms of cruelty' (E152), until he finally realises that 'No individual can keep these Laws, for they are death/ To every energy of man, and forbid the springs of life' (E177).

In February 1824, Robert Southey recalls, in a letter to Caroline Bowles, the atmosphere at the beginning of the Revolution: 'Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race.'[277] In his works produced after the tumultuous 1790s, Blake increasingly began to imagine a kind of visionary society which could regenerate itself from broken parts, rather than utterly reorganise itself from disorganised atoms, precisely because this visionary society was modelled on a pre-formed heavenly society, rather than a body politic which was constantly evolving, while being declared to having been founded on fixed principles. For it was in these post-revolutionary works, beginning with *The Four Zoas*, that Blake invests heavily in the myth of Albion's fragmentation and regeneration into original unity, contrasting Albion's Christ-like resurrection against the organic development of Urizen.

[277] *The Correspondence of Robert Southey and Caroline Bowles*, ed. Edward Dowden (Dublin, 1881), 52.

Blake was not the only one to draw on the Christian connotations of regeneration in thinking about the French Revolution.[278] Christ's resurrection is an implicit image in the following statement of Mirabeau's: 'You breathed on remains that seemed inanimate. Suddenly a constitution was organised, and already it is giving off an active force. The cadaver that has been touched by liberty has risen and received new life.'[279] More explicitly, circles associated with what would become the Constitutional Church, welcoming the Revolution as the restoration of ancient Jerusalem, used the term's Christian connotations to juxtapose the Christlike-regeneration of France against the "regeneration of Lycurgus." Lycurgus was the mythical lawgiver who founded the institutions of ancient Sparta. Lycurgus's regeneration of the Laconic state, being the work of a human legislator, proceeded 'from laws to mores'; Christ's regeneration of humanity, however, 'changed hearts'.[280] Once France had been regenerated, there was scarcely any need to legislate. Regeneration could be carried out spontaneously, almost miraculously, as the dazzling spectacle of revolution broke mental chains and delivered a new frame of mind. In revealing Los's labours to be insufficient to restore *Jerusalem*, and only able to build a Golgonooza, with its looms and mills and prisons and work-houses, Blake puts himself in the camp of people who believed in spontaneous regeneration of the human society through mental and spiritual liberation. At the end, Los must create states instead of systems:

> I go forth to Create
> States: to deliver Individuals evermore! Amen.

[278] The term 'with its extraordinary charge of energy,' appears in many brochures, broadsides, and pamphlets calling for the revitalization of the nation during the French Revolution. Ozouf, "Regeneration", 781
[279] Cited in Ozouf, 783.
[280] Ozouf, 785, 782.

> So spoke the voice from the Furnaces, descending into Non-Entity
> [To Govern the Evil by Good: and States abolish Systems.] (E178)

As Albion hurls himself into the furnace in an act of self-sacrifice, the furnace of violence is transformed into the Edenic springs of life. Utopian projects are to be discarded for the restoration of ancient organic unity through spiritual regeneration, rather than legislative construction.

3) The Four Zoas and the Emergent Mind

Introduction: The Neurological Webs of Urizen

For a decade or more, a growing number of scholars have been turning to the materialist history of Romantic cognitive science and neuroscience in their readings of literary works. Alan Richardson, for instance, building on his earlier monograph, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2001), makes a case in *The Neural Sublime* (2010) for the importance of noting how organic, embodied conceptions of the mind, associated with political radicalism, directly shaped the works of Keats, Shelley and other poets:

> An organic and developmental understanding of mind; an unprecedented appreciation for the pervasive role of the "unconscious" in mental life; a protoevolutionary sense of kinship between human and animal minds; a growing sense (however anxious) of the limitations of conscious introspection and of the split or fragmented nature of individual subjectivity; a renewed emphasis on instinct, intuition, and inherited characteristics; a materialist or "corporealist" approach to mind or at least an acknowledgement of the profound interpenetration of mind and body–all these were common concerns of Romantic-era brain science and Romantic literary writing alike.[281]

These were, indeed, concerns in Blake's works as well. In Night the Sixth of *The Four Zoas*, Urizen embarks on a hazardous journey into his skull-bound mind to explore the space where 'Thought is closd in Caves' (E344). Blake's description of Urizen's mental voyage is rich with metaphors evoking a sense of entangled confusion. 'Stemming his downward fall labouring up against futurity,' Urizen attempts to orient himself within a muddled mind by 'throwing his venturous limbs into the Vast unknown'; however, he only succeeds in 'Creating many a Vortex' (E349). Drawn from Descartes's theory of planetary motion, which described the universe as a plenum of interlocking vortices of whirling matter, the image of the vortex was a

[281] *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 11.

common image used in the eighteenth century to describe the intricate, chaotic nature of the mind. The 'chaos and perpetual rapid succession of our ideas,' writes the radical materialist La Mettrie, 'pursue each other as one billow pushes another,' and the imagination is:

> always carried away by the vortex of the blood and the spirits; one wave leaves a trace, which is erased by the following one. The soul runs after them, often in vain. It must expect to regret those it was not quick enough to seize and keep. Thus the imagination, in the true likeness of time, is perpetually destroyed and renewed.[282]

As Paul Ilie puts it, underneath the Enlightenment optimism that the world could be illuminated by the philosophical mind was the apprehension that, if '[c]haos is no longer a cosmological phenomenon external to the mind,' then the human intellect might not be able to fathom the abyss of nature.[283] An implication of the materialist paradigm was that the mind itself was coextensive with the unruly, unpredictable physical world in which it is embedded. The evolutionist view, that intelligence itself emerged out of a fluid mass of mingled confusion, further implied that the human mind shared in the mutable qualities of the *prima materia* out of which it developed. The futility of disorganised thought, of cognitive paths appearing and disappearing, resonates with Urizen's frustrated passage through mental realms: 'high bounding over hills & desarts floods & horrible chasms,' writes Blake, 'Infinite was his labour without end his travel,' for 'monsters of the deeps,' destabilizing elements swimming in the volatile depths of the mind, continually 'devourd the path before him' (E346). Though *The Four Zoas*, a sprawling unfinished manuscript replete with revisions and excisions, offers the reader no less confusing a journey through its pages, the text's underlying preoccupation with the materiality

[282] Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Ann Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.
[283] Paul Ilie, *The Age of Minerva. Volume 2: Cognitive Discontinuities in Eighteenth Century Thought. From Body to Mind in Physiology and the Arts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 101.

of thought can provide us with an avenue through which to penetrate this bewildering work and make sense of its chaos.[284]

Not all thinkers were troubled by the plasticity of the mind. For certain radical materialists, sensationalist epistemology offered utopian possibilities. If intelligence was shaped by sensory association and habit, then social and moral progress could be effected by organic means. Improvements in education and the environment could mould people into refined citizens. La Mettrie, for instance, assuming psychological continuity between human beings and animals, suggested that if an orangutan could be taught to communicate with human beings, then he would 'no longer be a wild man, nor an imperfect man, but a perfect man, a little man of the town, with as much substance or muscle for thinking and taking advantage of his education as we have.'[285] If an orangutan could be transformed into a perfect man through the development of its intellectual faculties, what could a human being become? The plasticity of the brain, however, made it susceptible to derangement as well as refinement. Blake was aware that the dependence of mind on what John Yolton has called "thinking matter" meant that thought, rather than remaining a purely abstract process, could be disrupted or distorted by changes in material causes.[286] If "trains" or "strands" of thought were dependent on the

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[285] La Mettrie, *Machine Man*, 12.
[286] John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

continuous physical transmission of ideas through nervous pathways, mental error could be explained by physiological disorder: a disorganised nervous system could lead to a disorganised mind. Just such is the assumption in Spurzheim's *Observations on Insanity* (1817), a text which Blake read and annotated. As Spurzheim writes, 'disturbed functions will derange the organization, and one deranged cerebral part, will have influence on others, and so arises insanity.'[287] The idea that the mind depended on the fortuitous movement of spirits further introduced the threat of volatility. Blake finds the material contingencies of intelligence deeply troubling: it meant that mental activity was open to disturbance, liable to error. The mind rested on corrupt ground.

Time and again in *The Four Zoas*, Urizen discovers with horror the embedded nature of the human mind. In Night the Sixth, attempting to organise a rational mind within the inner Abyss, Urizen leaves in his wake a 'dire Web' which 'Followd behind him as the Web of a Spider dusky & cold/ Shivering across from Vortex to Vortex drawn out from his mantle of years' (E351). This 'living Mantle adjoind to his life & growing from his Soul' (E351) reveals Blake's engagement with eighteenth-century physiological models of the mind. In *D'Alembert's Dream* (written in 1769 and published anonymously in 1782), Diderot's materialist ensemble of philosophical dialogues, the vitalist physician Théophile de Bordeu presents an evocative analogy comparing the nervous system to a sensitive spider's web:

> The threads are everywhere; there isn't a single point on the surface of your body that is not the terminus of one of them, and the spider lurks in a part of your brain I have already

[287] Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, Or Insanity* (London, 1817), 152. Blake seems to agree that damage to the body's organisation causes physical disease but disagrees with Spurzheim on mental disorder: 'Corporeal disease. to which I readily agree. Diseases of the mind I pity him' (E662). However, judging from his other annotations in this monograph, Blake's main objection seems to be to Spurzheim's identification of religiosity with insanity and his reduction of religious enthusiasm to disorder in the brain.

> mentioned, the meninges, which can scarcely be touched without reducing the whole organism to unconsciousness.[288]

The animal body is a delicate organic network whose various muscles, bones, nerves, membranes, evolving and extending from the brain as 'a multitude of imperceptible threads,' transmit vibrations to the central nervous system to be processed as sensation and thought.[289] This analogy not only communicates the exquisite sensitivity of the nervous system, but also communicates how inextricably coextensive this nervous network is with the wider universe. In *D'Alembert's Dream*, Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse asks a provocative question: 'how do you know that the whole world hasn't its meninges, or that there isn't a big or little spider living in some corner of space with threads extending everywhere?'[290] What is for the materialist a wonderful picture of vibrant sensitivity interconnected with a vital universe, however, becomes in *The Four Zoas* a dire image of spiritual death as Urizen becomes trapped in his own cold and dusky mental webs.

The fibrous web model of the nervous system is particularly relevant for *The Four Zoas* if we take the poem seriously as a dreamwork. From the eighteenth-century materialist perspective, dreams result from a loosening of the neural network, allowing for disorganization in thought and the haphazard production of novel connections. In *D'Alembert's Dream*, Diderot describes sleep in fibrous terms as a state in which 'the whole network relaxes' and 'each thread of the network becomes taut, vibrates, transmits to the common centre a multitude of sensations

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[288] Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew, and D'Alembert's Dream*, trans. with introductions by Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 183.
[289] Diderot, 183.
[290] Diderot, 184. Philo, David Hume's mouthpiece in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), uses a similar arachnoid analogy to imagine an organicist cosmos. Alluding to the Hindu myth which posits that the world 'arose from an infinite spider, who spun this whole complicated mass from his bowels,' Philo argues that 'an orderly system' may well 'be spun from the belly as well as from the brain'. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56.

often discordant, disconnected and muddled.'[291] Moreover, in sleep the source of these sensations is internal, producing dreams that are self-referential and self-enclosed: rather than arising from objects in the outer world, the sleeper's sensations are 'prompted by one's own sensitivity' as the nerves generate their own sensations.[292]

As the web image demonstrates, particularly prevalent in *The Four Zoas* are motifs of fluidity and stickiness, motifs which convey the sense of destabilising connectivity and self-generative plasticity produced by vital materialist science of the brain. It was commonly accepted in the eighteenth century that the agency of organic liquids physiologically grounded thought and sensation. The nervous fibres were widely understood as hollow ventricules for the circulation of animal spirits, subtle fluids which were produced by the brain and distributed to every point of the body to stimulate muscle contractions and transmit sensory information. 'All the nervous Solids, animated by a Fluid,' writes the French physiologist Claude-Nicholas Le Cat, are 'endued' with 'general Sensation.'[293] The subterranean rivers, fountains, and channels guarded by Urizen's daughters thus recall the popular depiction of the nervous system as a cavernous network of fluid-filled ducts. Thomas Willis described the cerebullum as 'a peculiar Fountain of animal Spirits' in *Cerebri anatome* (1664), an influential study of the brain and nervous system which, as G. S. Rousseau has argued, set the language for the cult of sensibility.[294] He also attributed madness to the over-excitement of the animal spirits, which forces them down 'new and wholly devious Tracts.'[295] The 'hideous monsters of the deeps'

[291] Diderot, *D'Alembert's Dream*, 214, 215.
[292] Diderot, 216.
[293] Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, *A Physical Essay on the Senses* (London, 1750), 2.
[294] G. S. Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[295] Thomas Willis, *The London Practice of Physick: Or the Whole Practical Part of Physick Contained in the Works of Dr. Willis* (London, 1685), 479.

encountered by Urizen might well be these animal spirits, which, in Mandeville's words, travel as 'volatil Messengers' through 'all the Mazes and Meanders' of the brain to retrieve images 'by piece-meals from the dark Caverns of oblivion.'[296] This inward voyage thus reveals to Urizen the liquid materiality running underneath the 'Labyrinthine porches' (E320) of reason, a materiality whose obscure ways frustrate the rational investigator of interiority.[297] Bridging the gap between the mind and the body, these liquid spirits often conceptually flowed at the border between the material and the immaterial, the mechanical and the vital. As Darwin writes, mind was not limited to nervous structures; the sensorium not only comprised 'the medullary part of the brain, spinal marrow, nerves, organs of sense, and of the muscles; but also at the same time that living principle, or spirit of animation, which resides throughout the body, without being cognizable to our senses, except by its effects.'[298] Locating intelligence in liquid animal spirits circulating the nervous system, fluidist neurophysiology thus offered Blake a framework which allowed him to explore the idea that thought is subject to the fluctuating influence of a sensitive body enmeshed in a chaotic world.

This chapter thus approaches the difficult and lengthy poem by focusing on these liquid motifs of neurophysiological autopoiesis. The first section discusses the descriptions of fluidity clustered around the figure of Tharmas, who spends the first few Nights continually emerging from and dissolving into the waves of the unconscious. Blake's descriptions of Tharmas, drawing on the liquid imagery liberally used by Erasmus Darwin to elucidate his transformationist theories, critique Darwin's evolutionary view of the origins of life and mind

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[296] Bernard Mandeville, *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (London, 1711), 130–31.
[297] The labyrinth was, of course, another common metaphor for the mind. Bonnet describes the complex structures of the fibrous brain as a medullary maze, 'un Labyrinthe plus tortueux que celui de DEDALE' (a Labyrinth more torturous than that of Daedalus). Charles Bonnet, *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l'ame* (Copenhagen, 1760), 2.
[298] Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia: or, the Laws of Organic Life* , 2 vols (London, 1794-96), 1.10.

out of the primordial oceans. For Blake, the evolutionary paradigm, arguing that the mind was a phenomenon which emerges and disintegrates with the physical organization of the body, not only contradicts the Christian belief in the indestructibility of the soul, but also produces a preoccupation with our biological history and leads us forget the source of our spiritual life. His eyes fixed on the obscure past, Tharmas represents the materialist who loses sight of Divine Vision. The second section of this chapter then discusses the ways in which the sexual drive (in the form of Luvah/Orc) appears in the poem as a disruptive liquid force. Eighteenth-century medics believed that the seminal fluids could influence the cognitive operations of the animal spirits. *The Four Zoas* articulates another side to Blake's critique of the materialist paradigm, namely the idea that complex human society evolved through the agency of the libidinal bends of self-interest operative in the minutest fibres of the body. For Blake, this opinion, controversially presented by Mandeville and physiologically interpreted in the works of Darwin, produced a fluidist-materialist account of love and sociability which he rejects in favour of the Christian idea of love as self-sacrifice.

Blake's concern with the way our material nature corrupts our spiritual and intellectual faculties is present in other works in his corpus, but what is interesting in *The Four Zoas* is how its manuscript form registers this unease. It is immediately apparent that any reader of *The Four Zoas* cannot ignore the issue of textuality in what Frye called '[t]he greatest abortive masterpiece in English literature.'[299] Left unfinished with its various revisions, deletions, and insertions, assembled into a heterogenous bundle of sheets with two versions of chapter seven left extant, the manuscript poem has long confounded and intrigued scholars of Blake. In this incomplete, unengraved state, *The Four Zoas* might promise to be an unbounded playground

[299] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 266.

for the reader, a textual space offering itself up to the prolific production of generative readings. Its lines, disrupted, extended, scored through, and reinstated, might invite comparison with the budding severed arms of a polypoid form, with a tangle of disjointed limbs ever gesturing towards coherence even as it falls apart. However, it seems that, highlighting the kinship shared between language and matter in a fallen world, *The Four Zoas* formally registers how the nervous mind and the sinuous text collaborate in giving unreliable body to thought. Urizen's web is more than cerebral; it is textual, and it overwhelms him even as he tries to exert control over it in the act of writing. In Night VII, 'His book of iron on his knees,' Urizen 'tracd the dreadful letters,' but 'underneath his feet a deadly root' (E353) springs up and grows into the Tree of Mystery. The twisted branches of the tree soon surround the stubborn Zoa, hiding him in an intricate labyrinth, yet still he sits 'fixd obdurate brooding' writing his books as he 'Traces the wonders of Futurity in horrible fear of the future' (E354). Weaving a 'Direful Web of Religion' out of verbal text to bind the external world to his own narrow epistemology, Urizen soons finds himself 'tangled in his own net' when the Web 'fell/ From heaven to heavn thro all its meshes altering the Vortexes' (E376). As an evolving manuscript, what John Pierce describes as 'a literary form that accumulates and records its own growth, united with a minimal censuring of past development (or developments),' *The Four Zoas* puts on display its inability to escape the textual condition.[300] Ultimately, *The Four Zoas* presents, as a solution, no less than its own destruction. Ending with an apocalyptic Night the Ninth, the poem stages the liberation of thought from the agglutinate fetters of matter as Urizen's books burn up with the Tree of

[300] John B. Pierce, *Flexible Design: Revisionary Poetics in Blake's Vala or The Four Zoas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 142; see Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Mystery. *The Four Zoas* thus culminates in an idealist fantasy: the release of life and art from 'the clotted gore & from the hollow den' (E388).

Tharmas and Fluid Intelligence

Drawing attention to 'Tharmas Parent power,' *The Four Zoas* begins with a retrospective glance towards the instinctive, autopoietic beginnings of life on earth. As Nelson Hilton has suggested, the introduction of 'Tharmas Parent power' and his consort Enion at the beginning of *The Four Zoas* echoes Darwin's celebration of the 'amazing powers' of vitality 'originally impressed on matter and spirit by the great Parent of Parents! Cause of Causes! Ens Entium!'.[301] Blake's descriptions of Tharmas are rich in allusions to Darwin's hypotheses concerning the origins of life, particularly his belief that life, traced to its origins, might have emerged from common abiotic sources. Embryos developed in the watery womb ('all quadrupeds and mankind, in their embryon state, are aquatic animals'.[302] Might early life forms have similarly emerged from the open womb of the primeval oceans? Staging a primordial scene of abiogenesis, Darwin suggests that we all evolved out of a vital liquid medium:

> Thus in the womb the nascent infant laves
> Its natant form in the circumfluent waves;
> With perforated heart unbreathing swims,
> Awakes and stretches all its recent limbs;
> With gills placental seeks the arterial flood,
> And drinks pure ether from its Mother's blood.[303]

[301] Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society* (London, 1803), p. 453n; Nelson Hilton, "The Spectre of Darwin," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 37.
[302] Darwin, *Temple*, 26n.
[303] Darwin, *Temple*, canto 1, ll. 389-394.

Phylogeny encapsulates ontogeny: 'Organic Life began beneath the waves'.[304] In waters oceanic or amniotic, life begins as an organic network crystallising out of a liquid environment.

Instead of showing life emerging out of liquid origins, however, *The Four Zoas* begins with its reversal: the dissolution of life into liquid chaos. Life's formative powers are in ruins: 'Lost! Lost! Lost! are my Emanations Enion O Enion,' cries Tharmas, while Enion is herself 'almost Extinct & soon shall be a Shadow in Oblivion' (E301). *The Four Zoas* begins with degeneration and despair where Darwin sees progression and development. Life's liquidity was for Blake as unsettling as it was inspiring. The ecological world can easily be dissolved into a sprawling, polymorphous entanglement of forms, but in his emphasis on the importance of individual identity, Blake invokes an evolutionary paradigm only to subvert its values. As this chapter will show, he does this by capitalizing on the very association of evolution with liquidity: if what can evolve can also dissolve, the autopoietic powers of the body do not provide safe grounds for the consolidation of true human consciousness.

Engaging with the works of materialists like Darwin, Blake was aware of the vitalist idea that distributed throughout the body, and found in varying degrees in every particle of life, intelligence, sophisticated or simple, was a product of self-organisation, an emergent property of vital matter. In Night III, the Universe cracks open with a crash and Urizen's rationally constructed world falls to Tharmas's waves. Tharmas himself, however, is in crisis. Endlessly sinking into and reemerging from his surging oceans, Tharmas can barely maintain a stable form. If Urizen represents stubborn reason, compelled to organise the world according to his own cognitive systems, Tharmas represents the irrational, decentralised intelligence of the body

[304] Darwin, *Temple*, canto 1, 1.234.

out of which reason evolved. Unlike skull-bound Urizen, Tharmas's mind pervades an ocean of disorganised sensitivity:

> My skull riven into filaments. my eyes into sea jellies
> Floating upon the tide wander bubbling & bubbling
> Uttering my lamentations & begetting little monsters
> Who sit mocking upon the little pebbles of the tide
> In all my rivers & on dried shells that the fish
> Have quite forsaken. (E330)

Unsurprisingly, the watery form of Tharmas recalls descriptions of the protean Polypus which 'vegetates beneath the Sea' (E337). The Polypus, lacking an easily identifiable central nervous system, seemed to have an intelligence which was equally distributed throughout its body. In animals of the 'polypose' kind, as David Hartley opined, 'the sensorium may be diffused over the whole medullary substance'.[305] Like the 'Quivering,' 'trembling' polyp, which demonstrates sensibility and a 'most exquisite Sense of Feeling,' Tharmas thus represents a kind of fluid, plastic intelligence which is not dependent on rigid organization.[306]

The idea that intelligence could be resolved into living filaments of sense undermines the status of reason, a faculty long assumed to be transcendent, a marker of humanity's superior status. Research into polyps and other insects, which seemed to possess a divisible vegetable soul which was spread throughout their body, challenged the idea the brain was the sole domain of cognition. Worms, for instance, demonstrated volitional movement after having their heads removed. As Henry Baker asks, 'If the Animal Soul or Life, say they, be one indivisible Essence, all in all, and all in every Part, how comes it, in this Creature, to endure being divided forty or

[305] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2 vols (London, 1749), 1.32.
[306] Henry Baker, *An Attempt Towards a Natural History of the Polype* (London, 1743), 95, 81.

fifty Times, and still continue to exist and flourish?'[307] As Ilie has shown, these simple organisms, possessing a kind of primitive cognition, a preverbal sensibility which might develop into more conscious, sophisticated thought in more complex beings, invited a broader definition of animal intelligence.[308]

According to this radical materialist point of view, human reason is an emergent phenomenon, a product of branching networks of circulating fluids. Aquatic polyps and human brains differed only in sophistication. Human beings, as rational animals, were not in a category of their own; rather, they were part of a scale of nature on whose bottom rungs even polyps possessed primitive intelligence, a primitive intelligence which formed the basis of high-order thinking. In Darwin's words, even 'Imperious man, who rules the bestial crowd/ Of language, reason, and reflection proud […] Arose from rudiments of form and sense,/ An embryon point, or microscopic ens!' (1.309-10, 313-14). However, while Darwin's scheme is progressive, Blake flips the developmental paradigm into one of deterioration. Whereas Darwin's gaze into our nascent past produces wondrous images of budding life, Blake suggests that evolutionary narratives of human origins dissolve human identity into materialist chaos. For Tharmas's crisis is a crisis of degeneration: a great Zoa dissolves into a slew of microorganism passively floating along and attaching themselves to the tired old shells of more developed creatures. The mind's emergent quality also makes it transient. The materialist position, after all, holds that 'as the faculty of thinking in general ripens, and comes to maturity with the body, it is also observed to

[307] Baker, 203.
[308] Ilie, *Age of Minerva*, 2.234–73.

decay with it.'[309] If sentience is the fleeting property of a decaying body, then consciousness has no permanent unity. What is at stake is the very permanence of the human soul.

Moreover, a decentralized intelligence is bereft of vision and focus, and Blake's polyp metaphor demonstrates this literally. Lacking an optic nerve, its eyeless sight makes the polyp the epitome of sensitivity without conscious awareness. Naturalists remarked on its unaccountable quality of photosensitivity – in lieu of sight, it seemed to possess a sense of touch so exceedingly delicate that it could even respond to light, making it, in Diderot's words, 'all eye'.[310] Intelligence without consciousness, however, is a very limited form of intelligence. As Diderot writes, 'the man who is reduced to a single sense would be mad. Nothing would remain except feeling, a blind quality in the living molecule. Nothing is more mad than this.'[311] This is why Tharmas is both boundless as the ocean and yet as narrow as 'an atom/ A Nothing left in darkness' (E302). Reduced to one pervasive sense, Tharmas can 'wish & feel & weep & groan' and yet he apprehends nothing outside of these raw sensations. His eyes dissolving into blind sea-jellies, Tharmas is the embodiment of such visionless madness: he becomes, like the Polypus, a creature 'of soft affections without Thought or Vision' (E120).

Without coherent vision, Tharmas has no proper 'I.' (As Henry Baker asks, 'If animal Identity, say they, consists in Consciousness […] when the *Polype* is divided into several Parts, all soon becoming perfect *Polypes*, where shall we find the Identity of the original *Polype*?')[312] Despite his association with the tongue, a liquid Tharmas is unable to articulate himself,

[309] Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (London, 1777), 27.
[310] Cited in Ilie, *Age of Minerva*, 259-60. 'Le polype va à la lumière, se rend à l'endroit où abonde sa, proie, il sent son voisinage, il évite les obstacles: il est tout œil.'
[311] Cited in Ilie, 261. 'L'homme réduit à un sens serait fou. Il ne reste que la sensibilité, qualité aveugle, dans la molécule vivante. Rien de si fou qu'elle.'
[312] Baker, *Natural History of the Polype*, 203–4.

emerging with a primal ‘Dolorous Groan’ as a flow of emotive gestures unattached to any pronoun, a nameless ‘gnasshing,’ ‘panting,’ ‘sobbing,’ ‘despairing stamping struggling’ (E329) sea of affect without understanding.

Without a proper I, there is also no proper Other, and hence no ground for understanding. As Tharmas’s eyes dissolve, so does Enion, the object of his vision, fade away:

> Why does thy piteous face Evanish like a rainy cloud
> Melting. a shower of falling tears. Nothing but tears! Enion
> Art thou for ever vanishd from the watry eyes of Tharmas. (E331)

Enion collapses in mourning, but under a veil of tears Tharmas’s vision itself blurs until Enion’s image dissolves. Enion and Tharmas further lose sight of each other when they reciprocally send each other to sleep: ‘Thy fading lineaments,’ complains Tharmas, ‘make my eyelids fall.’ Enion falls in turn:

> Sometimes a little sleep
> Weighs down her eyelids then she falls then starting wakes in fears
> Sleepless to wander round repelld on the margin of Non Entity. (E331)

As Tharmas’s organs of sight dissolve into tears, he becomes a being of pure affect. A thing of pure affect, however, has no boundaries, and only the possession of distinct boundaries can be the proper grounds for recognition of the Other. The dissolution of the borders of the self repels the Other to the margins of knowability, as the destruction of intersubjective relations destroys the very conditions of knowledge and recognition. Ironically, it seems that when the self is dissolved, the other is no better known.

There is more to Tharmas’s association with weeping. His name seems to be inspired by Tammuz, the ancient Mesopotamian fertility god condemned by the prophet Ezekiel. Like

Tharmas, Tammuz was imaged as a shepherd, and the name of his consort, Inanna, echoes Enion's.[313] Referring to the cult practice of ritual lamentation over his symbolic death, Ezekiel criticized the 'women weeping for Tammuz' (Ezekiel 8:14) and the association between Tammuz and tears is reinforced by the legend that he was idolized as a weeping statue.[314] The Vulgate renders Tammuz as Adonis (perhaps picked up by Blake when he places Thel by the river of Adona, E3); he has also been traced to Osiris, as noted by Blake ('Thammuz in Lebanon & Rimmon in Damascus curtaind/ Osisris: Isis: Orus: in Egypt,' E138). His cult worship is most famously dramatized by Milton:

> *Thammuz* came next behind,
> Whose annual wound in *Lebanon* allur'd
> The *Syrian* damsels to lament his fate,
> In amorous ditties all a Summer's day,
> While smooth *Adonis* from his native Rock
> Ran purple to the sea, suppos'd with blood
> Of *Thammuz* yearly wounded: the Love-tale,
> Infected *Sions* daughters with like Heat,
> Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch
> *Ezekiel* saw, when by the vision led
> His eye survayd the dark Idolatries
> Of alienated *Judah*. (*Paradise Lost,* 1.446-457)

Tammuz's followers seemed to lose their individual identities and melt into unrestrained communal affect in the worship of the inextinguishable forces of life which persist beyond the death of the individual. Sexually charged with images of tears and wounds, the adoration of Tammuz involves the liberal indulgence of fluid feeling and liquid libido. Darwin writes that the Tammuz myth seems to ritualise 'the decomposition and resuscitation of animal matter.'[315]

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[313] See Thorkild Jacobsen, "Toward the Image of Tammuz," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), 73–103.

[314] 'It is said that he was an idol of brass, whose eyes the pagans used to fill with lead; then making a fire in the hollow parts of the idol, the lead would melt, and the image seem to shed tears.' Augustin Calmet, 'Tammuz', *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible* […] *Revised, Corrected, and Augmented*, 2 vols (1801).

[315] Erasmus Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, p. 108n.

As the annual drama of his lamented death and celebrated return suggests, Tammuz is a dying-and-rising god, a symbol of the cycling seasons and the regenerative capacity of nature.

Continually disintegrating and regaining form, Tharmas is a version of Tammuz. But Tharmas not only laments his disintegration. He also laments his perpetual resurrection, experiencing inextinguishable life as dire torment. Eternal death and rebirth is exhausting:

> Deathless for ever now I wander seeking oblivion
> In torrests of despair in vain. for if I plunge beneath
> Stifling I live. If dashd in pieces from a rocky height
> I reunite in endless torment. Would I had never risen
> From deaths cold sleep beneath the bottom of the raging Ocean. (E331)

Matter's relentless plastic drive towards life gives Tharmas no rest: he longs instead to 'Flow down into the sea & slumber in oblivion' (E331). Thus Tharmas, as the representative of the life principle, 'father of worms & clay' (E332), is also a representative of the death principle. As he says to Urizen in Night the Sixth:

> give me death
> For death to me is better far than life. death my desire
> That I in vain in various paths have sought but still I live
> The Body of Man is given to me I seek in vain to destroy
> For still it surges forth in fish & monsters of the deeps
> And in these monstrous forms I Live in an Eternal woe. (E346)

In essence, Tharmas, as material life force, is actually a force for eternal death. Life forms ceaselessly evolve out of matter, spontaneously emerging out of the surging seas as fish and monsters, only to die and emerge again in new forms. In the figure of Tharmas, the life drive and the death drive form two sides of the same coin.

Herein lies a clue to Blake's resistance towards the evolutionary paradigm. In his eyes, evolutionary accounts of mind are not linear and progressive but cyclical. A world of vital

matter has no *telos*, for what evolves also devolves. And what it devolves into is a sea of sensitivity without thought or vision—a sea of vibrant matter without identity. As Laura Quinney writes, in spite of the materialists Blake himself had an 'intuition of [the soul's] transcendence—its superiority to the material world.'[316] Reducing mind to physiology, empiricists deny the intransience of identity. If the mind organises and articulates itself out of matter, it could disintegrate and disarticulate itself as well.

As John Pierce writes, 'While generally accepted as the natural starting-point for the poem, the description of Tharmas's fall in the opening pages of the manuscript is, perhaps surprisingly, one of the most complex and elusive cruxes in the poem.'[317] It seems that as he revised the manuscript, Blake turned Urizen's eyes from 'remembrance' to 'futurity' (E390) (i.e. the perpetuation of himself beyond death) and expanded the role of Tharmas, orienting him towards the origins of life. These origins, however, are obscure. Night I is heavily revised, and in fact Nights II and III were named 'Night the First' at certain points in the manuscript's history. If Urizen's gaze is neurotically fixed upon the perpetuation of the self beyond death, Tharmas is drawn towards our material origins, our original emergence from chaos.

From Blake's perspective, the turn, in scientific enquiry, towards our bio-ontological origins thus produces a limited view of our intellectual and spiritual faculties. Suggesting that human intelligence developed out of ordinary matter, materialism leaves the self vulnerable to dissolution along with the body, denying the permanence of ideal forms and the indestructibility of the soul. While *The Four Zoas* clearly bears the influence of Darwin's vital materialist theories concerning the evolution of life out of matter, Blake himself rejects this backward-

[316] Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul*, 10.
[317] Pierce, *Flexible Design*, 33.

looking inquiry into our material origins. To cast one's eyes into the archaic history of life on earth is to take a regressive stance, indulging the death drive and privileging the primordial, communal sources of life at the expense of an emphasis on spiritual individuation. To cast a backwards glance towards the murky margins of imaginative existence only serves to turns our gaze away from the ever-present Human Form Divine.

In *Night Thoughts*, Young urges the reader to let their thoughts 'flow redundant; like Meander flow,/ Back to thy fountain; to that parent Power' (4.361-2). But the parent power Young turns towards is very different from the one towards which Darwin's eye is directed. Young's parent power is the God, the divine source of the everlasting human soul. Darwin's parent power is the principle of generation which creates life as it destroys life. Tharmas represents the latter, proving to be a false parent power–the power of generation, not regeneration.

Reasoning from the Loins: Luvah and Liquid Libido

In Night the First, Vala and Luvah, representing Albion's fiery sexuality, attempt to usurp Urizen's rational control on the mind. Rising up the body with a rush of blood ('the Spirits/ Of Luvah & Vala shudderd in their Orb: an orb of blood!' E306), Luvah and Vala 'woke & flew up from the Human Heart/ Into the Brain' (E305). While Urizen 'sleeps in the porch' (E305), the generative functions stage a power-grab, leading to war between libido and reason. This passage further reveals Blake's anxieties about the fluid self-organising capacities of the flesh. The sexual instincts of the body, operating through the agency of vital liquids, seem ever intent on disrupting the mental faculties. Urizen continually attempts to regain control; in Night the Seventh (a), for instance, he tries to command a phallic Orc to 'stretch out & up the

mysterious tree' in 'Serpent form' (E306). But as we all know, the rational mind does not actually have the power to raise a phallic response.[318] Upon arousal, the sexual organs, swelling with liquid spirits, threaten to disrupt the mental faculties, overcoming reason with sexual fantasies, foiling the mind's attempts at conscious self-restraint – evidently, the brain-sex connection leaves the brain vulnerable to the autonomous agency of the genitals. As the anatomist Alexander Monro noted, 'serpentine and convoluted,' the nervous fibres seem to be 'very much resembling the winding of the seminal ducts on the testicle, or epididymis.'[319] The homology between the nervous and sexual structures materially substantiated the idea that they were part of the same vital liquid-filled network. Might 'the generation of an animal, and the structure of human thought,' as Hume suggests, be processes which 'bear some remote analogy to each other?'[320] For some physiologists, the fact that the testes and the brain both relied on the agency of animal spirits suggested that this was more than a curious coincidence. The nervous fluid in the human brain was, according to French surgeon Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, essentially identical to the liquid substance:

> which, concentrated for years in the acorn of an Oak, grows in the bowels of the earth, and gives growth and life to this great tree; that which the egg or the spermatic liquor of an animal contains, and which, awakened by the operations of generation, produces and animates this other masterpiece.[321]

[318] C.f. Augustine, who believed that the inability to bring the penis under conscious control was the legacy of the fall. Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin UK, 2003), 14.23.
[319] Alexander Monro, *Observations on the Structure and Functions of the Nervous System: Illustrated with Tables* (Edinburgh, 1783), 67.
[320] Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 93.
[321] 'Cet esprit sécond, qui concentré des années, dans le gland d'un Chêne se dévelope dans les entrailles de la terre, et donne l'accroissement et la vie à ce grand arbre; celui que l'oeuf ou la liquuer spermatique d'un animal contient, et qui, réveillé par les opérations de la génération, produit et anime cet autre chef-d'oeuvre.' Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, *Traité de l'existance, de la nature et des proprietés du fluide des nerfs* (Berlin, 1765), 37–38.

If the brain and the genitalia were connected by nerves and vessels flowing with animal spirits, then the mind was exposed to 'a two-way influence between an individual's brain and groin.'[322]

The intimate relationship between the mind and the generative organs produces bitter fruit, leading to what Blake calls 'Reasoning from the loins in the unreal forms of Ulros night' (E318). In *Jerusalem*, Blake describes the seed in the human loins as endowed with 'bends of self interest & selfish natural virtue' (E327). The agenda of the generative organs is only the preservation and reproduction of the self. The irony in Blake's description of this "natural virtue" of self-interest as a form of "reasoning" is evident when read against the moralists and political economists who cast self-interest as a rational function, lauding it is a principle of dispassionate deliberation which allowed subjects to regulate their passions.[323] Moving away from the classical idea that the desire for excess was an unnatural appetite, many eighteenth-century moral and economic philosophers believed that the insatiable desire for more was not only a natural bent of the mind, but in fact an extension of the rational faculty. Functioning as an innate economic principle, it was the basis upon which enlightened civil society was founded. In *The Four Zoas*, however, this Enlightenment principle takes the form of the Spectre, identified by S. Foster Damon as the 'rational power of divided man,' who appears in the second half of Night the Seventh (a) to fulfil the role of Satan in the Night's Edenic drama.[324] The Spectre may represent the rational function, but as Damon notes, its reason 'is not the detached, impersonal thing it claims to be' but rather 'the false reasonings which are invented to justify its selfish desires.'[325] Representing the machinations of self-centred Selfhood, the Spectre is

[322] Darren N. Wagner, "Sex, Spirits, and Sensibility: Human Generation in British Medicine, Anatomy, and Literature, 1660-1780" (PhD diss., The University of York, 2013), 23.
[323] See Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[324] Damon, 'Spectre,' in *Blake Dictionary*.
[325] Ibid.

none other than the insatiable appetite with which we are born, the 'Slave of Every passion' (E368). As he tells Los, 'the Spectre is in Every Man insane brutish/ Deformd that I am thus a ravening devouring lust continually/ Craving & devouring' (E360). When the Spectre was divided from Los, he fell into the reproductive organs: 'I sunk with cries of blood issuing downward in the veins/ Which now my rivers were become rolling in tubelike forms/ Shut up within themselves descending down I sunk along/ The goary tide even to the place of seed' (E359). It is ironic, then that the Spectre, appearing under the Tree of Mystery as it 'Began to blossom in fierce pain shooting its writhing buds/ In throes of birth' (E357) to form poisonous fruit, should be the one to tempt Enitharmon, who is 'enslavd to vegetative forms' (E359), with the promise of liberation from generation.

The Four Zoas articulates an important aspect of Blake's critique of the materialist paradigm: its resistance to how this paradigm is founded on the supposition that our greatest achievements and our most celebrated qualities should be attributed primarily to the libidinal bends of self-interest woven into the minutest parts of our corporeal being. The materialist model undermines Christian altruism, presuming to reveal that it is the principle of animal egotism which underwrites our acts of charity and love. Mandeville, for instance, grounded his social theory in materialist physiology and its understanding of the animal appetites.[326] In his preface to *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), Mandeville described humanity's 'vilest and most hateful Qualities' to be as essential to the flourishing of societies as the 'small trifling Films and little Pipes' are essential to the healthy natural body.[327] Mandeville uses the organic image

[326] See E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35–59.
[327] Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits. With an Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools. And A Seach into the Nature of Society*, 3rd edn (London, 1724), ii.

merely as a metaphor, but later thinkers would indeed advance physiological interpretations of the selfish hypothesis (the claim that all our motives and desires, even apparently altruistic ones, can be ultimately explained in terms of self-preservation). Explaining the development of the human species in associationist terms of pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance, Darwin, Malthus, and others advanced anthropological theories which not only placed the principle of self-interest at the heart of human development, but also argue that the pursuit of self-interest is coded into the smallest fibril of our organic frames, driving growth and reproduction.[328]

Attributing human behaviour to animal motivations, Mandeville promoted an idea that was as influential as it was controversial: human civilisation itself emerged according to the same principles of self-organisation that gave rise to complex structures throughout nature.[329] Seeing no qualitative distinction between humans and animals, Mandeville located sociability within an evolutionary context, effectively producing a naturalised account of the development of human society. The naturalisation of culture was further advanced in poems such as Richard

[328] Scarcity and want, for instance, appears in the first edition of Malthus's *Essay* as a necessary drive spurring the evolution of humanity: 'The first great awakeners of the mind seem to be the wants of the body.' *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society. With Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other Writers* (London, 1798), 356. These wants act as 'the first stimulants that rouse the brain of infant man into sentient activity,' exciting them out of the 'sluggishness of original matter.' Ibid., 357. The world, he writes, is a 'mighty process of God […] for the creation and formation of mind; a process necessary, to awaken inert, chaotic matter, into spirit; to sublimate the dust of the earth into soul; to elicit an aethereal spark from the clod of clay.' Ibid., 353. Malthus belief that necessity leads to the development of consciousness, however, underwrites rather cold theodicy towards the end of his first *Essay*. In chapters omitted in later editions of the *Essay*, Malthus accepts the suffering and death of the weak and the unfit as a necessary part of God's divine plan: 'Nothing can appear more consonant to our reason, than that those beings which come out of the creative process of the world in lovely and beautiful forms, should be crowned with immortality; while those which come out misshapen, those whose minds are not suited to a purer and happier state of existence, should perish, and be condemned to mix again with their original day.' Ibid., 389–90. Blake, having shared a publisher with Malthus, was probably aware of Malthus's work; he criticises this kind of Malthusian thinking in *The Four Zoas* when he has Urizen, reading from his 'book of brass,' teach the following ways of 'Cold hypocrisy': 'when [the poor man's] children sicken let them die there are enough/ Born even too many & our Earth will be overrun' (E355).

[329] Rousseau's speculations on the history of humanity, for instance, were influenced by Mandeville – as E. J. Hundert writes, 'modell[ing] his theory of the emergence of culture on an Epicurean account of social evolution,' Rousseau 'explicitly confronted Mandeville's arguments while attempting to provide a natural history of morals founded, as was Mandeville's, upon the modern sciences and medicine.' *The Enlightenment's Fable*, 58–59.

Payne's Knight's *The Progress of Civil Society* (1796) and Erasmus Darwin's *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society* (1803). Both poets described *eros* as the guiding principle which, in Knight's words, not only 'Plans the republic of the frugal bee' (1.99) and instructs birds to 'join confederate in one common cause (1.106), but also 'changed the wandering brute to social man' (1.130).

This was part of the materialist milieu against which Blake was writing. That is not to say, however, that *The Four Zoas* denies the idea that self-interest governs much of our apparently civilised behaviours. In Night the Seventh (a), Urizen, having explored the dens of his mind, 'silent descended to the Caves of Orc' (E352). Entering the subterranean realm governed by the fiery youth, Urizen finds a very different world from his snowy wastes. Orc's world sees the animal passions enflamed and enraged: here lions 'Howl in the burning dens,' tygers 'roam ill the redounding smoke/ In forests of affliction' and the 'bulls of Luvah breathing fire bellow on burning pastures' (E353). And yet already in Night the Second, we discover that Luvah's furnaces provide the hidden force fuelling the construction of Urizen's golden city of reason and industry. Fiery desire, 'melted with woe' and running in our nervous 'channels,' is the 'molten metal' necessary for the construction of Urizen's edifices. Hewn stone, meanwhile, must be 'placd in beds of mortar mingled with the ashes of Vala' (E319) to provide suitable foundational support to Urizen's rational world. It seems to indeed be fluid libidinal desire which drives us to build cities and erect institutions.

In *The Four Zoas*, however, self-interest is not a "natural virtue" leading to harmony and benevolence; rather, as a perverting principle directed towards the preservation of one's own personal interests at the expense of true Christian love, it continually disrupts human relationships. Embodying this erotic principle with a violent Orc and a fiery Luvah, Blake

undermines the enlightened rational subject, puncturing the belief that the animal drives are refined into delicate sensibilities or that self-interest grows into benevolence. Self-interest instead corrupts love. Take parental love, for example, supposedly the most selfless of affections. As it is presented in materialist psychology, even the love and care a parent shows for its young becomes motivated by self-interest. According to Darwin's sensationist explanation, for instance, parental affections are at base incentivised by physical pleasure. In a note to *The Temple of Nature*, Darwin argues that parental love is motivated by a kind of masturbatory enjoyment: the 'secretion of nutritious juices occasioned by the stimulus of an embryon or egg in the womb gives pleasure to the parent,' while 'an additional pleasure is produced by the new secretion of milk.'[330] This is the kind of perverse pleasure which drives the Daughters of Enitharmon to 'weave the ovarium & the integument/ In soft silk drawn from their own bowels in lascivious delight' (E376). 'His loins inwove with silken fires' (E342), Orc is the epitome of this grotesque love. Bound to a rock, Orc becomes a raging fire of generative desire: 'His limbs bound down mock at his chains for over them a flame/ Of circling fire unceasing plays to feed them with life' (E341). Rooted to this generative world, Orc is described as 'Concenterd into Love of Parent Storgous Appetite Craving' (E341). Unpacking this dense line, we find that *storge* (parental love) is described as self-centred and appetitive, driven by love of self rather than love of child.[331] The drive to satisfy selfish desires is at the expense of

[330] Darwin, *Temple of Nature*, 48.

[331] Incidentally, the ironic interchange between "parent" and "child" echoes a 1770 work called *Rational Self-Love*, which describes storge as 'the Child of *Self-Love*.' Asserting that parental love is grounded in the narcissistic 'pleasure of seeing oneself in a Manner *reproduced*, and going to descend to a long Series of Generations,' this text shows that Blake was not alone in the belief that love of children is based on the fantasy that this '*living Miniature* […] will transmit to Posterity a thousand little Copies of its beloved Original, the *Parent*.' L[aurence] Nihell, *Rational Self-Love, Or A Philosophical and Moral Essay on the Natural Principles of Happiness and Virtue* (Limerick, 1770), 70. C.f. the following comment by the celebrated preacher William Fleetwood: 'But yet, I question not but this Parental, Natural, and Irresistible Affection, is greatly heightened and improv'd in Reasonable Creatures, by the Hopes of deriving some Comfort, Credit, or Advantage from their children: So that, although the Parental Love be the most disinterested of all Loves, yet is it truly selfish at the Bottom […].' *The*

spiritual life, for in Orc's world the 'plow of ages & the golden harrow wade thro fields/ Of gory blood,' and 'the immortal seed is nourishd for the slaughter' (E353). Urizen eventually sees that lacking a healthy outlet, the 'vital substance in these fires that issue new & new' (E354) produce no spiritual fruit, only eternal anguish and dissatisfaction for the fallen Zoa 'Bound here to waste in pain' (E353).

Orc is also the child of Enitharmon and Los, and the generative love he embodies devours parents as well as offspring. After Orc 'rent his discordant way/ From [her] sweet loins of bliss' (E358), Enitharmon realises that 'Life lives upon Death & by devouring appetite/ All things subsist on one another' (E369). Even in the very womb, the embryo is a ravenous mass consuming its mother from within:

> Lo how the heart & brain are formed in the breeding womb
> Of Enitharmon how it buds with life & forms the bones
> The little heart the liver & the red blood in its labyrinths
> By gratified desire by strong devouring appetite she fills
> Los with ambitious fury that his race shall all devour. (E356)

Blake's description of the embryo's voracious appetite could have been inspired by Darwin's description of gestation as a process in which the developing fibres and vessels of the young embryo compulsively drinks up amniotic fluid:

> the irritation of the liquor amnii, which surrounds it, excites the absorbent mouths of the new vessels into action; they drink up a part of it, and a pleasurable sensation accompanies this new action; at the same time the chemical affinity of the oxygene acts

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Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants […] *With Three Sermons Upon the Case of Self-Murther* […] *The Third Edition* (London, 1726), 4. Swedenborg similarly argues that parental affection is not intrinsically imbued with Christian love: 'with those who are not under the Influence of Charity, there is no Conjunction of Charity with the Love called *Storge*, or parental Affection, the Consequence whereof is, that such Parents frequently love wicked, immoral, deceitful Children, more than those that are good, moral, and upright, and thus prefer such as are unserviceable to the Public before such as are serviceable.' *True Christian Religion: Containing the Universal Theology of the New Church, Which Was Foretold by the Lord, In Daniel, Chap. Vii, 13, 14; and in the Apocalypse, Chap. Xxi. 1, 2.*, 2nd edn (London, 1786), 398.

> through the vessels of the rebuscent blood; and a previous want, or disagreeable sensation, is relieved by this process. As the want of this oxygenation of the blood is perpetual [...] the vessels become extended by the efforts of pain or desire to seek this necessary object of oxygenation, and to remove the disagreeable sensation, which that want occasions.[332]

Darwin's account of embryonic drinking describes how, even in their primitive prenatal innocence, human beings are ravenous creatures, devouring their own mothers from within. The associationist account of embryogenesis, however, frames this appetite in positive terms, for Darwin identifies love with what is produced when 'the appetites of hunger and of thirst afford pleasure by the possession of their objects.'[333] Love, writes Darwin, 'which is a sensation, when the object is present; and a desire, when it is absent,' is ultimately a form of 'animal attraction.'[334] The child's love for its mother is grounded in the sensuous pleasure derived from drinking up its mother's milk, satisfying a thirst which in fact precedes its birth.

The Four Zoas thus critiques Darwin's evolutionary anthropology for the materialist account of love it produces. Blake obliquely parodies Darwin in Night the Second when Luvah attempts in vain to satisfy a thirsty infant Vala. 'I nurtured her,' explains Luvah, 'I fed her with my rains & dews,' until 'she grew/ A scaled Serpent' (E317). Feeding Vala only encourages her monstrous appetite: 'I commanded springs to rise for her in the black desart/ Till she became a Dragon winged bright & poisonous' (E317). Finally, Luvah 'opend all the floodgates of the heavens to quench her thirst' (E317). The water breaks: Vala is born, 'a little weeping infant a span long' (E317). But as is common in Blake's myth, the very same images representing fallenness are later transformed into symbols of redemption. At the end of Night the Second,

[332] Darwin, *Zoonomia*, 377.
[333] Darwin, 173.
[334] Darwin, 174.

Enitharmon's song celebrates Christ's incarnation as a weeping infant as an event which regenerates the earth:

> Arise you little glancing wings & sing your infant joy
> Arise & drink your bliss
> For every thing that lives is holy for the source of life
> Descends to be a weeping babe. (E324)

Just as the devouring serpent is changed into a gentle 'Earthworm' which 'renews the moisture of the sandy plain' (E324), so is the insatiable infant transformed into a source of life and joy.

Thus sings Enitharmon, waking 'the bubbling springs of life in regions of dark death.' However, it is not until Night the Seventh (a) that Los and Enitharmon learn to love in Christ's image. When the Spectre tempts the pair in Night the Seventh (a), he tells Los that he, the self-interested portion in the human psyche, is Los's 'real self' (E368). Los's response disarms him. Los 'embraced the Spectre first as a brother/ then as another Self' (E368). Giving up his own 'Domineering lust' in 'Self abasement,' Los is thus able to start 'humanizing' (E367) himself. In this process, the liquid fires of the generative portion in humanity are tamed. Los works 'in sweet moderated fury,' 'embracing the furious raging flames,' in order to 'modulate his fires,' which 'He vanquished with the strength of Art' (E370). Developing true affection, Los and Enitharmon thus turn from self-love to self-sacrifice:

> Los loved them & refusd to Sacrifice their infant limbs
> And Enitharmons smiles & tears prevaild over self protection
> They rather chose to meet Eternal death than to destroy
> The offspring of their Care & Pity. (E371)

This new attitude has profound effects. This new depth of love breaks open Enitharmon's 'Obdurate heart,' and this new emotional vulnerability allows Los to enter her bosom and

'explore/ Its intricate Labyrinths' (E373) with understanding and compassion. The vegetated forms woven by Enitharmon are now 'Opend within their hearts & in their loins & in their brain,' and the spiritual health of vegetable world is ameliorated now that Los 'loved them/ With a parental love for the Divine hand was upon him/ And upon Enitharmon' (E373). This more tender-hearted love also transforms Los and Enitharmon's relationship with other figures. Finding 'his Enemy Urizen' in his hands in the form of an infant, Los begins to feel 'love & not hate,' while Rintrah and Palamabron 'In infant innocence reposd on Enitharmons bosom' (E371). As Pierre Bayle, one of Mandeville's most important influences, writes, 'Only two things drive the human will: self-love, and the grace of the Holy Spirit.'[335] Abdicating the former, Los and Enitharmon discover the power of the latter: 'Now we know,' declare the Sons of Eden, 'that life Eternal/ Depends alone upon the Universal hand & not in us/ Is aught but death' (E376).

This change in attitude at the end of Night the Seventh (a) prepares for the rehabilitation of the sexual function in Night the Ninth as Orc, originally the sacrificial object of Los and Enitharmon, transforms into self-sacrificing Christ. In the course of this self-abnegation the devouring fires of lust are transformed into the warm flames of love. In Night the Eighth, Urizen:

> saw the Lamb of God clothed in Luvahs robes
> Perplexd & terrifid he Stood tho well he knew that Orc
> Was Luvah But he now beheld a new Luvah. Or One
> Who assumed Luvahs form & stood before him opposite
> But he saw Orc a Serpent form augmenting times on times. (E373)

[335] Cited in Pierre Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53. 'Il n'y a que deuz mobiles de la volonté de l'homme, l'amour-propre et la grâce du Saint Esprit.'

The sexual function splits. Generative lust, in the form of Orc, grows as a reptile serpent form until it self-combusts, consuming the vegetative world and destroying with it the Tree of Mystery upon which Orc is crucified ('The tree of Mystery went up in folding flames/ Blood issud out in mighty volumes pouring in whirlpools fierce/ From out the flood gates of the Sky,' E388). The 'distracted ravening desire' lodged in the human constitution is extracted from the human frame as it is crushed in the 'wine presses of Luvah' (E404). Restored to life, the Regenerate Man orders Vala and Luvah to return to their rightful locations, 'the place of seed not in the brain or heart' (E395). Spiritual love, meanwhile, resembling but not identified with Luvah, takes the form of the Lamb of God, which Enitharmon sees as a 'gently beaming fire' in 'the inmost deep recess/ Of fair Jerusalems bosom' (E376). Selfish desire consumes itself in blind destruction, eros is relegated to the loins, and love once more takes its place at the heart of the Human Form Divine.

The Autopoietic Text

It is not only the Tree of Mystery which is destroyed at the end of *The Four Zoas*. Ending in an apocalyptic Night the Ninth in which 'The books of Urizen unroll with dreadful noise' (E387) and the 'Enormous volume of Heaven and Earth' fold up, in an allusion to Revelation, 'like scrolls' (E386), the poem seems to stage its own destruction as its *telos*.[336] As the material world, like a corrupt text, is burnt up in flames, *The Four Zoas* fantasizes about the liberation of Vision from the twisted entanglements of paper and flesh alike. As the abandoned status of the manuscript suggests, *The Four Zoas* seems to be asking the reader to bear witness to the troublesome degenerative potential of not only matter but also text. Continually splitting off

[336] 'The heavens departed as a scroll, when it is rolled together' (Revelation 6:14).

into shifting lines of thought, cancelling certain developments yet leaving many of these deletions legible on the page, Blake, refusing to commit to his vision, produces a narrative which fails to adhere according to any standard demands for cohesion. Critics have tried to rehabilitate this aspect of *The Four Zoas*.[337] Richard Sha, for instance, has argued that, branching out in unexpected ways, the narrative of the poem resembles the complicated pathways of a nervous system which has the power to regenerate dead-ends and form new connections, producing a framework which 'expands the imagination rather than dooming nervous speakers to endlessly recapitulate their disease.'[338] Joining other Blake critics like Makdisi and Gigante in associating epigeneticist biology with liberative ideologies, Sha argues that '[m]uch like the Romantic physiological object, which is open to revision when proof warrants because it is more epistemological than ontological, the nerves invite imaginative ontologies that have provisional status.'[339] As Sha himself seems to acknowledge, however, the expansive growth of cognitive

[337] Contrasting it against *Jerusalem*'s imposing walls of words, Vincent De Luca appraises *The Four Zoas* as a text which highlights the temporal aspect of reading and writing, a text which 'not only encompasses traditional fictive time, the diachronic story line, but also recuperates the author's time, making the history of the poet's creative acts an integral part of the created work.' *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 115. Going further in this vein, Andrew Lincoln has argued that the multiple revisions of the text embody an organic logic of human history. Lincoln's "staged" reading of the text, moving archeologically from the earliest to the latest layers of the poem, presents *The Four Zoas* as a work which consciously engages with the processes by which myth and history are produced. *Spiritual History: A Reading of William Blake's Vala, or The Four Zoas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). For Lincoln, the temporal incoherence of *The Four Zoas* is mimetic of the narrative inconsistencies found in mythological structures that developed organically out of contradictory source materials, a feature which would have been drawn to Blake's attention by a wave of synoptic studies carried out in the 1770s. Meanwhile, writing on Blake's "manuscript poetics," John Pierce considers the manuscript as a 'distinctly layered event' whose meaning 'exists in the stages of development of the poem, not its organic unity'. *Flexible Design*, xxxvi. Blake, he writes, 'seems to see his myth, like the human mind, as an infinitely flexible form' (22) which changes over time. While these readings have been important in demonstrating the fruitfulness of approaching *The Four Zoas* as an evolving work, I join Peter Otto in resisting readings which present a 'romantic response to disorder'. *Blake's Critique of Transcendence: Love, Jealousy, and the Sublime in The Four Zoas* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 6. Like Otto, I believe instead that, registering a deep dissatisfaction with the insecurity of textuality and materiality, 'the (unfinished) form of the work embodies the poem's insights about the nature of the fallen world and of fallen perception.' "Final States, Finished Forms, and The Four Zoas," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 20, no 4 (1987): 144-46 (144).

[338] Richard C. Sha, "William Blake and the Neurological Imagination: Romantic Science, Nerves, and the Emergent Self," in *Imagination and Science in Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 96-143 (131).

[339] Sha, 100.

matter can prove a hindrance to the reader, who is apparently invited to engage in a kind of reductionism in response to this proliferation of meaning: 'Given the vertiginous textual plenitude of the poem—where the characters morph into each other—the reader craves loss: some kind of path through.'[340] This is the problem posed by plasticity: a tendency towards monstrosity, deformity, incomprehensibility. Embodying unchecked plasticity and disorganised growth, the sprawling manuscript of *The Four Zoas* seems to warn against the plasticity of textuality as an obstacle, not a vehicle, to the clear-sighted transmission of vision.

As a material artefact, the unfinished manuscript of *The Four Zoas* is a keen reminder that Blake often wrestled against language. Just as figures such as Tharmas struggle to articulate themselves, Blake himself almost seems overwhelmed by a language contaminated by vibrant materiality. The parallels between the dangerous vitality of language and the dangerous vibrancy of matter are subtly drawn in a passage from Night the First describing Enion's creation of Tharmas's spectrous body. Taking the loosened fibres of the sunken Zoa, Enion weaves a new physical form which, to her astonishment, begins to take on a life of its own:

> Wondring she saw her woof begin to animate. & not
> As Garments woven subservient to her hands but having a will
> Of its own perverse & wayward Enion lovd & wept. (E302)

Mimetic of the spectre's polypoid form, these lines, running up the margins of the page, appear as an insertion into the main body of the text, taking on the shapeshifting nature of Enion's

[340] Sha, 97. In fact, in an earlier monograph, Sha acknowledges that since Blake believed that the body itself was flexible and grounded change, textuality was not needed to liberate the body from fixity. Blake would not have automatically associated textuality with freedom; as he writes, Blake realised that 'the letter could obfuscate the spirit, especially when the letter became law, and explains why he attempts to quicken the spirit at the expense of the letter.' Richard C. Sha, *Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750-1832* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 207.

sinewy fabric.[341] Moreover, Blake's loose use of punctuation introduces here, as it does elsewhere, an uneasy stickiness in the language. Does 'perverse and wayward' qualify the woof or Enion? Or are both woof and weaver implicitly conjoined and equated by this untethered set of adjectives? Time and again *The Four Zoas* offers instances in which the material text, 'perverse and wayward,' seemed to be challenging Blake's authorial control by generating its own connections. *The Four Zoas* is thus an interesting work because, amidst passages describing the self-organising nature of matter, it presents moments in which the author's lack of control over language becomes visible, putting on display the text's seemingly autopoietic powers of generating meaning beyond the author's conscious intentions.

Moreover, alongside these moments of authorial conflict with the fluid plasticity of language, Blake scatters throughout *The Four Zoas* a very specific linguistic device in order to mimetically mirror the autopoietic nature of the material world: the chiasmic 'x to x' formula. Blake uses this chiastic formula at least 22 times in *The Four Zoas* to depict a world which is as self-involved, self-referential, and disorientating as Blake's verse. In *The Four Zoas*, its usage is marked by a lack of geographical specificity: hanging up the 'universal curtains,' cosmic eagles 'spread out from Sun to Sun/ The vehicles of light' (E319); Los and Enitharmon 'step from star to star' (E322); Winter 'spread his wide black wings across from pole to pole' (E339). Creatures are trapped 'from Eternity to Eternity' (E377) while Urizen's web shivers 'from Vortex to Vortex' E350) and vibrates 'From heaven to heaven from globe to globe' (E352). In *Jerusalem* the movement is more terrestrial, moving from 'Hill to Hill' (E193), 'house to house'

[341] The conventional comparison between textiles and verbal texts is, of course, highly relevant here. See Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, 'The Loom of Language and the Garment of Words in William Blake's *The Four Zoas'*, in Weaving *the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), 87–107.

(E210), ‘street to street’ (E212), ‘Mountain to Mountain (E214), ‘seas to sea’ (E224). But while *Jerusalem* is more concerned with the cosmopolitan experience of humanity, *The Four Zoas*, depicting the ‘cracking’ of ‘the heavens across from immense to immense’ (E386), effectively creates a confused cosmography of psychological events and abstract topologies. This is to describe Urizen’s ‘poor ruind world’ in Night the Sixth, a ‘world of Cumbrous wheels/ Circle oer Circle’ without fixed reference point, a space where Urizen throws ‘his venturous limbs into the Vast unknown/ Swift Swift from Chaos to chaos from void to void a road immense’ (E349). ‘[I]nfinite the distance & obscurd by Combustions dire,’ Urizen’s journey leaves him wishing for a fixed point ‘Where self sustaining [he] may view all things beneath [his] feet,’ and yet he fails to find ‘an End a world beneath of voidness’ (E349).

Blake’s use of this device is interesting because it is a device which is used with profusion in Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden*. Perhaps no poet exploited the formal features of verse to evoke the marvellous emergence of fibrous life forms out of simple matter as vividly as Erasmus Darwin. Darwin believed that the natural world gained complexity through the accumulation and combination of like stuff through the agency of a generative principle which perpetually does ‘Press drop to drop, to atom atom bind,/ Link sex to sex, or rivet mind to mind’ (1.25-26). Darwin used closed heroic couplets to embody this phenomenon, binding lines to lines with end rhyme until a lengthy poem unfolds. In Pope’s day the heroic couplet formed a closed aphoristic unit of thought which could be assembled with other heroic couplets into a larger argumentative whole, reflecting the Newtonian belief in a perfectly-assembled mechanical cosmos. Later in the century one finds long poems such as Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1730), Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742-45), and William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785) abandoning the heroic couplet for blank verse to create more fluid, discursive meandering

rhythms. Darwin, however, embraces the heroic couplet to depict a universe which differs from Pope's ideal, instead depicting a living world in which the vital forces of nature drive the autopoietic emergence of organic forms. Darwin further depicts how complex forms develop through the permutational combinations of simpler geometric units through using the rhyming couplet in conjunction with mimetic chiasmi:

> Points glued to points a living line extends,
> Touch'd by some goad approach the bending ends;
> Rings join to rings, and irritated tubes
> Clasp with young lips the nutrient globes or cubes. (1.253-7)

If each point is a word, we see, before our eyes, the living poetic line form and attach itself to others, maintaining its identity as a distinct metrical unit while being incorporated into larger flows of sense. Using this flexible formula with profusion, Darwin portrays a world held together by agglutinate likeness. And as the world gains complexity, myriad agents weave together an ecosystem of cycling relations: the glow worm flies '[f]rom leaf to leaf' (1.195) while the spider shoots its web '[f]rom blade to blade' (3.577). Ice spreads '[f]rom isle to isle' (3.587), winds blow from 'clime to clime' (4.22) and 'zone to zone' (4.593), while fire travels 'from grain to grain' (1.245) and 'dome to dome' (1.397). Combining, as Goldstein notes, these chiasmi with 'a chorus of present participles' and semantic units which 'systematically alternate between passive and active voices,' the structure of Darwin's verse echoes its sense, articulating a vibrant image of an intimately-woven animated world.[342]

Using the 'x to x' formula to show how the natural world, endlessly reproducing itself, weaves for us meandering, repetitious paths of generation without end, *The Four Zoas* uses

[342] Amanda Jo Goldstein, "Nerve Poetry and Fiber Art: Biosemiosis and Plasticity in Erasmus Darwin," *Literature Compass* 17, no. 3-4 (2020), doi: 10.1111/lic3.12552.1

Darwin's device to advance an anti-materialist Christian ontology. In fact, Blake's use of the formula to depict the mundane world as a world of cyclical change without release finds precedent in *Night Thoughts*. Young also uses the device profusely, particularly to describe how those who pursue worldly values are caught in loops of entrapment. 'Ambition,' he writes, 'fires ambition,' and 'love of gain/ Strikes, like a pestilence, from breast to breast' (5.155-6). As men 'homage pay to men' (4.364) and bow in awe 'of clay to clay/ Of guilt of guilt' (4.366-7), the respect they pay to wealth and status corrupts them from within. With 'ceaseless agitation,' they 'restless roll/ From cheat to cheat' (8.905-6) and 'shame to shame' (9.680), chasing after vice until the sickly soul tosses from 'side to side' (9.2338), wavering as the ocean's tides which are pulled by the moon from 'side to side' (9.1202). As the days 'spin our hours/ On Fortune's wheel' (8.113-4) 'from stage to stage' (8.112), 'life speeds away/ From point to point' (2.422). In contrast, Young uses a formula of 'from x to y' to describe how the dull round of moral corruption can only be transcended when we turn our souls upwards towards heaven: the act of reflection and contemplation, for instance, allows us to 'climb Night's radiant scale' (9.1710), 'from low to lofty, form obscure to bright' (9.1951). For Young underlines his point with a geometric analogy:

> Nature revolves but man advances; both
> Eternal, that a circle, this a line.
> That gravitates, this soars. Th' aspiring soul,
> Ardent and tremulous, like flame, ascends,
> Zeal and humility her wings, to heaven.
> The world of matter, with its various forms,
> All dies into new life. (6.691-697)

Mankind, 'Midway from nothing to the Deity' (1.75), must ascend the Chain of Nature to reach rarer atmospheres through cultivating virtue, which 'straightens Nature's circle to a line' (3.370).

The importance of rising above the mundane world is found in *The Four Zoas* as well. The intellectual bread produced from the great human harvest is lifted upwards in 'golden & in silver baskets in heavens of precious stone' (E406) as, like the sun, 'Urthona rises from the ruinous walls' (E407) of the body. Peter Otto has argued that *The Four Zoas* critiques the endeavour to transcend volatile materiality, particularly in the way it presents Urizen's attempts to divide the rational spirit from the body as futile attempts which leave him sinking back into the very physical world he wishes to rise above. As Otto writes, 'The Regenerate Man thinks he can turn to the spiritual, leaving hell and the natural world behind. This is an illusion. Because there is nothing in the sky which will support his weight, he will fall back into the female body.'[343] It seems to me, however, that Night the Ninth challenges Otto's reading by rehabilitating reason. Liberated from the flesh, intelligence appears as 'living flames winged with intellect/ And Reason' (E387). Winged thoughts 'Start forth' in the 'trembling Millions,' arising 'into the flames of mental fire,' freely 'Bathing their Limbs in the bright visions of Eternity' (E388). Blake's image of winged flames recalls Young's description of how our undying souls, 'wing'd with fire,' can aspire to heaven by developing reason enlivened by feeling. God himself, writes Young, 'kindled at one flame/ The world of rationals; one spirit pour'd/ From spirit's awful fountain; pour'd himself/ Through all their souls' (4.520-3). In *The Four Zoas*, the 'strong heroic Verse/ Marshalld in order for the day of Intellectual Battle' (E300) at the beginning of Night the First is transformed into transcendent fires which 'march in order flame by flame/ From the clotted gore & the hollow den' (E387).

There is nonetheless a vital difference between the redemptive schemas of Blake and Young. Young is almost entirely invested in our future state, seeing little value in life on earth.

[343] Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence*, 39.

Gazing up at the 'manuscript of heaven' (9.873), he sees a certain beauty in its complexity: 'Mark how the labyrinthian turns they take,/ The circles intricate, and mystic maze,/ Weave the grand cipher of Omnipotence' (9.1131-33). And yet the clue to our human life cannot be found immanently within the world. 'Nothing this world unriddles, but the next' (7.466), writes Young, for ''Tis immortality your nature solves;/ 'Tis immortality deciphers man' (7.506-7). Reason, 'with an energy divine,/ O'erleaps' (6.248-9) the 'visible and present,' which Young believes is merely 'for brutes' (6.246). As George Eliot writes, Young demonstrates an 'impiety towards the present and visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague and the unknown.'[344] He turns away from the concrete reality of mundane daytime, seeking out abstract 'Darkness' which, writes Young, 'has more Divinity for me,' as it 'strikes Thought inward: it drives back the Soul/ To settle on Herself, our Point supreme!' (5.128-30) Confronted with human mortality, Young sees 'a fathomless abyss;/ A dread eternity' (1.64-65). Blake's descriptions of Urizen terrified by the 'visions of futurity/ That his dread fancy formd before him in the unformd void' (E322) very clearly echo Young's morbid midnight lucubrations. In spite of Ahania's pleas ('Why wilt thou look upon futurity darkning present joy,' shes asks, E326), Urizen cannot turn his eyes from the 'dismal vision' of 'Eternal death' which shines before him like a 'dark lamp' (E327-8). Driven by morbid terror, Urizen sits 'brooding' over his books, attempting to preserve himself with the 'pen obdurate,' tracing 'the wonders of Futurity in horrible fear of the future' (E354).[345] By the end of the poem,

[344] George Eliot, "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young (1857)," in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 385.

[345] Similarly, Young's response to the dreadful thought of death is to attempt to thwart it through writing. As Steve Clark writes, 'Young's poetic voice refuses to concede this dependence [on the body], remaining completely disembodied, impossible to situate either spatially or perspectivally. Its ascendancy depends neither on the coherence of its arguments, nor the conversation of an opponent, but on its own tirelessly ingenious self-perpetuation.' Steve Clark, "'Radical insincerity' in Edward Young's Night Thoughts," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997): 177.

however, Urizen discovers that spiritual life does not begin after death: it is in the here and now. He wishes he had never 'cast [his] view into futurity nor turnd/ [His] back darkning the present,' and regrets his voyage 'Thro Chaos seeking for delight & in spaces remote/ Seeking the Eternal which is always present to the wise/ Seeking for pleasure which unsought falls round the infants path' (E390). Blake's image at the end of Night IX of men 'bound to sullen contemplations in the night,' men who restlessly 'turn on beds of sorrow. in their inmost brain/ Feeling the crushing Wheels,' then 'rise' to 'write the bitter words/ Of Stern Philosophy' (E406), seems to be very fittingly directed at Edward Young.

For Blake, visions of immortality can be seen even in the fallen world. Sometimes all that is needed is a cleansing of the doors of perception. Thus at the end of Night the Ninth, Tharmas's lions asks a set of curious questions: 'How is it we have walkd thro fires & yet are not consumd/ How is it that all things are changd even as in ancient times' (E407). Alluding to the men who survived the fiery furnace in the Book of Daniel (as well as to Daniel's survival of the lion's den), the lions' questions suggest that regeneration can occur without any change in external form: salutary fires need not consume that which they cleanse. At some point, Blake abandons the hope that he can perfect the manuscript through revisional evolution. And yet *The Four Zoas* persists as an imperfect work which nonetheless manages at points to convey some of the sublimity of the vision lying beneath its disorderly surface. The reader needs only to be receptive to the moments of clarity which pierce through the poem's obscurity.[346] Nothing has changed, and yet in a moment the work can be illuminated, brought to life.

[346] The mind, in Blake's view, can apprehend the nature of things through the immediate intuition of the logic behind phenomena. In his annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*, Blake writes that 'Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once Christ addresses himself to the Man not to his Reason' (E664). See also the following line by Lavater: 'The discovery of truth, by slow progressive meditation, is wisdom', but, as Blake underlines, the '[i]ntuition of truth, not preceded by perceptible meditation, is genius' (E587).

If Blake does critique transcendence, he does it in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Compare the ending of *The Four Zoas* with the denouement of *Milton,* in which Jesus, clothed with 'a Garment dipped in blood/ Written within & without in woven letters' of 'Divine Revelation' (E143), recuperates the written text under the model of incarnation. Or compare it with the ending of *Jerusalem*, which promises the possibility of visionary conversation in which 'every Word & Every Character/ Was Human' (E258). *Milton* and *Jerusalem* present a more optimistic view not only of language's ability to materialize vision, but also of embodiment itself; *The Four Zoas*, however, can only imagine a violently radical disentanglement of language from matter in response to the many issues raised and encountered in the poem.

Perhaps the writing and final abandonment of *The Four Zoas* had a salutary effect for Blake. There is no doubt that Blake was gripped by an enduring fascination with displaying the coterminous nature of the material and the textual. Working directly on the copperplate with no preliminary or transfer drawings, in the making of his illuminated books Blake always showed a profound 'sensitivity to the mind forming itself outside the body and inside the medium.'[347] However, it seems that with the drafting of *The Four Zoas,* this sensitivity became a dehabilitating over-sensitivity, the poem's self-reflexive loops proving intractable. After a decade-long struggle with the manuscript, Blake shows in his next works, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, far more confidence in his ability to present Divine Vision in book form, beginning to highlight a different aspect of textual production: inspiration. In a letter written to Thomas Butts in 1803, Blake described having 'composed an immense number of verses on One Grand Theme' (E728), claiming to have written it 'from immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without Premeditation & even against my Will' (E729). This may be

[347] Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 43.

material for *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, or *Jerusalem*; in any case it shows that by this time Blake has begun to think of writing not as an act of creation but as an act of transcription. By the time he wrote the letter to Butts, Blake had begun to turn towards Christianity.[348] In his later epics, Blake begins to emphasise the importance of ceding artistic agency to God. Effacing himself in *Milton*, he calls on the muses to descend 'down the Nerves of my right arm' and carry out the ministry of 'The Eternal Great Humanity Divine' (E96). In the preface to *Jerusalem*, he invokes the metaphysics of voice, describing how the verse was dictated to him by a God who 'speaks in thunder and in fire' (E145). Blake originally described this God as a God from whom 'all books are given' (E145). Erasing these words, he assertively separates the sublime words of the spirit from the material books which seek to fix these words within its leaves. As the next chapters will show, Blake's late works consistently emphasise a key message: that 'life Eternal/ Depends alone upon the Universal hand & not in us' (E376).

[348] Since Christian symbolism appears most strongly in the last two nights and seems to have inspired the second version of Night the Seventh (Pierce believes that Blake wrote these Nights after 1802), Pierce attributes some of Blake's difficulties with the text to the attempt to 'graft' Christian symbolism onto an earlier version of text which was already relative complete (47).

4) Sexual Reproduction and Literary Production in *Milton*

Introduction: The Evolution of Sexuality

> For Golgonooza cannot be seen till having passd the Polypus
> It is viewed on all sides round by a Four-fold Vision
> Or till you become Mortal & Vegetable in Sexuality
> Then you behold its mighty Spires & Domes of ivory & gold. (E135)

How do you sex a Polypus? In the 1740s, sexual reproduction had become the universal model used to account for the mysteries of generation. The ubiquity of sex had been established by Carl Linnaeus, who made sexual difference an essential category in his classificatory schema, famously extending sexual dimorphism to plants by comparing stamens and styles with male and female human sexual organs.[349] Sex was essential for reproduction; as he writes, 'the offspring proceeds not from the egg alone, nor from the male sperm alone.'[350] However, Bonnet and Trembley's research into asexual reproduction threw Linnaeus's generalisations into doubt. The scientific community was particularly perplexed by the ability of Trembley's polyp to reproduce on its own. As Henry Baker writes, 'There is no Appearance of Copulation, nor any Distinction of Sex amongst them. Every one of them is prolific, and that as much if kept entirely apart from all others, as when several abide together.'[351] Spallanzani considered it 'a perfect hermaphrodite, without sex,' while in Erasmus Darwin's verse a 'male Polypus parental swims,' producing offspring off its budding limbs.[352] In the same year as Trembley's discovery, Bonnet made his name through his ground-breaking observation of parthenogenesis in aphids. He had

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[349] John Farley, *Gametes & Spores: Ideas about Sexual Reproduction, 1750-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 5–11.
[350] Cited in Farley, 33.
[351] Baker, *Natural History of the Polype*, 49.
[352] Lazzaro Spallanzani, *Tracts on the Natural History of Animals and Vegetables*, trans. J. G. Dalyell (Edinburgh, 1799), 320; Darwin, *Temple of Nature*, 2.85.

managed to isolate a single aphid and observe it give virgin birth to ninety-five live young eleven days later. Bonnet's discovery implied something extraordinary: that sexual fertilisation did not need to occur for aphids to produce offspring. The universality of sex was cast in doubt. Noting how '[t]he numberless species of vine-fretters [aphids], of polypi, or millepedes, and of infusion animalcules, multiply, without having recourse to the common laws of generation,' the Scottish obstretrician William Smellie asks the inevitable question: 'If many species of animals are destitute of all the endearments of love, what should induce us to fancy that the oak or the mushroom enjoy these distinguished privileges?'[353]

This chapter concerns itself with the symbolic significance of sex in *Milton*. In this poem, the idea that reproductive sexuality is not essential to life but is rather a product of fallen biology provides Blake with a conceptual framework with which to construct a gendered understanding of genius. Blake did not believe that sex was an inherent part of humanity, indeed, nor of life. In a conversation recounted by Henry Crabb Robinson, Blake once described the original state of humanity as 'an androgynous state,' 'a union of sexes in man as in Ovid.'[354] Nor did Blake believe that reproduction was the inalienable goal of sex. Blake once said that 'I saw Milton in imagination, and he told me to beware of being misled by his *Paradise Lost*. In particular he wished me to show the falsehood of his doctrine that the pleasures of sex arose

[353] William Smellie, *The Philosophy of Natural History* (Edinburgh, 1790), 246.
[354] *The Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson: An Abridgement*, ed. Derek Hudson (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 88. Robinson's comments suggest that Blake believed that Edenic humanity consisted of a kind of androgyny which entailed fluid corporeality and shape-shifting desire. The androgynous figure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is Hermaphroditus, who takes on a double-sexed form after the river nymph Salmacis lustfully clings to him as 'the polypus holds fast his enemy catched under the waves, by letting down his claws on all sides' until they merge into a single body. *Ovid's Metamorphoses, Translated into English Prose*, 4th edn, corrected (London, 1797), 148. The original reads 'utque sub aequoribus deprensum polypus hostem continet ex omni dimissis parte flagellis' – 'or as the sea-polyp holds its enemy caught beneath the sea, its tentacles embracing him on every side.' Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Volume I: Books 1-8*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 4.336–7.

from the fall. The Fall, he insisted, 'could not produce any pleasure,' since it 'only produced generation and death.'[355] After all, in *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve only have children after they are expelled from Eden. This anecdote provides an insight into Blake's project in *Milton*: to correct Milton's error and show that the pleasures of sexuality, existent before the Fall, were detached from reproduction.

Blake's belief that humanity was originally androgynous and only divided into the sexes at the Fall can be traced back to Jacob Boehme. In the words of the English Behmenist physician George Cheyne, author of *The English Malady* (1733), '*originally* there must have been no Difference of *Sexes*, because at *last*, in their restor'd and recover'd State there will be none; they will, in that respect, be like the *Angels*, as *Revelation* expressly asserts'.[356] Cheyne and Blake were both influenced by Boehme's belief that the 'Sexual Garments' (E142) were only a property of the gross mortal body.[357] According to Boehme, Adam at first enjoyed an androgynous virgin state; had God desired 'the *bestiall* copulation, and propagation, then he would instantly in the beginning have created Man, and woman, and both Sexes had come forth in the *Verbum Fiat*, into the division of both Tinctures, as it was in the *other* earthly creatures.'[358] Adam originally propagated spiritually, and the 'magical Impregnation and birth, had been a Virgin-like Image wholly perfect according to the first'; however, after the Fall,

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[355] Robinson, *Diary*, 88.

[356] George Cheyne, *An Essay on Regimen. Together with Five Discourses, Medical Moral, and Philosophical: Serving to illustrate the Principles and Theory of Philosophical Medicin, and point out Some of its Moral Consequences*, 2nd edn (London, 1740), 153. As Cheyne continues, 'Something *analogous* to *Creative* Fecundity, possibly, may be even in *Angels*, and primarily may have been too in the *human* Race, because of their *Similarity* and Resemblance to those *Angels*, and to their grand Original the *Deity*; I say, some *miniature* Resemblance of his *Creative* Power might have been in them.' Ibid.

[357] As Cheyne writes, 'all the Difference of the *Sexes* lies in the different *Configuration* of the superinduc'd Crust or Shell laid over the primitive *aethereal* Body.' Ibid., xxxiii-xxxiv.

[358] Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum. Or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses called Genesis* […] (London: 1654), 78.

the '*Venus's Matrix* was taken from *Adam*, and formed into a *woman*'.[359] Containing within him the female heavenly Wisdom, the Virgin Sophia, he was originally able to reproduce through his imagination alone. This originary fantasy of mental parthenogenesis is evocatively described by another English Behmenist, the mystic Jane Lead, in her work *The Signs of the Times* (1699):

> The Male has his Virgin in himself, and so from hence may multiply a Spiritual Offspring, as was proposed in the first *Adam*. And on the other Hand, the Female Virgin shall have her Male Power and Spirit in her self, to bring forth in the like manner, according to the excellent might of the God-Man so incorporating with the Virgin-mind. So that here will be no dependency upon what is without themselves, each one having the Deified Seed, to procreate these Angelic births from themselves.[360]

However, according to Boehme, Adam began to lust after his feminine portion, prompting God to replace the spiritual Sophia with a separate earthly Eve. For Boehme the Fall 'is thus a fall from androgyny into gender; it is also a fall into matter.'[361] Biological reproduction becomes necessary because humanity has lost the "Deified Seed" that once resided in the soul.

However, Blake's vision of sexual differentiation as a historical phenomenon could also have been informed by the life sciences. While many biologists noted that only the more sophisticated creatures reproduced sexually, Erasmus Darwin was the first to suggest that sexual dimorphism was a result of evolution. As he argues in his two-volume work *Zoonomia* (1794-96), as well as in his later poem *The Temple of Nature* (1804), originally, all creatures reproduced asexually. Life, in its primitive form, existed only in the male: 'The Reproductions

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[359] Boehme, 79.
[360] Jane Lead, *The Signs of the Times: Forerunning the Kingdom of Christ, and Evidencing When It Is Come* (London, 1699), 15.
[361] B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96.

of the living Ens/ From sires to sons, unknown to sex, commence' (2.63-4). Even now, some animals, such as aphids and polyps, still produced by male parthenogenesis. Certain plants and animals then became hermaphroditic, until finally some species achieved full sexual differentiation, females taking on the specialised labour of reproduction. The polyp's androgynous state was explained by its position on low on the *scala natura*, but having ascended the ladder 'the larger and more perfect animals are now propagated by sexual reproduction only, which seems to have been the chef-d'oeuvre, or capital work of nature' (p. 36).

Arguing that biology has a history, Darwin quite probably provided for Blake an evolutionary paradigm for understanding the origins of sex. According to Thomas Laqueur, 'Sexuality as a singular and all-important human attribute with a specific object–the *opposite* sex–is the product of the late eighteenth century. There is nothing natural about it.'[362] Darwin's writings conform to the eighteenth-century commonplace which sees sexual dimorphism as natural. However, by suggesting that sex is historical, Darwin suggests that though it is natural, sex is not necessarily an essential aspect of life. As Blake writes in *Jerusalem*, 'Humanity is far above/ Sexual organization' (E237). This is an idea which lies at the heart of Blake's late epics.

Staging Blake's encounter with England's great epic bard, *Milton* is above all a poem about the relationship between genius and poetic predecessors. This chapter therefore explores how reproductive and non-reproductive sexualities serve as metaphors for different kinds of attitudes towards originality and inheritance in literary production. While other Romantic poets attempted to appropriate (female) procreative ability as a model for male artistic creativity, Blake seems to construct a concept of genius which sets prolific birth as its opposite.

[362] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 13.

Reproductive sex, in *Milton,* is fallen: as a biological process of self-replication it fundamentally expresses a form of narcissism. Correspondingly, as a reaction against the Romantic cult of individual genius, Blake uses the motif of reproductive sexuality to disparage a form of genius which exaggerates its own originality and denies the importance of influence. Sex itself is not the problem, since it can be the occasion for sensual delight and tender affection. Biological reproduction, however, contaminates erotic activity by adulterating it with the drive towards self-proliferation. In contrast, non-reproductive activity, especially homoerotic activity, seems in *Milton* to represent a far less self-centred mode of relating to poetic tradition.

As the first section of this chapter will show, using the image of the seed and the clay, *Milton* presents a preformationist theory of poetic genius which emphasises the importance of divine inspiration in the creative process. Blake juxtaposes this model of inspired genius against a kind of self-involved, narcissistic genius whose creative process is likened to sexual reproduction. The second section will show how the fallen genius which refuses inspiration is not only associated with the epigenetic growth of the polymorphically prolific Polypus, but also with Satan, who incestuously engenders monsters with Leutha, his self-begotten daughter. Sexual reproduction and male parthenogenesis are brought together into a disturbing project of self-replication to symbolise a kind of poetic activity which seeks to perpetuate its own image and deny any participation of the divine. Conversely, only by accepting homosocial influence (depicted through homoerotic imagery) is the artist made ready to receive the seeds of inspiration. Ultimately, the abdication of the sexual makes possible homosocial encounters in which artists and poets emulate and mould each other in Christ's eternal, preformed image–thus the Human Form Divine is renewed time after time.

The final section of this chapter addresses a rather troubling aspect of Blake's sexual myth. Like many men of his time, Blake disproportionately associated women with sexuality.[363] He thus casts the reproductive drive as female and hence calls for the annihilation of this female portion in order to allow humanity to transcend biology. Given his condemnation of the dreaded 'Marriage hearse' (E27) in the *Songs* and his exposure of male sexual hypocrisy in works such as *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake seems to have been sympathetic to the plight of eighteenth-century women. As Susan Fox argues in her 1977 essay, however, as his mythology developed Blake became increasingly preoccupied with femininity as a metaphor for weakness and the compensative urge to dominate and tyrannise others.[364] (One might be tempted to conclude that, in Brian Wilkie's words, 'depending on his kaleidoscopically shifting point of view,' Blake both rejects the denigration of sex and 'endorses it in his inimitably ironic way.')[365] Since he does not believe that biological difference translates into spiritual difference, Blake does not seem to despise actual women, whose sex was not essential to their being. However, Blake personifies the Female Will in the form of Vala, a blood-thirsty Nature Goddess who symbolises corrupt corporeality and the stubborn will of mortal flesh. Since the female sex only differentiates and emerges with the Fall, and is accompanied by generation and death, the Blakean 'Female Will' describes the fallen instinct which motivates men and women to reproduce themselves and impose their own will upon the world. In *Visions*, this very same instinct had in fact been associated with the male figure of Bromion, who multiplies himself symbolically, economically, and biologically through begetting slaves through Oothoon: 'Thy

[363] Johnson defines sex as 'the property by which any animal is male or female,' but he also gives the following definition: 'Womankind; by way of emphasis.' See Susan Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–15.
[364] Susan Fox, "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry," *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1977): 507–19.
[365] Brian Wilkie, "Epic Irony in Milton," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 365.

soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south:/ Stampt with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun' (E46). In *Milton*, however, the generative instinct is gendered female, and humanity's liberation from the reproductive instinct thus entails the dissolution of the female.

But as the final section will argue, *Milton* asks the reader not to read its sexual symbolism too literally. In the eighteenth-century rise of mythography, a new wave of scholars increasingly sought to trace the roots of world religions to ancient fertility rites. Was the Cross originally a phallic symbol? Was the Ark derived from depictions of the human womb? *Milton* sees Blake reacting against such reductive analyses of religion along sexual lines. As Ololon's womb transforms into the the Ark, the biblical symbol of regeneration, it is not woman that Blake seeks to annihilate so much as the materialist frame of mind which produces reductive readings of human spirituality.

Seed and Clay

How can fallen humanity become a fit vehicle for vision? How can a man or woman of too solid flesh become a poet and a prophet, a mouthpiece for God's word on earth? As Blake asks in *Milton*:

> O how can I with my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust,
> Tell of the Four-fold Man, in starry numbers fitly orderd
> Or how can I with my cold hand of clay! But thou O Lord
> Do with me as thou wilt! for I am nothing, and vanity. (E114)

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, poets and critics increasingly attributed the origins of poetry to the enigmatic powers of Nature; the idea that the imagination worked by analogy to or even as an extension of Nature's prolific generativity is elegantly expressed in Keats's

axiom, 'if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.'[366] Modelled on Homer and Shakespeare, on great bards foreign or homegrown, the figure of the genius was built up through the publication of a number of dissertations on the subject, ranging from William Sharpe's *Dissertation on Genius* (1755), Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), William Duff's *Essay on Original Genius* (1767), and Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Genius* (1774). Late eighteenth-century criticism was characterised by a marked shift in aesthetic values away from propriety and formal polish, from the imitation of classical authors, towards the vigour and force of what Alexander Gerard called 'real natural genius.'[367] The genius was allied to nature, not culture – or rather, through him, nature produced culture. Homer was just such a 'very uncommon genius' who worked without example or model, relying on his imagination, which, in Gerard's Lockean terms, 'does not, like memory professedly copy its ideas from preceding perceptions of sense, nor refer them to prior archetypes,' but instead presents the material of art 'as independent existences produced by itself.'[368] Kant had read Alexander Gerard's *Essay* with interest, and in the *Critique of Judgement* he defined genius as the vehicle through which nature itself bodies forth works of art from which formal rules could be retrospectively abstracted. For Kant too, genius worked without a conscious awareness of the formal laws unfolding in his work: 'Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art.'[369] As James Engell writes, the Romantic dictate was that 'the artist should imitate the

[366] Letter to John Taylor (27 February 1818), in John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 238-39.
[367] Gerard, *Essay on Genius*, 10.
[368] Gerard, 29.
[369] Kant, *Critique*, 186

inworking, creative, and organizing spirit of nature, the natura naturans, rather than copy or imitate nature's outward form and appearance, the natura naturata.'[370] However, perhaps no critic appealed to nature as vividly as Edward Young, who uses an influential metaphor to suggest that nature is the source of originality:

> An *Original* may be said to be of *vegetable* nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*: *Imitations* are often a sort of *Manufacture* wrought up by those *Mechanics*, *Art*, and *Labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own.[371]

Genius itself was a quasi-natural force: it was the "vital root" of human creativity.

The ascendance of Nature over the prescriptive strictures of neoclassical criticism forms a main theme in Hayley's *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782), a verse essay which traces the genealogy and progress of the epic tradition. Like Keats, Hayley compares poetry to plant life to juxtapose the rational rules of criticism against the spontaneous development of art: 'Where Learning's code of Critic Law is read,' he writes, 'The germs of Fancy ripen there no more.'[372] Learned study could not produce great poems; poetry is not a 'slow-form'd creature of scholastic thought' but a 'child of Passion,' and it was Nature's 'plastic hand' which modelled the vast store of characters which appear in Homer's seminal epics.[373] For Blake, however, Nature only produces a 'cold hand of clay' which can do nothing without the agency of divine inspiration.

In *Milton*, Blake recasts organic metaphors for the poetic process in preformationist terms in order to trace creative agency back to the Human Form Divine. *Milton* was composed during

[370] Engell, *Creative Imagination*, 83.
[371] Young, *Conjectures*, 12. See the Introduction of this thesis, 9-12.
[372] William Hayley, *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (London, 1782), canto 1 line 262, 264.
[373] Hayley, 1.102–103, 2.60.

Blake's time living in Felpham at Hayley's invitation. Initially marked by hope and optimism, this 'three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean' (E145) soon saw Blake beset by creative difficulty. Haunted by the spectre of self-doubt, Blake writes what Thomas Vogler calls a 'prelude to vision,' a poem which works out the conditions of creativity in preparation of some greater work.[374] The Bard's Song of Book I dramatizes Blake's psychological conflict with his patron, who frustrated Blake's genius by occupying him with the lucrative but unambitious work of miniature painting and book illustrating.[375] Blake mythologises this conflict by casting Hayley, a mediocre poet, as a jealous Satan who usurps Palamabron's (Blake) work in the fields of art and sends him towards the mill of commerce. However, before the Bard's Song begins, Blake overturns Hayley's suggestion that poetry emerges through Nature's hand by employing organic metaphors with a preformationist twist. In the enigmatic invocation at the incipit of the poem, he describes inspiration as a gift planted like a seed in the mind:

> Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song
> Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms
> Of terror & mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delusions
> Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose
> His burning thirst & freezing hunger! Come into my hand
> By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
> From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
> The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise,
> And in it caus'd the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms
> In likeness of himself. (E96)

The phrase 'planted his Paradise' is full of productive ambiguity. The mind is its own seedbed, yielding its poetic crop; at the same time, the mind's generative powers are ultimately God-given, planted there as a garden by a divine hand. Alluding to Genesis 1:26 ('And God said, Let

[374] Thomas A. Vogler, *Preludes to Vision: The Epic Venture in Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Hart Crane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
[375] For a biographical reading of *Milton,* see, e.g. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 313–55.

us make man in our image, after our likeness'), Blake defers his own creative agency to one greater man, presuming only to clothe the sweet forms made in the image of the Eternal Humanity Divine.

Blake casts inspiration in preformationist terms not only to undermine the artist's own conscious control over the creative process, but also to suggest that as much as poetry is a space of invention, it is also a space in which eternal ideas are renewed. At the end of Book I, it is Antamon, not the poet or the bard, who creates Spectres, the Platonic existence of forms:

> Antamon takes them into his beautiful flexible hands,
> As the Sower takes the seed, or as the Artist his clay
> Or fine wax, to mould artful a model for golden ornaments,
> The soft hands of Antamon draw the indelible line:
> Form immortal with golden pen; such as the Spectre admiring
> Puts on the sweet form; then smiles Antamon bright thro his windows
> The Daughters of beauty look up from their Loom & prepare.
> The integument soft for its clothing with joy & delight. (E126)

Amanda Jo Goldstein argues that this passage, along with a passage in *Europe* which describes Antamon as a 'prince of the pearly dew' whose 'crystal form' is seen 'Floting upon the bosomd air' (E66), collates various metaphors of generation both epigenecist and preformationist.[376] However, while Goldstein finds echoes of Harvey's self-forming embryo and Buffon's internal mould in these passages, it is evident to me that this passage does not describe organic self-organisation so much as the artefactual production of ideal forms which are subsequently dressed in organic bodies. Hence this passage, likening the seed to the carefully designed mould, is predominantly preformationist in its outlook, emphasising the virtual existence of the type as pre-existent in the seed. The gendered language further contrasts preformed design against

[376] Goldstein, *Sweet Science*, 64.

superficial material embodiment – a phallic pun places Antamon's golden pen within conventions in European art theory, aligning design with masculinity and materiality with femininity.[377] However, Antamon should not be confused with the earthly poet, whose brain is only the ground for Antamon's seed, the site in which the Eternal Great Humanity Divine 'caus'd the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms/ In likeness of himself' (E96).

It is important to recognise the preformationist outlook underlying Blake's conception of the imagination because it allows us to understand how Blake related himself to tradition. While being an incredibly original poet, he also drew on a vast store of images, positioning himself as a member of a lineage of poets, tracing back to the authors of the scriptures, in whom the perennial seeds of vision were profusely sown. The symbol of the garden is one such seed. In a poem with Milton as a main protagonist, the mention of 'Paradise' most immediately recalls Milton's biblical Eden, though Blake's mental paradise also recalls, among other literary gardens, the 'ioyous Paradize' that is Spenser's Garden of Adonis (Milton himself 'acknowledged' to Dryden that Spenser was his 'original') and the sweet and pleasant land named Beulah in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.[378] The preformationist outlook thus emphasizes tradition even as Blake radically departs from it. Discussing poetic influence as a matter of poetic voice and imaginative identity, Harold Bloom has dismissed the importance of the transmission of images from one poet to another, a process which he describes as 'indeed just

[377] As Anne K. Mellor has argued, 'Blake consistently portrayed the female – as poetic metaphor, as a set of human activities, and as a visual image – as secondary to the male. In Blake's symbolic system, males (or the masculine dimension of the psyche) create ideas, forms, designs; females (or feminine states of mind) can desire (and thus inspire) these forms but not create them.' Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 22).

[378] R. M. Cummings, ed., *Edmund Spenser: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 205. Additionally, Homer's verse was described by Pope as a 'wild paradise' of verse which was 'too luxuriant' perhaps, but possessing 'unequalled fire and rapture.' Preface to *The Iliad*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 10 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939-1967), 7.3-4.

"something that happens"'; for Bloom, 'Ideas and images belong to discursiveness and to history and are scarcely unique to poetry.'[379] For as visual a poet as Blake, however, images have a strange vitality of their own, and cannot be relegated to mere discursiveness. As Joseph Wittreich writes,

> Like epic poetry as Milton wrote it, prophecy is a tissue of "Imaginative Images" perpetually renewed through contemplation. Just as Revelation is a rebirth and reinterpretation of images used by John's predecessors, so in Blake's epics images gathered from previous prophecies are renewed in the poems and continually renewed in the minds of those who read those poems creatively.[380]

Preformationist imagery allows Blake to configure the perpetual renewal of these epic images in organic terms.

This preformationist reading of *Milton* illuminates an important scene in Book I: Milton's struggle against Urizen on the banks of the Arnon. This scene stages the symbolic contest between vision and reason, between the inspired poet and the ego or selfhood which attempts to impose its own image on Creation. Earlier in the poem, Urizen's vain attempts to organise his own body leave him trapped 'in darkness & solitude, in chains of the mind lock'd up' (E96). Held between arousal and inhibition, Urizen is 'Enraged & stifled without & within,' struggling to orient himself 'in trembling & howling & dismay.' He is suspended in self-regard as his eyes form 'two little Orbs' closed in 'two little Caves,' these orbs turning inwards until they 'beheld the Abyss' (E97) of the interior self. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan's rolling eyes show how his suffering is amplified by self-reflection:

now the thought

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[379] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 71.
[380] Joseph Anthony Wittreich, "Opening the Seals: Blake's Epics and the Milton Tradition," in *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem*, ed. Stuart. Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 97-142 (36).

> Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
> Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
> That witnessd huge affliction and dismay
> Mixt with obdurat pride and stedfast hate. (1.54-58)

Satan's fall into a 'dismal Situation' (1.60) amidst 'sights of woe' (1.64) is further echoed in the refrain which punctuates the formation of Urizen ('And a first Age passed over & a State of dismal woe'), showing how the self-involved mind creates for itself a hellish solipsistic landscape. By moulding him with clay, however, Milton is able to prepare Urizen for redemption. Urizen has hardened into a hostile 'Rocky Form,' his feet 'infixing deep' in the 'marble beds' of his obstinate selfhood (E112). He attempts to convert Milton to his cause through a freezing baptism of reason: 'with cold hand Urizen stoop'd down/ And took up water from the river Jordan: pouring on/ To Miltons brain the icy fluid from his broad cold palm' (E112). Milton survives Urizen's assault, and takes clay into his hands to restore Urizen to flexible vitality:

> But Milton took of the red clay of Succoth, moulding it with care
> Between his palms: and filling up the furrows of many years
> Beginning at the feet of Urizen, and on the bones
> Creating new flesh on the Demon cold, and building him,
> As with new clay a Human form in the Valley of Beth Peor. (E112)

Fashioned out of clay, Urizen is a new Adam; as Nancy Moore Goslee writes, in this scene Urizen is redeemed from a 'fallen and static sculptural mode' as classical marble is replaced by Hebraic clay, mathematical form by living flesh.[381] Milton's intervention, regenerating the fallen Zoa by sculpting him into a fresh human form, thus reveals several pieces of insight: that generation must be countered by regeneration; that the fallen mind cannot regenerate itself; and

[381] Nancy Moore Goslee, *Uriel's Eye: Miltonic Stationing and Statuary in Blake, Keats, and Shelley* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 191.

that the imagination must take on a human aspect, based on the pre-formed image of the Human Form Divine.

It is interesting to see how the symbol of Urizenic clay relates back to the agrarian imagery in the poem's invocation. Blake's description of Urizen's 'furrow of many years' recalls Milton's poem 'Nature Unimpaired by Time' (composed in Latin, the poem is later translated into English by William Cowper). Milton's poem suggests that the earth's fertility cannot be exhausted; as he asks rhetorically, 'shall the face of nature then be plough'd/ Into deep wrinkles, and shall years at last/ On the great Parent fix a sterile curse?'[382] No, answers Milton. The human mind:

> wearies her self
> With her own wand'rings, and, involv'd in gloom
> Impenetrable, speculates amiss!
> Measuring, in her folly, things divine
> By human; laws inscrib'd on adamant
> By laws of man's device, and counsels fixt
> For every, by the hours, that pass, and die.[383]

However, God has guaranteed the perpetual fecundity of the land for our benefit, and earth's 'antient vegetative pow'r' is ever renewed.[384] Transposing the divine guarantee of earthly renewal onto the mind, Blake suggests that while the fallen imagination cannot regenerate itself, it can nonetheless be fertilised anew through divine agency. Thus the deep furrows of Urizen's brow can be smoothed over, and the mind entrenched in limiting habits of thought can be made ready for fresh seed.

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[382] *Latin and Italian Poems of Milton: Translated into English Verse, and a Fragment of a Commentary on Paradise Lost, by the Late William Cowper, Esqr. With a Preface by the Editor, and Notes of Various Authors* (London, 1808), p. 53.
[383] Milton, *Latin and Italian Poems*, 53.
[384] Milton, *Latin and Italian Poems*, 55.

As a point of comparison, Hayley's *Essay* also uses an agricultural metaphor to argue that genius is not a scarce resource. However, describing Genius as Nature's 'sweet Plant of richest power' (4.11), Hayley locates the source of fertility in Nature. It is Nature which produces the 'Seeds of Poesy' (4.34) and the 'grain/ Of Fancy, scatter'd o'er the infant brain' (4.45-6). Refuting the 'supposed Parsimony of Nature in bestowing Poetic Genius' (p. 70, he begins the fourth epistle with an apostrophe to Nature: 'Say, generous Power, benignant Nature, say,/ Who temp'rest with thy touch our human clay,/ Warming the fields of Thought with genial care,/ The various fruits of mental growth to bear?' (4.1-4) It is Nature, not God, who moulds the clay of genius. In fact, he specifically denies the argument that poetry has a supernatural source:

> Who will from social ease his mind divorce,
> To prove in Art's wide field its secret force,
> If, blind to Nature's frank parental love,
> He deems that Verse, descended from above,
> Like Heaven's more sacred signs, whose time is o'er,
> A gift miraculous, conferr'd no more? (4.65-70)

From Blake's point of view, Hayley's passage would be guilty of Nature-worship: as he suggests in the invocation, art's wide field cannot produce its own seeds.

But as I have suggested, the image of clay also serves to underline the human aspect of the imagination over the natural. For Coleridge, organic form 'shapes as it develops itself from within,' while a work acquires mechanical form 'as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened.'[385] Blake, however, uses the biblical resonances of clay to emphasise the importance of the divine transformation of the self in the image of the Human Form Divine. On the next plate, Urizen is described as a 'forming image':

[385] *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare: A Selection*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 53.

> So spoke they as in one voice! Silent Milton stood before
> The darkend Urizen; as the sculptor silent stands before
> His forming image; he walks round it patient labouring.
> Thus Milton stood forming bright Urizen, while his
> Mortal part Sat frozen in the rock of Horeb: and his
> Redeemed portion. (E114)

Blake's image of living form is neither the self-shaping organism nor the hardened shape but the lump of warm clay which is perpetually worked by regenerative hand. As Morris Eaves writes, 'what Coleridge and the German Romantics would call organic and describe in metaphors of vegetation and nature naturing, Blake calls physiognomic to emphasize its human aspect, its origin in intellectual activity (the head), and its liberation from natural law.'[386] Through the symbol of clay, Blake effectively yokes together the physiognomic with the vegetative, creating a preformationist vision of genius which combines continuity with flexibility, artifice with life. Since the Valley of Beth Peor is the burial ground of Moses, to rebuild Urizen here is, as Bloom notes, 'to replace the grave of the moral law of Urizen by a new Adam.'[387] However, since Beth Peor is also the cultish house of a Moabite deity, Milton avoids firing Urizen clay body into a new idol, and degenerate reason is restored to a flexible image which is made to plan but never fired into fixity. The calcified Urizenic shell of tired laws and habits is replaced, and flexible flesh is built upon its regenerated frame.

Finally, the phrase 'forming image' echoes a passage in *Paradise Lost* in which Adam recounts his dreamy memory of Eve's creation. In this dream, he recalls how he saw God take from him a rib which he 'formd and fashiond with his hands,' until '[u]nder his forming hands a Creature grew,/ Manlike, but different sex' (8.469-71). This verbal echo highlights the way in

[386] Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art*, 65.
[387] Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, revised and enlarged edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 103.

which Blake transforms the story of humanity's creation: what was in *Paradise Lost* a scene describing the creation of a separate sex for the purposes of generation thus becomes in *Milton* a scene of baptismal regeneration. In essence, Blake effectively reworks Biblical images of creation to describe the imagination as a faculty which does not bring new things into being so much as allow archetypal forms to take renewed existence–the imagination, for Blake, is preformationist.

In his *Essay on Epic Poetry*, Hayley imagines the possibility of calling Homer back to life: 'Yet, could thy mortal shape revisit earth,/ How would it move, great Bard!' (2.21-22) In his own epic, Blake imagines England's own great bard returning to earth in order to regenerate the arts. And just as Hayley calls modern poets to trace their predecessors' 'happy course' and 'bravely emulate' the 'mental force' of those who 'nobly ventur'd on the sea of Rhyme' (1.445-8), so does Blake call modern poets to emulate what Hayley calls their 'brave Progenitors' (3.23). However, to accept the influence of Milton, Blake must first remould him into an acceptable model. Hayley too had attempted to shape Milton's reception, attempting, in his biography of the great poet, to defend Milton's reputation against those who had 'very blindly imputed' Jacobin principles 'to a truly English writer of acknowledged genius, and the purest reputation, who is, perhaps, of all men living, the most perfectly blameless in his sentiments of government, morality, and religion.'[388] In order to reclaim what Hayley describes as one of 'the nervous republican writers of the last century,' Blake had imagined Milton returning to Earth to speak against the misguided veneration of blamelessness and rigid moral virtue.[389] Ironically, then, while calling for the continuation of a prophetic tradition, the tradition Blake seeks to

[388] Hayley, *The Life of Milton, In Three Parts. To Which are Added, Conjectures on the Origin of Paradise Lost: With an Appendix* (London, 1796), viii.
[389] Hayley, viii.

renew is one which he perceives in his own image. And thus Blake finds a way to insist on the denial of self in the regeneration of the Human Form Divine while also being one of the most original artists of his time.

Incestuous Birth

Thus does Milton strive against Urizen on the banks of the Arnon, 'giving life […] To his adversary' (E113). Citing these lines, Helen Bruder and Tristanne Connolly have described this scene as a 'homosensual process of rebirth' through which 'Godlike artistic genius is transgendered, as shaping and birthgiving marry.'[390] While I agree with their identification of queer undertones in this passage, I insist, as I have done elsewhere in this thesis, that in Blake's symbolic biology, birth, an individual event which engenders something singular, must always be distinguished from regeneration, the renewal of the archetypical in the particular. *Milton* is deeply concerned with the danger that the regenerative powers of the imagination might be corrupted for the purposes of procreation. Spinning the Polypus from their bowels, 'Five Females & the nameless Shadowy Mother' sing to 'lure the Sleepers of Beulah down/ The River Storge (which is Arnon) into the Dead Sea' (E134). The Daughters of Beulah, freely playing within the mind as 'Sweet Female forms, winged or floating in the air spontaneous' (E134), are at risk of being drawn down into Al-Ulro and Or-Ulro (the 'Loins & Seminal Vessels' and the 'Stomach & Intestines' respectively) for the mindless production of flesh.[391] *Milton* thus warns against the displacement of the imagination from the mental realm to the sexual.

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[390] Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne J. Connolly, "Introduction," in *Queer Blake* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-20 (8).

[391] As Otto has noted, Blake may have been influenced by the religious and medical idea, common in his lifetime, that the spermatic seed is first produced in the head and travels down the body. Otto cites the Swedenborgian Robert Hindmarsh, who writes in 1792 that '[t]he characteristic peculiar to male animals is the formation of seed in themselves, which is first conceived in the understanding, then formed in the will, and afterwards translated to

It was a commonplace belief in Blake's time that the parents' sexual imagination shaped the offspring in the womb. While the mother's imagination was conventionally held to be predominant in its influence, Darwin emphasised the role of the male imagination in determining the form, and even sex, of the child.[392] Indeed, in *The Temple of Nature* Darwin suggested that it was the male imagination which originally produced the female sex as a derivative of itself after developing 'the fond wish to form a softer sex;/ Whose milky rills with pure ambrosial food/ Might charm and cherish their expected brood' (2.114-116). This fantasy soon materialised through the mysterious agency of the imagination:

> The potent wish, in the productive hour,
> Calls to its aid Imagination's power ,
> O'er embryon throngs with mystic charm presides,
> And sex from sex the nascent world divides. (2.117-120)

From a Blakean point of view, this passage seems to narrate the terrible perversion of the imagination in aid of producing sexed life.

In *Milton*, the first poem in which the Polypus plays a more substantial role (it was previously briefly named in *The Book of Los*), the sexually ambiguous Polypus is a monstrous symbol of fallen materiality. A manifestation of vegetative life in its most primitive state, the Polypus is asexually prolific. However, associated both with the male Orc ('this Polypus is Orc,' E127) and the Six-fold Miltonic Female ('Within [the Polypus] sit Five Females & the Shadowy Mother/ Spinning it from their bowels with songs of amorous delight,' E134), it is also the site

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the lower parts of the body, where it is enveloped with a material covering, and thence conveyed into the wombs, and last of all brought forth into open day.' Robert Hindmarsh, *Letters to Dr Priestly* (London, 1792), 344-45.

[392] As he writes, the father's seed is 'liable to have its propensities, or appetencies, altered at the time of its production by the imagination of the male parent; the extremities of the seminal glands imitating the motions of the organs of sense; and thus the sex of the embryon is produced; which may be thus made a male or a female by affecting the imagination of the father at the time of impregnation.' *Zoonomia*, 597.

in which life takes on sexual form. Ololon and Milton, typological echoes of humanity's first parents, must pass through the Polypus in order to put on their sexual garments and become 'Mortal & Vegetable in Sexuality' (E135). Milton's mortal Shadow, described 'Like as a Polypus that vegetates beneath the deep' (E109), later appears as 'A mournful form double; hermaphroditic: male & female/ In one wonderful body' (E109). Ololon, meanwhile, by 'stepping into the Polypus within the Mundane Shell,' takes on the 'Female Form' of a Virgin of twelve years (E136-7). The Polypus is a site of gender trouble, but it is also a site of sexual development.

Milton also seems to be touched by Darwin's idea that the introduction of the female introduced change into the familial line. In *Zoonomia,* Darwin observed that while the paternal offspring of plants (i.e. buds and bulbs) always exactly resemble their parents, being strictly speaking not a new animal so much as 'a branch or elongation of the parent' (544), their sexually reproduced offspring on the other hand, 'being supplied with nutriment by the mother, is liable to perpetual variation' (552). As he phrased it in *The Temple of Nature*, 'Birth after birth the line unchanging runs,/ And fathers live transmitted in their sons' (2.107-8). In *Milton* Beulah appears as 'the beloved infant in his mothers bosom round incircled/ With arms of love & pity & sweet compassion' (E129). In contrast, the masculine imagination is described as the 'Eternal Great Humanity' who appears 'in fury of Poetic Inspiration/ To build the Universe stupendous' (E129). Transmitted in 'the words of man to man,' 'seen in every face/ As the breath of the Almighty' (E129), the Eternal Humanity is the poetic truth which is preserved down a male line. Through him every Man can be seen 'still going forward thro'/ The Bosom of the Father in Eternity on Eternity' (E130). Sheltered from the harshness of mental war by 'the shadow of wings' (E129), Beulah, however, allows 'Temporal Habitation' for the poet to 'fall into Error'

(E130) and difference. Given how Hayley and Darwin moved in the same social circles, it is interesting to note how Hayley also describes continuity in the epic tradition in terms of paternal lineage and individuality in terms of feminine nature. Homer is the 'mighty Father of the Epic line'; Tasso, meanwhile, 'Heir to a mantle by the Muses spun' (2.1), is 'Of a poetic Sire the more poetic Son' (3.193-4). Yet the feminine creative principle working within these men produces difference. Challenging the critics to explain Homer's verse 'As if their souls had lodg'd in Homer's brain' (1.228), he asks 'What mind can trace how thought engender'd thought,/ How little hints awak'd the large design,/ And subtle Fancy spun her variegated line?' (1.222-4) Fancy's generative power *engenders* thought, enlivening and investing poetry with variety.

Based on the idea that the male line preserves identity while female productions produce difference, Blake uses gendered language to cast inspired work as male and uninspired work as female. Female reproduction is code for the stubborn will to fashion and propagate one's own deviant image in defiance of eternal vision. Hence in *Milton*, birthgiving is not associated with Milton but with Satan, who births Leutha from his own brain and upon her begets monsters. The idea that the poet brings forth poetry through the female within is a common conceit in Romantic writing.[393] Earlier in the eighteenth century, the birth metaphor was used to describe poetic activity bereft of intellectual control; by the end of the century, the birth metaphor had been reinvented to exalt poetic creation as a mysterious product of unconscious mental activity.[394] As Shelley writes in his *Defence of Poetry*, 'a great statue or picture grows under the

[393] See, e.g., Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of The Feminine," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 13–26, and Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender*.
[394] Terry J. Castle, "Lab'ring Bards: Birth 'Topoi' and English Poetics 1660-1820," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 78, no. 2 (April 1979): 193–208.

power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation, is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.'[395] And as originality became a privileged quality in the arts, critics and poets participated in fantasies of intellectual parthenogenesis; only the uninspired artist, writes Young, 'conceives not the least embryo of new thought.'[396] Indeed, the genius himself was born, not made: 'An Adult Genius comes out of Nature's hand,' writes Young, 'as *Pallas* out of *Jove*'s head, at full growth, and mature: *Shakespeare*'s genius was this kind.'[397] In *Milton*, however, this parthenogenesis fantasy is cast in Satanic terms. Claiming to be 'self-begot, self-raised/ By [his] own quickening power' (5.860-61), Milton's Satan is, as Harold Bloom argues, a model of the strong poet who feels compelled to deny the influence of his poetic predecessors.[398] As Leutha, Satan's daughter, springs 'forth from the head of Satan' (E106), the Miltonic drama between Satan, Sin, and Death is reworked into an allegorical relationship between the male genius, his feminine imagination, and the monstrous offspring produced by this incestuous affair. Attempting to beget his own likeness on his own brain-child, Blake's Satan makes audacious claims for self-sufficiency, externalising and entering into relations with his feminine portion, forsaking brotherhood for incestuous sexuality.

Blake's Satan has been read as a homosexual figure. '[E]ntering the doors of Satans brain night after night/ Like sweet perfumes' to 'stupif[y] [Satan's] masculine perceptions' and 'ke[ep] only the feminine awake' (E106), Leutha has been described by S. Foster Damon as 'the personification of Hayley's unconscious homosexuality.'[399] Along similar lines,

[395] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 504.
[396] Young, *Conjectures*, 55.
[397] Young, *Conjectures*, 31.
[398] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 20–23.
[399] Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 238.

Christopher Hobson has characterised mild Satan's 'soft/ Delusory love to Palamabron' (E106) as 'a male-male love based on the presence of a feminine-gendered principle in the brain.'[400] There is reason, however, to read Satan instead as a heterosexual foil to Blake's queer Milton. The feminine quality operative in Satan is thus not homosexual desire but heterosexual desire. As Susan Matthews suggests, Satan's 'feminine delusion' (E105) is not repressed homosexual desire so much as effeminacy–and the two should not be confused one with another.[401] Similarly, Elfenbein argues that by representing the 'straight male mind' which 'believes in its own self-sufficiency' in Satanic terms, Blake 'uncovers the narcissism and egotism lurking behind the glorification of the eighteenth-century genius as all-encompassing male creativity.'[402] Heterosexuality is a metaphor in *Milton* for a kind of artistic creation which only serves to distribute the artist's selfhood, and Satan, as a foil to Milton, embodies a model of genius which emphasises individual originality at the expense of vision.

Satan's sexed body is a body which is dominated by the biological instinct towards self-preservation and self-replication. Forming the mortal body, Gwendolen in *Jeruslaem* 'wove two vessels of seed, beautiful as Skiddaws Snow;/ Giving them bends of self-interest & selfish natural virtue' (E238). Satan is a similarly self-coiling figure of self-interest. Put on trial in Book I, Satan turns inwards in self-defence, entrenching himself in an illusion of insulated selfhood. In his rage 'his bosom grew/ Opake against the Divine Vision: the paved terraces of/ His bosom inward shone with fires' (E102), as he retreated to an infernal interior self. Setting himself as his own moral authority, he declares himself 'God alone,' demanding that all obey his self-

[400] Christopher Z. Hobson, "Blake and the Evolution of Same-Sex Subjectivity," in *Queer Blake*, ed. Tristanne J. Connolly and Helen P. Bruder (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 23-39 (29).
[401] Susan Matthews, "'Hayley on His Toilette': Blake, Hayley and Homophobia," in *Queer Blake*, ed. Tristanne J. Connolly and Helen P. Bruder (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 209–20.
[402] Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 156.

wrought 'principles of moral individuality' sourced from the Tabernacle of 'the uppermost and innermost recesses/ Of [his] Eternal Mind' (E103). Sinking into 'his own place' (E104), Blake's Satan echoes Milton's Satan in making an interior hellscape as the flames within his bosom fade into 'extreme blackness, and darkness' as Satan's bosom opens into 'a vast unfathomable Abyss' (E103).[403] This abyss recalls the Urizenic abyss–in fact 'Satan is Urizen/ Drawn down by Orc & the Shadowy Female into Generation' (E104). Satan's relationship with Leutha, who emerges from 'Satans inmost Palace of his nervous fine wrought Brain,' further wraps around a language of self-centeredness. She seems to have sprung from Satan's brain (as she claims, her 'Parent power Satan has committed this transgression'). But she also claims to be herself the 'Author' of Satan's crime, having entered into his brain night after night to seduce him into transgression (just as Milton's Satan himself, disguised as a toad, whispers venom into Eve's sleeping ear). Paradoxical relations are further apparent when Leutha is described as 'taking on her, his Sin'–she both is and bears Satan's sin. Satan's labyrinthine, self-generating body is shot through with bends of self-interest, and this sense of convolution finally takes the form of 'Serpents holds' and 'stings of the Serpent' (E106) as 'a Dragon-form forth issues[s] from [Leutha's] limbs' to echo Milton's description of Sin as 'a Serpent arm'd/ With mortal sting' (2.652-53).

Milton, too, is tempted to indulge in narcissistic sexual existence. As he contends with Urizen on the banks of the Arnon, a 'Double-sexed,' 'Twofold form Hermaphroditic,' 'self-dividing stood/ Before him in their beauty' (E113), attempts to seduce him away from his homo-heroic task. Because the procreative drive is gendered female in Blake's mythos, the sexed male

[403] In *Paradise Lost,* Milton shows us that the mind 'is its own place, and in it self/ Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n' (1.254).

body is paradoxically a feminised body; as Vala cries in *Jerusalem*, 'The Human is but a Worm, & thou O Male: Thou art/ Thyself Female, a Male: a breeder of Seed: a Son & Husband' (E215). Comparing the descriptions of the binding of Urizen in *The Book of Urizen* and *Milton*, it becomes apparent that by *Milton* Blake places greater emphasis on the male body as a form which is as sexed as the female. In *Urizen*, Los, undergoing division, produces a separate female form which, functionally little more than a womb, bears him a worm-like child. Los is dominant but not generative in the procreative process: 'Eternity shudder'd when they saw,/ Man begetting his likeness,/ On his own divided image.'(E79) In the retelling of this scene in *Milton*, after the emergence of a female form, 'from [Los's] Back/ A blue fluid exuded in Sinews hardening in the Abyss/ Till it separated into a Male Form howling in Jealousy' (E97). Like the female form, the male form is a secondary production splintering off from the original human form. Though Blake still linguistically identifies the eternal human form with the masculine gender, the male vegetative body is just as much a fallen form as the female. Later in the poem, Tirzah is described weaving the sexed mortal body: 'She ties the knot of milky seed into two lovely Heavens,/ Two yet but one: each in the other sweet reflected!' (E113). The adjective *milky* is ambiguous enough to describe the sex-related fluids found in both male and female bodies. The knot of milky seed could refer to the male testes, but it could also refer to the female ovaries–-male seed and female seed are correlatives, mirrors of one another. Ultimately, however, in both cases the sexed body is a feminised body. Milkiness is feminine; Ololon, for instance, is 'a sweet 'River, of milk & liquid pearl.'(E115) To be sexed is to have the self-generative seed planted by the feminine hand of Nature within the gonads – thus the sexed male body is a form hermaphroditic.

Contrasting the sexed body which weaves itself from its own milky seed against the body of clay which receives the perennial seeds of Genius, Blake shows that generation and regeneration operate by rather different mechanisms. Turning away from the hermaphroditic body, Milton knows that true inspiration is transmitted from one male poet to another through homosocial encounters. This is apparent, for instance, in the scene in which Los appears to bind Blake's sandals. The encounter is erotic. 'Los,' writes Blake:

> kissed me and wishd me health
> And I became One Man with him arising in my strength:
> Twas too late now to recede. Los had enterd into my soul:
> His terrors now posses'd me whole! I arose in fury & strength. (E117)

However, the illustration of this scene is far more explicit (figure 13). Blake, kneeling to tie on his sandal, turns around to see Los behind him stepping out of a flaming sun. This highly suggestive image seems to present Blake fellating Los, 'pictorally implying,' as Hobson writes, 'one of the most despised acts in hierarchic male culture, sucking the penis, as the source of moral fraternity and prophetic inspiration.'[404] Queerness, as Hobson, Elfenbein, and Sha argue, is liberatory for Blake; in Sha's words, 'where reproductive sex traps mankind into the material world of nature, perverse sex allows the sexual act to take on imaginative and spiritual reunification of the senses.'[405] However, it seems to me that Blake's aim in *Milton* is not to celebrate homosexuality for its own sake. Rather, queerness is used as a metaphor for a relationship with the prophetic tradition which emphasises receptivity over originality. For in this illustration is enclosed the eroticisation of the symbol of the seed of inspiration: Blake, swallowing Los's seed, receives the germs of inspired song with his tongue of clay. The seeds

[404] Christopher Z. Hobson, *Blake and Homosexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 143.
[405] Sha, *Perverse Romanticism*, 196.

of genius are thus passed down a male lineage without mediation of the female womb, and divine vision is transmitted without the corrupting intervention of the individual will.

It is significant that the ultimate source of Poetic Genius is depicted as the eternal human figure of Christ, since it emphasises the continuity, rather than development, of vision. This is what separates Blake's preformationist organicism from the evolutionary organicism of his contemporaries. Writing on Blake's *Laocoon* plate, Morris Eaves notes that while Coleridge 'prefers the grammar of process that tells what the imagination does,' Blake prefers 'the grammar of identity that tells what the imagination is.'[406] As he continues, 'Imagination, envisioned as a person rather than a mental faculty or process, organizes personal identity and, through identity, organizes the work of art.'[407] And if for Blake the tradition of poetry is, as Frye writes, 'an evolution of a single archetypal form,' it is not surprising to see that *Milton* shows its several male protagonists entering into relations of emulation which reproduce Christ's form.[408] For instance, the illustration of Milton casting off his robes and entering into Eternal Death (figure 14) echoes Blake's illustration of 'Christ descending into the Grave' (figure 15) for Hugh Blair's *The Grave* (composed 1805). In both images the male figures step their left foot forward, both arms outstreched downwards; it is also a more distant echo of Blake's watercolour of Christ entering the grave in *Mary Magdalen at the Sepulchre* (c. 1805). From a different angle, a variation of this pose is replicated in the mirrored plates depicting Milton falling as a star and entering Blake's left foot (figure 16) and Robert's right foot respectively. This pose, with arms outstretched, is an old one in Blake's corpus (see, for instance, 'Glad Day'), but it gains its richest meaning on a plate in *Jerusalem* which shows a

[406] Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art*, 6.
[407] Eaves, 19.
[408] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 323.

male figure spreading out his arms in emulation of Christ on the cross (figure 17). 'When Blake imagines himself to be a reincarnation of Milton,' writes Frye, 'the imaginative power that is reborn is not a different form, as in ordinary life, but the *same* form which in the process of transforming itself has purged and clarified its vision.'[409] This form is the Human Form Divine, which is never generated, only regenerated time after time.

The Dove and the Ark

Finally, the dazzling apocalyptic end of the poem is an enigmatic scene which has produced a spectrum of readings by critics interested in the sexual content of *Milton*. The reader beholds 'Milton descended to Redeem the Female Shade/ From Death Eternal' (E132-3), while Ololon appears in Blake's garden in the guise of a young virgin. With a shriek, Ololon's virgin form transforms into a dove and flies into the oceanic bosom of Milton's Shadow, while her remaining part appears as a Moony Ark in a cloud of blood which folds around Jesus's limbs as a visionary garment. Does this ending depict a true redemption of the female, or is the female rather annihilated or absorbed into the male? In this final section, I will argue that the ending, revealing sex to be only a garment which can be cast off with the mortal body, calls for humanity to transcend sexuality. While in *Jerusalem*, Christ's 'Maternal Humanity must be put off Eternally/ Lest the Sexual Generation swallow up Regeneration' (E250), in *Milton* it is Ololon who must cast off her sexuality. But exchanging the womb for the ark, this ending not only heralds the end to sex. Staging the transformation of Ololon's womanly exterior into a set of biblical symbols typifying regeneration, this visionary denouement, in calling for a turn from

[409] Frye, 322.

biology to myth, from natural religion to revelation, calls for a turn in the understanding from the literal to the figurative, from the natural to the symbolic.

Milton's ending has conventionally been read as a celebratory epithalamion, a reunion of the sexes as spiritual equals. As Frye writes, since Milton's 'vision of women takes in only the hostility and fear which it is quite right to assume toward the temptress who represents moral virtue, like Delilah among the Philistines or Eve before the tree of knowledge,' he produces 'no vision of the spiritual nature of love.'[410] It seems that Blake's Milton is summoned back to Earth to rectify this error and redeem the sex he so unfairly maligned. According to W. T. J. Mitchell, having annihilated his masculine ego, Milton consequently receives Ololon into a 'fruitful, liberating dialectic of contraries' in which sexual difference is not dissolved: in seeking out Milton, Ololon 'reverses the traditionally passive role of the virtuous heroine in epic and romance but she does not escape this role by becoming a female warrior, a woman in the armor of a man.'[411] Upholding this reading, Clare Colebrook argues that by asserting that the female is not simply a weak derivative of the male, Blake, through giving Ololon an active role in the epic, shows that 'if the feminine is incorporated in a fruitful and dynamic contrary then sexual difference will be the opening to new life and renovated perception.'[412]

Questioning this optimistic reading, other critics have detected misogynistic elements in this final encounter between Milton and Ololon. Shedding contrite tears before Milton and losing her human form amidst images suggesting sexual consummation, Ololon can certainly

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[410] Frye, 352.
[411] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Blake's Radical Comedy: Dramatic Structure as Meaning in Milton," in *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem*, ed. Stuart. Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 305.
[412] Claire Colebrooke, "Blake, Literary History and Sexual Difference," in *Women Reading William Blake*, ed. Helen P. Bruder (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 16-25 (23).

be read as less than Milton's equal. Arguing that *Milton* reinforces an ideology of gender subordination, Marc Kaplan, for instance, reads Ololon not as a dignified bride but as the 'willing victim' of a blood-sacrifice who offers up her maidenhead in sexual submission.[413] On a less literal level, other critics have questioned the liberative qualities of Blake's androgynous ideal, reading the ending as the fulfilment of a fantasy in which female qualities are assimilated into the male psyche. Essick notes that since androgyny for Blake entailed 'an absorption of the female into the male, thereby cancelling her independent presence, never the man's,' Blake's androgynous ideal is in fact 'less an androgyne than a male freed from the anxieties associated with females outside his willful control.'[414] Similarly, Alan Richardson argues that in perpetuating the Romantic ideal of androgyny, which 'promised a utopian image of wholeness but generally delivers still another version of the male incorporation of the feminine,' Blake reveals both his 'desire to escape conventional notions of gender and his inability to do so.'[415] Stating this view in stronger terms, Diana Long Hoeveler offers a chilling warning: 'do not think that Ololon survives this apocalyptic merger with Milton in any form other than as the cannibalized female within.'[416]

To me, it seems that while Blake flirts with the trope of the divine wedding, ultimately *Milton* sidesteps this expected comedic ending for something rather more radical. What Ololon offers Milton is not marriage but 'the severe contentions/ Of Friendship' (E143), and in order to make this possible she casts off her sexual power, which flies into the Ulro, joining not with

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[413] Marc Kaplan, "Blake's Milton: The Metaphysics of Gender," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 19, no. 2 (1995): 172.
[414] Robert N. Essick, "William Blake's 'Female Will' and Its Biographical Context," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31, no. 4 (1991): 615-630 (617).
[415] Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of The Feminine," 19.
[416] Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 135.

Milton proper but with his corresponding vegetative shadow. Ololon is thus no virgin bride.[417] Seeing that sexual union takes humanity into the deadly Ulro, the 'Void Outside of Existence, which if enterd into/ Becomes a Womb' (E143), she realises that sexual difference leads to generation and death, and so casts off her sexual garments and rejects the reproductive role which has long been woman's burden. Shedding her virgin form, her dolorous shriek may echo the virgin's cry of pain at the point of penetration and the mother's pangs at childbirth, but it also echoes the shriek Thel emits when she turns away from her biological destiny, fleeing from the grave plot of fleshly desire to return to the vales of sexless innocence. Ololon, however, is more mature than Thel. While her sexual exterior joins Milton's shadow 'as a Dove upon the stormy Sea' (E143) to renovate the material world, her spiritual form takes its own course and welcomes eternal life in the form of Christ, who arrives to put an end to humanity's 'propagated curse' (*Paradise Lost*, 10.729).

I argue, moreover, that what Ololon rejects is not only sex but the very worship of fertility and Nature's generative power, and therefore *Milton* ends not in marriage but in an anti-fertility ritual. As a representative of the feminine, Ololon is dismayed to find that she has been the cause of Natural Religion:

> Are those who contemn Religion & seek to annihilate it
> Become in their Femine portions the causes & promoters
> Of these Religions, how is this thing? this Newtonian Phantasm
> This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon & Bolingbroke
> This Natural Religion! this impossible absurdity
> Is Ololon the cause of this? (E141)

[417] Robinson recounts a curious conversation with Blake on marriage. On June 14th, 1826, Blake declares that he 'from the Bible has learned that *Eine Gemeinschaft der Frauen Statt finden sollte*' [there should be a community of women]' (*Diary*, 92). As Robinson writes, 'When I objected that *Ehestand* [marriage] seems to be a divine institution he referred to the Bible: "that from the beginning it was not so."' Ibid.

It is obvious why Newton, Voltaire, and Bolingbroke are named – they exalted an impersonal watch-maker God who operated through physical laws and who could therefore be known through the use of reason. Hume and Gibbon, however, are named as spiritual enemies because, approaching religion from a natural historic framework, they represented and promoted a new analytical spirit which found natural psychological explanations for religious development. Having 'the impudence to historicize subjects and periods that had largely remained insulated from secular historical analysis,' they opened up the possibility of considering Christianity as a natural outgrowth of the irrational human mind rather than of divine revelation.[418] As Hume speculates in his controversial work *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), religion must have been polytheistic in its origins, arising out of primitive anxiety and fear in a dangerous, uncertain world, with monotheism only evolving by the 'natural progress of human thought' towards rationality as '[t]he mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior.'[419] Citing Hume, Gibbon approaches the history of Christianity from a radically secular perspective in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789), showing how the rise of Christianity ironically led to the decline of Rome by promoting the superstitious adulation of idols. Naming Hume and Gibbon, Ololon gives us a hint as to why she names herself the cause of Natural Religion: secular histories of Christianity made it all the more possible to study religion as a product not only of human nature, but more specifically of the human fascination with sexuality and fertility.

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[418] Timothy Crimmins, "Universal and Profane: The Historiographical Consequences of Natural Religion," *History and Theory* 59, no. 2 (2020): 227-54 (229). See also, J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 183-91, and Stephen Paul Foster, *Melancholy Duty: The Hume-Gibbon Attack on Christianity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1997).

[419] David Hume, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume: A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34–35.

The late eighteenth century saw a keen antiquarian interest in the role of sexuality and phallic symbolism in pagan and Christian worship.[420] Winckelmann and Diderot wrote on the intimate relationship between sensual and sacred love in Greek religion, while William Jones and others drew attention to the sexual cults in Indian culture. Amidst this new-found interest in the role of sexuality in religion arose the intriguing idea that all religions had their roots in fertility cults. In *L'origine de tous les cultes* (1795), Charles Dupuis argued that universal religion originated as Nature worship, its active and passive principles figured as a dynamic balanced between the masculine and the feminine, the solar and the lunar. Including Christianity in his discussions, Dupuis compared Christ with other fertility Gods such as Osiris and Mithas.[421] Richard Payne Knight made a similar argument in *The Worship of Priapus* (1786), focusing on the origins of various religious symbols in representations of the male and female sexual organs. For Knight, religion arose in the desire to worship the creative energies of life; as he writes, people were driven to represent the 'beneficent power of the great Creator' by 'that organ which endowed them with the power of procreation, and made them partakers, not only of the felicity of the Deity, but of his great characteristic attribute, that of multiplying his own image, communicating his blessings, and extending them to generations yet unborn.'[422] Christianity was not exempt from his analysis, since the Cross, for instance, 'served as the emblem of creation and generation, before the Church adopted it as the sign of salvation.'[423] Though he mitigated the controversial implications of this observation by describing it as 'a lucky coincidence of ideas, which, without doubt, facilitated the reception of it among the

[420] Frank Edward Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 259–70.
[421] Charles Dupuis, *Origine de Tous Les Cultes, ou, Religion Universelle* (Paris, 1795).
[422] Knight, *Worship of Priapus*, 29.
[423] Knight, 48.

Faithful,' the irreverent suggestion remains. A few pages later, he notes that an ancient bronze housed in the Vatican shows the 'male organs of generation placed upon the head of a Cock, the emblem of the Sun, supported by the neck and shoulders of a Man.'[424] Underneath this representation of the divine procreative power 'incarnate with man' is an inscription announcing 'The Saviour of the World,' a title 'always venerable, under whatever image it be represented.'[425] The salacious joke on Christ is clear.

Hence Ololon's guilt over the development of Natural Religion. As a female form she represents sexuality, and it is the emphasis on sexuality which has produced the idea of what Blake calls in *Jerusalem* a 'Vegetated Christ,' who along with the idea of 'a Virgin Eve' forms 'the Hermaphroditic Blasphemy' (E250). Placing sexuality at the heart of human culture, the comparative mythographers and historiographers of religion believed that a preoccupation with generative life, not spiritual life, gave rise to primitive religion.

It is significant that the portion of Ololon which represents generative life takes the form of a dove, for the dove was identified by mythographers as one of the feminine symbols of the primordial generative principle. For Knight, the Dove is a representation of 'the Holy Spirit, the first-begotten Love, or plastic Nature,' the generative spirit brooding over matter.[426] Citing the Orphic fragments as an example, he notes that the deity was often attributed with wings as emblems of his generative power, and the egg was correspondingly:

> a very proper symbol of Chaos, containing the seeds and materials of all things, which, however, were barren and useless, until the Creator fructified them by the incubation of

[424] Knight, 48, 54.
[425] Knight, 54.
[426] Knight, 146.

> his vital spirit, and released them from the restraints of inert matter, by the efforts of his divine strength.[427]

Erasmus Darwin similarly fell on a 'deist spectrum,' and in *The Temple of Nature* he supplied the suggestion that the story of Eve's creation might have originated in 'an hieroglyphic design of the Egyptian philosophers, showing their opinion that Mankind was originally of both sexes united, and was afterwards divided into males and females' (42).[428] And like Knight, Darwin similarly draws on the image of the dove brooding over chaos to locate Eros at the centre of Creation. Immortal Love, writes Darwin, 'On wings outstretch'd, o'er Chaos hung sublime;/ Warm'd into the life the bursting egg of Night,/ And gave young Nature to admiring Light!' (1.15-17) By sending this dove form into the sea of chaos, Ololon reveals that spiritual life has nothing to do with generative Eros. Darwin's description of primordial love spreading her 'wide arms' to hold the world in 'soft embraces' (1.18) is echoed in Blake's description of Ololon's children being received in Beulah's maternal arms 'as on wings/ Of dovelike softness' (E130).

However, Beulah is a place of the imagination, not of generation, and Ololon is called not to generate new forms but to 'Watch over this World, and with [her] brooding wings/ Renew it to Eternal Life' (E116). Ololon's dove-like form also recalls the Milton's description of the Holy Spirit in his retelling of Genesis 1:2, as well as two other biblical doves, the dove which is sent out of Noah's Ark, and its typological double, the dove-like form of the Holy Spirit which descends at Jesus's baptism. At the end of the poem, Ololon is called not to quicken the world with new life but to renew the eternal life which resides within it. That Ololon transforms

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[427] Knight, 34.
[428] Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

into a Moony Ark emphasises this turn towards redemption, since the Ark itself is a symbol of regeneration through baptism.[429] As written in I Peter 3:21-22, Christ suffered for those:

> Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waiting in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience of God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Just as Noah and his family were saved in the ark from corporeal death by water, so are true believers saved by the water of the baptismal fount from eternal death. The parallel between the eight souls saved in the Ark and the Starry Eight which, through Ololon's descent, reunite to form 'One Man Jesus the Saviour' (E143), further cements the connection. The dove-like form of Ololon's female portion thus recalls the generation of the material world to contrast it against the regeneration of fallen humanity through Christ.

For Blake, the corruption of the ark into the womb meant the degeneration of religion from a focus on spiritual regeneration to a preoccupation with physical generation. Rejecting the idea that religion arose out of fertility cults, Blake is indebted to the speculative mythographers who believed that Nature Worship arose as perversions of an original One True Religion. Blake engraved a tailpiece depicting Noah's Ark as a crescent moon for Jacob Bryant's famous *Analysis of Antient Mythology* (figure 18), which argues that as the story of Noah degenerated into pagan myths: his 'interval in the ark was esteemed a state of death: and what ensued was looked upon as a second life, and the renewal of nature.'[430] Tracing various

[429] Indeed, for early Christians, the rite of baptism signalled a ritualistic break with sexuality. Through baptism, the Christian church found a means of perpetual regeneration outside of marriage and childbirth, making possible 'a Christianity of discontinuity—a Christianity of the "born again."' Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 124.
[430] Jacob Bryant, *A New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, 3 vols (London, 1773), 2.205.

world religions back to representations of the archetypal myth of Noah and the Ark, George Stanley Faber similarly argued that the corruption of revelation and history after the flood by priestcraft saw Noah transformed into various Father gods such as Osiris, Jove, Moloch, and Dagon (all mentioned in *Milton*, E137-8) and the Ark worshipped as Mother Goddesses such as Isis and Venus. He sketches this idea in brief in *Horae Mosaicae* in 1801 and develops it at length in his 1803 work *A Dissertation on the Mysteries of the Cabiri* and his 1816 work *The Origin of Pagan Idolatry*, making him another likely source for Blake's idea that the world's many fertility myths of death and rebirth were derived from the myth of Noah's Ark.[431] According to Bryant and Faber, the Ark soon became a symbol of literal rebirth, its spiritual meaning submerged. '[L]ooked upon as the womb of nature; and the descent from it as the birth of the world,' the Ark, writes Bryant, represents 'an intermediate state between a lost world, and a world renewed.'[432] Similarly, Faber writes that '[t]he inclosure of the Noëtic family within the Ark was considered by the ancient mythologists as a state of death and darkness; and their quitting it, as a restoration to life and light.'[433]

Blake believed that fertility worship did not degenerate into religion; rather he believed that religion degenerated in fertility worship, and that the Deists keen on reducing Christianity to materialist doctrine were continuing in this trend. As Blake writes in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, the Druids of Natural Religion 'began to turn allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command' (E542-3). Uncovering the original sexual contents which later transformed into various world religious symbols, the mythographers of the eighteenth century, like the

[431] Another potential source for Blake's ideas, Edward Davies makes a similar argument in *The Rites and Mythology of the British-Druids* (1809). See Jason Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 114–51.
[432] Bryant, 2.364.
[433] George Stanley Faber, *A Dissertation on the Mysteries of the Cabiri*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1803), 1.153–4.

druids they studied, were guilty of giving priority to the literal over the symbolic. Ololon's final transformation, however, reverses this historical corruption of the symbolic into the natural: the fleshly womb is dissolved into a cleansing menstrual flood, out of which emerges the Ark, the archetypal symbol of spiritual regeneration. *Milton* thus sees Blake reacting against the materialist analysis of religion which reduces it to the worship of human sexuality by sublimating biological imagery into artificial imagery. The corporeal makes way for the symbolic. Ending with Christ's descent, *Milton* fulfils an ancient promise: that from the seed of woman will come one who will renew heaven and earth, casting off the garment of mere flesh for symbolic garment, 'a Garment dipped in blood,/ Written within & without in woven letters' (E143).

5) 'Renews by its seeds': Blake's *Laocoön*

Introduction: Originality and Organic Unity

Admiring the noble equanimity embodied in the famous statue group, Goethe declares in an essay on the *Laocoön* that 'it is a great advantage in a work of art, to subsist by itself' as a 'tranquil object.'[434] In this essay, which was translated into English in 1800 by the *Monthly Magazine*, Goethe praises the sculptor's decision to strip the subject matter of contextual detail. Goethe was not the first to admire the sculptor's decision to undress, and thereby decontextualise, the Trojan priest. 'Had the Laocoon been covered with a garb becoming an antient sacrificer,' writes Winckelmann decades earlier, 'his sufferings would have lost one half of their Expression.'[435] For Goethe, the sculptor 'strips man of every thing which is not essential to him,' imbuing him with universal significance.[436] As he writes:

> It is thus, that in this admirable groupe, Laocoon is only a simple name; the artist have [sic] taken from him his priesthood, all that is national and Trojan in him, all the poetical and mythological accessories; all in fact that mythology has made of him is done away; he is only now a father with his two sons, menaced with death by the bite of two serpents.[437]

For Goethe, *Laocoön and His Sons*, in its authentic wholeness, appears to be enigmatically frozen in time. Inviting the reader to imaginatively place themselves in front of the group, he conjures up an image of the sculpture appearing as something exposed 'like a flash of lightning fixed, a wave petrified at the instant when it is approaching the shore.'[438] In spite of Goethe's

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[434] Goethe, "Observations on the Laocoon," in *The Monthly Magazine: Part I. For 1799. From January to June, Inclusive. Vol. VII* (London, 1799), 349-352, 399-401 (350).
[435] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks: With Instructions for the Connoisseur, and An Essay on Grace in Works of Art*, trans. Henry Fuseli (London, 1765), 31.
[436] Goethe, "Observations" 351.
[437] Goethe, 351.
[438] Goethe, 351.

brilliant metaphor of fixed lightning and petrified waves, however, the artefact of the *Laocoön* itself had not survived the wear and tear of time fully intact. When it was excavated in Rome in 1506, the statue group had obviously suffered multiple instances of damage, the loss of Laocoön's right arm being the most significant. By 1800, the *Laocoön* had been the subject of several attempts at restoration. In 1532, Giovanni Antonia Montorsoli fitted him with an outstretched arm which was not replaced until the discovery of the original arm, bent and flexed, in the twentieth century. From 1725 to 1727, the restoration received further amendment by Agostino Cornacchini. The actual *Laocoön* was a mutilated object, bearing the scars of time. Through linguistic and visual mediation, however, the *Laocoön* becomes a neoclassical ideal. It is Goethe's descriptive power which animates the ancient work until it is no longer a static artefact but a living expression of human dynamism.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, as new archaeological projects unearthed the classical world in fragments, filling increasingly heterogeneous collections with specimens which threatened idealised visions of the past, art critics and theorists invested ever more ardently in dreams of organic unity to compensate for the anxieties of fragmentation haunting the adulation of ideal form.[439] Organic unity was a classical aesthetic idea. Describing artworks by analogy to living things, ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle laid the foundation for a way of thinking about art objects which stressed the necessity of each part to the integrity and perfection of the entire piece.[440] By Goethe's time, however, a distinctly Romantic sense of

[439] See Jonah Siegel, *Matter, Form, Abstraction: Mediation and the Reception of Antiquities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[440] In Plato's *Phaedrus*, for instance, Socrates argues that 'every discourse must be organised, like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole.' Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 264c. See, also, Aristotle, *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. Stephen Halliwell et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1450b.32-1451a.6.

organic unity had developed. An object did not need to be intact to be whole.[441] Instead, the fragment could be a miniature or microcosm of an original or virtual unity. Developed in neoclassical descriptions of antique works, the idea that the fragment could imply the whole of which it was a part, that it could be a germ from which the whole could be regenerated in the imagination, enabled the fragment to become what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have called 'the romantic genre *par excellence*.'[442]

No work of art seemed to embody this ideal more evocatively than the Belvedere Torso. A fragmentary statue of a male nude, the Torso was another renowned classical work housed, along with the *Laocoön*, in the Vatican Museums. Sir Joshua Reynolds lauded the Torso as an exemplary work because the 'perfection' of the 'science of abstract form' could be found within its '*disjecta membra poetae*.'[443] Around 1820, Blake punctures this ideal on a dense single-plate etching featuring two short texts, 'On Homers Poetry' and 'On Virgil' (figure 19) On this plate, Blake voices the opinion that 'when a Work has Unity it is as much in a Part as in the Whole. the Torso is as much a Unity as the Laocoon' (E269). If he seems to be supporting this organicist ideal, he adds a comment which reveals an ironic tone: 'Unity,' writes Blake, 'is the cloke of folly' (E269). The *Laocoön*, after all, is in far better condition. How can the Torso be as much a unity as the *Laocoön*? Blake draws parallels with epic poetry:

[441] The contrast between classical and romantic conceptions of organic unity were first discussed in G.N.G. Orsini, "The Organic Concepts in Aesthetics," *Comparative Literature* 21 (1969): 1–30. See, also, Orsini, *Organic Unity in Ancient and Later Poetics: The Philosophical Foundations of Literary Criticism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975).
[442] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 40.
[443] Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. Pat Rogers (London: Penguin, 1992), 235.

> Every Poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity, but why Homers is peculiarly so, I cannot tell: he has told the story of Bellerophon & omitted the judgmet of Paris which is not only a part, but a principal part of Homers subject. (E269)

How can an epic poem which omits a vital event from its narrative be construed as the epitome of poetic unity?

A brief text, this etching has received little serious critical attention beyond serving as evidence for Blake's repudiation of the classics, which he associates with commerce, war, and empire, in preference for the gothic – his concluding assertion, that 'Grecian is Mathematic Form/ Gothic is Living Form' (E270) is probably the most frequently-cited part of this bold manifesto. However, this plate rewards closer consideration, because it shows Blake grappling with one of the central elisions of concepts in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philhellenism – the elision of organic unity and originality as aesthetic ideals. For neoclassical critics and scholars, Greece, increasingly celebrated as the source of Western civilisation, seemed to present the optimal state of human development, flourishing in its pure primitive simplicity, entirely original to itself amidst the corrupting influences of civilisation. Correspondingly, Grecian form, epitomised in sculpture depicting smooth, strong Grecian bodies, seemed to be guided by an ideal of beauty centred around wholeness and unity. For Blake, the adulation of timelessness, self-sufficiency, and organic wholeness in classical art concealed the reality of history.

Blake, sceptical of the myth of Greek autochthony, thought that Greece had no claim on being the original source of its own culture, let alone that of human culture more generally, for 'Sacred Truth has pronounced that Greece & Rome as Babylon & Egypt: so far from being parents of Arts & Sciences as they pretend: were destroyers of all Art' (E270). Having lived

through the destructive Napoleonic Wars, during which Napoleon orchestrated the looting of art across Europe, Blake conveys his anti-imperial message with a keen sense of urgency: 'Rome & Greece swept art their maw & destroyd it a Warlike State never can produce Art. It will Rob & Plunder & accumulate into one place, & Translate & Copy & Buy & Sell & Criticise, but not Make' (E270). The truth, according to Blake, was that classical art was not original. Instead, it could be traced back to earlier traditions, specifically the visionary tradition of the Hebrews. The worshipping of classical statues as free-standing forms produces an illusion of originality, but even the Torso and the *Laocoön* were based on Hebraic originals.

Ironically, the establishment of originality and unity as aesthetic ideals in the second half of the eighteenth century occurred amidst the rise of historicism in art criticism – amidst, in other words, the invention of art history as a modern discipline. The beginnings of a new historicist approach to classical antiquity might be traced back to the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns which took place at the end of the seventeenth century, and the changing receptions of Homer are a good index for the changing attitudes towards the Hellenic past. Critics such as Anne Dacier and Charles de Saint-Évremond found ways to read Homer with fresh temporal distance, framing him as a primitive bard who must be understood in relation to the customs and manners of the archaic world in which he was embedded. A few decades later, the Scottish classicist Thomas Blackwell contributed to biographical readings of Homer with his influential *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735), and his influence can be felt in Robert Wood's *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (1769). A traveller as well as a scholar, Wood visited many of the Mediterranean locations described in Homeric verses, and identified the wandering bard's genius with his ability to produce the 'marks of locality' Wood

sought to trace in person.[444] Wood argued that the mythology of the *Iliad* was not derived from Egypt but was 'a natural outgrowth of the Greek admiration for nature.'[445] Homer's genius lay in his 'amazing powers of original imitation,' a formulation which sounds oxymoronic to modern ears, but reflects eighteenth-century identifications between the powers of invention and observation.[446] For Wood, Homer's originality lay in his ability to present his own geographical origins in his works: he was 'the most original of all poets, and the most constant and faithful copier after nature.'[447] An original genius reflects his origination: as Kirsti Simonsuuri writes, in eighteenth-century aesthetics, genius is 'the total response of the artist, by means of art, to the world that had moulded him.'[448] The elevation of Greece according to ideals emphasising originality and truth to nature curiously developed in tandem with a greater awareness of the distinct historical contingencies surrounding specific artists and specific works of art.

The rise of historicism was not limited to literary criticism. The discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii produced new artefacts to study, and institutions such as The Society of Dilettanti were keen to finance travel and publications to bring these objects under studied scrutiny. Few people were more influential in cultivating a historicist understanding of the plastic arts than Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Many scholars and connoisseurs believed Greek culture to be, in Shaftesbury's words, '*original to it-self*,' and this belief would only gain

[444] Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (London, 1769), xi.
[445] Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 191.
[446] Wood, *Original Genius of Homer*, lxviii.
[447] Wood, vi.
[448] Kirsti Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth-Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic (1688-1798)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 141.

prevalence in the following century as Egyptian and Phoenician influences on Greece are increasingly erased or denied.[449] But as Brian Vicks writes,

> It was Winckelmann more than anyone else who helped launch the century-long wave of German Philhellenism, and Winckelman has been taken to be a sort of romantic *avant la lettre* in his obsession with the cultural uniqueness and originality of the ancient Greeks.[450]

He launched a new paradigm for art history with his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), establishing, as Alex Potts writes, 'a model for conceptualizing the entirety of an artistic tradition through a systematically conceived history of its rise, flourishing, and decline.'[451] Winckelmann's project, founded on the assumption that political, climatic, sociological conditions disclosed themselves in aesthetic sensibilities, narrated the history of art as a grand universal narrative of evolution and decline, drawing not on the schematic accounts on ancient authorities but on a generalising stylistic analysis of the artefacts themselves. And since the spirit of an age manifested itself in the stylistic qualities of the artworks it produced, for Winckelmann the 'noble simplicity and sedate grandeur' found in Greek works bespoke the self-standing originality of Greek culture itself.[452] More than anyone, it is Winckelmann who exemplified the neoclassical tendency, critiqued by Blake in 'On Homers Poetry,' to conflate formal unity with originality in organicist terms.

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[449] Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury Earl of, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London, 1711), 1.137; Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Vol. 1. The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985* (London: Vintage, 1991).
[450] Brian E. Vick, "Greek Origins and Organic Metaphors: Ideals of Cultural Autonomy in Neohumanist Germany from Winckelmann to Curtius," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 3 (2002): 483-500 (485).
[451] Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 13.
[452] Winckelmann, *Reflections*, 30.

Winckelmann's postulations concerning the originality of Greece are rich in organic metaphors. Describing the importance of political freedom to the health of Greek culture, he writes that '[t]hrough freedom, the way of thinking of an entire people sprang up like a fine branch from a healthy trunk.'[453] He discredited the idea that Egyptian or Etruscan art must have acted as a precursor to Greek art, arguing that '[e]very people has found within itself the first seeds of necessity'; as he continues, 'the Greeks appear, as they themselves report, not to have gathered the first seeds for their art from other people but rather to have been its original inventors.'[454] Winckelmann's organicist understanding of the evolution of culture was influenced by Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* (1748) and Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langes* (1781), which suggested that climate had a key role in shaping different civilisations. As he writes, 'The influence of climate must invigorate the seed from which art is to germinate, and Greece was the preferred soul for this seed.'[455] As I shall show, this subtle strand of organicism, woven throughout Winckelmann's project, allows for the concepts of unity and originality to be quietly but ingeniously enjoined.

Blake similarly uses the metaphor of the seed to elucidate his thoughts on originality, to different effect. Blake would have learnt of Winckelmann through his friend Henry Fuseli. During his years as an apprentice, he acquired a copy of Fuseli's translation of five essays by Winckelmann published under the title, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*. 'There are innumerable passages in this book,' writes Geoffrey Keynes, 'which may have sown in Blake's mind seeds of some of the ideas that afterwards to the size, sometimes, of

[453] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Malgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 188.
[454] Winckelmann, 111, 112.
[455] Winckelmann, 186.

obsessions.'[456] The first section of this chapter thus sets Blake and Winckelmann in dialogue, exploring the ways in which their diverging uses of organic metaphors reflect rather different emphases as they both navigate the tension between cultural transmission and originality. While Winckelmann fetishizes the originality of the Greeks and formal unity of their artworks, Blake's history of art emphasises the fact of cultural borrowing, puncturing the myth of Greek autochthony and the illusion of autonomy in the individual artefact. Comparing the thoughts of Blake and Winckelmann, this chapter reveals what is at stake in Blake's bold pronouncements against neoclassical values.

This chapter concerns itself with three questions: how did the ideals of organic unity and of originality become entangled in neoclassical aesthetics? How does Blake undermine these ideals in his artistic theory? And finally, how does Blake's theory of originality translate into his artistic practices? Though the press was vital to his preferred modes of artistic production, Blake, as Morris Eaves argues, defended his art against the division between mental and physical labour through recourse to a Romantic emphasis on the integrity of the artist and the work.[457] At the same time, however, the fact that there are discontinuities among different copies of Blake's texts, none of which might be considered the "original," undermines this privileging of organic integrity.[458] Blake's proliferation of textual and graphic difference seems

[456] As Keynes contines, 'Blake's dogma, "Art can never without Naked Beauty displayed," finds its justification in many of Winckelmann's pages; also his distaste for drawing from models, his preference for general forms of beauty and ideal images, and his use of garments which emphasize rather than obscure the human form.' Geoffrey Keynes, *Blake Studies: Notes on his Life and Work, in Seventeen Chapters* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), 48. See, also, Carol Hall, "Henry Fuseli and the Aesthetics of William Blake: Fuseli as Transmitter of J. J. Winckelmann, J. J. Rousseu, and J. C. Lavater" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1979).

[457] Morris Eaves, "Blake and the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum and Technology," *PMLA* 92, no. 5 (1977): 903–27.

[458] See, e.g. Saree Makdisi, "The Political Aesthetic of Blake's Images," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 110–32.

to demand an unconventional understanding of originality – one which certainly deviated from the way it was understood in late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism.

The second and third sections of this chapter thus work through readings of Blake's *Laocoön* plate (c.1826-1827, figure 20) and *Joseph of Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion* (c.1810, figure 21) respectively, showing how they differently embody his ideas concerning the relationship between a work of art and its situated position in human history.[459] Goethe praises works such as the *Laocoön* group as timeless works of marble perfection, but the cloak of unity obscures complicated layers of reception history. Arguing that the roots of classical art can be traced to artworks from ancient Judea, and that these "originals" were in turn inspired by divine vision, Blake reveals the disordered palimpsestic wrappings of the sculpture's history. Ultimately, even the Greek "original" is only another derivation of the universal genius. But Blake embraces the derivative nature of all art, and works such as *Joseph of Arimathea* demonstrate how Blake's practices of seamlessly incorporating classical figures into his own work disclose an attitude towards art which emphasises participation in inspired tradition over autochthonous originality. Blake's attitude to the classics was thus in a way diametrically opposed to the norms of his time: neoclassical critics emphasised originality while elevating the antique works of a distinct culture as timeless models of art; Blake, meanwhile, produced highly original works while forgoing claims to originality of vision altogether.

[459] For more on aspects of Blake's work as a visual artist, see David Bindman, *Blake as an Artist* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), Robert N. Essick, *William Blake, Printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), Morris Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art*, and Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Focusing my attention on Blake's reception of classical sculpture, I do not discuss in detail the concept of original and copy with regards to his illuminated books. For discussion of these matters, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) and Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*.

The Torso and Organic Unity

Neoclassicism's anxieties of fragmentation manifest themselves clearly in the contradiction between Winckelmann's desire to view art objects in their historical contexts on the one hand, and, on the other, his own tendency to produce virtuoso readings of certain masterpieces as objects of formal perfection which transcend the vicissitudes of time. Critics such as Verity Platt have noted how his 'set-piece descriptions' of the works housed in the Vatican's Cortile de Belvedere are 'presented as intensely subjective, first-person encounters with highly individuated objects of the Hellenistic and Roman periods,' departing from the historical focus that characterizes the rest of the *History*.[460] As Elizabeth Prettejohn comments, 'suddenly the emphasis is on the visual, on the present, on the singularity of the work rather than its position in a historical sequence, on the way 'I' (Winckelmann) experience it rather than on its objective properties.'[461] Through ekphrastic description, even the fragment, resurrected as a whole, can stand out of time.

In an essay of 1759, Winckelmann takes the famous Torso Belvedere as the paragon of a novel sense of organic unity. According to Winckelmann, the Torso may be a mere fragment of the original masterpiece, but the remarkable knowledge of anatomy displayed in the piece allowed one to reconstruct the rest of the body. Punning on the Italian meaning of *torso* (the stem of a plant or trunk of a tree), Winckelmann writes that '[j]ust as only the trunk remains of a mighty oak that has been felled and stripped of its twigs and branches, so the image of the hero sits there maltreated and mutilated.'[462] However, if you 'observe this work with a calm

[460] Verity Platt, "Re-Membering the Belvedere Torso: Ekphrastic Restoration and the Teeth of Time," *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 1 (2020): 49–75 (54).
[461] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art 1750-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19.
[462] *Johann Joachim Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, trans. and with an introduction and notes by David Carter (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), 144.

eye,' then the hero depicted will 'appear to you as if in the midst of all his tasks, and the hero and god will be visible in this work at the same time.'[463] The Torso's thighs and his one remaining knee give the viewer an idea of the legs. The missing limbs begin to take shape in the viewer's imagination, for '[s]ome sort of force is discharged from what is present and brings about a sudden completion, as it were.'[464] Winckelmann's ekphrastic prose unfolds in time as the viewer's eye is gradually guided around the form. Underneath the wrappings of verbal description, however, the Torso suddenly emerges as a timeless whole. The Torso, then, is a figure from whose mutilated body lost appendages can be regenerated. Identifying the figure as Hercules, Winckelmann goes so far as to say that every one of the past feats of the ancient hero can be read in a single pose. For Winckelmann, this regeneration of the ancient fragment in the seat of the imagination is possible because the sculpture itself was originally crafted so as to faithfully render the intimate relationship between all of the muscles and bones in a body engaged in action.

Winckelmann seems to have been able to reconcile historicist awareness with formalist critique through employing organicist language, carrying out what Elizabeth Décultot has called the 'naturalization of Greek culture' in his aim to present cultural autarky as the ideal model whereby '[o]ne nation's culture should feed only from the sap of its people and grow organically, ignoring foreign influences.'[465] The graceful forms of Greek sculpture reflected the racial health and purity of the Greek people. The Greeks cultivated the body in exercise and competitive sports, either in the nude or in garments which allowed the limbs to move freely.

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[463] Winckelmann, 145.
[464] Winckelmann, 146.
[465] Elizabeth Décultot, "Eighteenth-Century Anthropological and Ethnological Studies of Ancient Greece: Winckelmann, Herder, Caylus, and Kant," in *Kant and His German Contemporaries. Volume 2: Aesthetics, History, Politics, and Religion*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 71–90 (74, 80).

The well-developed nature of their bodies was partly also attributable to a temperate climate and good blood. The Greeks were superior at capturing ideal beauty in stone because their fleshly bodies, in harmony with their geographic and hereditary conditions, preeminently displayed the unity and wholeness which constituted the beautiful.

Winckelmann openly identifies statuary with the body in his 'Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and the Art of Sculpture' (1755). As he writes, 'in the development of the beautiful Greek body, as in the works of their masters, there was more unity in the whole structure, a noble combination of the parts, a greater measure of fullness,' than modern bodies.'[466] Greek bodies, firmly bound by the skin, showed 'more unity of system, a nobler harmony of parts, and a completeness of the whole, above our lean tensions and hollow wrinkles.'[467] The athletic Greek body, which had not one inch of excess fat, not one hint of superfluity, was the organism par excellence in which every part contributed to the whole; the beautiful Greek statue is judged along similar demands for elegant economy. If art naturally displayed a nation's genius, then the graceful statuesque body, singular and present, seemed to ultimately reflect the purity and health of the Greek spirit.

The statue, a three-dimension representation of a human or animal body, easily lends itself to such Pygmalion moments. Comparing sculpture to painting, Herder finds greater liveliness in the former because of its greater integrity:

> For in sculpture the *one object* is the whole and the whole is *one object.* […] What sculpture should create, and what it has succeeded in creating, are forms in which the living soul animates the entire body, forms in which art can compete in the task of

[466] Winckelmann, *Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, 37.
[467] Winckelmann, *Reflections*, 16.

> representing the *embodied soul* —that is to say, gods, human beings, and noble animals.[468]

Herder's organicism leads him to emphasise suggestions of the internal unity of the body's machinery over the realistic surface details of the flesh. If veins and cartilage are not 'softened and veiled in the fullness of the whole,' then '[r]ather than being experienced as belonging to the fullness of a *single* body, they will be perceived as independent, separate entities that prefigure the ultimate demise of the body, from which they should therefore be removed.'[469] The more the overall figure is softened, the less one perceives the body as a summary of parts, and the more one intimates what lies within.

This emphasis of ideal form over surface detail was common in the period, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, to Blake's vexation, was preeminently influential in directing taste towards the emphasis of ideal form over minute particulars. The elevation of smooth idealised forms in this period was based on the false belief that ancient Greek sculptors deliberately erased surface details such as wrinkles and veins.[470] It would be the arrival of the Parthenon sculptures in London in 1806 which would lead the wider community to judge statues thought to be Greek originals (such as the Apollo Belvedere) as Roman copies and imitations due to the technical

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[468] Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. and trans. Jason Gaiger (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2002), 45.
[469] Herder, 54.
[470] Amidst this era of intense admiration for Antique statues, Anton Raphael Mengs was one of the few people to challenge the neoclassical elevation of ideal form by speculating, based on the observation that they lacked the attention to natural surface detail found in early Greek sculpture, that certain Antique statues were only Roman copies of Greek originals. Blake held a similar opinion to Mengs, asserting that 'perhaps the Torso is the only original work remaining; all the rest are evidently copies, though fine ones, from greater works of the Asiatic Patriarchs' (E531). As Alex Potts shows, Blake might have encountered Meng's writings on the inauthenticity of the famous antiques. "Greek Sculpture and Roman Copies I: Anton Raphael Mengs and the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 150–73.

superiority of the Elgin Marbles.[471] William Hazlitt, for example, writes that the Elgin Marbles, with their depiction of veins and wrinkles in the skin, 'give a flat contradiction to this gratuitous separation of grandeur of design and exactness of detail' which can be found in Reynolds.[472] But behind Hazlitt's disagreement with Reynolds lies a similar tendency to view the statue as an organic whole. For Hazlitt, the marbles were 'nothing but human figures petrified'; it were 'as if the very marble were a flexible substance, and contained the various springs of life and motion within itself.'[473] The excellency of the Marbles lies in their ability to suggest, through surface alone, the presence of an organised interior structure:

> This is the great and master-excellence of the Elgin Marbles, that they do not seem to be the outer surface of a hard and immovable block of marble, but to be actuated by an internal machinery, and composed of the same soft and flexible materials as the human body.[474]

As the body was understood as an organic machine, so was sculpture judged based on its ability to give the illusion that marble muscles were flexing underneath its skin of stone. Sculpture was the arena in which art came to be judged by concepts used to understand living beings.

Winckelmannian organicism had a wide influence in late eighteenth-century aesthetics. Kant read Winckelmann, and the teleological element of his aesthetic theory relied heavily on analogies with the biomechanical relationship between form and purpose in living organisms.[475] An artwork ought to have a 'purposiveness of form' resembling the self-organised subordination

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[471] Blake himself, however, did not view them with enthusiasm. According to Samuel Palmer, 'he thought with Fuseli and Flaxman that the Elgin Theseus, however full of antique savour, could not, as ideal form, rank with the finest relics of antiquity.' Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake: "Pictor Ignotus."* 2 vols (London, 1863), 1.302.

[472] *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P. P. Howe after the edition of A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, 21 vols (London: Dent, 1930-4), 18:147.

[473] Hazlitt, 145, 146.

[474] Hazlitt, 156.

[475] On the connections between Kant and Winckelmann, see Décultot, "Winckelmann, Herder, Caylus, and Kant".

of parts to the whole.[476] Indeed, the Torso captivated the minds of art critics because the figure, striking a dynamic pose, muscles flexed, seemed to be imbued with a sense of purpose. The centrality of the illusion of organicity to post-Wincklemannian receptions of the Torso can be evident, for instance, in German archaeologist August Emil Braun's 1850 commentary on the sculpture. For Braun, the mysterious sense of unity possessed by the Torso can be attributed to the strength of purposiveness of the figure's activity, which involves:

> the unconcious cooperation of all the organs for motion for a single object [such that] we possess in this work so delicately woven a structure of parts, in which the mightiest individual forms are blended together, in one grand whole with the utmost truth and grace.[477]

The Torso, suspended in action, invites the viewer to engage with the sense of purpose which can be read in the figure depicted. Every nerve and muscle seems to be directed towards some end. The presence of the artist who created the statue according to some formal rule is temporarily forgotten as the statue emerges as a hero striving to accomplish a feat of labour. Winckelmann instantiated a new way of looking at the classical fragment – and it was supported by an organicist vision of autonomy which delicately brought the separate concepts of organic unity and autochthonous originality into a new and intimate relationship.

Winckelmann was prone to eliding the physical integrity of the nude with the psychic integrity of the virtuous soul in his appraisal of Greek art. His celebration of the *Laocoön* displays this tendency clearly. In his greatness of soul, the Trojan priest does not succumb to the throes of deathly agony, expressing pain without falling to violent emotion. As

[476] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 48.
[477] August Emil Braun, *The Ruins and Museums of Rome: A Guide Book for Travellers, Artists, and Lovers of Antiquity* (Brunswick, 1854), 179.

Winckelmann writes, 'As the bottom of the sea lies beneath a foaming surface, a great soul lies sedate beneath the strife of passion in Greek figures.'[478] Laocoön is a paragon of classical virtue, an emblem of suffering transfigured into beauty. The sculpture depicts '[p]angs of piercing every muscle, every labouring nerve,' and yet ultimately 'tranquillity reigns' in a body which does not dissolve into extremes but instead presents a dignified harmony of parts.[479] Greek culture produced ideal bodies and ideal souls, and unity was the standard by which this ideal nature was judged.

Blake, however, was aware that underneath this idealisation of organic unity was often a confusion between physical and ethical integrity. In neoclassical aesthetics, sculpture was to embody an ideal which, as Walter Bate writes:

> signifies the ethos or "character" — which is eternal and changeless — rather than the pathos or "feeling," which is passing and in flux. And from the revelation of the potentialities of this fruition, of this changeless ethos, and from the subduing and disciplining of these potentialities to the consonance and decorum of the ideal, arise the inherent finality, the repose and serenity, which are the properties of classical sculpture, architecture, and writing.[480]

For Blake, to confuse character and ethos is a dangerous mistake. Blake invokes the classical concept of unity in 'On Homers Poetry' mainly to attack the assumption, underlying classical criticism, that characters are either virtuous or wicked:

> Aristotle says Characters are either Good or Bad: now Goodness or Badness has nothing to do with Character. an Apple tree a Pear tree a Horse a Lion, are Characters but a Good Apple tree or a Bad, is an Apple tree still: a Horse is not more a Lion for being a Bad Horse. that is its Character; its Goodness or Badness is another consideration. (E269)

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[478] Winckelmann, *Reflections*, 30.
[479] Winckelmann, 30.
[480] Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 20.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle's rough categorisation of characters on moral grounds supports his standards for plots: a well-constructed tragedy, for instance, would not show good men coming to their downfall, nor should it show evil men finding prosperity.[481] This kind of thinking, which simplistically elides character and morality, ignores the human possibility of change or redemption. Referring to the fable in which a Scorpion, unable to suppress its innate maliciousness, ungratefully attempts to sting the Turtle generously ferrying him across the river, Blake writes that 'Those who will have Unity exclusively in Homer come out with a Moral like a sting in the tail' (E269).[482] Blake may have believed that all human beings were born with a fixed character (as evinced by his interest in Lavater and physiognomy) but he certainly did not believe that character had any moral valence.

Whereas critics used ekphrasis to build an aura around the free-standing artwork, granting it the ontology of a teleologically autonomous living organism, Blake, with his famous *Laocoön* plate, produced a literal linguistic framework on paper to manipulate the iconic image for his own ends. No longer wrapped with the illusion of hermeneutic self-sufficiency, the Laocoön group becomes matter for Blakean allegory. While the classical concept of moral virtue viewed human nature in static, general terms, Blake insisted on acknowledging the minute human particulars which are strangled by the twin serpents of classical ethics and aesthetics. As Blake insists in *Jerusalem*, it is an error to impute 'Sin & Righteousness/ To Individuals & not to States' (E171). Engraved as cross-hatched tubes without scales or other surface details, the serpents, in contrast to the veined and sinewy human figures, show how the neoclassical ideals of smoothened beauty bind the spasmodic energies and minute details of the

[481] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 69.
[482] The fable appears in *The Fables of Bidpai*, which was translated into English as early as 1699. See Bidpai, *The Instructive and Entertaining Fables of Pilpay, An Ancient Indien Philosopher*, 6th edn (London, 1789), 79–82.

body.[483] Recalling the serpent in Eden which brought about humanity's expulsion from Eden, these twin serpents writing around the tragic figures, separately labelled as 'Good' and 'Evil,' represent the spirit of moral polarisation which marked the Fall from our primeval state of innocence. The 'Good' serpent sinks its fangs into God the Father, transforming him into a toxic image of mortal virtue and religious law. The 'Evil' serpent, meanwhile, attacks the sons, reducing Adam and Satan to a state of sin and depravity. The *Laocoön* thus represents, in symbolic terms, the Fall of humanity into the dichotomised states of Good and Evil. While art critics used the *Laocoön* to equate unity in form to unity in character, Blake reinterprets the *Laocoön* to show how this notion of unity chokes the minute particulars of human existence.

Laocoön and the Sacred History of Art

Blake's *Laocoön* plate is also a manifesto for his theories concerning the submerged sacred history of classical art. This single-plate engraving reproduces the famous Laocoön group and nests it within a dense assemblage of aphorisms on the conflicting values between Classical and Hebrew culture. Blake had first engraved the Laocoön group in 1815 as part of a commission to illustrate Flaxman's article on sculpture in Abraham Ree's *Cyclopaedia* (figure 22). As David James argues, the later engraving seems to be an attempt to redeem his earlier work from the world of commerce.[484] However, the plate's title suggests that Blake's motivations in re-engraving the group extend beyond a desire to reassert the values of art over industry. The Greeks, Blake alleges, had appropriated the group to illustrate a scene from a war between empires, but the image of the Trojan priest and his two sons originally depicted Jehovah

[483] In a passage in *Jerusalem*, Blake seems to have the Laocoön in mind when Albion describes how 'Reasonings like vast Serpents/ Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations' (E159).
[484] David E. James, "Blake's Laocoön: A Degree Zero of Literary Production," *PMLA* 98, no. 2 (1983): 226–36.

'& his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim/ of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact. or. History of Ilium' (E273). The true history of the Laocoön group according to Blake is set in centre-stage, and Blake supplements this bold pronouncement with aphoristic assertions that 'The Gods of Priam are the Cherubim of Moses & Solomon The Hosts of Heaven' and 'What we call Antique Gems are the Gems of Aarons Breast Plate' (E274).

Blake was convinced that Greek and Roman statues, like Greek and Roman myth more generally, were derived from ancient Hebrew art, which was in turn inspired by vision.[485] In his description of *A Vision of the Last Judgement* (1808), Blake remarks that texts such as Apuleius's *Golden Ass* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were ultimately 'derived from real Vision in More Ancient Writings' (E556). He makes his point more clearly in the *Descriptive Catalogue* for his 1809 exhibition:

> No man can believe that either Homer's Mythology, or Ovid's, were the production of Greece, or of Latium; neither will any one believe, that the Greek statues, as they are called, were the invention of Greek Artists; perhaps the Torso is the only original work remaining; all the rest are evidently copies, though fine ones, from greater works of the Asiatic Patriarchs. The Greek Muses are daughters of Mnemosyne, or Memory, and not of Inspiration or Imagination, therefore not authors of such sublime conceptions. (E531)

Blake's belief that Greek works such as the Apollo Belvedere and the Venus de' Medici were copies of ancient Eastern originals may have been idiosyncratic, but the arrival of the Parthenon sculptures in London in 1806 had certainly thrown into doubt the authenticity of antique sculptures. The superior workmanship and stylistic differences of the sculptures Lord Elgin put

[485] See Morton D. Paley, "'Wonderful Originals'--Blake and Ancient Sculpture," in *Blake in His Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 170–97.

on display were immediately apparent, and works which once formed the paragon of excellence were now appraised as copies and imitations. Only a minority of the ancient sculptures most admired in the eighteenth century—the Laocoön, the Borghese Warrior, the Belvedere Torso—seemed to display the quality of execution exemplified in the Parthenon sculptures.

Even before the arrival of the Parthenon sculptures, a number of mythographers put forward the idea that the myriad mythological systems could be traced back to the religion of the Hebrews. Blake certainly encountered this idea when he engraved illustrations for Jacob Bryant's *New System, or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (first published in 1774) as an apprentice under James Basire, who specialised in antiquarian engraving. According to Bryant, as religion degenerated, the monotheistic Hebraic God divided into the many gods of polytheistic pantheons (or, in the case of Egyptian mythology, the various personified attributes and emanations, or 'derivatives,' of a single Deity).[486] Attempting to overturn the Greek myth of self-origination, Bryant insisted that despite Greek attempts to find local etymological sources for various mythical and geographical names, in reality much of their mythology was derived from other civilisations. Bryant's precursors included Christian Euhemerists such as Edward Stillingfleet, who had attempted to unmask pagan deities as corrupted memories of historical personages from Old Testament history in his *Origines sacrae* (1662). Similarly, the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth had argued in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) that polytheism arose from the tendency to personify the names and attributes of a monotheistic God, as well as features of the natural world, into separate deities. There was thus a rich strand of scholarship attempting to trace the roots of heathen idolatry to the one true faith

[486] Bryant, *New System*, 1.306.

of Adam and Noah.[487] Blake clearly bears the influence of this mythographic tradition when he writes, in his first illuminated book *All Religions Are One* (1788) that '[t]he Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy' (E1).

Blake's narrative of cultural and spiritual degeneration, however, also allowed for the perennial possibility of regeneration. If the 'Jewish & Christian Testaments,' as 'the Great Code of Art' (E274), are themselves 'An original derivation from the Poetic Genius' (E1), then perhaps all art potentially has this paradoxical character of being both a product and renewed source of eternal inspiration. This concept of originality allows Blake to recuperate the act of copying as long as the style one clothes it in is one's own. No person with imagination can copy something without making it his or her own in the act of execution. The forms of art may be eternal, but as Blake writes in a 1799 letter to Reverend Trusler, 'I find more & more that my Style of Designing is a Species by itself' (E701). As he continues, he employs yet another paradox to describe the complicated relationship between originality and derivation, writing that being 'compelld by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led' he finds it 'out of my power' to 'slavishly' follows 'the track of another.' Ultimately, his work is not to start a new school or be an isolated eccentric, however: 'if I were to act otherwise it would not fulfill the purpose for which alone I live. which is in conjunction with such men as my friend Cumberland to renew the lost Art of the Greeks' (E701). As Sarah Haggarty writes, inspiration for Blake 'seems not to arrive as an idea that is subsequently worked, or "smoothd" over, by the same or different hands,' for each artist has unmediated access to vision.[488] At the same time, if each act

[487] See Colin Kidd, *The World of Mr Casaubon: Britain's Wars of Mythography, 1700-1870* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016), 29–78.
[488] Sarah Haggarty, *Blake's Gifts: Poetry and the Politics of Exchange* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 113.

of mediation also bears within it the trace of the original vision which inspired it, then perhaps this vision could be accessed once more in the imaginative acts of interpretation and reinterpretation.

In fact, since the objects he sees in his visions are often already artworks, the question of Blakean originality is incredibly vexed. According to his own accounts, Blake's visions are not always visions of mythical beings themselves so much as visions of inspired artworks depicting these beings. According to what Stephen Larrabee has called 'Blake's theory of the sculptural vision,' Blake considered the work of artistic representation, which was supposed to deal with ideal forms rather than naturalistic bodies, in sculptural terms.[489] Blake believed that, like the ancient sculptors who 'embodied and organized' the gods 'in solid marble,' so did he create 'representations of spiritual existences,' giving tangible form to immaterial realities (E541). Blake also takes Chaucer as his precursor, since he 'makes every one of his characters perfect in his kind; every one is an Antique Statue; the image of a class, not of an imperfect individual' (E536). But for Blake, vision itself had a sculptural quality. As Larrabee writes, Blake 'often "saw" in sculptures and outlines. His visions were sculpture-like; they appeared in "Grecian" forms. They were usually linear or relief-like, for his eye had been trained on prints and engravings.'[490] Blake's sculptural imagination even coloured the way he viewed living nature. While other writers marvelled at the breathing marble housed in museums, poetically eulogising stone warmed to life, Blakean vision conversely elevated creatures of flesh and blood into ideal plastic form:

[489] Stephen Addison Larrabee, *English Bards and Grecian Marbles; The Relationship Between Sculpture and Poetry Especially in the Romantic Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 110.
[490] Larrabee, 107.

> ‘The other evening,’ said Blake, in his usual quiet way, ‘taking a walk, I came to a meadow, and at the farther corner of it I saw a fold of lambs. Coming nearer, the ground blushed with flowers; and the wattled cote and its woolly tenants were of an exquisite pastoral beauty. But I looked again, and it proved to be no living flock, but beautiful sculpture.’[491]

In Blake’s theory of the imagination, sculpted forms were the true originals, and natural forms their temporal manifestations. As he writes in *Jerusalem*, ‘All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of/ Los’s Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works’ (E161). Blake inverts the priority between natural phenomena and artistic representation. Ideas, the germs of all things on earth, have the solidity of marble.

When Blake describes the visions inspiring his own works of art, he often describes these visions as visions of pre-existing works of art. For example, he writes in his *Descriptive Catalogue* that he was inspired to paint his portraits of Nelson and Pitt after being ‘taken in vision into the ancient republics, monarchies, and patriarchies of Asia’ where he saw ‘wondering originals,’ some ‘painted as pictures, and some carved as basso relievos, and some as groupes of statues, all containing mythological and recondite meaning, where more is meant than meets the eye’ (E531). These works prompted his wish to ‘emulate the grandeur of those seen in his vision’ (E531). Though dealing with contemporary events, these works serve to resurrect, through vision, the ‘stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier age’ (E530-1). His paintings of Nelson and Pitt are thus, in effect, mediated visions of mediated visions. Blake may claim to be an ‘Original Artist’ (E528), but even these startlingly original paintings are renewals of the “bright Sculptures” of ancient vision.

[491] Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 1.319–20.

In fact, according to Blake's genealogy of art, the true origins of human art could be traced to the artworks 'sculpted and painted on walls of Temples, Towers, Cities, Palaces, and erected in the highly cultivated states of Egypt, Moab, Edom, Aram, along the Rivers of Paradise' (E531). He traces the origins of art to the scenes depicted on the walls of the Temple of Solomon, the first great temple to stand in Jerusalem before its destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II. The scenes depicted on the walls of this temple were inspired by vision, specifically Ezekiel's vision of divine cherubim on the banks of the river Chebar. This vision inspired King Solomon to decorate the Lord's temple with 'two cherubims of olive tree' overlaid with gold, and to embellish the walls with 'carved figures of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without.'[492] According to Blake's own genealogy of art, the various forms of ancient art are thus imitations and copies of the 'wonderful originals' of Ezekiel's vision depicted on the walls of Solomon's Temple; moreover, original vision can be resurrected through a discerning engagement with the degenerated derivations from these wonderful originals.

But Blake's *Laocoön* plate not only attempts to produce a corrected history of the *Laocoön* group: it also sets out the relationship between the engraving of the real artefact and its layered interpretive history in graphical terms. Though Winckelmann's highly allusive text evinces how any engagement with famous antique sculptures is already, as Platt writes, 'enmeshed in a discursive web' of ancient and modern references to these pieces and their subjects, neither he nor Goethe makes explicit acknowledgement of the dense historical layers language brings to a sculpture.[493] Embedding it within a palimpsestic network of Gothic

[492] 1 Kings 6:23; 1 Kings 6:29.
[493] Platt, "Re-Membering the Belvedere Torso," 60.

lettering and Greek and Hebrew text, Blake places the art object back into the labyrinthine archeological layers of its receptive history, a history which is decidedly textual as the reader is referred to Plato, Virgil, and the Scriptures.

Blake's *Laocoön* shows a clear hierarchy between word and image, as the text supplying contextual information forms an external wrapping supplementary to the concrete image at the heart of the plate. The sculpture group has a strong presence: while the engravings for Ree's *Cyclopaedia* are lightly outlined using a stipple technique, Blake's later decision to engrave the *Laocoön* in a heavy linear cross-hatching style emphasises the marble solidity of the ancient sculpture and removes any illusion of floating levity and ideal form. Engraved with its podium included, the *Laocoön's* ontology as a crafted object is placed centre-stage. The text, however, is dizzying in its mobility. The aphoristic statements are haphazardly broken, bent, and contorted to conform to the outline of the sculptural group or fill the plate's marginal space – the reader must turn the plate or their head in various directions in order to read the lines up, down, and across the plate. Certain lines seem fragmentary: for instance, though the lack of initial capitalisation suggests that the second line continues the first as a full sentence, there seems to be no logical connection between the line 'Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only (Read Matthew CX. 9 & 10 v)' and the line following it: 'by pretences to the Two Impossibilities Chastity & Abstinence Gods of the Heathen.' It is difficult to tell where one aphorism ends and another begins, and impossible to determine any logical order in which to read them.[494] Moreover, this mass of aphorisms displays a bewildering

[494] On the subject of linearity in Blake's *Laocoön*, see Julia Wright, "The Medium, the Message and the Line in William Blake's Laocoon," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 33, no. 2 (2000): 101–24 and Rosamund A. Paice, "Encyclopaedic Resistance: Blake, Rees's Cyclopædia, and the Laocoön Separate Plate," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Autumn 2003): 44–62.

proliferation of equivalences. Many of the aphorisms follow a pattern of 'x is y.' So, linking up sets of aphorisms, we find that 'The Eternal Body of Man' is 'The Imagination,' which is 'God himself,' which is 'The Divine Body,' which is 'Jesus,' which is us as 'his members,' all of which 'Manifests itself in his Works of Art' which is 'the Tree of Life,' which is 'Christianity.' Christianity conversely is not 'Money,' which is 'the lifes blood of Poor Families,' 'Caesar,' 'Empire,' 'Natural Religion,' 'The Great Satan or Reason,' or 'the Root of Good & Evil.' No particular word is chosen as an anchor for the rest. However, while the central male figure in the Laocoön group is variously named as 'The Angel of the Divine Presence' in English and 'Angel of Jehovah' in Hebrew, as well as the Greek for 'Serpent-holder' (*Ophiuchus* is the name of the constellation depicting a man grasping a monstrous serpent), the image underneath these labels retains its own sense of stability, representing the permanence of vision in spite of the changing circumstances of its historically-contingent interpretations, including Blake's own.

Joseph of Arimathea and the Eternal Image

Ultimately, the *Laocoön* plate is very self-consciously about art itself, and implicitly critiques trends in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century art criticism towards the erasure of the artefactual and hence historical contingencies of artworks and their receptive afterlives. What Blake's *Laocoön* does is to distinguish the art object from the layers of interpretive text which create a literal aura around the work, highlighting the difference between the history of the image and the history of its reception. Blake's *Laocoön* print, however, remains an anomaly amongst his corpus, as his usual *modus operandi* is to organically incorporate classical poses into his own designs. A more representative treatment of classical forms appears in a loose sketch he made of the same group (figure 23). Executed mostly in pencil, this light sketch depicts the father and his two sons struggling against deadly serpents. However, there is no

podium in sight. The figures are dressing in flowing robes, and their dynamic poses recall but do not replicate the Greek original. The Trojan priest becomes a Blakean bearded patriarch. The pathetic scene is translated into Blake's mythic code, and the figures, delivered from their artefactual status, take on a rudimentary life of their own.

As much as neoclassical critics admired the ancients, there was no consensus as to how the artist was to cultivate his or her own originality while learning from them. As Jonah Siegel writes, '[t]hat a growing emphasis on originality was destined to conflict with artistic practices based on orchestrating images from a more perfect classical past is a theme that has already been well developed by critics and historians.'[495] Winckelmann had famously written that the 'only way for us to become great, and, if indeed it is possible, inimitable, is through the imitation of the ancients,' advocating not for the direct imitation of classical forms, but rather for emulating the spirit of originality with which these forms are imbued.[496] Meanwhile, rejecting the opinion that artistic ability was innate, not taught, Reynolds emphasized the importance of copying in one's artistic education. Artists needed to build a store of materials gathered from the old masters before they could produce their own creations. Even accomplished artists needed to continue absorbing external influences, for '[t]he Mind is but a barren soil; is a soil soon exhausted, and will produce no crop, or only one, unless it be continually fertilized and enriched with foreign matter.'[497]

Artists, writes Reynolds, must be receptive to foreign material. For Reynolds, the aim of learning through copying was to form one's own mind through assimilation. Exchanging the

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[495] Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11.
[496] *Winckelmann on Art, Architecture, and Archaeology*, 32.
[497] Reynolds, *Discourses*, 158.

vegetable metaphor for an animal one, he likens the artist's mind to a receptive womb: 'When we have had continually before us the great works of Art to impregnate our minds with kindred ideas; we are then, and not till then, fit to produce something of the same species.'[498] It seems that Blake could not disagree more. In his marginal notes to Reynold's *Discourses*, he writes that 'Reynolds Thinks that Man Learns all that he Knows I say on the Contrary that Man Brings All that he has or Can have into the World with him' (E656). As he continues, '[t]he Mind that could have produced this Sentence must have been Pitiful a Pitiable Imbecillity. I always thought that the Human Mind was the most Prolific of All Things & Inexhaustible' (E656). Blake then transforms Reynold's metaphor of the mind-as-field to advance a preformationist account of the imagination. The artist's mind was not a piece of barren soil. Instead, it was already furnished with innate ideas, ideas which germinated and blossomed in due course. 'Man,' he writes, 'is Born like a Garden ready Planted & Sown' (E656). Conversely, 'This World is too poor to produce one Seed' (E656).

Later in his marginal notes, however, Blake contradicts himself. 'No one,' he opines, 'can ever Design till he has learnd the Language of Art by making many Finishd Copies both of Nature & Art & of whatever comes in his way from Earliest Childhood' (E645). And in fact, as the remainder of chapter will show, Blake himself carried out the kind of copying permitted by Reynolds. Reynolds considered specific antique objects to be the 'fountain-head' of art, and so '[a]ll the inventions and thoughts of the Antients, whether conveyed to us in statues, bas-reliefs, intaglios, cameos, or coins, are to be sought after and carefully studied.'[499] And though Reynolds was primarily advocating for the study of manner and style, depending on the way in

[498] Reynolds, 158.
[499] Reynolds, 166.

which it was executed he did also allow for the borrowing of particular figures or poses and 'transplanting' them into one's own work:

> he who borrows from an antient, or even from a modern artist not his contemporary, and so accommodates it to his own work, that is makes a part of it, with no seam or joining appearing, can hardly be charged with plagiarism: poets practice this kind of borrowing without reserve. But an artist should not be contented with this only; he should enter into a competition with his original, and endeavor to improve what he is appropriating to his own work. Such imitation is so far from having any thing in it of the servility of plagiarism, that it is a perpetual exercise of the mind, a continual invention.[500]

Blake himself carried out such "seamless" borrowings, but he seemed to manage to justify such practices by considering ancient works not as originals themselves but as derivations from true original vision to which the modern artist had immediate access.

By saying that the mind is born like a garden ready planted, Blake is not saying that the mind originates its ideas. The mind does not produce these seeds; they were originally planted within it by a divine hand. Consequently, these ideas are not original to the artist. A seed produces an individual plant, but this individual plant is only an expression of an ideal type. Similarly, the artist might produce a design, but this design is ultimately, whether the artist realises it or not, only a variation of an originary archetype. Blake describes this organicist inflection of a Platonic approach to form in his description of *A Vision of the Last Judgement*. The seminal image is more permanent than individual artworks, just as the species is more permanent than the individual organism:

> The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is considerd as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies. but renews by its seed. just [*as*] <so>the Imaginative

[500] Reynolds, 167.

> Image returns [*according to*] <by>the seed of Contemplative Thought the Writings of the Prophets illustrate these conceptions of the Visionary Fancy by their various sublime & Divine Images as seen in the Worlds of Vision.(E555)

Hence, though ideas originate in the mind, no idea is truly original, just as no single oak or lettuce is a novel creation. Just as the Eternal Images of the Oak and the Lettuce renew themselves generation after generation, so do the Eternal Images of the Mind renew themselves in succeeding artistic and literary productions. Copying from art, one can gain mediated access to Vision.

Working often from reproductions themselves at a second or third remove from the original, Blake himself reworked figures from his 'stores of classic imagery' into his own art with a kind of visual allusiveness.[501] For instance, echoes of the Belvedere Torso (figure 24) appear in the figure standing on the podium on plate 8 of *Milton* (figure 25). The figure on plate 25 of *Jerusalem* (figure 26) similarly resembles the Torso, while the figure of Cambel on plate 81 of *Jerusalem* (figure 27) resembles the Medici Venus.[502] Meanwhile, the figure of Giant Despair in Blake's illustrations of *Pilgrim's Progress* seems to take the form of the Farnese Hercules.[503] This is in line with practices of Blake's artistic heroes; as Reynolds writes, Raphael's 'materials are generally borrowed, though the noble structure is his own.'[504] Michelangelo similarly incorporated into his artworks figures taken from the stores of art history. For instance, basing his design for the body of St. Bartolomew in *The Last Judgement* (1536–1541) on the figure of the Belvedere Torso, Michelangelo demonstrates one art historian's assertion that no practice 'was more central to the Renaissance tradition than that of

[501] Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 1.303.
[502] As noted in Paley, "Wonderful Originals," 171.
[503] As noted in Larrabee, *English Bards and Grecian Marbles*, 100.
[504] Reynolds, *Discourses*, 143.

copying works of art.'[505] These practices had theoretical backing: following Vasari, *inventio*, the orderly composition of artistic forms, was conventionally elevated in artistic discourse, and this practice was considered as the practice of moulding and rearranging existing forms to create new ones. Furthermore, in its history, reproductive printmaking in fact often took an interpretive stance, rearranging figures and substituting new backgrounds for old ones. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, instead of providing blank backgrounds for sculpted figures, many engravers situated their figures not on podiums but in more naturalistic environments.[506] Statues were freely translated across media, their materiality as objects of stone deemphasised as they were depicted as if creatures of flesh and blood. Although reproductive engraving had become more documentative in Blake's lifetime, Blake often took an interpretive stance himself.

Perhaps the most intriguing example of this practice is an engraving titled *Joseph Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion*. Blake first engraved this subject in 1773, when he was a youth of sixteen in the second year of his apprentice to Basire. The male figure was based on a figure from Michelangelo's *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (1549), which he could have known from an engraving by Nicholas Beatrizet (figure 28), though Blake identifies his immediate source as a 'drawing by Salviati' (E671).[507] Beatrizet had extracted the soldier with folded arms from the crowded fresco housed in the Paoline Chapel and engraved it as a figure in isolation. Blake placed this figure in a rocky British seascape of his own invention, identifying the figure as the disciple of Christ who, as legend has it, brought the Holy Grail to England. Around 1810,

[505] Susan Lambert, *The Image Multiplied: Five Centuries of Printed Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings* (London: Trefoil Publications, 1987), 115.
[506] Sarah Cree, "Translating Stone into Paper: Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Prints After Antique Sculpture," in *Paper Museums: The Reproductive Print in Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. By Elizabeth Rodini and Rebecca Zorach (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 75–101.
[507] Jenijoy La Belle, "Blake's Visions and Re-Visions of Michelangelo," in *Blake in His Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 13–22.

he reengraved the subject, adding an inscription explaining that 'This is One of the Gothic Artists who Built the Cathedrals in what we call the Dark Ages Wandering about in sheep skins & goat skins of whom the World was not worthy such were the Christians in all Ages.' According to legend, Joseph of Arimathea was a craftsman who had buried Christ in a tomb he had hewn out of rock, and after his arrival in England he supposedly built the first church in Glastonbury. Arimathea thus represents the artist's role in the resurrection and transmission of truth in a hostile environment.

Blake's *Joseph of Arimathea* is a work about history; as David Bindman writes, 'Joseph of Arimathea is a link, though a legendary one, between the Bible story and the history of England, and the two were to be irrevocably intertwined in Blake's work.'[508] Blake's title draws parallels between Joseph of Arimathea and the Old Testament prophets who 'wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and *in* mountains, and *in* dens and caves of the earth' (Hebrews 11:37-38). But as Dena Bain Taylor has noted, the brooding, melancholy figure in Blake's engraving also bears resemblance, with his hooded cloak and bare feet, to depictions of ancient druids in eighteenth-century antiquarian studies.[509] Antiquarians such as William Stukeley, author of *Stonehenge, A Temple restored to the British Druids* (1740), which Blake probably knew, believed that ancient British religion had hidden roots in the original patriarchal religion of the Hebrews. The druids themselves were descendants of the family of Gomer, son of Japhet, who was son of Noah, the first Druid. However, over time, this original religion

[508] Bindman, *Blake as an Artist*, 15.
[509] Dena Bain Taylor, "The Visual Context of 'Joseph of Arimathea Among The Rocks of Albion'," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (Autumn 1986): 47–48.

degenerated into cruelty and superstition. As Henry Rowland writes in *Mona Antiqua Restaurata* (1723):

> so near in descent to the fountains of true religion and worship as to have one of Noah's sons for grandsire or great-grandsire, and may be well imagined to have carried and conveyed here some of the rites and usages of that true religion, pure and untainted in their first propagating of them: though I must confess they soon after became, as well here as in other countries, abominably corrupted, and perverted into the grossest heathenish fictions and barbarities.[510]

Thus Blake's Arimathea, standing on the barren rocks of England, is, as Taylor argues, a representative of the difficult task of regenerating true spirituality in a land which has lost its way. If, as Siegel writes, the subject of Blake's engraving seems to 'telescope back in time,' Blake 'draws attention to the fact that, much like the figure at its center, the work itself has a layered identity and history.'[511] Taking an isolated figure from an original composition and placing it within a new setting, Blake's 1810 engraving is a re-engraving of his 1773 attempt to copy Beatrizet's engraving of a drawing based on Michelangelo's original fresco. What results is a work deeply engaged with the tension between origination and continuity as Blake's *Joseph of Arimathea*, like its subject, travels back and forth between different times and contexts. Imaginatively done, the practice of copying can be a way to engage with works of the past to regenerate timeless sources of originality.

What this chapter has sought to underline is how Blake's organicist language of art did not develop in isolation. As this thesis has consistently attempted to demonstrate, significantly different versions of organicism were evolving during Blake's lifetime. In his project is to

[510] Henry Rowlands, *Mona Antiqua Restaurata: An Archaeological Discourse on the Antiquities, Natural and Historical, of the Isle of Anglesey The Ancient Seat of the British Druids* […], 2nd edn (London, 1766), 45-46.
[511] Siegel, *Desire and Excess*, 77.

regenerate the art of the ancients, Blake employs a preformationist language of art which de-emphasises individual genius and prioritises divine vision as the source of art. In doing so he yokes images of artifice to images of the organic: Los's hall of marble is like a perennial store of visionary seeds waiting to be sown and resown time and again. However, critics at the heart of the neoclassical movement had already invoked images of vital flesh and native growth in descriptions of stone artefacts to navigate anxieties of fragmentation and idealise cultural originality. Responding to the works of Winckelmann and Reynolds, Blake very consciously adapts the organicist language of neoclassicism to subvert it from within. Ironically, attempting to restore iconic images from antique history to what he thought were their original contexts, Blake ends up becoming one of the most original artists of his generation.

Coda: Plasticity, Post-Humanism, and Blake's Human Form

In 1486, Pico della Mirandola composes his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. In what has been identified as a seminal text of Renaissance humanism, the Italian philosopher adulates the human capacity of self-transformation through the exercise of free will. Retelling Genesis, Pico writes that Adam was created after every place was filled in the universal scheme of forms: by the time God came to give form to human identity, 'there was nothing among His archetypes from which He could mould a new progeny.'[512] God therefore made Adam:

> neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may, as the free and extraordinary shaper of yourself, fashion yourself in whatever form you prefer. It will be in your power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Alternatively, you shall have the power, in accordance with the judgement of your soul, to be reborn [*regenerari*] into the higher orders, those that are divine.[513]

Blake shares Pico's Neoplatonic worldview. He agrees that humanity has the capacity to rise to the heights of divinity or fall into vegetative life. Unlike the Renaissance scholar, however, Blake is far less inspired by the protean capacities of human freedom. He refuses to celebrate the infinite plasticity of humanity, to laud its capacities for self-making. While Pico chooses to 'wonder at this chameleon of ours,' Blake is far more sceptical of the humanist dream of self-determination.[514]

Blake understands that plasticity makes humanity vulnerable. Our capacity to be moulded makes us susceptible to deformation from within and without. Our biological nature sees bends of self-interest woven into our very frames, unconsciously directing our behaviour from within. From without, social forces organise our minds and bodies through coercion and

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[512] *Pico Della Mirandola: Oration on the Dignity of Man: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Francesco Borghesi, Michael Papio, and Massimo Riva (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 115.
[513] Pico, 117.
[514] Pico, 123.

discipline. Highly impressionable, the plastic body is subject to inscription, interwoven with significative systems which oppress the human form. Moreover, internal and external agents of deformation are intimately related: it is the egoistic interests of bodies in power which drive the creation of social structures to subordinate the interests of others to their own. This is the underlying significance of Blake's epigenesis imagery: not having full control over our organic nature, we are compromised by our own plasticity.

Acutely aware of how people become enmeshed in networks of agency and influence, Blake anticipates post-humanist concerns over individual autonomy. Long before Foucault or Michel de Certeau became interested in how human beings are organised and disciplined into subjects, embedded in nexuses of bio-power and regimes of knowledge, Blake was already sceptical of the humanist optimism concerning our unique ability to shape ourselves as conscious, autonomous actors. Even before the arrival of posthumanism, a 'historical movement in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore,' Blake was cognisant of the ways in which human agency is distributed beyond individual intention.[515]

That said, Blake nonetheless differs significantly in perspective from contemporary post-humanist thinkers. Whereas post-humanism dissolves human agency, Blake offers a radical reinterpretation of humanism to emphasise the importance of remaining true to oneself while under physical and mental pressure. Post-humanism critiques the "human" as a category, finding ways in which imaginary demarcation between the human and the nonhuman fails. It questions the dualistic division between mind and body, between subject and object. Blake,

[515] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.

however, finds important uses for dualism, invoking the existence of a body which is disentangled from the distorting effects of internal desire and external authority. He imagines the permanence of a spiritual body which is not bound by nature or culture, biology or history. At the beginning of *The Four Zoas*, Blake cites Ephesians 6:12 ('For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'). Idealising the spiritual body, Blake is not against the physical body per se, but rather the physical body's complicities with the machinations of power. Flesh and blood make us open to the corruptive influence of selfish want and egoistic desire; they also provides social institutions with a naturalistic discourse with which to justify their own methods of manipulation.

Blake's ideal of a purer humanity pre-existent to the trappings of power and civilisation are of his time. *Humanism* as a concept has a complicated genealogy. Taken up by cultural historians like Georg Voigt and Jacob Burckhardt to describe the rebirth of the study of Greco-Roman language and literature in fifteenth-century Italy, the idea of Renaissance humanism, as Tony Davies writes, is 'a nineteenth-century anachronism' that was influenced by the hellenocentric, nationalistic concerns of German romanticism.[516] For these historians, 'the historical role of Renaissance humanism' was 'in instituting a new and distinctly modern notion of human individuality, a notion projected back onto the writings of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *umanisti*, but demonstrably shaped by and inseparable from nineteenth-century conditions and concerns.'[517] Davies argues that the conception of *Man* in the universal, essentialist abstract in fact emerges out of the revolutionary discourse of inalienable human

[516] Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[517] Davies, 18.

rights. It is Rousseau's idea that 'Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains,' which 'enfolds a distinction between an abstract 'Man' (defined by an essential freedom) and actual 'men' caught up in the toils of historical servitude.'[518]

However, Blake does differ from the secular, rationalist thinkers who promoted the liberation of humanity from the chains of church and state. While many Enlightenment thinkers located the source of human dignity in our unique status as rational beings, Blake focuses on the glory of the human as a spiritual being. In other words, Blake radically affirms a human-centric attitude by producing his own brand of Christian humanism. Insisting on the concept of the human, Blake gestures towards the possibility of telling apart our spiritual essence from our social conditioning, of distinguishing transcendental ontology from temporal ontogeny.

Furthermore, Blake insists on the inter-subjective component of humanity: to be human is to be recognised as human. Amidst a chaos of intentional flow and material flux, we must seek to meet each other face to face, to affirm the human form as it travels through a world of change. From the post-humanist perspective, consciousness, conceptually separated from the body, is at risk of becoming an island.[519] Blake's divine humanism, however, assumes that we are all connected in spirit, and that it is the body, with its own self-centred drives towards self-proliferation, which separates us from each other. It also assumes that our identity can never be wholly self-organised. Rather, we derive our identity from participation in divine humanity more broadly.

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[518] Davies, 25.
[519] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 17.

For Blake, to heal the damage caused by human exceptionalism is not to do away with the concept of the human, but rather to expand it such that we can see fellow humans in unexpected places. It is thus that we can capitalise on our innate ability to personify and animate the world, to empathise and connect with other subjects. As Blake writes in an annotation to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*:

> Think of a white cloud. as being holy you cannot love it but think of a holy man within the cloud love springs up in your thought. for to think of holiness distinct from man is impossible to the affections. (E603)

This radical reinterpretation of the human – not as an individual of the human species but rather as anything in which we recognise subjectivity – allows Blake to form a spiritually inflected humanism which sees all of creation as originally and potentially human, as originally and potentially divine.

What Blake asks us to value is not human plasticity but rather human elasticity. What Blake asks us to value is not totipotency or polymorphousness but a certain confidence in our own identity. He asks us to value the capacity within us to resist deformation, to recover from manipulation, to maintain fidelity to form without falling into fixity. This is what Blake's symbolic use of preformationist imagery illustrates: it is our continual ability to return to our unfallen state, our ability to be regenerated time and again, which opens the door to our perennial salvation. And while we must take Blake's Christian view into account when analysing his understanding of humanity's relationship with its own embodied nature, we do not need to be Christians to appreciate the liberative yet affirmative potential of an ethics, a poetics, an aesthetics of regeneration.

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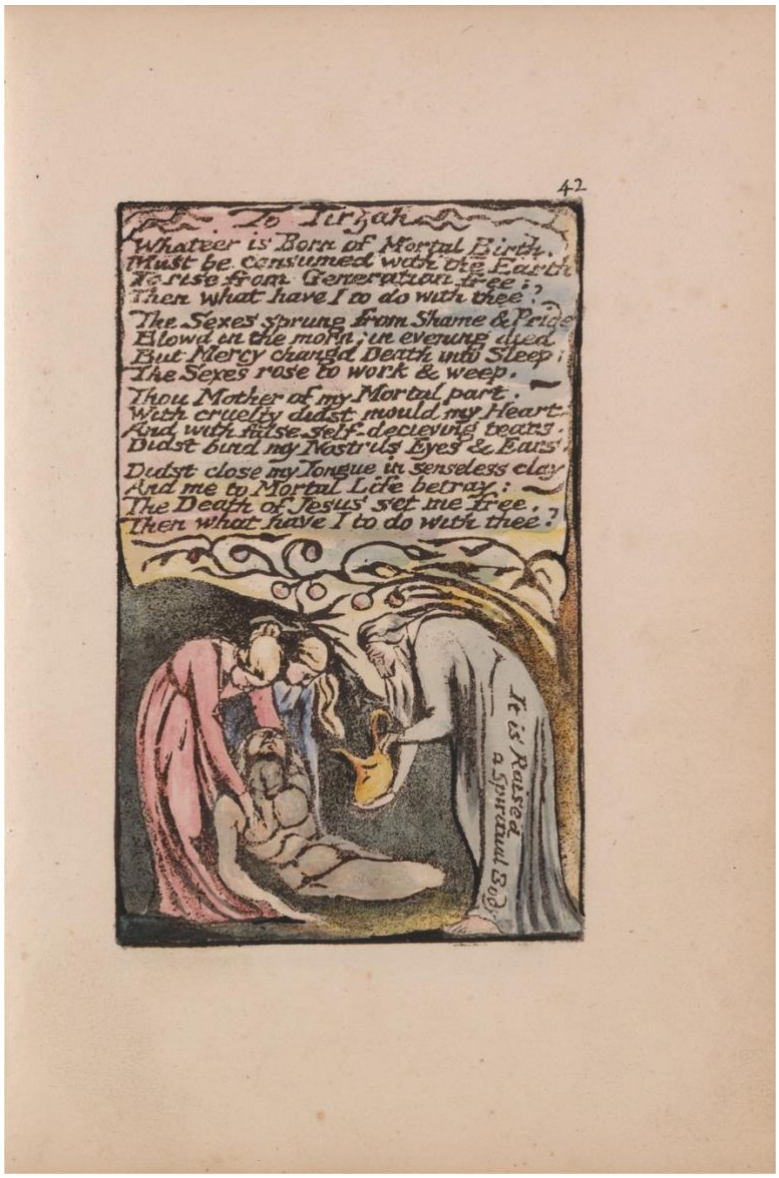
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Appendix: Figures



Photographic reproduction originally obtained from Blake Archive website. Photographic reproduction here is sourced from the Yale Center for British Art website: https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:3764 (public domain).

Figure 1) William Blake, 'To Tirzah,' *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Copy L (plate 42), 11.4 x 7.2 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, 1795, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/songsie.l?descId=songsie.l.illbk.42

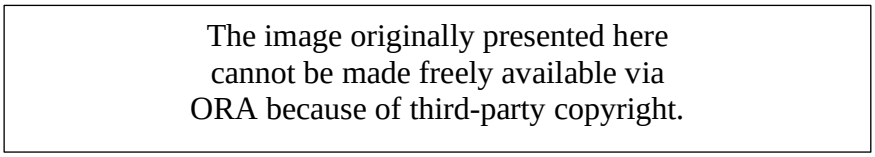


Figure 2) Luigi Schiavonetti after William Blake, *The Reunion of the Soul & the Body*, from *The Grave*, 26.7 x 17.5 cm, etching and engraving, 1808, collection of Robert N. Essick. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/bb435.1?descId=bb435.1.comdes.13



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Figure 3) William Blake, *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*, Copy B (plate 1), 9.4 x 6.3 cm, etching and engraving, c. 1818, British Museum. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/gates-sexes.b?descId=gates-sexes.b.illbk.01



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Figure 4) William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, Copy E (plate 2), 22.5 x 16.2 cm, relief etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.e?descId=jerusalem.e.illbk.02



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Figure 5) William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, Copy E (plate 19), 22.5 x 16.3 cm, c. 1821, relief etching with hand colouring, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.e?descId=jerusalem.e.illbk.19



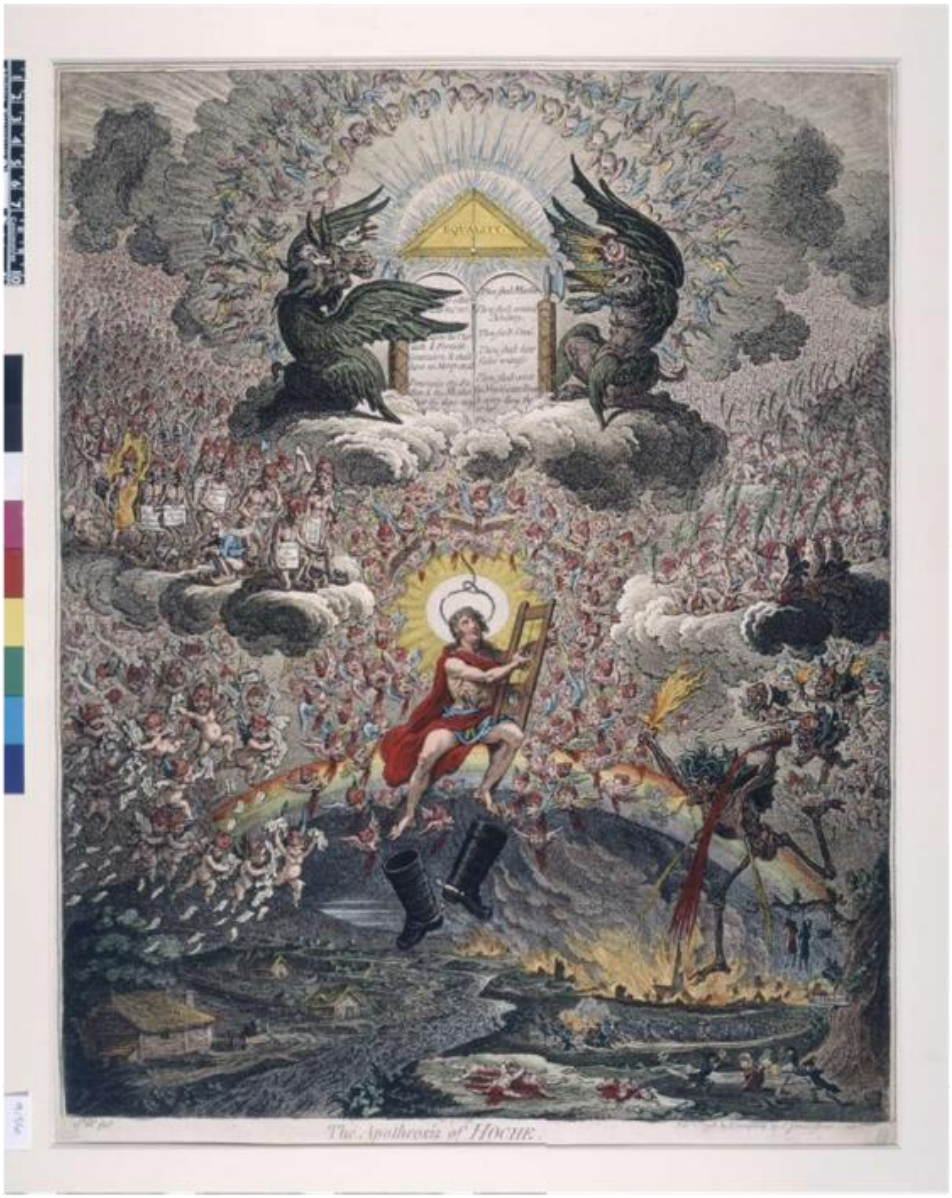
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Figure 6) William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, Copy E (plate 37, Erdman 33), 22.6 x 16.3 cm, relief etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.e?descId=jerusalem.e.illbk.37



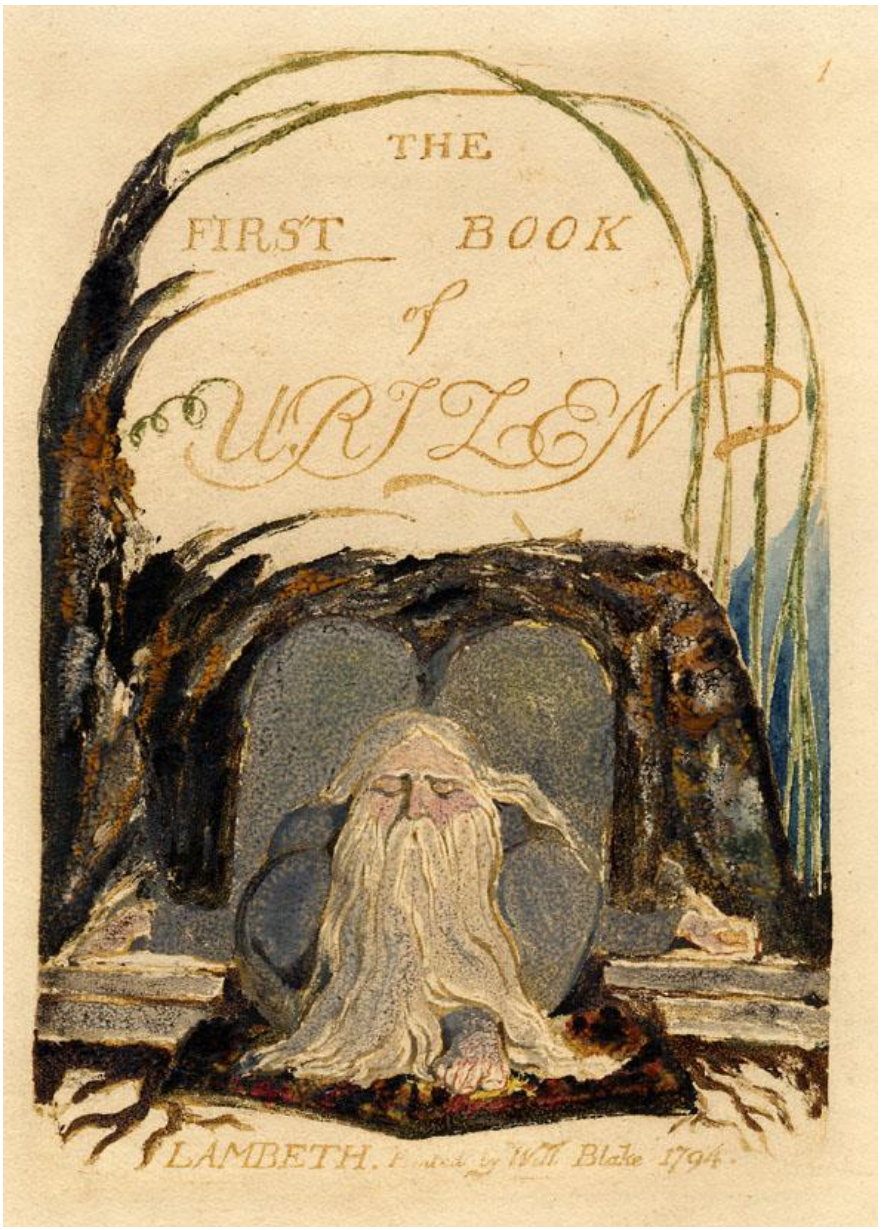
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Figure 7) Louis-Jean Allais, *La Constitution republicaine, semblable aux tables de Moyse, sort du sein de la Montagne au milieu de la foudre,* engraved for the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility, 13 x 20 cm, etching, 10 August 1793, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection de Vinck 6170. https://exhibits.stanford.edu/frenchrevolution/catalog/dz797bp5343



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Figure 8) James Gillray, *The Apotheosis of Hoche*, 50 x 38.7 cm, etching, aquatint, hand-coloured, 1798, British Museum. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1851-0901-953



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Figure 9) William Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D (plate 1), 14.9 x 10.3 cm, relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring, 1794, British Museum. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/urizen.d?descId=urizen.d.illbk.01

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Figure 10) Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, 56 x 71 cm, oil on panel, c. 1789, Musée Carnavalet - Histoire de Paris. https://www.carnavalet.paris.fr/collections/declaration-des-droits-de-lhomme-et-du-citoyen



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Figure 11) William Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D (plate 15), 1794, relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring, 14.8 x 9.1 cm, British Museum. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/urizen.d?descId=urizen.d.illbk.15



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Figure 12) William Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*, Copy D (plate 25), 1794, relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring, 15.5 x 10.4 cm, British Museum.
http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/urizen.d?descId=urizen.d.illbk.25

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Figure 13) William Blake, *Milton* Copy B (plate 21), 16 x 11.1 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Huntington Library.
http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/milton.b?descId=milton.b.illbk.21

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Figure 14) William Blake, *Milton* Copy B (plate 13), 16 x 11.1 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Huntington Library.
http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/milton.b?descId=milton.b.illbk.13



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Figure 15) Luigi Schiavonetti after William Blake, *Christ Descending into the Grave*, 27.7 x 20.2mm, etching, 1813, Royal Academy of Arts. https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/christ-descending-into-the-grave



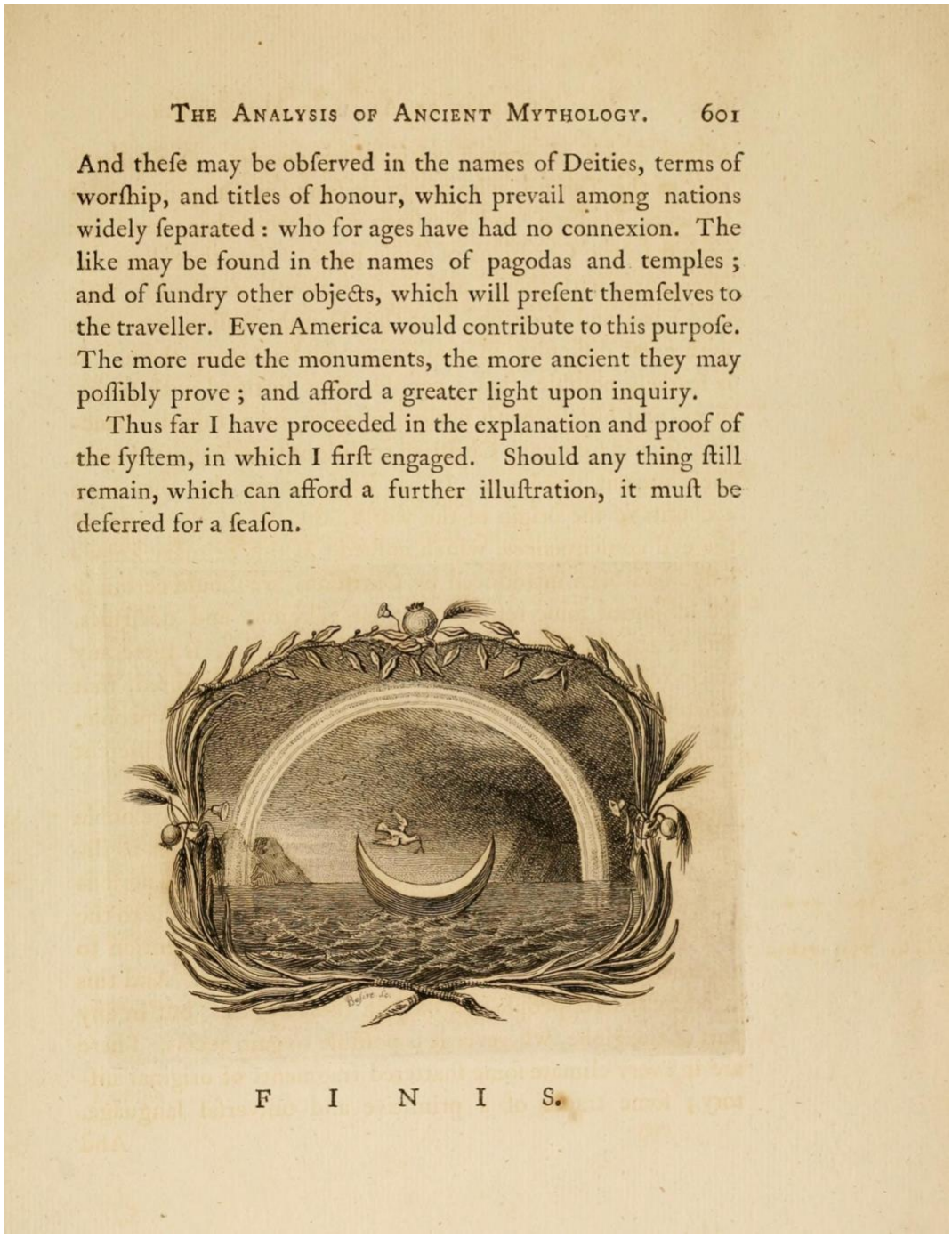
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Figure 16) William Blake, *Milton*, Copy A (plate 29), 16 x 11.2 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, c. 1811, British Museum.
http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/milton.a?descId=milton.a.illbk.29



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Figure 17) William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, Copy E (plate 76), 22.4 x 16.3 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.e?descId=jerusalem.e.illbk.76



THE ANALYSIS OF ANCIENT MYTHOLOGY. 601

And theſe may be obſerved in the names of Deities, terms of worſhip, and titles of honour, which prevail among nations widely ſeparated: who for ages have had no connexion. The like may be found in the names of pagodas and temples; and of ſundry other objects, which will preſent themſelves to the traveller. Even America would contribute to this purpoſe. The more rude the monuments, the more ancient they may poſſibly prove; and afford a greater light upon inquiry.

Thus far I have proceeded in the explanation and proof of the ſyſtem, in which I firſt engaged. Should any thing ſtill remain, which can afford a further illuſtration, it muſt be deferred for a ſeaſon.

FINIS.

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Figure 18) Signed by James Basire, possibly engraved by William Blake, illustration of the Moony Ark, in volume 3 of Jacob Bryant's *A New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (London, 1776). Page scan taken from digitised copy of the book accessed through Hathi Trust.
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433003048133&view=1up&seq=9&skin=2021

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Figure 19) William Blake, *On Homers Poetry*, Copy F, 13 x 10.6 cm, relief etching, c. 1822, Morgan Library and Museum.
http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/homer.f?descId=homer.f.illbk.01

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Figure 20) William Blake, *Laocoön*, 26.6 x 21.6 cm intaglio etching/engraving with drypoint lettering and hand colouring, c. 1826-27, Collection of Robert N. Essick, Altadena, California. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/laocoon.b?descId=laocoon.b.illbk.01



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Figure 21) William Blake, *Joseph of Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion*, 25.5 x 13.9 cm, engraving and etching, with grey wash, first state 1773, reworked state c. 1810-20, British Museum. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1864-0611-3



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Figure 22) William Blake, 'Sculpture,' plate 3 (second sequence), in Abraham Rees, *The Cyclopædia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, 39 vols (London, 1820), vol 4 (plates). Page scan taken from digitised copy of the book accessed through Hathi Trust.
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015025939466&view=1up&seq=9&skin=2021

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Figure 23) William Blake, *Laocoön*, 53.3 x 3.8 cm, drawing, chiefly in pencil, c.1818, Collection of Sir Geoffrey Keynes, image in Geoffrey Keynes, *Drawings of William Blake: 92 Pencil Studies* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), image 59, author's photograph.

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Figure 24) Francesco Faraone Aquila, *The Belvedere Torso*, 27.5 x 29.5 cm, book plate, 1704, engraving with etching, Royal Academy of Arts. https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/the-belvedere-torso



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Figure 25) William Blake, Milton, Copy A (plate 8), 16.8 x 11.3 cm, relief and white-line etching, hand coloured, c. 1811, British Museum. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/milton.a?descId=milton.a.illbk.08



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Figure 26) William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion* Copy E (plate 25), 22.2 x 16.3 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.e?descId=jerusalem.e.illbk.25



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Figure 27) William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion* Copy E (plate 81), 21.1 x 14.9 cm, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, c. 1821, Yale Center for British Art. http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/jerusalem.e?descId=jerusalem.e.illbk.81



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Figure 28) Nicholas Beatrizet, *Joseph of Arimathea*, after Michelangelo's Crucifixion fresco in the Cappella Paolina, Vatican, 34.4 x 18 cm, engraving, 1540-66, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/383229