

# Deformed, Dismembered, and Disembodied: Reinventing the Body Politic in William Blake

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## *Abstract*

This thesis examines William Blake's illuminated books from 1794–1820, suggesting that he reinvents the traditional body politic metaphor through disabled and deformed figures inspired by Norse myth. The body politic figures society within a metaphorical body to imply that diverse parts are united within the parameters of the nation. Blake's bodies are traditionally seen as moving towards Christian ideas of renewal, a 'perfect' form, but this thesis argues that this is not always the case in the illuminated books. Typical body metaphors are predicated on wholeness, in other words, an able-body politic, however Blake disassembles this model in the illuminated books to reveal a nation body that continues to be in contention with itself.

Throughout the eighteenth century, ideas of nation, identity, and 'Britishness' were topics of debate. Britain's collective anxiety over its identity was expressed within eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism, a literary and artistic movement interested in Old Norse culture and its influence on individual nations across the British Isles. Eighteenth-century scholars, poets, and artists such as Thomas Gray, Henry Fuseli, and James Macpherson, mediated an idea of ancient Scandinavia, recasting it as a land of wild, untamed liberty from which different British heritages could source cultural narratives. This thesis proposes that Northern antiquarianism provided Blake with the necessary language and imagery to critique formations of British identity at the turn of the century.

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하나님께 너무 감사하고 하나님 없이 나는 아무것도 아니에요.

예수 그리스도 안에서 아멘.

## Conventions

When discussing the *Poetic Edda* in the original, this thesis will refer to Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason's Íslensk fornrit edition of *Eddukvæði* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014) based on the Codex Regius or GKS 2365 4to (c.1270) and AM 748 I a 4to (c. 1300–25) manuscripts. When discussing the poem *Völuspá*, this thesis will draw from the *Konungsbók* manuscript; when referring to specific strophes that differ in the *Hauksbók* manuscript, this distinction will be clearly indicated.

Similarly, when referring to Snorri's *Edda* in the original, this thesis will refer to Anthony Faulkes' editions of the Prologue and *Gylfaginning* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2005), and *Skáldskaparmál* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1998). Snorri's *Edda* consists of a Prologue and three other sections known as *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal*.

Unless stated otherwise, modern translations of the Norse will be taken from the Carolyne Larrington translation of the *Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and the Anthony Faulkes translation of Snorri's *Edda* (London: Everyman, 1995). In discussions concerning specific eighteenth-century mediations of Snorri's *Edda*, translations will be taken from Thomas Percy's *Northern Antiquities* (1770); this will be clearly indicated.

Quotations taken from Norse texts will be presented in English translation within the body of the thesis. Unless pertinent to the argument, the original Norse will be given in a footnote; these quotations will not contribute towards the overall word count. I follow the orthography of the editions and scholarship cited regarding Norse spellings, e.g. q and ø rather than ö, however as my focus remains on eighteenth-century mediations of the Norse, I will use modern orthography for certain words and titles when discussing them in-text, e.g. Odin rather than Óðinn; *Völuspá* rather than *Vqluspá*.

## *Author Declaration*

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. The section on the *Edda* and *Poetic Edda* in ‘Introduction: Blake’s Forms of Deformity’ is published in an earlier version within “‘Hann var blindr’: The Function of Disability in the Aftermath of Ragnarøk,’ *Mirator* 20, no.2 (Spring 2021): 5–20. A part of Chapter One ‘Aberrant Bodies and Creation Narratives: Questioning Urizen’s Corporeality’ is published in ‘Deformed Bodies and Old Norse Origins in William Blake,’ *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 60, no.3 (Summer 2020): 529–549.

All sources are acknowledged as references.

# Introduction

## Blake's Forms of Deformity

One Central Form Composed of all other Forms being Granted it does not therefore follow that all other Forms are Deformity [...] All Forms are Perfect in the Poets Mind. but these are not Abstracted nor Compounded from Nature <but are from Imagination>

(E648. *Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*:  
[pg.60])<sup>1</sup>

For William Blake, deformity was a component of the human form envisioned by the creative, poetic genius. In his response to Sir Joshua Reynolds here, Blake disputed Reynolds' belief that 'the Ideal Beauty, is the great leading principle, by which works of genius are conducted,' and that from this central form 'every deviation is deformity.'<sup>2</sup> As an artist and engraver, the human form was central to his work. From 1772–82, Blake was apprenticed to the antiquarian engraver James Basire who introduced him to the medieval antiquities in Westminster Abbey, many of which he sketched as part of his training.<sup>3</sup> In 1779, Blake entered the Royal Academy where renowned doctor William Hunter had already been the Professor of Anatomy for ten years.<sup>4</sup> In the paintings, watercolours, engravings, and prints made throughout his career, the exaggerated portrayals of the human physique are recognisably 'Blakean' with their hyper-defined muscles and contorted postures reminiscent of the *écorché* statues used at the Academy.<sup>5</sup> Looking at his

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<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all Blake quotations in this thesis are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, Rev. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), henceforth abbreviated as E. The illuminated books will be cited by E-page, followed by plate and line number. For other works, an abbreviated title will be provided, with clear indicators to line or in-text page number.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua Reynolds, 'Discourse III, December 14, 1770,' in *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, Vol.1. London: Printed for T. Cadell. MDCCXCVII. [1797], 40.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Mapping Mythologies: Countercurrents in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 162.

<sup>4</sup> Roy Porter, 'William Hunter: a surgeon and a gentleman,' in *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-century Medical World*, ed. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the Royal Academy and Blake, see: Tristanne Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 25–72; D.W. Dörrebecker, 'Innovative Reproduction: Painters

art and poetry, it seems that for Blake, the human body was not just a physical form; it was a microcosm of the world and an embodiment of his own creative endeavours. In the illuminated books the human body is graphically and textually appraised, but the enigmatic relationship between these two elements belies any comfortable understanding of the body itself.

Interpretation is usually thrown on the active participation of the reader, who then has to make sense of the dissonances between text and design. The illuminated books remain provocatively open-ended as they continue to challenge how we, as readers, engage with text, art, and the limits of the human body.

This thesis is concerned with the human form and body metaphors in Blake's illuminated books produced between 1794 and 1820, starting with *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794) and finishing with *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (composed 1804 – c.1820). The difficulties of Blake's later poetry reveals a range of perspectives and sometimes contradictory conclusions. There has long been a tendency to fashion the plot and cast of these poems as a sort of totalised mythos based on a pre-formed system. My approach is more concerned with the way these materials are used and developed across their particular contexts. I will address the body in Blake, then, as it is presented—mercurial and continuously in flux—to survey his developing critique of the body politic metaphor at the turn of the century.

With this in mind, the contributions made to Blake Studies in this thesis are threefold. Firstly, I draw on Disability Studies to recast the Blakean body as one that inherently refutes and resists the vision of an 'ideal' or complete form. Although the body in the illuminated books is generally seen as moving towards Christian ideas of renewal, I suggest that the theoretical approach advocated by Disability Studies helps us to see how Blake in fact rejects this view. The body, it seems, is part of a never-ending flux; it cannot and does not move towards 'completion.' Secondly, the body in Blake is often a site of negotiation where questions of State identity are deliberated. The illuminated books describe a body politic, a metaphor that figures

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and Engravers at the Royal Academy of Arts,' in *Historicizing Blake*, ed. Steve Clark and David Worrall (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 125–46.

diverse parts of society as uniting within the parameters of a nation. Drawing again from Disability Studies, I build upon existing accounts within Blake Studies to propose that Blake's vision of society rejects the conception of an able-body politic, that is, a body metaphor predicated on a totality or 'completeness' to exist. By subverting prevailing views, Blake critiques eighteenth-century ideas of 'Britishness' and nation. Thirdly, I argue that the disabled and deformed figures presented throughout the illuminated books have sources in Old Norse myth. Blake's antiquarianism has been long-established by scholarship, and yet the extent of his specific interest in Old Norse and ancient Scandinavia has not yet been examined in great detail. I propose that Blake's sustained engagement with Northern antiquarianism—a literary and artistic movement interested in Old Norse culture and its influence on the British nations—provided him with a language to critique formations of British identity. By situating Blake within a circle of his contemporaries who were also interested in the ancient North, I examine how his mediation of Norse cultural artefacts influenced his conception of the body. In short, this thesis demonstrates a reciprocity between these aspects of Blake's creative approach, as he uses Old Norse myth and motifs to (re)formulate the Blakean body as one which is inherently deformed, thus rejecting the able-body politic metaphor.

### ***Conceptualising the Blakean Body***

The body in Blake is mutable and the interplay between multiple smaller forms within it results in a continuous redefinition of external identities. Rather than moving towards or away from an idealised vision or image, the body develops in unpredictable and sometimes counter-intuitive ways. There is an illusion of wholeness, but more often than not the Blakean body is incompatible with such a vision. When using the term 'Blakean body' I refer to a physicality that challenges, subverts, and reimagines the literal and metaphorical borders of the human form. It is a type of embodiment that resists full textual and visual materialisation. It wrestles with the fundamental proportions of the human body and pushes corporeality to its limit. In this

way, the Blakean body invites readers to view it as a form within which lies a plurality, a vast network of social interactions; in other words, something like an ‘assemblage.’

My ideas in this regard have been influenced by Manuel DeLanda’s post-Deleuzian account of ‘assemblage,’ where it is implied that ‘despite the tight integration between its component organs, the relations between them are not logically necessary but only contingently obligatory: a historical result of their close coevolution.’<sup>6</sup> Unlike a totality—a whole that appears seamless, organic, and connected by ‘relations of interiority’—an assemblage relies on ‘relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage.’<sup>7</sup> These autonomous parts move to either stabilise the identity of the assemblage, transform it, or both simultaneously. Blake’s dismissal of Reynolds suggests a plurality within the body, something also explored in his earlier work *All Religions are One* (c.1788): ‘As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius’ (E1. ‘Principle 2<sup>d</sup>’). The parentheses captures a similar paradox where two contending definitions, ‘same’ and ‘variety,’ frame an idea of the ‘infinite,’ thus displaying a discrepancy that allows the poet’s imagination to engage with different forms.

This sense of discrepancy, I believe, speaks to Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of the body as an anxiety in his essay ‘Corpus’ (1992). For Nancy, the uncertainty about one’s physicality transforms into an ontological concern about existence. The body is a fluid force of being that needs other categories to be defined, something that is visible in Blake’s *The Book of Urizen*. Most helpfully for this thesis, Nancy envisions the body as an open space. ‘The body-place,’ he writes ‘isn’t full or empty, since it doesn’t have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality [...] it is a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited,

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<sup>6</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 12.

<sup>7</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 9, 18.

distressed, tied, untied.’<sup>8</sup> The body is an existence without existence; it is a place where the body should be. DeLanda similarly proposes that ‘a body-plan defines a space of possibilities,’ and this is an essential aspect of assemblages, as ‘the capacities of an assemblage are not given, that is, they are merely possible when not exercised.’<sup>9</sup> Both Nancy and DeLanda’s approaches account for the co-existence of a plurality within a whole, one which interacts through ‘relations of exteriority.’ This idea, I propose, lies at the heart of the Blakean body presented in the illuminated books, where the physicality of different figures is akin to an open space which they concomitantly inhabit and embody.

The fluidity of the Blakean body manifests within the relationship between body, writing, and language. Nancy views writing as a way of giving the body its value; it understanding the extremities of the human form and touches the body.<sup>10</sup> He coins the term ‘excription’ to capture this moment when writing brings the body into being, as ‘being placed *outside the text*’ is ‘the most *proper* movement of its text.’<sup>11</sup> Writing the body becomes an exploration of existence, where the written word is an attempt at realising what it means to be. In *William Blake and the Body* (2002), Tristanne Connolly observes something similar occurring in the illuminated books. Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection, Connolly suggests that a text is participatory, that is, it invites readers to find individual significances because it is ‘manifold, made up of different layers of language, and is not entirely fixed but resists finality.’<sup>12</sup> A body’s textuality prevents us from fully comprehending its existence as it endures within an ambivalent domain susceptible to change. As an already mutable form, the Blakean body can move beyond simple signification to capture Nancy’s vision of the body as neither signifier nor signed, but as an act of exposing—extending—moments of existence. The body is ‘the site of a breakthrough through which *it can come in from the world*.’<sup>13</sup> Any

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<sup>8</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ in *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>9</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 9.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 11.

<sup>12</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 7, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 25.



discrepancies in the illuminated books enact what Nancy sees as an ‘impossibility of writing “to” the body, or of writing “the” body without ruptures, reversals, discontinuities (discreteness), or trivialities, contradictions, and displacements of discourse within itself.’<sup>14</sup> Ross Woodman suggests that the body is an extension of language and is therefore a vehicle through which meaning is conveyed. He explains that language—specifically poetry—draws from a metaphorical body to become ‘a break, a fissure, a representation that is other than what is represented which is nevertheless unknowable except as it is represented.’<sup>15</sup> Turning to *Milton: a Poem* (c.1804–11), Woodman views the metaphorical body as enacting ‘its psychosomatic condition in the slow composition of [Blake’s] epic vision as it painfully, sometimes plotlessly, unfolds.’<sup>16</sup> When the body ferments and vegetates, it cannot function in and of itself. It needs an external referent to be identified and made coherent.

Different cultural frameworks open the illuminated books to new interpretations. Traditional Judeo-Christian contexts read the Blakean body in relation to a pre-determined outcome or vision as found in the Bible.<sup>17</sup> Blake’s syncretism, though, allows for other cultural referents to influence the body’s presentation. This is not to say that Blake ignores the Divine Christian body, which remains a helpful referent and dominant motif in his work, but rather the Blakean body denies the satisfaction of a Christian vision. As an assemblage, the body is open in its configuration and this heterogeneity becomes ‘a variable that may take different values.’<sup>18</sup> The body presented, then, is open to perspectives beyond the Judeo-Christian framework, such as eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism.

I want to briefly address the language used by critics, such as Connolly, when discussing the body in Blake. Through a Gender Studies perspective, Connolly examines the

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 19–21.

<sup>15</sup> Ross Woodman, ‘Nietzsche, Blake, Keats and Shelley: The Making of a Metaphorical Body,’ *Studies in Romanticism* 29, no. 1 (1990): 116.

<sup>16</sup> Woodman, ‘Making of a Metaphorical Body,’ 130.

<sup>17</sup> For more on Blake and the Bible, see: *Blake and His Bibles*, ed. David Erdman (West Cornwall, Connecticut: Locust Hill Press, 1990); Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010); Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake’s Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 11.

anatomical and physiological practices of Blake's time on his work. Focusing on specific characters, she attempts to understand how 'Blake conceives of human beings as multiple' despite the union within the Human Form Divine found at the end of *Jerusalem*.<sup>19</sup> Connolly positions the body against a pre-existing ideal that lies at the foundations of her study: an original form untouched by external actors, for example Urizen before Los' intervention during the Seven Ages.<sup>20</sup> She suggests that Blake prioritises eternal existence over mortality, and views 'all birth as misbirth, a deformation of an ideal, transparent, unrestricted shape.'<sup>21</sup> While 'deformation' here does not refer to disability and deformity aesthetics, Connolly's use of the term draws attention to her assertion that Blake conceives the human body as moving towards an 'ideal' form, that it is a 'totality' made of interior relations and not an assemblage 'whole.' Despite Connolly's persuasive and enlightening argument, I believe that Blake's approach reveals a more complicated view of this Eternal or Divine 'ideal,' an idea which itself limits our general understanding of the body. Building on this formative study, I suggest that we must approach Blake's illuminated books with a more open idea of the body.

### *The Language of Disability Studies*

The illuminated books continuously struggle with an idea of 'wholeness.' The language of disability and the aesthetics of deformity, though, equips us with the critical tools needed to approach the Blakean body. When Blakean bodies are reified into a larger body politic, they are ascribed a function. Their signification, however, remains dependent on changing 'relations of exteriority,' thus inviting a critique of the reification process. The body is conceived more as a unit of existence and becomes an umbrella term where a diverse cast of parts—call them beings,

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<sup>19</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 125. For more on Blake and the Divine Image, see: Thomas Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion: The Renovation of the Body in the Poetry of William Blake* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974); Peter Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence: Love, Jealousy, and the Sublime in The Four Zoas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jason Whittaker, *Divine Images: The Life and Work of William Blake* (London: Reaktion Books, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 192.

<sup>21</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 122.

characters, or personality traits—are fragmented and re-formed. In *A History of Disability* (1997) Henri-Jacques Stiker expands on the fragility of the human form, urging readers to recognise how the disabled reveal ‘the inadequacy of what we would like to see established as references and norm. They are the tear in our being that reveals its open-mindedness, its incompleteness, its precariousness.’<sup>22</sup> Blake’s language similarly challenges established norms to reveal this instability that Stiker ascribes to the role of the disabled.

Matt Lorenz argues that ‘Blake is deeply concerned with the causes and consequences of disability,’ but like most eighteenth-century writers, Blake ‘relies on metaphorical language and concepts that scholars in this field would view as ableist.’<sup>23</sup> Taking Tharmas from *The Four Zoas* (c. 1796–1807), Lorenz demonstrates Blake’s prioritising of vision metaphors to undermine the importance of sight within the human sensory system, indicated by ‘a healing of the aesthetic blindness embodied in the fallen Tharmas and of the epistemological blindness embodied in the fallen Urizen.’<sup>24</sup> This direct engagement with disability in Blake is informative and important work, but this thesis does not survey the ways in which Blake engages with physical ability. Although Lorenz’s observation is pertinent to my critical undertaking, however, I will focus on developing a critical language rooted in Disability Studies and deformity aesthetics to further examine body metaphors in the illuminated books.

In recent years, the social model of disability has been the dominant approach in Disability Studies. Michael Schillmeier explains that this model appeared and ‘defined itself in opposition to other accounts which were accustomed to seeing disability merely as an individual limitation, and/or medical problem.’<sup>25</sup> An example of this approach is Lennard Davis who believes that ‘disability is a specular moment’ and that the power of control lies with the

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<sup>22</sup> Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. William Sayers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Matt Lorenz, ‘Blakean Wonder and the Unfallen Tharmas: Health, Wholeness, and Holarchy in *The Four Zoas*,’ in *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text*, ed. Michael Bradshaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 128.

<sup>24</sup> Lorenz, ‘Blakean Wonder,’ 141.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Schillmeier, *Rethinking Disability: Bodies, Senses, and Things* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.

observer.<sup>26</sup> Davis suggests that ableist societies are responsible for the fixed category of ‘disability,’ though Schillmeier argues that disability cannot be explained by ‘the social,’ but rather ‘the social’ must be explained ‘by the practices and experiences of disability that emerge from the different ways of how bodies, minds, senses and things relate.’<sup>27</sup>

A key part of the discourse is understanding the limitation of language when addressing disabled narratives and experiences. When discussing the subversive experience of the disabled, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue that ‘the body is first and foremost a linguistic relation which cannot be natural or average. The textual nature of language [...] lacks the very physicality that it seeks to control or represent.’<sup>28</sup> According to Mitchell and Snyder, materiality and language are mutually exclusive, and yet they attempt to correspond with one another.<sup>29</sup> They coin the phrase ‘narrative prosthesis’ to realise the illusory function of the disabled body which, ‘deemed lacking, unfunctional, or inappropriately functional needs compensation, and prosthesis helps to effect this end.’<sup>30</sup>

Ato Quayson supports Mitchell and Snyder’s premise, though he disagrees with their assertion that disability has a pragmatic function for the audience and that the disabled themselves are categorised in literature as narrative obstacles.<sup>31</sup> He identifies in their theory an assumption that literature aims to resolve or correct deviance and suggests an alternative: that it is not the role of the disabled to cause a collapse within literary frameworks, but that aesthetics fail due to an encounter with disability.<sup>32</sup> This, Quayson suggests, is ‘aesthetic nervousness,’ a key term he argues elucidates the moments ‘when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability.’<sup>33</sup> Tobin Siebers aligns

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<sup>26</sup> Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London; New York: Verso, 1995), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 12; Schillmeier, *Rethinking Disability*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 25; Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 25–26.

<sup>33</sup> Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 15.

himself with Quayson's theory and views the disabled form as one that both 'enriches and complicates notions of the aesthetic, while the rejection of disability limits definitions of artistic ideas and objects.'<sup>34</sup> Siebers asserts that disability aesthetics refutes representations of harmony to embrace a 'beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result,' thus stressing that the disabled body compels an epistemological shift.<sup>35</sup>

The difference between 'narrative prosthesis' and 'aesthetic nervousness' is both a question of perspective—how can we, as readers, best approach representations of disability in literature?—and our reception of such representations. To provide an answer, Davis coins 'normalcy,' a term that has greatly influenced the field. His understanding of disability relies on a basic division between a disabled body and one that is socially deemed normal, where 'to understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body.'<sup>36</sup> He argues that 'the normal' arises from historical moments, and so 'the implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production.'<sup>37</sup> This standardising of the body and participating in ableist constructions of society rewards the majority for their similarities and handicaps those who do not fit neatly into these social constructions.<sup>38</sup> Language is part of this categorisation process as Davis suggests, 'by conceptualizing *language* as writing and speech, or by fetishizing the aural/oral incarnation of language, we are performing in effect an act of repression against language, in the largest sense of the term.'<sup>39</sup> Davis also pinpoints another problem: language itself has become an ableist construction, and so the means of correctly representing disabled experiences further diminishes. For Mitchell, Snyder, Quayson, and Davis, it is important to understand the multiple layers of mediation—and therefore the distance—between literary representations and the real-

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<sup>34</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 19.

life, lived experiences of disabled people. Language becomes a barrier, bringing to mind Nancy's 'excription' which attempts to bridge the gap between what we might find on the page and the limitations of our perceptions.

Mary Douglas suggests that 'the functions of [the body's] different parts and their relation afford a source of symbol for other complex structures.'<sup>40</sup> In eighteenth-century scholarship, this is most certainly the case. Felicity Nussbaum has made important contributions to our way of understanding disability and deformity in the period. She proposes that 'deformity is often linked with race as well as with femininity, since the category of the monstrous in the eighteenth century loosely refers to the many varieties of unfamiliar beings.'<sup>41</sup> Michael Bradshaw and Essaka Joshua define Romanticism as an aesthetic category that 'mythologises the liberation of the creative individual and thus celebrates difference, and yet also witnesses to the experience of oppression and of enforced conformity'; they argue that the period is in fact one that challenges the symbolic appropriation of the disabled.<sup>42</sup> For Paul Youngquist, 'abnormality breeds interest, the kind of interest that circulates power,' meaning that in societies with a desire 'to build a proper body that circulates a norm for human health and wholeness, monstrosities prove a challenge, a carnal turn toward some unutterable otherness.'<sup>43</sup> He views the Romantic period as a time when a 'proper body'—or a 'norm,' to borrow from Davis—was being established and so any aberrance became problematic.<sup>44</sup>

Studies on disability in the long eighteenth century cover a broad range of topics, but in terms of language, David Turner views the concept of disability in this period as a category that

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 2002), 142.

<sup>41</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, 'Feminotopias: The Pleasures of "Deformity" in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England,' in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 167; for more on race, gender, and deformity, see: Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Bradshaw and Essaka Joshua, 'Introduction,' in *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text*, ed. Michael Bradshaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Youngquist, *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xi, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xv.

challenged patriarchal society and participated in emergent discourse concerning class.<sup>45</sup> He suggests that medical and social models are not adequate when considering eighteenth-century conceptions of disability. Although terms such as ‘disabled’ and ‘able-bodied’ were in circulation during this period, ‘they were not yet seen as fundamental categories of identity that divided everyone according to their physical capabilities or the presence or absence of an impairment which affected their ability to participate on an equal basis with others.’<sup>46</sup> Analysing a range of texts and dictionaries to think about the eighteenth-century language of impairment, Turner suggests alternative terms that were also in circulation, such as ‘lame’ or ‘cripple,’ and proposes possible interchangeability between certain terms.<sup>47</sup>

Joshua also addresses these concerns about the term ‘disability,’ arguing for a separation within critical discourse between ability and aesthetics, which she believes were two distinct categories in eighteenth-century bodily conventions.<sup>48</sup> She demonstrates the limitations of the modern conception of ‘disability’ when approaching Romantic literature and suggests alternative expressions such as ‘capacity,’ ‘weakness,’ and ‘picturesque’—all in use at the time—to better our understanding of eighteenth-century ideas of disability. Joshua proposes that during the eighteenth century the ‘ideal’ had two meanings: perfection and a Platonic archetype, and so introduces more flexibility within the term through these alternative phrases.<sup>49</sup> I propose

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<sup>45</sup> For more studies on disability in the long eighteenth century, see: David Chandler, “‘In Mental as in Visual Darkness Lost’: Southey’s Songs for a Mad King,’ in *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text*, ed. Michael Bradshaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 87–103; Helen Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996); Jason Farr, *Novel Bodies: Disability and Sexuality in Eighteenth-century British Literature* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2019); Christopher Gabbard, ‘Disability Studies and the British Long Eighteenth Century,’ *Literature Compass* 8, no. 2 (2011): 80–94; Christine Kenyon Jones, “‘An Uneasy Mind in an Uneasy Body’ Byron, Disability, Authorship, and Biography,’ in *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text*, ed. Michael Bradshaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 147–67; Edward Larrissy, *The Blind and Blindness in Literature of the Romantic Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Emily Stanback, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Fuson Wang, ‘Romantic Disease Discourse: Disability, Immunity, and Literature,’ *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 33, no. 5 (2011): 467–82.

<sup>46</sup> David Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 22–23.

<sup>48</sup> Essaka Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 184.

<sup>49</sup> Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature*, 17.

that Joshua's idea of 'capacity' is useful when studying of the body in Blake which David Fallon understands to be social, communal, fluid, and a manifestation of the collective.<sup>50</sup>

Both Joshua and Turner see 'disability' and alternate terms as words that 'not only described the body, but also inscribed it with social meaning.'<sup>51</sup> For DeLanda, 'the set of possible capacities of an assemblage is not amorphous, however open-ended it may be, since different assemblages exhibit different sets of capacities.'<sup>52</sup> The assemblage operates through a structure reliant on multiple mechanisms which reconfigures the micro- and macro-states as unfixed; they emerge relative to the context and as such, the capacity of an assemblage is dependent on its specific environment.<sup>53</sup> Although Joshua does not discuss DeLanda, her development of Godwin's idea of 'capacity' captures a similar sort of flexibility. Godwin' uses 'capacity' as a synonym for utility and advocates for a reintegration of the socially disadvantaged so that they may regain value in society.<sup>54</sup> For Godwin, humans continuously move towards their perfect state, and through integration, they can present society with new skillsets. Similar to the assemblage then, physical 'capacity' or utility within a society permits fluidity, but this is still determined by society's needs and the role that ability plays in achieving such a goal. Assemblage theory, however, perhaps provides more variation and prospects, especially with regards to discerning body politics.

### ***The Able-Body Politic: Nationhood & the State***

The body politic metaphor figures society as a metaphorical body, implying that for the nation to be seen as functioning, diverse parts of society—the members—must unite within the parameters of the nation. It is a totalised vision of society, or as Antoine de Baecque suggests, 'the idea of the body is essentially pluralistic, so that the corporeity of society is placed at one

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<sup>50</sup> David Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment: The Politics of Apotheosis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 5, 261.

<sup>51</sup> Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature*, 42–48.



and the same time in conjunction with the singular individual-body and with the pluralistic universe-body.<sup>55</sup> In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson famously defines the nation as a political community ‘imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’; it has ‘finite, if elastic boundaries’ and removes ‘the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.’<sup>56</sup> However, Jeff Strabone takes issue with Anderson’s premise and defines the nation as a cultural community, where cultural production and its utilisation within the nation does not rely on sovereignty; ‘its cultural producers do not need the support of the state nor even the existence of the state.’<sup>57</sup> Instead, Strabone proposes that archaic native poetry provided historiographical evidence for the construction of the modern nation. ‘Culture,’ he argues ‘has been the main source of the nation’s distinctness,’ and in the case of eighteenth-century Britain, the intermingling and defining of cultural heritage revealed that ‘the nation is believed to belong to the people and not to the state; the national culture is believed to be of antique origin and to have continuously endured since its founding.’<sup>58</sup> Strabone defines nationhood as a product of public support and cultural production because, during the eighteenth century at least, there was a self-conscious engagement with poets like Allan Ramsay and Iolo Morganwg situating themselves within invented or mediated historical national traditions.<sup>59</sup>

The nation is unstable in definition as well as conception, especially when developed from cultural artefacts. This reinforces DeLanda’s theory where larger assemblages ‘emerge from the interactions of their component parts,’ and ‘the identity of the parts may acquire new layers as the emergent whole reacts back and affects them.’<sup>60</sup> In terms of the body, Ludmilla Jordanova suggests that we must ‘acknowledge its status as a cultural resource and its capacity to be a place where many social constituencies can find meanings that are immediately relevant

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<sup>55</sup> Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770–1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2016), 6–7.

<sup>57</sup> Jeff Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms in the Bardic Eighteenth Century: Imagined Antiquities* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan), 41.

<sup>58</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 33.

to them.’<sup>61</sup> External referents allow the body to recognise its own instability while continuing to infer meaning. Returning to nationhood, the idea of the body allows culture to move to the forefront of nation formation. Eric Hobsbawm, an influential voice in the field, posits that the idea of nation ‘belongs exclusively to a particular, and historically recent, period. It is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state.’<sup>62</sup> There is an understanding that while ‘nationhood’ and ‘nationalism’ were not active terms during the eighteenth century, ‘the people, independently of the state, have led the way in shaping its meaning.’<sup>63</sup>

When examining the development of a national consciousness during the long eighteenth century, Linda Colley optimistically suggests that due to factors like Protestantism, trade, and war, by the mid-nineteenth century there was ‘the existence of a mass British patriotism transcending the boundaries of class, ethnicity, occupation, sex and age.’<sup>64</sup> Although the Acts of Union passed between England and Scotland in 1707, and then with Ireland in 1801, there still remained strong cultural and historic difference between and within all the British nations. Colley acknowledges that there were ‘powerful divides – though not perhaps as powerful as regionalism and localism,’ but her assertion that Britain’s status as an island generated an insularity that placed them against the rest of Continental Europe is perhaps too broad a generalisation.<sup>65</sup> Colin Kidd’s account of British interrelations pulls back from Colley’s view to suggest that, while there was some amity between these nations, a pressure remained because of historical tensions and current anxieties, all augmented by contemporary politics. He proposes that the patriotisms of the British nations were not isolated, but worked in ‘a system of competing claims and counter-claims, dominated in the seventeenth century by tensions within

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<sup>61</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘Happy Marriages and Dangerous Liaisons: Artists and Anatomy,’ in *The Quick and the Dead: Artists and Anatomy*, ed. Deanna Petherbridge and Ludmilla Jordanova (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 1997), 100.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>63</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 365.

<sup>65</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 373, 375.

the Stuart multiple monarchy, and in the eighteenth by the rise of an overarching Britishness.’<sup>66</sup> Mark Philp similarly argues that the eighteenth century developed a sense of ‘collective self-determination’ that seemed to comment on the competition between nation states for the benefit of the ruling group.<sup>67</sup> Both Kidd and Philp recognise that although there was internal tension within Britain, there developed a paradoxical unity through difference. Unlike Colley who focuses on the commingling of nations and perceived levelling of differences, they identify that dissonance was part of an eighteenth-century ‘British’ consciousness.

Corporeal metaphors helped society visualise, understand, and challenge the political status quo. During the seventeenth century, the body politic was intimately tied to church as well as state. The friction between Catholicism and Protestantism meant that the Pope became the head of the Catholic Church, and Christ as the invisible head of the Protestant Church.<sup>68</sup> Moving into the eighteenth century, Youngquist suggests that the period’s cultural history ‘saw the installation of a norm of embodiment [...] that served (and in some ways still serves) to regulate the agencies of bodies in liberal society.’<sup>69</sup> This is visible, for example, in caricaturist and printmaker William Dent’s print ‘The Coalition Dissected’ (1783) which also appeared in a broadside dated 12 August 1783 (fig.1). Here, Dent imagines the disintegration of the Fox-North coalition with a figure that is half Lord North (the left) and half Charles James Fox (the right). This grotesque body is cleaved open to reveal different organs inscribed with words ranging from ‘Honesty’ to ‘Self-Interest,’ and references the East India Bill (1783) which led to the disbanding of the coalition.<sup>70</sup> The Fox-side strangles the coalition’s body politic with a rope titled ‘Anodyne Necklace’ that is knotted around the ‘Oratorical Lungs.’ The ironic hand

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<sup>66</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 260.

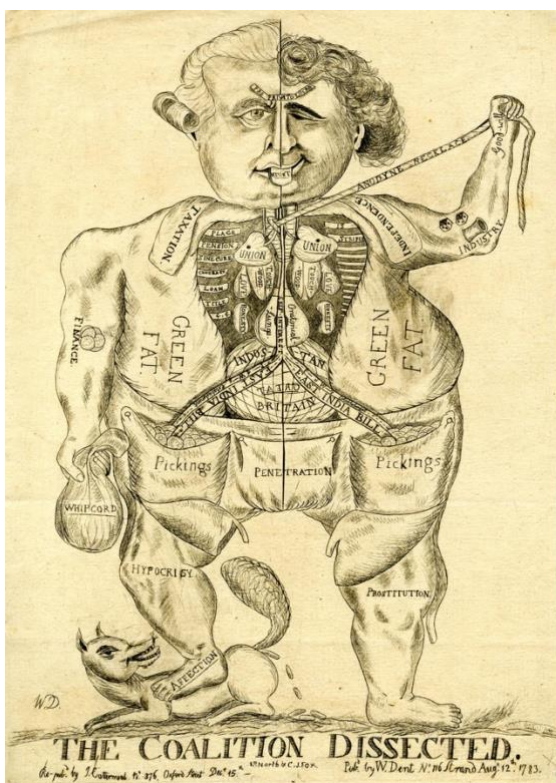
<sup>68</sup> James Nohrnberg, ‘Milton’s *Lycidas*, or Edward King’s Two Bodies,’ in *Immortality and the Body in the Age of Milton*, ed. John Rumrich and Stephen Fallon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 47.

<sup>69</sup> Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, xiv.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Dorothy George, ‘Curator’s comments,’ in *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London: BMP, 1935), *The British Museum Website*.

marked 'Good-will' further elevates the dark humour of this failing political union between the Whigs and Tories.

A decade later, Dent once again targets Fox and Jacobinism in a similar fashion (fig.2). Half-dressed as a Frenchman, Fox's body is inscribed with starkly divergent ideas. On the 'French' side, Dent etches 'Advocate for Atheists, Jews, Papists, Dissenters, &c.' while on the 'British' side, Fox supposedly has 'Interest of Levellers, Jews, Gamesters, Adventurers, &c.' Inside, there are varying accusations that range from 'Whoredom' to 'Cruelty,' and also denominators such as 'Gallic,' 'Aristocratic,' and 'Democratic.' As a response to the unstable situation of the 1790s, Dent's prints challenge and critique those who supported France. This brief example reveals the impact of the corporeal metaphor in eighteenth-century visual culture, where the political landscape transforms known figures into synecdoches. Rather than 'whole' bodies, Dent dissects them almost to the point of becoming disembowelled, and in a satirical vein, each labelled part comments on a perceived corruption in the political system.



**Figure 1:** William Dent, 'The Coalition Dissected,' 1783. Etching on Paper. Satirical print. British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 2:** William Dent, 'A Right Honble Democrat Dissected,' 1793. Hand-coloured etching on paper. Satirical print. British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Dent's caricatures illustrate how physiognomic language and imagery participated in contemporary political discourse. In terms of medical imagery, Lisa Cody suggests that 'through reproductive signs and stories, Britons could describe themselves and others, as individuals, as types, as members of different corporate bodies, including nations,' which then established ideas of community and otherness.<sup>71</sup> De Baecque addresses the polysemy of the word 'body' in Revolutionary France, arguing that it becomes part of the late eighteenth-century language of revolution and attempt to give a 'physiognomy to history.'<sup>72</sup> Responding to de Baecque, Mitchell and Snyder remind us that the corporeal metaphor offers 'an anchor in materiality' which, 'via disabled bodies gives all bodies a tangible essence in that the "healthy" corporeal surface fails to achieve its symbolic effect without its disabled counterpart.'<sup>73</sup>

In French revolutionary discourse, the distinction between disease, disability, and impotency is blurred. The events of the summer of 1788 and 1789 were seen as a metaphorical disease and degeneration that permeated France in the summer of 1788, and by 1789 to destroy the old body and make way for a new, organised body politic of Revolution.<sup>74</sup> De Baecque appraises Abbé Sieyès' revision of the organicist body politic where disease—or privilege—must be cured through a re-organising of France's territorial body.<sup>75</sup> Blake's *The French Revolution* (1791) also uses the disease motif, which Fallon reads as part of Blake's search for a new language to elevate the power of the people over the *ancien régime*.<sup>76</sup> Here, Blake questions, '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?' (E294. [Pg.10]:182–83). In terms of the body politic, Blake takes here the trope of the degenerate nobility to question the relationship between different parts of society.

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<sup>71</sup> Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>72</sup> De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 63–64.

<sup>74</sup> De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 79.

<sup>75</sup> De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 97–101.

<sup>76</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 76–77.

Regeneration is a major part of the discourse. For de Baecque, regeneration—instigated by external human intervention rather than being an internalised moment of inspiration—was a major motivator within the French Revolutionary body politic. The renewed body, however, relied on certain conditions and it was ultimately an utopian vision.<sup>77</sup> Fallon views Blake's body politic in a similar way. When analysing renewal in *The Four Zoas*, he argues that Blake forms 'a sublime utopian body politic combining unity and heterogeneity, dynamic energy, and harmony,' one that becomes 'the model for the renewal of the British political body' as imagined in *Milton*.<sup>78</sup> The idea that Blake's body politic moves towards a utopian vision is persuasive, but Fallon's argument relies on a classical and Christian model to define the social body in Blake. As a counterpoint, I suggest that when viewed through a Norse and Northern antiquarian framework, Blake's body politic does not present an unlimited utopia within the Divine Body. Instead, it gestures towards a darker, more fatalistic vision of perpetual loss. Not only this, but discussions concerning Blake's body politic posited by Fallon and others is predicated on an able-body politic, defined earlier as a metaphor that determines 'wholeness' or an ableist vision of the body as the archetypal model.<sup>79</sup> The form is heterogenous—as Fallon astutely recognises—but it also remains an uneasy prelude to incompleteness rather than assimilation.

Blake's illuminated books are concerned with the formation of British identity and the impact of various institutions such as religion, war, and monarchy on the nation. These discussions were topical and part of broader conversations concerning the American and French Revolutions, and the Napoleonic Wars. Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker remark that 'modern Britain, formed by the union of England and Scotland at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was tested by the events in France, war both threatening and bracing a nation that

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<sup>77</sup> De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 140.

<sup>78</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 237. For more on Blake and utopia, see: Nicholas Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>79</sup> See also: Julia Wright, *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004).

prided itself on commerce and industrialisation.<sup>80</sup> The impact of these international events on British literature, including Blake's poetry, cannot be denied. These political and cultural interventions are visible in Blake's critique of the British body politic, especially through his engagement with eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism. There is a temptation to read Blake's politics—and subsequently his body politic—almost allegorically. David Erdman views Blake's output in light of the political, intellectual, and industrial changes occurring at the turn of the century. Erdman draws parallels between the figures and events in the illuminated books with historical leaders and moments, for example when discussing *America: A Prophecy* (1793) and *Europe: A Prophecy* (1794), he relates Rintrah to Pitt, Palamabron with Parliament, and describes the poems as 'visualizations of current history.'<sup>81</sup> Although engaging, this approach can be limiting, and scholars who advocate a more historicist approach avoid suggesting clear allegorical analogues. Instead, they read Blake's poems as historical, cultural, and political products of the times.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from a brief period in Felpham, Surrey between 1800–1804, Blake resided in London his whole life. Born into a dissenting family with connections to the Moravian church, Blake's imagery and language was heavily influenced by his Christian beliefs.<sup>83</sup> The diverse nature of London's dissenting communities means that we cannot associate Blake to a single spiritual source of inspiration. During his lifetime he was associated with Joseph Johnson, a publisher who helped establish the first Unitarian church in London.<sup>84</sup> In the 1780s he was

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<sup>80</sup> Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 67.

<sup>81</sup> David Erdman, *Blake, Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 185–86.

<sup>82</sup> For example, the essays found in *Historicizing Blake* ed. Steve Clark and David Worrall (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994).

<sup>83</sup> The Moravian church was a polyglot, multilingual community founded in Germany but established in London during the eighteenth century. Blake's mother, Catherine, belonged to the Fetter Lane Congregation during the 1750s. See: Keri Davies, 'William Blake's Mother: A New Identification,' *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1999): 36–50; Alexander Regier, 'Anglo-German Connections in William Blake, Johann Georg Hamann, and the Moravians,' *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 56, no. 4 (2016): 757–76; Marsha Keith Schuchard, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family,' *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2004): 36–43.

<sup>84</sup> Gerald Tyson, *Joseph Johnson: A Liberal Publisher* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979), 42.

invested in the teachings of Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose work became the foundations of the satirical poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (composed 1790). Nancy Jiwon Cho and David Worrall also connect Blake with eighteenth-century self-styled prophets such as ex-Quaker Dorothy Gott who met Blake and his wife in 1789 at the London Swedenborg Conference.<sup>85</sup> The late eighteenth-century prophetic tradition peaked between the early to mid-1790s during the French Revolution crisis, and Blake's 'occupation of a prophetic stance within the illuminated books had the advantage of enabling his own distinctive poetic voice while also, in the context of the 1790s, allowing him some measure of validated political commentary.'<sup>86</sup>

Jon Mee asserts that outside of formal prophetic styles, Blake's poetry adopts varying features which indicates 'that he was self-consciously seeking to write prophetically throughout the decade.'<sup>87</sup> Despite this association with 1790s prophetic writing, Butler reminds us that Blake was still removed from the more general religio-political commentary and was not so interested 'with these specific applications for the generalised radicalism of its day.'<sup>88</sup> Saree Makdisi further reveals that Blake does not use the word 'rights'—a nod towards the radicalism of Thomas Paine—in the illuminated books, 'whereas "desire", the very bane of London radicalism [...] is one of the most important principles driving Blake's work.'<sup>89</sup> Makdisi considers Blake to be an outsider, but by using 'the language of radical antinomian enthusiasm,' he still participated in existing discourse where he both sympathised with and questioned political and cultural radicalism.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Nancy Jiwon Cho and David Worrall, 'William Blake's Meeting with Dorothy Gott: The Female Origins of Blake's Prophetic Mode,' *Romanticism* 6, no. 1 (2010): 60.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Rix, 'William Blake, Thomas Thorild and Radical Swedenborgianism,' *NJES: Nordic Journal of English Studies* 2, no. 1 (2003): 102; Cho and Worrall, 'William Blake's Meeting with Dorothy Gott,' 62.

<sup>87</sup> Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 21.

<sup>88</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 164.

<sup>89</sup> Saree Makdisi, *Reading William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>90</sup> Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3, 5.



Whittaker moves away from the specifics of 1790s politics to argue that Blake's work should be viewed in light of religious discourse, that is, as part of a non-linear 'pluri-dimensional approach.'<sup>91</sup> He separates Blake from any political group as 'many of his most important literary, historical, religious and political arguments are against the very cultural groups attacked by the government.'<sup>92</sup> In fact, Dent and Whittaker distance themselves from any particular stance to argue that Blake becomes a 'powerful nationalist poet in later poems, particularly *Jerusalem*' because of his ability to distinguish between 'the inclusive sovereign will of the people [...] from the exclusive, solitary will of the crown.'<sup>93</sup> Their broader examination of Blake's engagement with key ideas from the period reveals the value of the illuminated books as a commentary on a broad range of eighteenth-century events and philosophies. In this brief overview, it is clear that Blake's poetry from the 1790s onwards is interested in the impositions of state institutions on individual freedoms.

Blake's aversion to institutions also influenced his thoughts on the Bible. His suspicion of any text claiming scriptural authority is explicitly stated in his annotations to Bishop Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1797), where he distinguishes the difference between 'the Bible or <Peculiar> Word of God' from the 'Exclusive of Conscience or the Word of God Universal' (E615. *Annotations*: [pg.9]). Plate 11 from *Marriage* best presents Blake's philosophy regarding religion and organisation:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or  
Geniuses [...] Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of &  
enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental dieties  
from their objects: thus began Priesthood.

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

(E38. PL.11)

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<sup>91</sup> Jason Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 14–15.

<sup>92</sup> Whittaker, *Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 15.

<sup>93</sup> Dent and Whittaker, *Radical Blake*, 69.

As ‘forms of worship,’ nature or the naturally inspired becomes an untouchable set of tropes tethered to a system—an organised religion—which suppresses a ‘notion of the divine’ that is ‘much more radically decentred.’<sup>94</sup> This organisation is what Blake calls ‘State Religion,’ the impact of which is examined throughout the illuminated books. Blake’s syncretism, as I will discuss, allows him to recombine elements of the Bible to create his own poetical lexicon, his own ‘poetic tales,’ which contemporary Northern antiquarianism plays a significant role in creating.

### ***Eighteenth-Century Northern Antiquarianism: The British Nations***

The North was part of broader debates about ‘Britishness’ and nationhood, as ‘a sense of the past and historic identities were essential features in the imagined communities of eighteenth-century nationalism.’<sup>95</sup> For those in England, Northern antiquarianism and medievalism became an interest in recreating visions of Britain’s origins to then project them onto the future, with Gothic and Norse cultures becoming a synecdoche for Britain’s historical struggles against foreign invaders.<sup>96</sup> This vision of ancient resistance to oppression offered a new political rhetoric during the 1790s, with the Goths emerging from Roman rule as an example of liberty, the source of which ‘was apparently not the classical world but the barbarians who overthrew it in a profusion of blood.’<sup>97</sup> Eighteenth-century poetry claimed that different cultures formed part of the foundational myths belonging to one of the British nations, and this also included Scandinavia.

In her 1976 study on *Scandinavian Themes in English Poetry*, Margaret Omberg examined Mallet’s seminal work *Introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) and Thomas Percy’s English translation *Northern Antiquities* (1770), suggesting that these contributions to

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<sup>94</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 72.

<sup>95</sup> Rosemary Sweet, ‘Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 181.

<sup>96</sup> Clare Simmons, *Popular Medievalism in Romantic-Era Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 6; Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 52.

<sup>97</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 216–17.

English literature had been left unexplored.<sup>98</sup> Since then, Margaret Clunies Ross has made an important contribution to the field, focusing on eighteenth-century translations and mediations of Norse motifs in British poetry, including Percy's work.<sup>99</sup> Most recently, Heather O'Donoghue reviews the longstanding interest of English poets with Norse subjects in *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (2014). Here, O'Donoghue traces the influence of Norse myth from the Anglo-Saxon period into the twentieth century, arguing that even in our own modern society, poets 'have inherited the conception of Old Norse culture as an essential constituent of the history of the British Isles.'<sup>100</sup> Outside Norse reception studies, scholars such as Cian Duffy, Peter Mortensen, and Marilyn Butler take ideas of Scandinavia, the North, and Norse myth to map connections across Europe and Britain during the eighteenth century.<sup>101</sup>

Scandinavia was a rich cultural source that was appropriated and mediated by eighteenth-century writers, poets, artists, and scholars. Angela Byrne argues that "'The north" has been a fluid and socioculturally contingent but important geographical, historical, and ethnological construct since classical antiquity'; rather than being defined by latitude, it is 'a set of cultural, scholarly, and imaginative constructions applied to the Nordic and Celtic fringes of Europe, the northern reaches of the British Isles, and British North America.'<sup>102</sup> The rediscovery of Norse and Celtic works during the eighteenth century—and consequential interest in a 'Romantic north'—was augmented by scientific curiosity and travel to Scandinavia which contributed to ongoing conversations about the literary heritage of different British ethnic

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<sup>98</sup> Margaret Omberg, *Scandinavian Themes in English Poetry, 1760–1800* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1976), 12.

<sup>99</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (Trieste, Italy: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998), 19.

<sup>100</sup> Heather O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>101</sup> See: Butler, *Mapping Mythologies; Romantic Norths: Anglo-Nordic Exchanges, 1770–1842*, ed. Cian Duffy (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017); Peter Mortensen, *British Romanticism and Continental Influences: Writing in an Age of Europhobia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>102</sup> Angela Byrne, *Geographies of the Romantic North: Science, Antiquarianism, and Travel, 1790–1830* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 7.

groups.<sup>103</sup> Northern antiquarianism was in part a pursuit for an identity of a nation constructed from smaller nations with independent cultures. According to R.R. Agrawal, Percy and Thomas Chatterton brought attention to a ‘romantic and heroic past of England,’ James Macpherson ‘awakened an interest in Gaelic tradition,’ and Thomas Gray ‘led to the revival of Scandinavian mythology and tradition on the one hand and that of the Welsh mythology on the other.’<sup>104</sup> While this list is somewhat reductive, Agrawal does pinpoint key figures who initiated turning points in the eighteenth-century public’s understanding and reception of Northern antiquity across all British nations.

Gray was a scholar, poet, and a friend of other antiquarians such as Thomas Warton, Horace Walpole, and William Mason. His published odes between 1742 and 1769 included ‘The Bard’ (1757) and the Norse inspired ‘The Fatal Sisters’ (1768) and ‘The Descent of Odin’ (1768). ‘The Bard’ is often seen as ‘the mainspring of Celtic revival,’ and Gray’s interest in a ‘Celtic Britain’ was part of his broader project examining the origins of English rhyme.<sup>105</sup> His poetic output during the 1750s and 1760s was intimately tied to his scholarly antiquarianism, and so figures such as the Bard and Fatal Sisters must be examined in light of the multifaceted Celtic revivalist agenda. Although Gray brought the Bard back into the popular imagination, it was arguably Macpherson’s controversial Ossian cycle that brought Northern antiquity to the centre of debates concerning British national heritage.

Gray read widely around Scandinavian culture, enough to make his own judgements over the multiple cultures that laid claim to British history. While his ideological and political

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<sup>103</sup> For examples of contemporary travel accounts to Scandinavia see: Ebenezer Henderson, *Iceland; or the Journal of a Residence in that Island, etc.*, 2 vols. Edinburgh: Printed for Oliphant, Waugh and Innes; London: T. Hamilton, J. Hatchard, and L.B. Seeley. MDCCCXVIII. [1818]; William Thomson, *Letters from Scandinavia, on the past and present state of the northern nations of Europe*, 2 vols. London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robinson. MDCCXCVI. [1796]; Uno von Troil, *Letters on Iceland: Containing Observations etc. made during a Voyage undertaken in the Year 1772 by Joseph Banks*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: printed for J. Robson. MDCCLXXX. [1780]; Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, London: Printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXCVI. [1796].

<sup>104</sup> R.R. Agrawal, *The Medieval Revival and its Influence on the Romantic Movement* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990), viii–ix.

<sup>105</sup> Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1994), 18.

standpoint differed to Percy's—Percy was a conservative bishop and Gray moved in Whig circles—Gray's attitude towards Norse and Celtic motifs was also one of selective appropriation. Strabone notes that 'for Gray, the poetic remains of the Welsh, the Norse and the Anglo-Saxons were English poetry's origin points, followed in time by Continental influence.'<sup>106</sup> More specifically, Alison Finlay argues that Gray claimed 'the products of Viking culture as a close extension of the English.'<sup>107</sup> In a letter to Mason, Gray mused, 'might we not be permitted (in that scarcity of Celtic Ideas we labour under) to adopt some of these foreign whimsies, dropping however all mention of Woden, & his Valkhyrian Virgins, &c.'<sup>108</sup> He also placed great value on Norse verse:

I told you before [...] I would venture to borrow from the Edda without entering too minutely on particulars: [...] I think it would be still better to graft any wild picturesque fable absolutely of one's own invention upon the Druid-Stock, I mean upon those half-dozen of old fancies, that are known to have made their system. this will give you more freedom & latitude, & will leave no hold for the Criticks to fasten on.<sup>109</sup>

To Gray, the *Edda* was a collection of motifs to be anchored within better known British antiquities like the Druids. Despite some reservations, his overall eagerness to use and integrate the *Edda* with 'those half-dozen of old fancies' brought Scandinavian myth into the eighteenth-century imagination.

Although in his Commonplace Book Gray copied out parts of *Darraðarljóð*, taken from *Egil's Saga*, and *Baldurs draumar* in both Latin and Old Icelandic—the inspirations for 'The Fatal Sisters' and 'The Descent of Odin' respectively—he did not know Icelandic.<sup>110</sup> Clunies Ross proposes that this showed 'an interest in the language that went somewhat beyond the

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<sup>106</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 179.

<sup>107</sup> Alison Finlay, 'Thomas Gray's Translations of Old Norse Poetry,' in *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. David Clark and Carl Phelpstead (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2007), 4.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Gray, 'Thomas Gray to William Mason, (Jan 13, 1758),' ed. Alexander Huber. 2021. *The Thomas Gray Archive*.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Gray, 'Thomas Gray to William Mason, (Mar 24, 1758),' ed. Alexander Huber. 2021. *The Thomas Gray Archive*.

<sup>110</sup> Irene Tayler, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 10.

ornamental,' but Gray's inability to read and understand Old Icelandic hindered further scholarly pursuit.<sup>111</sup> Despite this, he evidently knew enough to translate certain Norse motifs and merge them with images from British cultures such as the Welsh-inspired bard. In this way, he developed a multi-cultural vision of British culture that was publicly recognised, as demonstrated in an 1808 reprint of 'The Descent of Odin' which introduced the poem as 'from the Norse and Welch tongues.'<sup>112</sup> In general, Gray's Norse odes were favourably received and inspired future generations who increasingly viewed his poetry in a political light.<sup>113</sup>

Gray's vision of British culture extended 'the reader's definition of what must be incorporated into the British experience,' and his poetry captured the versatility of Norse motifs when applied to eighteenth-century political discourse on nationhood.<sup>114</sup> Scandinavia's value as a cultural touchstone was also visible in Scotland, where Macpherson's *Ossian* poems—*Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), *Fingal* (1762), and *Temora* (1763)—initiated a Celtic revival that impacted all British nations. Macpherson, a Highlander from a Jacobite region of Scotland, captured a patriotism within his vision of original, Scottish culture.<sup>115</sup> Through the bard Ossian, he promoted Scotland's past during a period when England saw the country as a provincial backwater.<sup>116</sup> In his Preface to *Fragments*, Macpherson writes, 'tradition [...] refers [the public] to an æra of the most remote antiquity: and this tradition is supported by the spirit and strain of the poems themselves.'<sup>117</sup> Although Macpherson attributed his poems to sources that were 'handed down from race to race; some in manuscript, but more by oral tradition,' their intangibility proved frustrating to those who wished to either validate or invalidate his

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<sup>111</sup> Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain*, 106.

<sup>112</sup> 'Odes from the Norse and Welch Tongues. The Descent of Odin. Prophetess,' *The Port – Folio* (June 25, 1808): 406.

<sup>113</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 87.

<sup>114</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 83.

<sup>115</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 91–93.

<sup>116</sup> Alan Burnett and Linda Andersson Burnett, 'The Poems of Ossian – A Controversial Legacy,' in *Blind Ossian's Fingal: Fragments and Controversy*, ed. Alan Burnett and Linda Andersson Burnett, trans. James Macpherson (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>117</sup> James Macpherson, 'Preface,' in *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, etc.*, Edinburgh: Printed for G. Hamilton and J. Balfour. MDCCLX. [1760], iii.

findings.<sup>118</sup> With this emerging Celtic voice, however, ‘it was hoped that the Ossianic poems and their eponymous author [...] would improve the image of Scotland’s independent, pre-Union past,’ and heated debates ensued across Britain where people hurried to either denounce *Ossian* as an act of forgery or celebrate it as an inspired discovery.<sup>119</sup>

The wide-ranging responses developed into a nebulous ‘Gothicism’ comprising of different ancient cultures, and it was this version of the ‘Gothic’ that became associated with the ancient English constitution. Mark Goldie proposes that although ‘custom lacks a creator or moment of creation [...] in practice, it did rely on a singular canonical point of reference, the Saxon polity’ which became known as Gothic.<sup>120</sup> For many English Wilkites and Whigs, this played a central part in the anti-*Ossian* agenda of the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>121</sup> Although Macpherson’s supporters championed *Ossian* for its pro-Scottish rhetoric, his insistence that the fragments were ‘genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry’ fortified English resistance to his version of Scottish heritage.<sup>122</sup> The poems ‘invited not only aesthetic delectation, but sustained thought about the relationship between early poetry and history and the value of early texts for reconstructing the past.’<sup>123</sup> Percy responded negatively to Macpherson, and in a letter to Evan Evans, he complained that:

The Scots: – they are every where recommending the antiquity of their own country to public notice, vindicating its history, and setting off its poetry, and, by dint of constant attention to their grand national concern, have prevailed so far, as to have the broken jargon they speak to be considered as the most proper language for our pastoral poetry.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Macpherson, ‘Preface’, vi; Robert Rix, ‘Thomas Percy’s Antiquarian Alternative to Ossian,’ *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, no. 2 (2009): 200.

<sup>119</sup> Burnett and Burnett, ‘The Poems of Ossian,’ 29.

<sup>120</sup> Mark Goldie, ‘The Ancient Constitution and the Languages of Political Thought,’ *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 1 (2019): 7.

<sup>121</sup> Kelsey Jackson Williams, ‘Thomas Gray and the Goths: Philology, Poetry, and the Uses of the Norse Past in Eighteenth-Century England,’ *The Review of English Studies* 65, no. 271 (2014): 707.

<sup>122</sup> Macpherson, ‘Preface’, i.

<sup>123</sup> Kristine Louise Haugen, ‘Ossian and the Invention of Textual History,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 3 (1998): 310.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Percy, ‘Dr. Percy, late Bishop of Dromore to the Rev. Evan Evans, (July 21, 1761),’ *The Cambro-Briton* 1, no. 4 (1819): 133–34.

Percy directly responded to Macpherson with *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763) which promoted both Old Norse and a Germanic past as the foundations for pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture.<sup>125</sup>

Macpherson had his Celtic bard, but Percy produced ancient English minstrels who were ‘instruments of the state: guardians of history and genealogy, the wards of culture and nation.’<sup>126</sup> Like most of those from England embroiled in the controversy, Percy’s main issue was the lack of Ossianic sources, and so when he published *Five Pieces*, he included his own transcripts of the Icelandic originals.<sup>127</sup> Kelsey Jackson Williams argues that Percy’s decision to present ‘a literate Norse’ culture to counter Macpherson’s oral Celticism is also present in Gray who also wanted to refute Macpherson.<sup>128</sup> Although ‘a literate Norse’ culture might have circulated during the eighteenth century, modern scholars need to take care in asserting this sort of claim without reservation, as it was only after the Christianisation of Iceland that Norse myths were written down, by which time they were already mediated and removed from a more authentic Norse past. The eighteenth-century’s developing interest in ancient Scandinavia ‘was firmly linked with the growing articulation of Scottish nationalism through the publication of Norse texts relating to the early history of Scotland.’<sup>129</sup> On Gray’s part, he was ‘so charmed with the two specimens of Erse poetry,’ that he wrote to Macpherson directly, but after he ‘writ into Scotland to make a thousand enquiries. The letters I have in return are ill-wrote, ill-reason’d, unsatisfactory, calculated (one would imagine) to deceive on, & yet not cunning

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<sup>125</sup> Rix, ‘Thomas Percy’s Antiquarian Alternative to Ossian,’ 198.

<sup>126</sup> Nick Groom, ‘*Fragments, Reliques, & MSS: Chatterton and Percy*,’ in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 189.

<sup>127</sup> The title page for *Five Pieces* resembles that of Macpherson’s *Fragments*. In his preface, Percy pushes for Macpherson to produce originals for his ‘ERSE fragments.’ See: Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy: A New Edition and Commentary* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001), 20–21, 34–35.

<sup>128</sup> Jackson Williams, ‘Gray and the Goths,’ 708–709.

<sup>129</sup> Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 168–69.



enough to do it cleverly.’<sup>130</sup> This enquiry was based on Gray’s belief that ‘the Norse, the Welsh, and, implicitly, the Scots could happily co-exist in a multicultural, trans-national poetic past.’<sup>131</sup>

The responses to Macpherson exposes a movement between the definitions of Gothic, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norse during the eighteenth century. Clunies Ross states that ‘in the 1750s and 60s there were many people who used the terms “Gallic”, “Celtic”, “Erse”, “Gothic”, “Teutonic” and “Runic” quite interchangeably to refer to the ancient languages and the poetry of North-Western Europe.’<sup>132</sup> By the early nineteenth century, these terms became curious extensions of each other, for example, when discussing *Beowulf*, the *Monthly Magazine* determined that ‘the language is Danish-Saxon, and differs very little from that of the Icelandic skalds. Indeed it is very remarkable that the people of England, of Denmark, of Norway, and of Iceland, should all have used the same language for their poetry, and this language be no-where vernacular in any of the nations employing it.’<sup>133</sup> A review of Amos Cottle’s *Icelandic Poetry, or the Edda of Sæmund* (1797) commented that the myths and sagas were ‘monuments of Gothic intellect’ that ‘must remain, the first fruits of that noble stem of language, whose spreading branches yet overshadow Scandinavia, Germany, and Britain.’<sup>134</sup> A letter on semantics submitted to *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, suggested that ‘the Icelandic is but a dialect of the Gothic through the Cimbric.’<sup>135</sup> These brief examples reveal to us a public curious about linguistic similarities across Germanic cultures, including Britain.

Macpherson also relied on Mallet, creating a superficial distinction between Celtic and Norse cultures.<sup>136</sup> Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes stress that ‘Celticism was used as a tool in the construction and expansion of the post-1745 British state’; it was a term that dismissed

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<sup>130</sup> Thomas Gray, ‘Thomas Gray to Horace Walpole, (c. April 1760),’ ed. Alexander Huber. 2021. *The Thomas Gray Archive*; Thomas Gray, ‘Thomas Gray to James Macpherson, (May 1760),’ ed. Alexander Huber. 2021. *The Thomas Gray Archive*; Thomas Gray, ‘Thomas Gray to Thomas Wharton, (c. June 20, 1760),’ ed. Alexander Huber. 2021. *The Thomas Gray Archive*.

<sup>131</sup> Jackson Williams, ‘Gray and the Goths,’ 709.

<sup>132</sup> Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 41.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Cornucopia,’ *Monthly Magazine, Or, British Reg[i]ster* 43, no. 294 (Feb, 1817): 44.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Original Poetry,’ *Monthly Magazine, and British Register* 6, no. 39 (Dec, 1798): 452.

<sup>135</sup> W.R. Whatton, ‘Letter,’ *The Gentleman’s Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, (July, 1821): 31.

<sup>136</sup> Finlay, ‘Thomas Gray’s Translations,’ 4.

ethnic difference exacerbated through the British literary appropriation of ancient cultures.<sup>137</sup>

This is perhaps most obvious in Gray's approach. Percy, alternatively, distinguished the Celtic from the Gothic through linguistic roots, arguing that English derived from Old Saxon—or Anglo-Saxon—under the umbrella of Gothic languages, while Irish, Erse, and Welsh had roots in the Ancient Irish and Ancient British strands of the Celtic (fig.3).<sup>138</sup> Welsh is particularly singled out as 'the genuine daughter of the ancient British spoken in the time of the Romans.'<sup>139</sup>

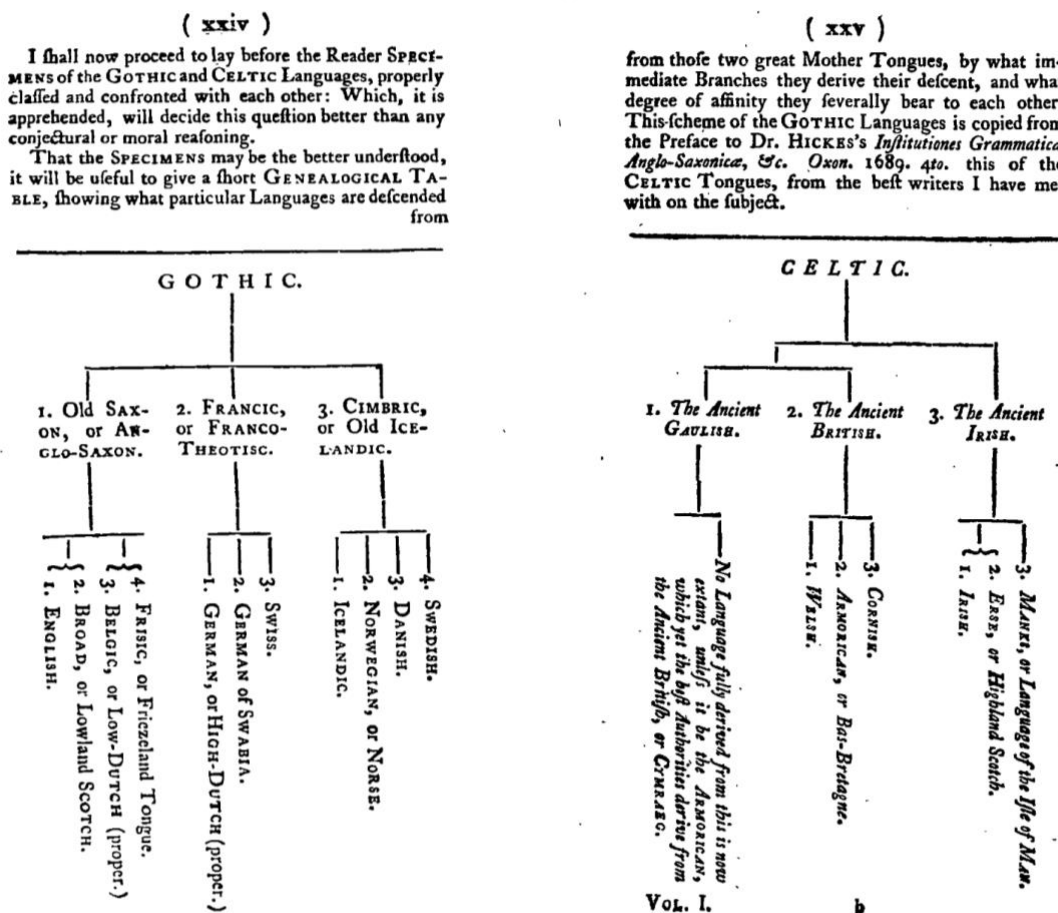


Figure 3: LEFT. 'Genealogical Table of Languages: Gothic,' 1770. In Thomas Percy, *Northern Antiquities*, Vol. I. London: Printed for T. Carnan and Co. (1770), p.xxiv. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

RIGHT. 'Genealogical Table of Languages: Celtic,' 1770. In Thomas Percy, *Northern Antiquities*, Vol. I. London: Printed for T. Carnan and Co. (1770), p.xxv. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

<sup>137</sup> Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes, 'Introduction: Romancing the Celt,' in *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*, ed. Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–2.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Percy, 'Translator's Preface,' in *Northern Antiquities: or, a description of the manners, customs, religion, and laws of the ancient Danes, and other northern nations, etc.*, Vol. I. London: Printed for T. Carnan and Co. MDCCLXX. [1770], xxiv–xxxii.

<sup>139</sup> Percy, 'Translator's Preface,' v.

During this time, figures from English history and legend such as King Arthur, were also reinvented in light of this emerging Gothicism. For instance, Richard Hole justifies his subject matter in *Arthur; or, the Northern Enchantment* (1789) as follows: ‘the old Gothic fables exhibit a peculiarity of manners and situation, which [...] afford more materials for the writer’s imagination, and contribute more to the reader’s entertainment.’<sup>140</sup> With Arthur, there is also a suggestion that ‘the Arthur of Teutonic romance, however, is the hero Dieterich of Bern,’ transmuting the English king into a German figure.<sup>141</sup> However, Dafydd Moore argues that removing Arthur from a Celtic past is thoughtless, and instead situating the king within an Ossianic Celticism reminds readers of the friction between individual national identities and the subsuming of multiple traditions under a dominant culture.<sup>142</sup>

Chatterton also contributed to eighteenth-century medievalism with his invented medieval poet Thomas Rowley, under whose name he published poems in 1777.<sup>143</sup> Chatterton is seen as the archetypal ‘boy poet’ who, after tragically dying at the age of 17, was romanticised by later poets as a model of poetic identity and devotion to the art.<sup>144</sup> Like the *Ossian* debates, the Rowley controversy divided readers who questioned the authenticity of Chatterton’s manuscripts.<sup>145</sup> Antiquarians and scholars fought over the evidence—or lack thereof—and measured Chatterton’s poems against Percy’s *Reliques*. Nick Groom argues that Chatterton challenged Percy’s version of an ancient English past by disputing ‘Percy’s imperious yet covert use of a single, authoritative written source’; he then ‘proposed a new version of manuscript

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<sup>140</sup> Richard Hole, ‘Preface,’ in *Arthur; or, the northern enchantment. A poetical romance, in seven books*, London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson. MDCCLXXXIX. [1789], iv.

<sup>141</sup> ‘Illustrations of Northern Antiquities,’ *The Edinburgh Review* 26, no. 51 (Feb, 1816): 184.

<sup>142</sup> Dafydd Moore, ‘The Critical Response to Ossian’s Romantic Bequest,’ in *English Romanticism and the Celtic World*, ed. Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44.

<sup>143</sup> Claude Rawson, ‘Unparodying and Forgery: The Augustan Chatterton,’ in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>144</sup> Rawson, ‘Unparodying and Forgery,’ 16; Bridget Keegan, ‘Nostalgic Chatterton: Fictions of Poetic Identity and Forging of a Self-Taught Tradition,’ in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 211.

<sup>145</sup> Maria Grazia Lolla, ‘“Truth Sacrificing to the Muses”: The Rowley Controversy and the Genesis of the Romantic Chatterton,’ in *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture*, ed. Nick Groom (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 153.

culture, and consequently devised a new national myth.<sup>146</sup> Chatterton subverted the Goth as a paragon of Tory patronage, turning the literate past and medieval manuscript into ‘a potent form of cultural currency.’<sup>147</sup> This cultural currency, specifically the Norse material, became central to Blake, implicitly so before the 1790s and explicitly thereafter. Eighteenth-century poetical accounts of ancient cultures, then, offered a ‘British’ literary heritage that did not portray a homogenous nation, and instead both celebrated and disputed the interrelations within Britain’s diverse culture.

### ***The Poetic Edda, Edda, & Thomas Percy’s Northern Antiquities***

Throughout this thesis, I will refer to both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*—also known as Snorri’s *Edda*—in their original and eighteenth-century mediated forms. Although I will focus on eighteenth-century reception of Norse myth, it is nevertheless important to understand how the original stories were presented and preserved, and how we, as scholars, should receive them today. Written c.1220 and after the Christianisation of Iceland (c.1000 CE), Snorri’s *Edda* elucidates a tension between original pagan folklore and a Christianised retelling. The manuscript is attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), a thirteenth-century politician, writer, and Iceland’s lawspeaker for two terms.<sup>148</sup> His mediation and his privileged education is visible in his representation of Norse mythology.<sup>149</sup> The structure of the *Edda*, as we know it today, was Snorri’s own intellectual framework as he attempted to make a system out of disparate sources. However, he was heavily influenced by a Christian worldview. Although scholars have previously argued that Snorri’s *Edda* is a reliable source for Norse mythology, the Christian liturgical influences are apparent.<sup>150</sup> Kevin Wanner suggests that modern scholarship struggles

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<sup>146</sup> Groom, ‘*Fragments, Reliques, & MSS*,’ 190.

<sup>147</sup> Groom, ‘*Fragments, Reliques, & MSS*,’ 190.

<sup>148</sup> Anthony Faulkes, ‘Introduction,’ in *Edda*, trans. Faulkes (London: Everyman, 1995), xii.

<sup>149</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘Introduction,’ in *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson’s ‘Ars Poetica’ and Medieval Theories of Language* (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1987), 9. [check]

<sup>150</sup> See: Henrik Janson, ‘Edda and “Oral Christianity”’: Apocryphal Leaves of the Early Medieval Storyworld of the North,’ in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical*

to conceptualise and reconcile two ‘versions’ of Snorri: one a politician, the other a man interested in cultural preservation.<sup>151</sup> It is then perhaps better to see Snorri as creating a literary product that functions ‘as a marker of social prestige and tool of political power,’ which in turn changes how we understand his creative intervention.<sup>152</sup>

The *Poetic Edda* is a compilation from c.1270, gathered chiefly from the Codex Regius or *Konungsþók* (GKS 2365 4to) manuscript, with some poems found either whole or in parts in two other codices, one being the late thirteenth-century manuscript (AM 748 I a 4to, c.1300–25) which contains the only extant copy of the poem *Baldrs draumar*.<sup>153</sup> While Snorri’s *Edda* was composed well after the Christianisation of Iceland, the written poems in the *Poetic Edda* cannot be dated so precisely and are understood to originate in pre-Christian oral traditions. There are different versions of the *Poetic Edda*, thus leading to variations within the poems themselves, for example in the *Hauksbók Völuspá*, dated c.1300, there are no references to Baldr’s death.<sup>154</sup> This particular poem has been preserved in different versions across the centuries, a natural consequence of the shift from a predominantly oral culture to the written word.<sup>155</sup> *Völuspá* describes the creation and destruction of Norse cosmogony, and so provides important insight into the cultural and religious beliefs of medieval Nordic society. It also exists in fragments in Snorri’s *Edda*, however it is impossible to know which poems Snorri did or did not know while writing, as the surviving manuscripts of the *Poetic Edda* postdate his work. The fluidity of the eddic material—and the inconsistencies that exist as a result—captures an

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*Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen and Tuomas Lehtone, with Alexandra Bergholm (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 171–97.

<sup>151</sup> Kevin Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 5–6.

<sup>152</sup> Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, 8.

<sup>153</sup> Carolyne Larrington, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ix–xxv, x–xi.

<sup>154</sup> ‘Appendix: The Seeress’s Prophecy (Hauksbók Text),’ in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 274–81; *Völuspá* (*Hauksbók*), *Eddukvæði: Volume I Goðakvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 308–16.

<sup>155</sup> For more on Norse oral culture, see: Else Mundal, ‘Oral and Scribal Variation in *Völuspá*: A Case study in Old Norse Poetry,’ in *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008), 209–27.

ambiguity that appealed to an eighteenth-century audience. As I will discuss, *Völuspá* was especially popular and was frequently adapted.

Macpherson was the first to use the term ‘Edda’ in his *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (1771) when referring to Peder Hans Resen’s Latin *Edda Islandorum* (1665) which included the poems *Völuspá* and *Hávamál*.<sup>156</sup> For the majority who had no access to Old Icelandic or Latin, their primary way of coming into contact with the *Edda* was through Percy’s 1770 two volume *Northern Antiquities*. This was a translation of a 1763 second edition of Mallet’s *L’histoire de Dannemarc*.<sup>157</sup> Until this point, only scholars and antiquarians could access the *Edda* with editions such as Resen’s. The first volume of *Northern Antiquities* is a scholarly overview of Scandinavian culture and myth through history. The second volume translates *Gylfaginning*—the first part of Snorri’s *Edda*, the other two being *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*. It divides *Gylfaginning* into thirty-three Fables as well as an extensive appendix that includes further observations on *Skáldskaparmál*, select poems from the *Poetic Edda*, and a supplement of Johannis Goranson’s Latin translation of the *Edda*. *Northern Antiquities* was the first accessible piece of scholarship on the *Edda* in the eighteenth century, and so it was well received by British readers. The *Monthly Review* saw it as ‘a work of great labour and very considerable utility’ and took particular interest in Odin as a corruption through whom the purity of original Scandinavian religion was lost.<sup>158</sup> The *London Magazine* published a three-part review between October and December 1770, quoting at length passages that connected world religions—including Scandinavian—with the Scythians.<sup>159</sup>

Part of the general interest was motivated by a desire to connect disparate cultures and religions to one source. Within Britain, knowledge of Scandinavian religious practices collapsed

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<sup>156</sup> Carolyn Larrington, ‘Translating the *Poetic Edda* into English,’ in *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. David Clark and Carl Phelpstead (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2007), 21–22.

<sup>157</sup> Omberg, *Scandinavian Themes*, 23. This thesis will attribute authorship of *Northern Antiquities* to Percy, though there remains an understanding that this is a work of translation.

<sup>158</sup> ‘*Northern Antiquities*,’ *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 1752–1825 43, (Aug, 1770): 93–94.

<sup>159</sup> ‘NORTHERN Antiquities, &c.,’ *London Magazine, Or, Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer* 39, (Dec, 1770): 629.

internal national boundaries by assisting the appropriation of figures such as the Bard and Druid. Whittaker remarks that Scandinavians were seen as possessing ‘a simple religion, a libertarian government and a martial spirit which were the supposedly essential characteristics of the Norse race brought from the east.’<sup>160</sup> The euhemerism of the Æsir is part of the original prologue to the *Edda* which describes Odin migrating from Turkey/Troy to Sweden where legendary Swedish King Gylfi, ‘when he learned of the arrival of the men of Asia (who were called Æsir), he went to meet them and offered Odin as much power in his realm as he wished himself.’<sup>161</sup> Percy notes that although this origin story is ‘useless and ridiculous,’ through the Creation and Deluge ‘we find in the heroes of that famous [Troy], the ancestors of Odin, and of the other Princes of the north.’<sup>162</sup>

In *The History of English Poetry* (1774–81), Warton recounts the North’s Asiatic connections, singling out the ‘remarkable correspondence [...] between the Druidical and the Persian superstitions’ which can also be found in the *Edda*.<sup>163</sup> Robert Rix suggests that Warton wanted to both challenge Percy’s focused attention on a Gothic Æsir as the origins of poetry in Europe, and ‘reconcile Percy’s theory with the former literary-historical model which purported that Arabian influences had provided the vernacular romance with its fabulous machinery.’<sup>164</sup> This desire for cultural unity in the *Edda* can also be noted in eighteenth-century scholars and antiquarians who strove to trace Britain’s historical roots to a single, shared, ancient experience. This is perhaps clearest in *Northern Antiquities* with its truncated form as shorter ‘fables’ that is similar in structure to Resen’s edition. Although Blake connects fables with allegory, in

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<sup>160</sup> Whittaker, *Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 27.

<sup>161</sup> Snorri Sturluson, ‘Prologue’ in *Edda*, trans. and ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Everyman, 1995), 4; [‘en er hann spyr til ferða þeira Asiamanna er Æsir váru kallaðir, fór hann móti þeim ok bauð at Óðiinn skyldi slíkt vald hafa í hans ríki sem hann vildi sjálf.’; 6].

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Percy, *Northern Antiquities: or, a description of the manners, customs, religion, and laws of the ancient Danes, and other northern nations, etc.*, Vol.2. London: Printed for T. Carnan and Co. MDCCLXX. [1770], xxiv–xxv.

<sup>163</sup> Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, Vol.1. London: Printed for, and sold by J. Dodsley, J. Walter, T. Becket, J. Robson, and G. Robinson. MDCCLXXIV. [1774], 40.

<sup>164</sup> Robert Rix, “‘The North’ and ‘The East’: The Odin Migration Theory,” in *Romantic Norths: Anglo-Nordic Exchanges, 1770–1842*, ed. Cian Duffy (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 169–70.

*Northern Antiquities* it gestures towards a conscious editorial decision to restructure the myths.<sup>165</sup> In Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, the most helpful definition of 'fable' is 'the series or contexture of events which constitute a poem epick or dramattick.'<sup>166</sup> *The Quarterly Review* proposes that 'when the fables of popular superstition are contemplated in detail, we discover a singular degree of uniformity in that realm wherein most diversity might be expected, in the ideal world'; with fables, the imagination has 'a boundless power of creation and combination,' allowing for similar images and figures to move cross-cultures.<sup>167</sup> Viewing the *Edda* as a sequence of fables, then, reveals a syncretism focused on producing continuity between different world myths and views during the eighteenth century.

### ***Imagining Scandinavia in the Johnson Circle***

The image of ancient Scandinavia continued to develop into the late eighteenth century. Northern antiquarianism remained a topic of interest within a group of writers and artists associated with the liberal bookseller and publisher Joseph Johnson, who also hired Blake as an engraver during the 1780s and 1790s. Based in London, Johnson worked with and knew a range of eighteenth-century thinkers, writers, and artists including—but not exclusive to—Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Joseph Priestley, Thomas Paine, and Henry Fuseli. Helen Braithwaite asserts that 'throughout his career Joseph Johnson was fundamentally sympathetic to ideas favouring improvement and reform,' though the extent to which this was the case can be disputed.<sup>168</sup> John Barrell, though, notes that Johnson was in fact a publisher who 'took an active and informed interest in all the different fields of intellectual endeavour in which he published.'<sup>169</sup> His weekly dinners were testament to his support of the various liberal and

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<sup>165</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 292.

<sup>166</sup> 'Fable, n.s. 4,' *A Dictionary of the English Language*, by Samuel Johnson. 1755, 1773. *Johnson's Dictionary Online*.

<sup>167</sup> 'Dictionnaire Infernal,' *The Quarterly Review* 22, no. 44 (Jan, 1820): 350.

<sup>168</sup> Helen Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent: Joseph Johnson and the Cause of Liberty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), xii.

<sup>169</sup> John Barrell, 'Divided We Grow,' *London Review of Books* 25, no. 11 (2003): 6–7.



radical London literati, with figures such as William Godwin and Paine informally meeting above his shop to discuss contemporary affairs.

In 1787, Johnson established the *Analytical Review* with Unitarian Thomas Christie. It was to be a journal that ‘encouraged a multiple-editor approach that gave legitimate public voice to the work of leading anti-government activists.’<sup>170</sup> Although Braithwaite suggests that the *Analytical* offered ‘impartial and rational analysis rather than critical commentary or opinion,’ Susan Oliver argues that due to its championing of many editorial voices, the *Analytical* broke down the traditional hierarchy of a regular press and maintained connections across Europe and North America.<sup>171</sup> It associated itself with a contemporary pro-liberalism that aligned with the views of a dissenting, professional middling class audience; it ‘was very much the journal of Rational Dissent. Its attitude to artisan radicalism was ambivalent.’<sup>172</sup> In its prospectus, the *Analytical* advocated for a rigorous enquiry that moved beyond established press structures, where ‘old Journalists appear [...] only to bring forward *themselves*’ and lost the impartiality that Johnson and Christie believed essential to reviews.<sup>173</sup> Johnson’s 1798 indictment for sedition cut the *Analytical*’s career short and its contents were used by the prosecution.<sup>174</sup> Gerald Tyson marks these years as the beginning of the end for Johnson’s business although, despite losing his 1780–90s clientele, his publication output in the 1800s ‘continued to achieve the same high standard as before.’<sup>175</sup>

The bookseller’s name can be found on the title page of Blake’s poem *The French Revolution* and children’s chapbook *The Gates of Paradise* (1793). Despite this, *The French Revolution* was left in its uncorrected proof stage, and *The Gates of Paradise* was only

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<sup>170</sup> Susan Oliver, ‘Silencing Joseph Johnson and the *Analytical Review*,’ *The Wordsworth Circle* 40, no. 2–3 (2009): 96–97.

<sup>171</sup> Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing, and Dissent*, 87; Oliver, ‘Silencing Joseph Johnson,’ 96.

<sup>172</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 223.

<sup>173</sup> Joseph Johnson, *Prospectus of the Analytical Review, or a new literary journal*, London: [s.n.], MDCCLXXXII. [1788], i–ii.

<sup>174</sup> *Prospectus of the Analytical*, iii; Oliver, ‘Silencing Joseph Johnson,’ 101.

<sup>175</sup> Tyson, *Joseph Johnson*, 174, 179–80.

displayed in Johnson's shop and never sold there.<sup>176</sup> Mee suggests that Blake's work from the 1790s was better positioned against contemporary visionaries like Richard Brothers, which would have situated him ambiguously alongside the rational millenarianism touted by Johnson's clientele.<sup>177</sup> Jeffrey Barclay Mertz considers different possibilities as to why *The French Revolution* was never published through Johnson, and concludes that it was a combination of genre choice, participating in the ongoing Revolutionary debates, and Blake's flouting of standard versification rules which 'would have prevented his poem from receiving favourable treatment in the reviews, thus diminishing its chances of commercial success.'<sup>178</sup> It is possible that during the 1790s, Blake's antinomianism was met with disapproval by the rational dissenters that made up the majority of Johnson's circle. To Johnson, Blake would have been first and foremost an engraver for other publications, and as such it is most likely that Blake remained on the periphery of the bookseller's intellectual gatherings.

Despite working in the business of producing books rather than as a poet, Blake still would have come into contact with Johnson's liberal establishment of creative and politically-reformist minds.<sup>179</sup> It is reasonable to assume that these interactions could have influenced Blake's creative production and augmented his rhetoric which 'was alive with political resonances.'<sup>180</sup> Blake's work shows a position of both inclusion and exclusion, where he is both involved with—yet on the margins of—a popular literary hub with a broad spectrum of radical politics. A well-known connection between Blake and Johnson is Fuseli, a Swiss artist who was a close friend and worked with Johnson on various projects. Angela Esterhammer suggests that 'Fuseli's enthusiasm for the Scandinavian *Eddas* likely influenced Johnson's late publication of the Icelandic *Edda* in an Icelandic-Latin-English edition.'<sup>181</sup> Although Esterhammer mistakes

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<sup>176</sup> Jeffrey Barclay Mertz, 'A Visionary among the Radicals: William Blake and the Circle of Joseph Johnson, 1790–95,' (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), 15–16; Joseph Byrne, 'Blake, Johnson, and *The Gates of Paradise*,' *The Wordsworth Circle* 44, no. 2–3 (2013): 132.

<sup>177</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 20.

<sup>178</sup> Mertz, *A Visionary among the Radicals*, 143.

<sup>179</sup> Mertz, *A Visionary among Radicals* 4.

<sup>180</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 6.

<sup>181</sup> Angela Esterhammer, 'Continental Literature, Translation, and the Johnson Circle,' *The Wordsworth Circle* 33, no. 3 (2002): 102.

James Beresford's poem-translation—*The Song of the Sun* (1805), printed by Johnson—as an edition of the *Edda*, it is clear that Johnson had direct interest in the ancient North which could have, in part, been encouraged by Fuseli. It is through the artist that we can find an overlap with Blake's interest in Norse mythology.

In the 1800 Francis du Roveray edition of Gray's poems, three of the six illustrated plates were produced by Fuseli, two of which depicted the Norse odes. Clunies Ross details how Fuseli, Blake, and their contemporary George Romney were inspired by Gray's sublime Norse subjects and 'were most certainly conscious of each other's work.'<sup>182</sup> As a group of artists, their ideological standpoint and dissenting sympathies would have found greater resonance with Gray's representation of Norse myth, rather than Percy's version. In comparison to Fuseli's illustrations, Blake's vision for Gray's Norse odes is more stripped back, though the influence of Fuseli's treatment of Norse myth remains visible in the illuminated books. Fuseli's personal interest in Gray can be dated to between 1770–78, though he famously depicts Jörmungandr inspired by Percy's rendition of the poem *Hymiskviða* in his 1790 Royal Academy diploma painting, *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent*.<sup>183</sup> The painting itself promotes a Burkean sublime countered by a comic Odin in the top left corner, and Jörmungandr's curvature is compelling, especially when viewed alongside Blake's serpent motif on the title plate for *Europe* and title design for 'The Descent of Odin' (fig.4).

Irene Tayler argues that Blake's snake in 'The Descent of Odin' alludes to the serpent found in Plate 20 of *Marriage*, however there seems to be a more interesting significance with the serpent in *Europe*, which Mee suggests is representative of 'a creative force in opposition to the moral law of the Urizenic system.'<sup>184</sup> Although the similarities between serpents might gesture towards Blake reusing a design like a stock template, the resemblance to Fuseli's painting hints towards the influence of Norse motifs. It must be noted that 'The Descent of

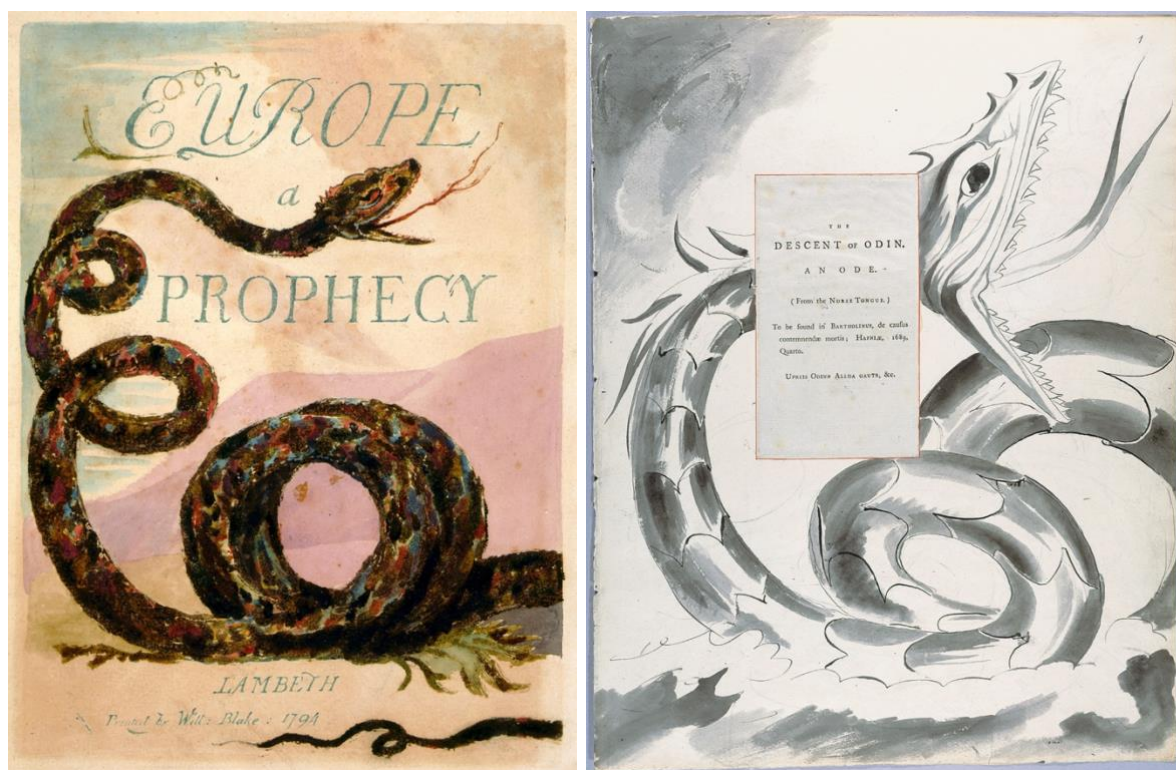
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<sup>182</sup> Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 119.

<sup>183</sup> Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 131–32.

<sup>184</sup> Tayler, *Blake's Illustrations to Gray*, 116; Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 146.

Odin' and the original Norse poem *Baldrs draumar* does not mention Jörmungandr; it relates Odin's quest to learn more about his son's impending death. While Baldr's death is part of the same narrative arc as Ragnarök, where Jörmungandr plays a key role, Blake was most likely not aware of this when choosing his motif for the title design to Gray's poem. Although O'Donoghue suggests Orc's serpent form as a source for the motif, and Clunies Ross admits that Jörmungandr 'has no relevance to Gray's poem,' neither scholar considers Fuseli's painting as a possible source of inspiration for either the design of Blake's *Europe* plate or his illustrations to Gray.<sup>185</sup>



**Figure 4:** LEFT. William Blake, Title Plate to *Europe: A Prophecy*, Copy E (1794). Relief and white-line etching with colour printing and hand colouring. Library of Congress. © The William Blake Archive.

RIGHT. William Blake, Title Page to 'The Descent of Odin,' in *Illustrations to Gray's 'Poems'* (1797–98). Object 77. Pen, ink, and watercolour over pencil. Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

Johnson's networks extended throughout Europe and North America, and his acquisition of foreign literatures—also reviewed in the *Analytical*—consolidated connections including those based in or from Scandinavia. For example, Johnson was in contact with the

<sup>185</sup> O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 101; Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 145.

Danish National Archivist Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin and in June 1788 expressed an interest in Thorkelin's work, though later in the year he stated 'that the idea of translating [Høst's] history is for the present, at least, given up.'<sup>186</sup> Although there was no substantial working relationship, the *Analytical* reviewed Thorkelin's *Fragments* (1788) and *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróða* (1787), praising its treatment of the Æsir: 'by making both Odin and Locki, the beneficent and malign rulers of the globe, temporary instruments of one immutable and superintending being, the mythology of the north has removed from its doctrines that endless jar of power and imbecility [...] which scatters blasphemy and ridicule over the systems of the east.'<sup>187</sup>

Johnson's interest in Scandinavia and the North continued throughout the 1780s and 1790s, most visibly in his provincial networks. In Bristol, brothers Amos and Joseph Cottle, who were close acquaintances with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, showed an interest in ancient British cultures and Scandinavia. Joseph—a bookseller and publisher associated with the first edition of William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*—wrote *Alfred: An Epic Poem* (1804). In 1797, Amos published his *Icelandic Poetry* based on the Copenhagen *Edda* (1787).<sup>188</sup> A 1798 review of *Icelandic Poetry* remarks that 'popular as Gray's versification is, we think the translator has done wisely in inserting one of his one; the loose and rapid versification which he has adopted, is best calculated to represent the original; and with this the polished style of Gray would ill have accorded.'<sup>189</sup> Southey keenly supported his friend's endeavours and wrote the introductory poem for the collection.

I should ascribe the review of Amos Cottles Edda, & the version of  
Vafthrudnismal in the M Magazine to you if I thought you understood the

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<sup>186</sup> Joseph Johnson, 'To Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, (June 05, 1788),' in *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, ed. John Bugg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online*; Joseph Johnson, 'To Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, (Oct 01, 1788),' in *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, ed. John Bugg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online*.

<sup>187</sup> Amanda J. Collins, 'An appendix on the periodical literature,' in *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Trieste, Italy: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998), 240; 'Edda sæmundar Hinns Fróða,' *The Analytical Review* 2, (Dec, 1788): 461.

<sup>188</sup> The Arnamagnæan Commission based in Copenhagen published an edited version of the Codex Regius manuscript and other poems, but they did not re-edit *Völuspá* and *Hávamál* as these were already available in the Resen edition. See: Larrington, 'Translating the *Poetic Edda* in English,' 22–23.

<sup>189</sup> 'Icelandic Poetry, Or the Edda of Sæmund,' *The Critical Review* 22, (Jan, 1798): 24.

Icelandic language. is that the case? he was in a hurry, & he wanted northern learning, but seemed to have no idea of knowing how or where to look for it. the Edda fell into his hands and delighted him – his brother who knows no language but English wanted to read it, & he had begun a prose translation when I advised him to versify it. in the course of six weeks he had the book half printed. all this was not as it should have been, however his book will make the Runic tales more familiar, & may perhaps give a good direction to the genius of some young man into whose hands it may fall.<sup>190</sup>

Despite concerns about the process, it is clear here that this did not dampen Southey's enthusiasm for the material itself and the impact it might have on the general public.

Southey himself published his own versions of Norse culture, 'The Race of Odin' and 'The Death of Odin,' in a 1795 collection of poems. Rather than drawing directly from the myths, Southey took the euhemerist stance of Odin as a military leader. Mortensen stresses Southey's singularity in approach as, 'in contrast to his fellow-Romantics, Southey not only refuses to domesticate the cult of the northern sublime; he radicalises it, lending greater relevance to familiar ideas and going beyond previous writers even in the act of imitating them.'<sup>191</sup> Through Odin, Southey focuses on the friction between the Gothic and Classical to configure 'Rome as the equivalent of the *ancien régime* in England and France,' while Odin and his men are the 'historical parallel to the apocalyptic forces of the modern revolutionary movement currently spreading throughout the European Continent.'<sup>192</sup>

Southey's Norse contributions during the 1790s were less about the formation of an ancient English past, and were more about timely political statements about liberty, with Odin embodying freedom and true poetry.<sup>193</sup> Lynda Pratt makes a compelling case that Southey was inspired by Frank Sayers, a doctor and poet based in Norwich who published his *Dramatic*

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<sup>190</sup> Robert Southey, 'Robert Southey to William Taylor of Norwich, (Jan 04, 1799),' in *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, and Ian Packer. 2009. *Romantic Circles Electronic Edition*.

<sup>191</sup> Peter Mortensen, "'The Descent of Odin': Wordsworth, Scott and Southey among the Norsemen,' *Romanticism* 6, no. 2 (2000): 228.

<sup>192</sup> Mortensen, "'The Descent of Odin'," 228.

<sup>193</sup> Lynda Pratt, 'The Southey Circle and Scandinavian Mythology and Literature,' in *Celtic and Germanic Themes in European Literature*, ed. Neil Thomas (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), 104.

*Sketches of Ancient Northern Mythology* (1790) with Johnson.<sup>194</sup> Norwich was a provincial city associated with the kind of dissent championed by Johnson's clientele in the metropolis. David Chandler asserts that 'Norwich had a long and proud record of Dissent,' though there was no established intellectual reputation until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when 'the Presbyterians began to evolve their own educational systems and commenced their slow drift toward rational theology and Unitarianism.'<sup>195</sup>

Norwich emerged as a thriving literary centre with the Unitarian Octagon Chapel opening in 1756, and the founding of the Norwich Public Library in 1784. Chandler notes that William Enfield, minister of the Octagon, and William Taylor were presidents of the library committee, with Sayers being chosen twice, only to politely decline.<sup>196</sup> At one point, Enfield worked at the dissenting institution, the Warrington Academy, with Barbauld, while both Sayers and Taylor were students at Barbauld's Palgrave Academy in Suffolk where they were considered 'two of the earliest pupils who possessed distinguished abilities.'<sup>197</sup> Taylor played an important role in drawing the public's attention to German Romantic literature. He translated and reviewed many of Johnson's German acquisitions, including the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gottfried August Bürger, with the bookseller becoming his main London distributor.<sup>198</sup> Taylor is important in the mediation of German literature in English culture, but Sayers is the key figure in relation to Northern antiquarianism.

In his *Dramatic Sketches*, Sayers re-imagined Norse myth and culture while remaining conscious of the ongoing discussions about English literary heritage:

Among that variety of superstitions and mythologies which have contributed at different periods to decorate the poetry of England, it is much to be lamented that scarcely any traces are to be discovered of the splendid and sublime religion of our Northern ancestors.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Pratt, 'The Southey Circle,' 103.

<sup>195</sup> David Chandler, "'The Athens of England': Norwich as a Literary Center in the Late Eighteenth Century,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 174–75.

<sup>196</sup> Chandler, "'The Athens of England','' 176.

<sup>197</sup> 'Notices of Mrs Barbauld,' *Christian Register* 46, no. 4 (Nov 19, 1825): 1.

<sup>198</sup> Esterhammer, 'Continental Literature, Translation, and the Johnson Circle,' 102.

<sup>199</sup> Frank Sayers, 'Preface,' in *Dramatic Sketches*, London: printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXC. [1790], iii.

In his posthumous biography of Sayers, Taylor describes the doctor-turned-poet mulling over his Welsh heritage, that ‘his pedigree might be traced up to Rhys-ap-Tewdwr Mawr, Prince of South Wales, and so up, through the heroes of Welsh history, into the age of fable and romance.’<sup>200</sup> While Sayers was interested in the different cultures of ancient British nations, it was the cultural impact of Scandinavian lore that captured his imagination. His desire to revive an interest in ‘the neglected beauties of the Gothic religion, and of recommending a freer introduction of its imagery into the poetry of the English nation’ was prompted by Gray.<sup>201</sup> Unlike Gray and Percy, though, Sayers’ subsequent writing on Norse mythology was not driven by scholarly curiosity, despite admitting that alongside the sketches, ‘a dissertation on the Northern mythology might have been prefixed with advantage.’<sup>202</sup> Rather, his intentions were to give ‘some slight idea’ of his subjects by elucidating a linguistic, and perhaps ideological, heritage for English poetry within the North.

*Dramatic Sketches*, then, participated in the ongoing discourse surrounding national identity and eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism taking subjects that were ‘in some degree influenced by the age.’<sup>203</sup> In an 1827 review of Taylor’s biography and Sayers’ work, Southey bemoaned that ‘the fault of writing too little is one which has not so often been laid to a poet’s charge. Dr. Sayers is to be charged with it [...]’.<sup>204</sup> Over the course of the 1790s Sayers became more conservative, which Chandler views as ‘a movement from atheism to a dogmatic Anglicanism,’ but these changing views do not diminish his earlier engagement with the Norse material.<sup>205</sup> His interpretation of Norse myth and culture continues to draw attention to the liberal, reformist attitude that was part of the Johnson circle during these years and Johnson’s broader interest in ancient Scandinavia.

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<sup>200</sup> Robert Southey, ‘Collective Works of the Late Dr. Sayers; to which have been Prefixed some Biographic Particulars,’ *The Quarterly Review* 35, no. 69 (1827): 175.

<sup>201</sup> Sayers, ‘Preface,’ iii.

<sup>202</sup> Sayers, ‘Preface,’ iv.

<sup>203</sup> Southey, ‘Collective Works of the Late Dr. Sayers,’ 204.

<sup>204</sup> Southey, ‘Collective Works of the Late Dr. Sayers,’ 195.

<sup>205</sup> David Chandler, ‘Sayers, Frank (1763–1817), Poet and Scholar,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 2004.



### ***Blake's Northern Antiquarianism***

The eighteenth-century curiosity in Scandinavia progressed into the early nineteenth century, as did Blake's own antiquarian interests. As mentioned earlier, his apprenticeship to the engraver Basire had a long-lasting influence on his work, and in 1797, John Flaxman commissioned Blake to illustrate Gray's odes, including 'The Fatal Sisters' and 'The Descent of Odin.'<sup>206</sup> David Duff reminds us that 'Blake's career spans the entirety of the British Romantic movement, from the antiquarian revivals of the 1760s to the 1820s, and he participates in each of its phases responding to successive generations of writers and numbers literary trends.'<sup>207</sup> Blake's syncretic practice and knowledge of a range of mythologies is visible in his *Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* (1809) that accompanied his largely unsuccessful exhibition. Here, Blake asserts:

The antiquities of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews [...] How other antiquities came to be neglected and disbelieved, while those of the Jews are collected and arranged, is an enquiry, worthy of both the Antiquarian and the Divine. All had originally one language, and one religion, this was the religion of Jesus, the everlasting Gospel.

(E543. *Descriptive Catalogue*: [pg.43–44])

Blake's interest in all the antiquities includes the *Edda*, which he mentions explicitly in his annotations to Watson's *Apology* where he declares, 'Read the Edda of Iceland the Songs of Fingal the accounts of the North American Savages [...] Likewise Read Homers Iliad. he was certainly a Savage. in the Bishops sense. He knew nothing of God. in the Bishops sense of the word & yet he was no fool' (E615. *Apology*: [p.8]).

Blake's approach reveals his awareness of different ancient cultures and the way they come together. His belief that the Bible was 'an amalgam of multiple texts stitched together over many centuries' also perpetuated his aversion to the idea that it was divinely received, and

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<sup>206</sup> Tayler, *Blake's Illustrations to Gray*, 10.

<sup>207</sup> David Duff, 'The Eighteenth Century and Romanticism,' in *William Blake in Context*, ed. Sarah Haggarty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 192.

allowed him to view other cultural texts in the same way.<sup>208</sup> Biblical texts were not seen by Blake as ‘a seamless narrative marked by occasional ruptures and mistakes,’ but were understood as fragmentary.<sup>209</sup> This is a key concept in the illuminated books and becomes, I suggest, part of Blake’s critique of a body politic as drawn from Norse subjects.

Blake’s largest and now non-extant painting from his 1809 exhibition was titled ‘The Ancient Britons.’ It depicted the escape of three Britons during King Arthur’s last battle. ‘The British Antiquities,’ Blake describes, ‘are now in the Artist’s hands; all his visionary contemplations, relating to his own country and its ancient glory, when it was as it again shall be, the source of learning and inspiration’ (E542. *Descriptive Catalogue*: [pg.39]). In this painting, Blake engages with Gothic resistance, where he proposes that ‘the stories of Arthur are the acts of Albion’ (E543. *Descriptive Catalogue*: [pg.42]). Although we cannot see the painting ourselves, there are other examples of how Blake engaged with ancient British cultures outside of the illuminated books. ‘Gwin, King of Norway’ from *Poetical Sketches* (1783) and ‘The Voice of the Ancient Bard’ from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794) reveal Gray’s influence on Blake’s subject matter and imagery. ‘Gwin’ is a spirited ballad with clear connections to both *Ossian* and Percy’s *Reliques*. The mention of ‘Gordred the giant’ (E417. 1.13) is also reminiscent of Chatterton’s own translation ‘Gordred Crovan’ (1769) which was based on the Norse-Gaelic king of Dublin and the Isles.<sup>210</sup> The poem engages with the theme of Gothic liberty, where the people rise against Gwin who ‘leads his host as black as night,/When pestilence does fly’ (E419. ‘Gwin’:55–56). This imagery draws on eighteenth-century mediations of Norse motifs and is developed in greater detail in the illuminated books.

During the eighteenth century, the ancient and purportedly British Bard and Druid were used widely in political rhetoric and literature to address questions concerning the liberties of

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<sup>208</sup> Leo Damrosch, *Eternity’s Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 245–46.

<sup>209</sup> Jerome McGann, ‘The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake’s Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes,’ *Studies in Romanticism* 25, no. 3 (1986): 319.

<sup>210</sup> For more on ‘Gwin,’ Chatterton, *Ossian*, and Percy, see: Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 66–68.

the people. Strabone counters Katie Trumpener's main argument that the English appropriated bardic culture, instead arguing that the English were part of a vast network of bardic appropriation that included the other British nations.<sup>211</sup> The role of the medieval bard, as conceived in the eighteenth century, was 'to preserve national memory and to rally the nation against oppression through the power of his martial verse and moral propriety – in short, to be the poet-prophet of the nation.'<sup>212</sup> Liberty was a nebulous term during the late eighteenth century, but through the Bard it became associated more with Northern cultural legacies rather than the Augustan, Classical models that were championed earlier in the century. Howard Weinbrot believes that the trajectory of Britain's interest from the Augustan to Gothic shows 'a growing awareness of the combined international and domestic focus of British literature, its expanding canon, and its acceptance in Gallic Europe.'<sup>213</sup> Strabone, on the other hand, sees the British nations retreating into their own native texts, consequently fuelling a national antiquarianism similar to other European countries.<sup>214</sup>

When *Monthly Magazine* declared Sayers 'the bard of Norwich' in his ability to unite 'so fine a spirit of imaginative thought, and so stern a fidelity of that state and consequence the subject particularly demands,' the comparison was made in admiration of Sayers' poetic spirit and expertise.<sup>215</sup> For Welshman Edward Williams—another member of Johnson's circle and better known by his nom-de-plume Iolo Morganwg—to be a bard was 'to provide the Welsh with a new version of their history by exhuming usable elements from the past, concocting new theories, and asserting their rights as a distinct and distinctive people.'<sup>216</sup> Iolo was heavily invested in Welsh antiquarianism and lived in London for part of the period that Blake worked

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<sup>211</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 54. See: Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalisms: the Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 33–34.

<sup>212</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 51.

<sup>213</sup> Howard Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: the Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>214</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 55, 64.

<sup>215</sup> 'News from Parnassus,' *Monthly Magazine, Or, British Reg[i]ster* 57, no. 393 (Mar, 1824): 120.

<sup>216</sup> Geraint Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a "Rattleskull Genius": Introduction,' in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Geraint Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 11.

for Johnson.<sup>217</sup> He briefly revived the *Gorsedd*—a gathering of Welsh Bards from ancient tradition—in 1792, and his self-styled bardism became part of a fabrication that participated in the same debates surrounding *Ossian*, Chatterton’s Rowley poems, and Percy’s *Reliques*.<sup>218</sup>

The Bard, then, was an active part of the late eighteenth-century imagination and ‘an aesthetic of disintegration and dualism undermining the monism of organic unity.’<sup>219</sup> In turn the Druids, after being rediscovered during the Renaissance in England, were associated with the ancient Celtic world and ‘depended on the concept of a long prehistoric barbarian past which, in Western Europe, as elsewhere, the classical world impinged.’<sup>220</sup> This history participated in a long-drawn myth that situated Europeans within a biblical history.<sup>221</sup> Stuart Piggott’s influential work, *The Druids* (1968), reveals a blurring between Druids and Bards throughout history. In Michael Drayton’s *Polyolbion* (1622), Druids were envisioned as ‘sacred Bards’ and philosophers, and in Aylett Sammes’ *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata* (1676), they were thought to have supplanted Phoenician bards.<sup>222</sup> Both the Bard and the Druid were important figures in relation to Blake who adopted a Bard-Druid—prophet-priest—figure to think about statecraft, priestcraft, and their impact on the liberties of the people. As Whittaker asserts, ‘the theme of political tyranny is linked to the important ideological support it finds within religion,’ but Blake remained interested ‘in how divine intervention can disrupt and subvert this power structure,’ which was in part embodied by the Bard-Druid.<sup>223</sup> These ancient British figures were essential to Blake’s grappling with the movement between inspiration and reification, and this was augmented by a clear engagement with Norse motifs.

Scholars have long been aware of the relationship between Blake and Old Norse. In 1923, Theodore Stenberg drew on the earlier critical works of Irene Langridge and P. Berger to

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<sup>217</sup> Jon Mee, “‘Images of Truth New Born’: Iolo, Blake, and the Literary Radicalism of the 1790s,” in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, ed. Geraint Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 175.

<sup>218</sup> Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 169.

<sup>219</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 65.

<sup>220</sup> Piggott, *The Druids*, 132.

<sup>221</sup> Piggott, *The Druids*, 133.

<sup>222</sup> Piggott, *The Druids*, 139–40.

<sup>223</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 19.

discuss Blake's relationship with Norse sources. These early scholarly examinations connected figures such as Urizen, Los, Enitharmon, and Tharmas, with prehistorical heroes of Nordic traditions.<sup>224</sup> In his short article, Stenberg proposed that Blake's *Vala*—or *The Four Zoas*—refers to *Völuspá* which was commonly translated in the period as *The Prophecy of Vala*, and that the adoption of an eddic name should be considered more seriously.<sup>225</sup> Despite framing his argument with unsupported and arbitrary connections to Norse culture, Stenberg nevertheless provided an initial insight into the connections that can be made between Blake and Norse myth. In *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), Northrop Frye developed these by proposing that the two *Eddas* provided supplementary myths that were 'equally faithful to the central form of the Word of God,' and as such they worked in tandem with the Bible.<sup>226</sup> Frye, like Stenberg, assumed the influence of eddic sources in Blake and did not cite any original or contemporary Norse translations. Instead, he generalises that 'to Blake [they] contained traditions as antique and authentic as those of the Old Testament itself.'<sup>227</sup>

Erdman has argued that Blake's agrarian imagery in *America*, 'a song of harvest reaped in the teeth of redcoats [...] a song of praise to the industrious man,' is based on Chatterton's Rowley poems and *Northern Antiquities*.<sup>228</sup> He concluded the discussion by acknowledging Blake's awareness of Mallet's writings on agricultural practices and sacrifices to Odin when planning and writing *America*.<sup>229</sup> In the 1990s, Mee summed up prior scholarship's explorations of Blake and Northern antiquarianism by reiterating that 'Blake's primitivism was part of a desire, widespread among radicals in the 1790s, to bring previously excluded currents into the public domain.'<sup>230</sup> In examining Blake's antiquarian interests, Mee exposed the relationship between eighteenth-century cultural politics and Blake's prophetic works. With a focus on the

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<sup>224</sup> Theodore Stenberg, 'Blake's Indebtedness to the "Eddas",' *The Modern Language Review* 18, no. 2 (1923): 204.

<sup>225</sup> Stenberg, 'Blake's Indebtedness to the "Eddas",' 206.

<sup>226</sup> Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 110.

<sup>227</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 125.

<sup>228</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, 229–30.

<sup>229</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, 231–32.

<sup>230</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 75.

influence of *Ossian* and Gray, Mee also demonstrated how Blake subverted primitive sources to challenge contemporary ideology and take ‘the taste for the antique to radical conclusions.’<sup>231</sup>

Following the same critical footsteps, Whittaker considered how, through eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism, ‘the ancient British nation emerged from almost complete darkness into a roseate Anglo-Celtic twilight.’<sup>232</sup> He drew clearer links between the development of Blake’s mythography and antiquarian knowledge, thus consolidating the centrality of antiquarianism in Blake’s work. Whittaker decisively situated Blake within the emerging discourse surrounding the North and suggested that Blake’s own interests—specifically in relation to the myth of Britain—were integral to the structure of the illuminated books.<sup>233</sup> Most recently, Fallon has examined Blake’s syncretism and readdresses the relationship between Blake and Enlightenment thinking. Taking the trope of apotheosis, he concluded that Blake’s syncretic antiquarianism invested more deeply in Enlightenment thinking than previously thought. Within Blake’s use of apotheosis, Fallon considered the biblical apocalypse as a motif that draws from the Bible, *Northern Antiquities*, and *Ossian*.<sup>234</sup> He has little to say, though, about the Norse tropes.

This brief overview reveals that Blake scholarship’s initial treatment of Blake’s engagement with Old Norse remains underdeveloped, but in Norse reception studies, he frequently appears along with other poets and artists. Clunies Ross has examined in detail the movement of ideas between Blake and his Royal Academy friends, and their fascination with Norse subjects.<sup>235</sup> Omberg has surveyed Scandinavia’s influence on Blake and others such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and Walter Scott.<sup>236</sup> Most recently, O’Donoghue confirms Blake scholarship’s thoughts by reiterating the importance of Celtic and Norse mythology in Blake’s version of British prehistory. In her chapter on Romantic reception of Old Norse, she

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<sup>231</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 80.

<sup>232</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 12.

<sup>233</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 15.

<sup>234</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 6.

<sup>235</sup> Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 118–19.

<sup>236</sup> Omberg, *Scandinavian Themes in English Poetry*, 124–38.

proposes that ‘transformed traces of Old Norse myth nevertheless linger in his imagination, and show themselves in his work.’<sup>237</sup> Blake is only a small case study in O’Donoghue’s broad and general overview of the development of Norse myth through the ages. Nevertheless, she brings an insightful reading to the Norse sources to better understand Blake’s engagement with Northern antiquarianism. Therefore, she moves away from a more general analysis.

In Blake scholarship, there is no substantial attention on the trajectory of key motifs and ideas from Norse sources to Blake’s poetry, and in Norse reception studies Blake is more a stepping stone or case study in overviews that map the movement of ideas. What is available is either a host of general connections concerning Norse motifs—an example being Frye’s unevidenced suggestion that in Blake’s symbolism the biblical Leviathan and Behemoth are comparable to Jörmungandr and the wolf Fenrir respectively—or brief analyses of said motifs without further sustained examination.<sup>238</sup> This thesis, then, strives to address two perceived gaps in these fields: the conceptualising of the Blakean body in terms of disability aesthetics and assemblage, and detailing Blake’s Northern antiquarianism. In this way, I suggest that within the illuminated books, Blake employs the body and Norse motifs to reveal a body politic invested in late eighteenth-century debates concerning nationhood.

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<sup>237</sup> O’Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 103.

<sup>238</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 140.

# I. Aberrant Bodies & Creation Narratives

## Questioning Urizen's Corporeality

Blake's 1794 illuminated book, *The [First] Book of Urizen*, critiques the relationship between religious institutions and the State. The poem tracks multiple appearances of the titular figure, and with each appearance—moments that can be loosely defined as births—Urizen is revised, revalued, and reinvented, either through his own volition or by others. These births generate different versions of Urizen—unembodied, lithic, or human-like—to pull away from a traditional creation story. His portrayal becomes intertwined with the motif of creation, only to reveal his refusal to be created. The poem dramatizes the tension between Urizen as both an unidentifiable darkness and a corporeal, visible form, forcing disillusion into the moment of creation. At first glance, the poem seems like a creation myth, and it is typically read and introduced by scholars as a satirical take on the Book of Genesis.<sup>1</sup> Jerome McGann argues that 'Genesis represents an edited collection of mythological narratives which have their basis in the cultural history of the ancient Jews,' and that *The Book of Urizen* follows a similar structure, with Urizen becoming the God of Moses, one of 'boundaries and moral codes.'<sup>2</sup> Although the Genesis framework has guided many interpretations, upon closer examination, Blake does not simply satirise this story. Rather, he revises the general creation motif and expresses an interest in the act of creation itself. Any straightforward parallels with the Bible are further complicated by Blake's syncretic practices.

Urizen avoids conception and subsequent identification by those who view him. His form and selfhood remain one of unorganised chaos, with the outcome of his births being somewhere among deformity, oppression, or outright failure. Unlike Genesis, there is no Edenic

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: Sibylle Erle, *Blake, Lavater, and Physiognomy* (London: Legenda, 2010), 31; Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, 201.

<sup>2</sup> McGann, 'Blake's Bible of Hell,' 318.



vision. For Pierre Bourdieu, reconstructing acts of creation initiates fractures that elucidate different possible outcomes:

There is no more potent tool for rupture than the reconstruction of genesis: by bringing back into view the conflicts and confrontations of the early beginnings and therefore all the discarded possibilities, it retrieves the possibility that things could have been (and still could be) otherwise [...] it questions the “possible” which, among all others, was actualized.<sup>3</sup>

The impossibilities of Urizen’s corporeality as both darkness and a physical entity engages with this idea, especially when the poem reveals a body that is actively breaking down both reader expectations regarding the narrative and its own physical status. *The Book of Urizen*, then, forces readers to confront ‘the possibility that things could have been’ through the presentation of Urizen’s multiple forms that appear in quick succession.

Leo Damrosch defines Blakean creation as ‘an ongoing expression of energy, not the primal event described in Genesis.’<sup>4</sup> This idea would have been familiar to Blake through Joseph Priestley’s materialist thesis *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) which presents the creation of matter as the product of complex physical forces.<sup>5</sup> With this view, creation is not a singular event, but a constant process. Similarly, as Urizen evolves he unravels temporal and cosmological events, only for them to be re-embedded into his body. Connolly proposes that the poem is invested in the development of the material body, though for Blake, ‘the body both provides and threatens identity’ and that Urizen’s growth imitates ‘foetal development.’<sup>6</sup> Although there is merit to her more medical and science-focused discussion, I want to counter-propose that there is no conceivable material or whole body at any point. Urizen’s body is, in Nancy’s terms, ‘an extension of the *there*, the site of a breakthrough

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Damrosch, *Eternity’s Sunrise*, 176.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit, etc.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol.1. Birmingham: Printed by Pearson and Rollason, for J. Johnson. MDCCLXXXII. [1782], 37–38.

<sup>6</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, vii, 81.

through which *it can come in from the world*.<sup>7</sup> It is a rupture and a way of questioning the ‘possible.’

Erin Goss suggests that the issues that arise when conceptualising Urizen derive from the inability for any external being, including the reader, to unite his name with a body.<sup>8</sup> Urizen, then, becomes an obscure yet malleable form, one who does not follow any coherent or recognisable development. His self-identification works in tandem with his identification by others, which in turn becomes a crucial point of disagreement. When ‘the body becomes itself a name, and that name marks the potentially irrevocable inaccessibility of the material,’ understanding Urizen becomes a trial of paradoxes.<sup>9</sup> His unknowability does not preclude development, but his ‘embodiment as consciousness brings him into the ontology of being.’<sup>10</sup> He is both present and absent, and although the poem constantly tries to reaffirm ‘Urizen (so his eternal name)’ (E75. 10:11), he continues to remain ‘unknown, abstracted/Brooding secret’ (E70. 3:6–7).

Urizen’s corporeality becomes an alternative model for creation, and by pushing the body to its physical limits in the poem, Blake critiques a body politic that takes State Religion as its foundation. Urizen is intimately connected to the developing political and philosophical laws—or, systems—that are part of the fabric of this universe, but he is a fissure, a literal gap, in knowledge; he is a source of anxiety for Los and the Eternals who cannot identify him. The system presented within the universal body is not closed, and so it remains open to further interpretation. Although lacking the more explicit historical references present in both *America* and *Europe*, the poem is heavily invested in late eighteenth-century politics. *The Book of Urizen* develops Blake’s earlier themes into what Mee suggests is a ‘mythologized history of the

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 25.

<sup>8</sup> Erin Goss, ‘What Is Called Corporeal: William Blake and the Question of the Body,’ *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 4 (2010): 422.

<sup>9</sup> Goss, ‘What is Called Corporeal,’ 425.

<sup>10</sup> David Worrall, ‘Introduction: Blake’s Urizen Books,’ in *William Blake’s Illuminated Books: The Urizen Books*, ed. David Bindman and David Worrall, Vol.6 (London: William Blake Trust/The Tate Gallery, 1998), 10.

growth of state religion,' a process that continued throughout Blake's career.<sup>11</sup> Worrall removes the *Urizen* poems—*The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania* (1795), and *The Book of Los* (1795)—from their traditional categorisation as different stages of creation myth, and instead argues that despite the absence of historicity, the poems 'are Blake's most political interventionist works of the 1790s.'<sup>12</sup> He also suggests that *The Book of Urizen* shows enslavement under institutionalised religion by transforming Christian doctrine into a myth that subverts Christian political authority.<sup>13</sup> *The Book of Urizen* is concerned with the broader patterns of institutionalised religion, and so Peter Schock asserts that by the beginning of the 1790s, 'Blake was already disposed to regard myth not as a pattern of traditional belief, but as a desacralized form open to radical reshaping.'<sup>14</sup> Mark Barr reads the poem as contesting the cultural hegemony of the received Bible, arguing that through *Urizen*, Blake engages with textual production and spiritual authority to highlight tensions between scripture and politics during the revolutionary decade.<sup>15</sup> Thus, by mythologising the foundations of a universe, Blake reveals a repressive philosophy embodied by the Church underwriting British history.

The presence of Northern antiquarianism intensifies this critique as it places *Urizen's* deformed and dark body at the centre of creation. McGann suggests that the *Urizen* poems 'are formally related to the fictional reconstructions carried out by Macpherson and Chatterton,' but Butler believes that there is no evidence of engagement with Northern antiquarianism or interest in primitive British history in the *Urizen* poems and Continental cycle.<sup>16</sup> Blake's syncretism, however, perpetuates the unstable textuality of the poem, and there is arguably a clear engagement with an ancient Scandinavia as presented in *Northern Antiquities*. O'Donoghue has

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<sup>11</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 32–33.

<sup>12</sup> David Worrall, 'The First Book of Urizen: Themes and Contexts,' in *William Blake's Illuminated Books: The Urizen Books*, ed. David Bindman and David Worrall, Vol.6 (London: William Blake Trust/The Tate Gallery, 1998), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Worrall, 'Introduction: Blake's Urizen Books,' 11.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Schock, *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Barr, 'Prophecy, the Law of Insanity, and The [First] Book of Urizen,' *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 46, no. 4 (2006): 741–42.

<sup>16</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 171; McGann, 'Blake's Bible of Hell,' 324.

made some preliminary connections, for example the relationship between Urizen and the *ginnungagap*—the Nordic primordial void—however there are more comprehensive links between the Norse creation myth and *The Book of Urizen* than she suggests.<sup>17</sup>

With this understanding, I want to propose two ways of reading Urizen. Firstly, his body coalesces with the darkness and therefore obscures his identity. This darkness confuses the Eternals who watch Urizen emerge, and aggravates Los who attempts to fashion Urizen's chaos into recognisable matter. Secondly, Urizen is created as dismembered and deformed; a fragmentary characteristic that further complicates his singular vision for a new world. This form is partly ableist in that Urizen is a negative force and his deformity typifies this trait. However, it is more Urizen's holistic version of a nation that aggravates his deformity, rather than the deformity itself propagating any sort of failure. In these two ways, Urizen's body invents an atypical creation story that becomes part of Blake's commentary on State Religion; it attempts to underwrite a stable body of national myth. Blake's creation myth, if we can even call it that, begins and ends with an absolute darkness that is integral to Urizen's identity, and this part of his selfhood is heavily influenced by the Old Norse creation myth which explicitly connects a dismembered body with a primordial darkness.<sup>18</sup> The Norse myth of the frost giant Ymir and the *ginnungagap*—found in Snorri's *Edda* and the poem *Völuspá*—presents an alternate creation narrative which, I suggest, answers some of the questions surrounding Urizen's corporeality and its embodiment of a religious body politic.

### ***Textual Embodiment I: Rules, Reification, & Rupture***

*The Book of Urizen* itself exists in seven different copies, all of which vary in plate order with only copies A and B including all the plates. Joseph Viscomi believes that these variations are a

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<sup>17</sup> O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 94.

<sup>18</sup> The Old Norse creation myth as found in Snorri's *Edda* describes the formation of two lands, Niflheim and Muspell, and the void in between known as Ginnungagap. In Niflheim there is a spring called Hvergelmir, from which flow multiple rivers known collectively as Elivagar. Elivagar freezes and layers of this poisonous ice cover Ginnungagap. When the ice thaws, droplets form a primordial being, Ymir, who is killed by the sons of Bore—Odin, Vili, Vé—and his corpse is dismembered to create the world.

logical consequence to the artistic process, especially seeing as Blake worked on copies over long periods of time.<sup>19</sup> He argues that differences between copies would have been impossible to avoid and as Blake produces his illuminated books in concentrated intervals, ‘each version shares in that period’s deliberate vision or revision of the illuminated book itself.’<sup>20</sup> Although Viscomi thinks it is possible that someone other than Blake moved the plates around in *The Book of Urizen*, he does admit that certain exclusions impact the meaning of the text.<sup>21</sup>

McGann, on the other hand, reads the structural incoherence as ‘deliberate acts on Blake’s part, textualizations which make Urizen a parody of Genesis carried out along lines opened up by the new biblical criticism and by the radical priest Alexander Geddes,’ another acquaintance of Johnson.<sup>22</sup> Urizen himself has an intimate relationship with the written word. He is the unstable figure at the centre of the universe who creates laws to define and limit the emerging world:

Here alone I in books formd of metals  
Have written the secrets of wisdom  
The secrets of dark contemplation  
(E72. 4:24–26)

These books become emblems of a quasi-theocratic system where he sits at the head. Writing his ‘Book/Of eternal brass’ (E72, 4:32–3), Urizen produces a narrow-minded worldview to unify civilisation:

Let each chuse one habitation:  
His ancient infinite mansion:  
One command, one joy, one desire,  
One curse, one weight, one measure  
One King, one God, one Law.  
(E72. 4:36–40)

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 163.

<sup>20</sup> Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 167, 178.

<sup>21</sup> Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 283.

<sup>22</sup> McGann, ‘Blake’s Bible of Hell,’ 323.

The juxtaposition of ‘infinite’ with the heavy repetition of ‘one’ punctuates Urizen’s insular, visionary demands: ‘One King, one God, one Law.’ This triad becomes an authorised boundary that is established in *The Book of Urizen*, and is then further supported in the other illuminated books. Every action taken against Urizen throughout the illuminated books becomes an act of defiance against these early maxims. The rhetorical *omne trium perfectum* emphasises Urizen’s self-affirmed model of order, with ‘God’ framed between ‘King’ and ‘Law’ to typify an oppressive institutionalism within this universal body politic.

In these early stages, there is no real sense of Urizen’s purpose or his ideological standpoint. His insistence on ‘one habitation’—that is, one mode of rule and understanding—denies aberrance within his own system, something further underlined by the triads that move towards the final line. There is, however, a paradox: Urizen demands stasis and order while he himself is a variable. His initial form as darkness at the beginning of the poem precludes attempts to visualise a physical body, which is further complicated by the cycles of re-birth that account for the narrative itself. Nevertheless, Urizen’s words materialise in his Books—static objects—at this early point in creation. The significance of this is paramount to understanding Blake’s critique of State Religion.

Thinking back to *Marriage*, Blake literalises the emergence of priestcraft through Urizen who reifies ‘poetic tales’ into the ‘forms of worship’ (E38. PL.11) that characterise oppressive Priesthood. This movement from inspiration to reification is also found in *The Song of Los* (1795) where Adam and Noah ‘saw Urizen gives his Laws to the Nations’ (E67. 3:8), and a little later ‘in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a Code of War’ (E67. 3:30). This exchange of laws and codes establishes Odin as a figure of oppression and institution; he becomes part of Blake’s history of corrupted religions in the poem’s opening. Scholars have already commented on the similarities between Urizen and the Norse god. Frye makes a passing comparison, commenting that Blake tends to visualise Urizen as ‘the Old Man, the cloud-gathering Zeus,

Jehovah, or Odin.<sup>23</sup> Mee associates Urizen with Mallet's Odin, a figure of oppression and war, and comments that 'Blake often follows Mallet in identifying the druids with Odin in opposition to the inspired bard.'<sup>24</sup> The Urizen-Odin paradigm, however, develops in the *Urizen* poems beyond these comparisons to further examine the reification and embodiment of law.

The design of Plate 4 presents an alternate visual representation of Urizen that mirrors his actions in *The Song of Los*. In some versions, his eyes are closed and in others, such as Copy A Plate 8, they are open (fig.5). In all copies Urizen sits with arms outstretched, holding what is most likely the Book of Brass. The parallel between body and text here emphasises Connolly's hypotheses that the illuminated books express new ways of textual embodiment.<sup>25</sup> The act of reading questions the physical relationship between text and body, while the symmetrical composition interrogates the spiritual authority of the Bible and the reification of the word. The contact between Urizen and his book creates the illusion of religious conformity that is embodied within his desire for a reified selfhood.

Nancy's 'excription' also tries to conceptualise this idea of textual embodiment. 'Ontology,' Nancy believes 'is affirmed as writing' which he also describes as 'a touching, a tact [...] [A writer's] very touch, which is certainly *his* touch, is in principle withdrawn, spaced, displaced.'<sup>26</sup> It is when objects manifest in the moment between them, and similarly, the body is 'written' when language moves against it. Alexander Regier suggests that for Blake, language was a privilege model of understanding, and so his poetry laboured 'to turn to the relation between language and thought in order to step outside a system that deifies ourselves or reason.'<sup>27</sup> He further suggests that Blake believed 'in the inextricability of language and thought, that thinking is always linguistic, and that language itself has ontological power.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 209.

<sup>24</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Nancy, 'Corpus,' 17.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Regier, *Exorbitant Enlightenment: Blake, Hamann, and Anglo-German Constellations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Regier, *Exorbitant Enlightenment*, 70.



**Figure 5:** William Blake, *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Copy A (1794), Plate 8. Relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring. Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

Language becomes an important tool when breaking down structures of oppression, including the body itself, but Urizen's corporeality reveals that even when the word is invoked to conceptualise—touch—his body, language becomes reified into his code. Ironically, the tool for breaking his tyranny bolsters the boundaries he establishes when external actors attempt to identify him. A physical form allows him to engage with external objects, and in this way he can dramatize the act of reading. This, however, then leads to a confrontation: as an entity, Urizen embodies an interiority that remains inaccessible despite moments of excription. The designs in the *The Book of Urizen* sometimes complement the text, thus revealing Urizen as a Priest-figure, a corruption of the Church-State relationship.<sup>29</sup> These visualisations consistently

<sup>29</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth and Enlightenment*, 9–11.



render Urizen in human form rather than as an all-consuming darkness. Sometimes, he is depicted as a physical form within a dark space, but the role of darkness in the poem is far more complex than this. There is an absent body; a rupture and confrontation of (non-)possibilities.

The absent body signifies the denied and unidentifiable body which is the source of chaos yet also the foundations for a body politic. Los fears Urizen's absent form, but despite eventually constructing a recognisable human body for Urizen, this breaks down—be it intentionally or unintentionally—to obstruct creative progress. The mutual development between Urizen's births and identification generates conversations concerning the distinction between what Urizen actually is and what the Eternals believe he represents. Their fundamental misreading and subsequent failure to identify Urizen is, I suggest, the result of their external perception. This failure results in a flawed birth because whether it is Urizen or Los, the labour to create a complete body proves inconceivable. Urizen's manifold selves, then, are subjected to injury and deformity throughout the poem to accommodate how he is identified by others. As a result, his body changes with the environment and his reception. Although rich in symbolism, Urizen's body cannot be seen as an uncomplicated or specific metaphor, and while body metaphors are typically predicated upon a desire for a functioning able body, Urizen's unpredictable form aggravates this idea of able-bodiedness which is, for himself, the self-proclaimed identity as 'One King, one God, one Law.'

### ***Cosmogony & Corporeality: Urizen's Re-birth(s)***

Although Urizen's physicality is uncertain in form and substance, he is first and foremost connected to a primordial darkness that exists before time. With each re-birth, Urizen interacts with his previous and future forms.<sup>30</sup> The *ginnungagap* elucidates some of the obscurity in *The Book of Urizen*, but first it is important to address a fundamental difference between the Bible

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<sup>30</sup> I say re-birth rather than rebirth, as the former retains some notion of biological movement. It suggests a physical change as part of corporeal re-formation, whereas the latter could also suggest a spiritual revival. See: 'Rebirth, n.,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2018.

and the Norse creation myth as found in *Völuspá* and Snorri's *Edda*. Although *Völuspá* also begins with a darkness that exists before time, there is a key difference. In Genesis 1:2, 'the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep,' a verse echoed in *The Book of Urizen*'s Preludium where Urizen is an abstraction, appearing 'Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary' (E70. 2:4).<sup>31</sup> However, the basic trajectory of both Blake's narrative and the Norse is distinct from Genesis. The biblical creation describes the physical emergence of the world, 'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light,' expanding on a divine power invested in the human world to develop recognisable dualities, such as light and dark, earth and sea, and night and day.<sup>32</sup> *The Book of Urizen* instead focuses on the creative potential within the chaos of pre-genesis; this universe has no recognisable physical attributes. Rather, the primordial darkness is central to the narrative, just like the *ginnungagap* in Old Norse myth.

Initially, Urizen is conceived as bodiless, 'a shadow of horror' (E70. 3:1), and is also 'Self-closd, all-repelling' (E70. 3:3). Being self-contained, he remains intangible though this produces a paradox. As a shadow rising from Eternity, Urizen is the darkness itself that exists before time, and yet he has a second form that is contained within this primordial space, or, within himself. Plate 3 reveals the relationship between Urizen-as-primordial-darkness and Urizen-as-lithic-body:

Ages on ages he lay, clos'd, unknown,  
 Brooding shut in the deep; all avoid  
 The petrific abominable chaos  
 (E71. 3:24–26)

Urizen is 'clos'd' and 'Brooding shut'; he takes refuge in his unknowability and solitude. This lithic body is built around him rather than with him, and as a result his corporeality entombs him. He is later described as 'dark Urizen' (E71. 3:27) which, alongside being a 'petrific abominable chaos,' stresses the difference in his two states: he is physical and identified, yet also an intangible darkness.

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<sup>31</sup> Gen. 1:2 [Authorised Version].

<sup>32</sup> Gen. 1:3.

His paradoxical identity as a petrified growth, but completely unformed, appears a little later when he is mentioned by name for the second time:

The sound of a trumpet the heavens  
Awoke & vast clouds of blood roll'd  
Round the dim rocks of Urizen  
(E71. 3:40–42)

There are clear apocalyptic reverberations here, echoing the warnings of prophet Ezekiel, 'whosoever hearth the sound of the trumpet does not take warning [...] his blood will be on his own head,' and the seven trumpets in the Book of Revelation.<sup>33</sup> Outside of these biblical resonances, this trope fashions Urizen into a being who does not correspond with a simple antecedent. Rather, this is an apocalyptic warning where the trumpets acknowledge Urizen's presence, perhaps even announcing a re-birth. Urizen *is* the darkness within the 'vast clouds of blood' and is also a physical being which, at this stage of creation, is petrified into 'dim rocks.' In these early stages, Urizen's body cannot be simply construed as human like in the designs. His second form is a geological formation which protrudes from himself, or, the darkness. Noah Heringman sees 'geology as anatomy,' and connects Blake explicitly to geologist James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* (1795).<sup>34</sup> The Darwinian influences on Blake's cosmogony are clear, but Heringman argues that in 'the geological formation of a body-prison for Urizen, under the aegis of Los [...] anatomy becomes closely identified with geology'; it becomes integral to Blake's creation narrative.<sup>35</sup> Arguably, Urizen as such does not exist within the 'clouds of blood' as the enjambed alliteration 'roll'd/Round' emphasises his being surrounded or entombed. Nevertheless, the image vividly suggests a violent birth, even if the outcome is a stillbirth and Urizen remains immobile and inactive.

The natal imagery continues with Urizen's third birth when the Eternals watch 'his pale visage/Emerge from the darkness' (E72. 4:41–42). Any hint of a human form quickly

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<sup>33</sup> Ezek. 33:4; Rev. 8:6.

<sup>34</sup> Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 96–97.

<sup>35</sup> Heringman, *Romantic Rocks*, 98.

disappears when Urizen regresses into his fourth state, a pre-natal, lithic body: ‘a roof, vast petrified around,/On all sides He fram’d: like a womb’ (E73. 5:28–29). Urizen’s aberrant body is constantly at odds with his external identification which initiates new processes of creation through destruction. Damrosch suggests that ‘terrified by formlessness, Urizen tries to create a world of petrified stability. Los breaks it asunder but that act precipitates his own fall.’<sup>36</sup> This analysis—based on the pun of ‘petrified’—suggests that the friction between Urizen’s lack of autonomy over his physical state is related to Los. When the eternal Prophet intervenes, Urizen endures a fifth re-birth and is ‘rent from [Los’s] side’ (E74. 6:4) in a moment reminiscent of the birth of Eve, when God ‘took one of [Adam’s] ribs, and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.’<sup>37</sup> Gender dynamic aside, the process of birth and the corporeal replication or inversion that follows reveals these changes as the ‘hardening of the collective body’ and a confrontation with a corrupt body politic.<sup>38</sup>

After this re-birth, Urizen is once again a paradox ‘laid in a stony sleep/Unorganiz’d, rent from Eternity’ (E74. 6:7–8). The Eternals promptly declare, ‘Death/Urizen is a clod of clay’ (E74. 6:9–10), which mirrors another biblical motif found in the Book of Isaiah: ‘But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand.’<sup>39</sup> In this case, Urizen is the lawmaker and godhead figure in this universe, but here Los—initially appearing as the oppositional force—becomes the creator. Urizen is reduced to ‘a clod of clay’ which Los manipulates to become the active creator while Urizen, the original Creator, becomes a thing created. This is further established when Los heals but Urizen does not:

But the wrenching of Urizen heal’d not  
Cold, featureless, flesh or clay,  
Rifted with direful changes  
He lay in a dreamless night

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<sup>36</sup> Damrosch, *Eternity’s Sunrise*, 174.

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 2:21–22.

<sup>38</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Isa. 64:8.

(E74. 7:4–7)

Urizen loses definition which provokes Los to begin his labour ‘affrighted/At the formless unmeasurable death’ (E74. 7:8–9). At this stage, Urizen still remains ‘featureless,’ ‘flesh or clay,’ and is an abstraction of death.

Horrified, Los crafts for Urizen a final and sixth form: the first recognisably human body. This body also initiates the movement of time and the subsequent Seven Ages map onto Urizen’s corporeal form. Though this new temporal organisation does not stop him from being disorganised:

In chains of the mind locked up,  
Like fetters of ice shrinking together  
Disorganiz’d, rent from Eternity,  
Los beat on his fetters of iron;  
And heated his furnaces & pour’d  
Iron odor and odor of brass

Restless turns the immortal inchain’d  
Heaving dolorous! anguish’d! unbearable  
Till a roof shaggy wild inclos’d  
In an orb, his fountain of thought.

(E75. 10:25–34)

The body is built rather than evolving organically, and so is distinguished from the other re-births. While Los’ mind is ‘locked up,’ Urizen is ‘the immortal unchained’; this becomes a process of suffering. Los struggles with the chaos and Urizen is ‘anguish’d’ by these attempts to define his corporeality. Los becomes ‘Disorganiz’d, rent from Eternity,’ a reaction that mimics Urizen’s prior state, ‘Unorganiz’d, rent from Eternity.’ The repetition supports a resemblance which counters the notion that Urizen and Los are opposing entities that move against each other. Urizen emerges from Los who then imitates the rupture created by Urizen. This metamorphosing of bodies into each other is a recurring motif throughout the illuminated books where different groupings ‘became what they beheld’ (E178. 32[36]:9). Here, the boundaries between Los and Urizen blur.

Prior to this moment, Urizen developed separate from Los' influence and Los retained his agency, but in the last two re-births Prophet and Law unite through their analogous situations: 'Disorganiz'd' and 'Unorganiz'd.' The subtle difference in the state of organisation stems from the disparate prefixes 'dis-' and 'un-.' These draw attention to the increasing similarity between these figures while maintaining some variance. The prefix 'un-' is usually an expression of negation.<sup>40</sup> 'Unorganised' can be defined as either 'not brought into an organized state; not formed into an orderly or regulated whole,' or 'of a physical object or substance: having little or no internal structure.'<sup>41</sup> As a negation rather than a contraction, it has a sense of never being organised to begin with, something supported by the second definition which is associated with formlessness, a term that underlies Urizen's corporeality. The prefix 'dis-', on the other hand, is more complex. It is sometimes seen as derivative of Latin words beginning with *dis-*, and as such extends from this etymological history to be applied to words without Latinate origin.<sup>42</sup> Regardless, it signifies separation and distinction; it is a specific movement of an object or situation *away* from organisation rather than being a simple negation. The following definitions demonstrate this most clearly: 'between, so as to separate and distinguish' and 'with a privative sense, implying removal, aversion, negation, or reversal of action.'<sup>43</sup> As a verb, it is defined in much the same way as the adjective, 'to destroy the organisation or systematic arrangement of; to break up the organic connection of; to throw into confusion or disorder.'<sup>44</sup> All these definitions are reflected in Los because when he becomes 'Disorganiz'd,' there is a breakdown in structure which literalises his fall into despair.

The difference, then, between these two words and characters not only stresses the situation, but delineates an emerging similarity. The caesura in both 'Disorganiz'd, rent from Eternity' and 'Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity' literally breaks down the line, thus replicating

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<sup>40</sup> 'Un-, prefix 1,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2018.

<sup>41</sup> 'Unorganized, adj. 1 and 2,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2018.

<sup>42</sup> 'Dis-, prefix,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2018.

<sup>43</sup> 'Dis-, prefix, 1b and 1d,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2018

<sup>44</sup> 'Disorganize, v.,' *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2018.

the moment of physical rupture. For Los, Urizen-as-darkness is unacceptable and must be ordered; he attempts to contain Urizen in a more determinate form and the material of Urizen's body moves from sulfuric fumes to clay to 'Iron sodor and sodor of brass.' These components echo Nebuchadnezzar's idol from the Book of Daniel with 'thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.'<sup>45</sup> Not only does this parallel cement Urizen as a quasi-biblical Old Testament oppressor, but it demonstrates the inhibition of Los' creative process:

In terrors, Los shrunk from his task:  
His great hammer fell from his hand:  
His fires beheld, and sickening,  
Hid their strong limbs in smoke.

(E77. 13:20–23)

The alliterative 'h' emphasises the repetitive possessive 'his' that both emulates Los' growing fears and ties him to his creation. The emotional response is captured in the dropped hammer—symbolising loss of creative freedom—and so although Los has successfully bound Urizen into a recognisable form, the continuous end stops and caesurae push him into a spiral of despair. This then results in another vacuum, the 'Abyss of Los' (E78. 15:5), which is a replica of Urizen's void.

What this brief overview shows is that Urizen's suffering and aberrant form is the start of Blake's subversion of the traditional body politic trope. We can see how Urizen expresses what Nancy calls 'the impossibility of writing' and the ruptures that Bourdieu, as examined earlier, sees as opening potential futures.<sup>46</sup> Urizen's aberrance is caused by a constant physical breakdown and physical displacement at the hands of the Eternals and Los. This movement is caused by frustrated attempts to write—or identify—him into existence. *The Book of Urizen* captures the impossibility of conceptualising a body, and it is this mutability that becomes the spine of the text. Urizen's literal spine is repeatedly built only to be unbuilt moments later, but it

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<sup>45</sup> Dan. 2:32–33.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy, 'Corpus,' 19–21.

is in these instances that the Blakean body becomes the fabric of a creation narrative and a marker of universal oppression.

### ***Deformed Bodies & Norse Origins: The Ginnungagap, Ymir, & Urizen***

The darkness—the unknowable—is a defining factor. Even when he is physically material, Urizen is arguably never fully-formed or able-bodied. Whether he is a cluster of ‘dim rocks’ or in a pre-natal form, the environment is dark and perhaps more reminiscent of death rather than new life. The violent imagery prevalent throughout *The Book of Urizen* diverges from the Christian creation to focus on the formation of an unconventional body. This, along with the darkness, has more in common with Norse myth. The biblical creation is concerned with morality and the question of good and evil as defined by a greater spiritual being. In *The Book of Urizen*, however, there is no movement towards a Fall like in Genesis. In fact, in his fallen state Urizen becomes the creator of life and systems that stem from his body. The attention given to the body as an integral part of creation—not just of man, but of the world itself—finds a better precedent in *Völuspá*, where the narrative moves from creation to destruction in a singular dramatic narrative concerning the gods and giants. In a similar fashion, *The Book of Urizen* revolves around a vacuum with no resolution; one’s conception merely induces a re-creation of oneself.

The Norse creation myth is arguably divided into two parts: the primordial void, and the emergence of Ymir. I propose that Blake borrows both of these elements to show how Urizen resides within the primordial chaos and yet is also the fabric of this new universe. In the beginning, a voice announces:

Lo, a shadow of horror is risen  
 In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!  
 Self-closd, all-repelling: what Demon  
 Hath form’d this abominable void  
 This soul-shudd’ring vacuum?—Some said  
 “It is Urizen”, But unknown, abstracted



Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

(E70. 3:1–7)

Urizen appears as a ‘Demon’ that rises from eternity, and his sudden appearance creates an ‘abominable void,’ a ‘soul-shudd’ring vacuum.’ Naming the darkness as ‘Urizen’ becomes a way of merely addressing its existence as no one, not even the Eternals who watch this process, have any frame of reference as to who, or what, Urizen is; he is ‘unknown,’ ‘self-closed,’ and ‘all-repelling.’ He actively shuns recognition and is a ‘dark power’ whose existence creates more darkness as the poem progresses, dividing the universe ‘in his ninefold darkness’ (E70. 3:9).

The Nordic creation narrative is found in different poems, but the *ginnungagap* is a motif specific to *Völuspá* and Snorri’s *Edda*.<sup>47</sup> In the first volume of *Northern Antiquities*, there is a meditation on the Scandinavian tendency to start their year with the winter solstice: ‘The day was divided into twelve parts, to each of which they assigned a distinct name: but in their computation of time, they made use of the word NIGHT instead of DAY.’<sup>48</sup> The focus on the night, emphasised by his own capitalisation, might suggest bemusement over this cultural difference, but Percy’s translator notes clarify, ‘Thus we say [...] FORTNIGHT, i.e. Fourteen Nights, (not Fourteen Days)’ to justify the interest in this particular Scandinavian tradition.<sup>49</sup> Percy’s translation validates Scandinavian time management with folk myth, explaining:

The longest night of winter was considered in the North, as that which had produced all the rest as well as the days; hence they termed it the MOTHER-NIGHT, and were persuaded that on such a night the world was created.<sup>50</sup>

The ‘MOTHER-NIGHT’ unites the darkness, which is the *ginnungagap* from Scandinavian creation myth with cultural practices, to illustrate how darkness is more than just a religious

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<sup>47</sup> A version without the *ginnungagap* can be found in the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*. This could be due to the original oral nature of the poem and, therefore, an assumption that the audience would know the finer details. See: ‘Vafþrúdnir’s Sayings,’ in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 36–46.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Percy, *Northern Antiquities: or, a description of the manners, customs, religion, and laws of the ancient Danes, and other northern nations, etc.*, Vol.1. London: Printed for T. Carnan and Co. MDCCLXX. [1770], 357–58.

<sup>49</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 358.

<sup>50</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 358.

creation motif and is inflected with cultural acts. The darkness becomes a significant motif in its own right, not just as a part of a creation myth to be overwritten by the emergence of light and day.

Although the second volume of *Northern Antiquities* presents Snorri's *Edda* in fables, it still follows the original text and includes the piecemeal translations from *Völuspá*. In doing so, it introduces the reader to a familiar creation narrative trope:

At the beginning of time, when nothing was yet formed, neither shore, nor  
sea, nor foundations beneath; the earth was no where to be found below, nor  
the heaven above: All was one vast abyss, wi[t]hout plant or verdure.<sup>51</sup>

The vacuous emptiness 'when nothing was yet formed [...] nor the heaven above' reveals a repetition of negation. 'Nor' and 'no' are interspersed throughout the verse, concluding 'without plant or verdure.' Urizen is similarly described in a series of negatives, specifically as 'unknown' or 'unseen' (E71. 3:19–20), until the poem also reveals:

Earth was not: nor globes of attraction  
The will of the Immortal expanded  
Or contracted his all flexible senses.  
Death was not, but eternal life sprung  
(E71. 3:36–39)

The definitive framing of 'Earth was not' and 'Death was not,' accentuated by caesurae, gestures toward *Völuspá*: 'the earth was no where.' The initial concealment of Urizen linguistically echoes the Old Norse and 'associates him with eighteenth-century histories of primitive religion.'<sup>52</sup>

In *Völuspá*, the *ginnungagap* is a 'pre-primeval emptiness, before earth and sky existed.'<sup>53</sup> In its simplest form, it is a chaotic darkness. A brief examination of how the *ginnungagap* is presented in the original Norse, *Northern Antiquities*, and Blake, reveals a

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<sup>51</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 170.

<sup>53</sup> Heather O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of Norse Myths* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 13.

linguistic similarity and transferred signification between all three texts. In the original, we find a clear repetition of negation:

vara sandr né sær  
né svalar unnir,  
jörð fannsk æva  
né upphiminn,  
gap var ginnunga  
en gras hvergi.<sup>54</sup>

Translated as ‘nor,’ ‘né’ punctuates the eddic *fornyrðislag* meter.<sup>55</sup> The interchanging alliteration and sibilance in ‘sandr né sær/né svalar’ stress the emptiness by rhythmically moving us toward the ‘gap var ginnunga.’ The emphatic placement of this phrase—a line in itself—draws attention to its nature as a force of dark chaos and can be literally translated as ‘yawning chaos.’

Similarly, Percy pushes the momentum of his translation towards ‘the earth was no where [...] nor the heaven above: All was one vast abyss.’ The capitalisation of ‘All’ along with the colon signals a conclusive statement. Just as the colon in Blake stresses that ‘Earth was not.’ Percy structures his translation to draw attention to this great abyss.<sup>56</sup> Although Percy does not translate the *ginnungagap* as chaos, in his notes he writes, ‘almost all the ancient sects agree in the doctrine of the Primitive Chaos,’ and he recalls that ‘the poet begins by a description of Chaos,’ before translating the lines containing the *ginnungagap*.<sup>57</sup> By connecting the *ginnungagap* to a chaotic ‘vast abyss,’ the linguistic and grammatical similarities here seem to elucidate a cosmogenic concept that appealed to Blake as an alternative creation motif.

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<sup>54</sup> *Völuspá, Eddukvæði: Volume I Goðakvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 292; [‘The Seeress’s Prophecy,’ in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4; ‘there was no sand nor sea nor cool waves;/earth was nowhere nor the sky above,/a void of yawning chaos, grass was there nowhere.’]

<sup>55</sup> *Fornyrðislag*, also known as ‘old-story metre,’ is a narrative metre that divides lines into two half-lines with a pause or caesura. There is a stressed alliterative pattern that carries across the half-lines. See: Larrington, ‘Introduction,’ xxviii–xxx.

<sup>56</sup> Although punctuation is a point of contention in Blake, having looked through all copies available on the *Blake Archive*, I can confirm that the colon exists in all of them and, therefore, we can assume that it was a deliberate punctuation mark on Blake’s part rather than a modern editorial addition.

<sup>57</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 11; Vol.1, 104–105.

The similarities go beyond just this comparison. When the *ginnungagap* is introduced in *Gylfaginning*:

Many strata of congealed vapours were formed, one above another in the vast abyss. Jafnhar added; By this means that part of the abyss which lies towards the north, was filled with a mass of gelid vapours and ice; whilst the interior parts of it were replete with whirlwinds and tempests. Directly opposite to it, rose the south part of the abyss, formed of the lightnings and sparks which flow from the world of fire.<sup>58</sup>

Another version of this account exists in the first volume of *Northern Antiquities*.<sup>59</sup> The *ginnungagap* exists in the north part of the primordial darkness and there is a distinction made between north and south through meteorological tropes. This is a key feature in both the Norse and *The Book of Urizen*, thus drawing a kinship between the *ginnungagap* and Blake's Urizenic void.

The unidentified voice at the beginning of *The Book of Urizen* recounts that there is 'vapour and cloud' (E70. 3:17) in Urizen's darkness, 'Bred from his forsaken wilderness' (E70. 3:15). It is also perpetually cold:

[...] swelling seas, sound in his clouds  
In his hills of stor'd snows, in his mountains  
Of hail & ice [...]  
(E71. 3:31–33)

The sibilance elevates the coldness of the *ginnungagap*-like Urizenic environment. They are 'his hills' of snow and 'his mountains' of ice, which we know are situated specifically in the north as, in a curious moment, the Eternals 'spurn'd back his religion;/And gave him a place in the north' (E70. 2:2–3). The distinction found in the original Norse and *Northern Antiquities*, between the 'gelid vapours and ice' of the north and the 'lightning sparks of the south,' is once again reflected in Urizen's conscious displacement and the climate of the Urizenic darkness.

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<sup>58</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 14; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2005), ['[...] ok jök hrímit hvert yfir annat allt í Ginnungagap.' Þá mælti Jafnhár: 'Ginnungagap, þat er vissi til norðs ættar, fýltisk með þunga ok höfugleik íss ok hríms ok inn í frá úr ok gustr. En hinn syðri hlutr Ginnungagaps léttisk móti gneistum ok síum þeim er flugu ór Muspellsheimi.'; 10.]

<sup>59</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 105–107.

Blake's awareness of Norse motifs is visible in his creation which is cold, dark, and linguistically echoes the Norse creation tradition. There are two versions of Norse creation: one describes the earth being lifted from the sea, and another which is more visceral and—interestingly—more corporeal. The nature of Urizen's identity as both the primordial void, and also a figure that exists within it, once again has a referent in the Norse creation myth with Ymir, the solitary frost-giant who lives within the 'gap var ginnunga' before the creation of the world. Both Urizen's and Ymir's bodies are moulded into their respective landscapes, a process that requires them to be fragmented and deformed. With the arrival of Los and the ushering in of the Seven Ages, Urizen gains a visibly human-like appearance which is clearly incapacitated and dismembered. Echoes of this human-likeness, though, begin prior to this intervention. Urizen's inconsistent corporeal identity, as both the darkness itself and an entirely distinct entity, is further complicated when questions surrounding his corporeality become entangled with the emerging material landscape.

Urizen's physical form challenges traditional readings of *The Book of Urizen* as a creation narrative, in part due to the precedent set in the Old Norse creation myth. As a 'cultural resource' and place of meaning—to borrow from Jordanova—the body becomes a universal language; a platform to project individual analyses.<sup>60</sup> Urizen's body, as discussed, is unknown and dark, and it is its fundamental unknowability that allows others to project their personal ideologies onto him as a means of identifying him. His purpose within *The Book of Urizen* is as a dismembered vessel that then constitutes both the laws and fabric of the universe. By transforming Urizen into the literal foundations of the world, Blake demonstrates the origins of this universe as dark and deformed.

The Norse creation might indeed begin with the *ginnungagap*, but the actual physical creation of the world starts with the dismembering and deforming of Ymir. The sources for Ymir can be found in *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* from *The Poetic Edda* and in

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<sup>60</sup> Jordanova, 'Happy Marriages and Dangerous Liaisons,' 100.

Snorri's *Edda*. The Fourth Fable in *Northern Antiquities* recounts the creation of the heavens and the earth by the sons of Bore: Odin, Vili, and Vé. It starts violently when 'the sons of Bore slew the Giant Ymir, and there ran so much blood from his wounds, that all the families of the Giants of the Frost were drowned in it [...]'<sup>61</sup> The narrative continues to vividly recount:

They dragged the body of Ymir into the middle of the abyss, and of it formed the earth. The water and the sea were composed of his blood; the mountains of his bones; the rocks of his teeth; and of his hollow bones, mingled with the blood that ran from his wounds, they made the vast ocean; in the midst of which they infixed the earth. Then having formed the heavens of his skull, they made them rest on all sides upon the earth.<sup>62</sup>

Lines from *Völuspá* embedded into the *Edda* translate a little differently: 'Of the flesh of Ymir was formed the earth.'<sup>63</sup> The word 'flesh' here holds significance as the sons of Bore not only displace Ymir, but also manipulate all separate components of his body to construct their world. The term 'body' might imply a completeness of being, but Ymir's mutilated corpse is demarcated as each component plays a role in the material creation. The term 'flesh,' then, more accurately reflects Ymir's disjointed and broken body which constitutes the birth of the world.

Norse cosmology describes the world as an island in the *ginnungagap*, positioned among the debris of Ymir's limbs and his bodily fluids, and this vision is comparable to the treatment of Urizen's own form. Ymir is actively situated within the *ginnungagap*, between the fires of *Múspellsheimr* and the ice of *Niflheim*, however prior to this moment, he is born within the void:

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<sup>61</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 22; ['Synir Bors drápu Ymi jötun. En er hann fell, þá hljóp svá mikit blóð ór sárum hans at með því drektu þeir allri ætt hrímþursa [...]; 11.]

<sup>62</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 23; ["Þeir tóku Ymi ok fluttu í mitt Ginnungagap, ok gerðu af honum jörðina, af blóði hans sæinn ok vötnin. Jörðin var gør af holdinu en björgin af beinunum, grjót ok urðir gerðu þeir af tönnum ok joxlum ok af þeim beinum er brotin váru." Þá mælir Jafnhár: "Af því blóði er ór sárum rann ok laust fór, þar af gerðu þeir sjá þann er þeir gerðu ok festu saman jörðina, ok lögðu þann sjá í hring útan um hana, ok mun þat flestum manni ófæra þykkja at komask þar yfir." Þá mælir Þriði: "Tóku þeir ok haus hans ok gerðu þar af himin ok settu hann upp yfir jörðina [...]; 11–12.] Percy's translation compresses the original and misses many of the details found in the *Edda*, including 'Jörðin var gør af holdinu' [The earth was made of the flesh']. See: Snorri Sturluson, 'Gylfaginning,' in *Edda*, trans. and ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Everyman, 1995), 8.

<sup>63</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 24.

A breath of heat then spreading itself over the gelid vapours, they melted into drops; and of these drops were formed a man, by the power of him who governed. This man was named Ymir; the Giants call him *Aurgelmer*.<sup>64</sup>

These ‘gelid vapours’ come from the poisonous river *Elivages* which, growing cold and becoming the ice of the *ginnungagap*, characterizes Ymir, ‘for he was wicked, as were all his posterity.’<sup>65</sup> Ymir’s genealogy is inconsistent, but the fluidity of his inheritance, identity, and legacy as a self-created maker can be compared to Urizen.<sup>66</sup> Both figures materialise from the aether, be it from icy vapours or dark shadows. The Eternals watch Urizen ‘Emerge from the darkness,’ and likewise Ymir appears from melted drops and ‘formed a man, by the power of him who governed’; they become incarnations of the chaotic matter from their respective voids.

The physicalness of the material landscape is literally embodied by both Ymir and Urizen, and a closer examination reveals similarities in their respective transformations into the world. Before Los enters the narrative, Urizen petrifies himself into a state likened to that of a womb. However, this prenatal form evokes a violence similar to the slaughter of Ymir:

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 struggling & beating  
The vast world of Urizen appear’d.

(E73. 5:30–37)

Urizen’s body suffers a violent movement towards corporeality, juxtaposing a physical form that imitates the natural world which is in pain as it emerges ‘struggling.’ The simile exemplifies the relationship between the natural world and Urizen’s metamorphosing form.

<sup>64</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 14–15; [‘Ok þá er möttisk hrímin ok blær hitans svá at bráðnaði ok draup, ok af þeim kvikudropum kviknaði með krapti þess er til sendi hitann, ok varð manns líkandi, ok var sá nefndr Ymir. En hrímpusar kalla hann Aurgelmi [...]’; 10.]

<sup>65</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 15; [‘Hann var illr ok allir hans ættmenn.’; 10].

<sup>66</sup> A version of Ymir’s genealogy can be found in *Vafþrúðnismál* which notes Aurgelmir as his grandfather, whereas the *Edda* describes Ymir and Aurgelmir to be one and the same. See: trans. Larrington, ‘Vafthrudnir’s Sayings,’ 41.

Dwelling on the semantics of the phrase ‘of Urizen,’ the understanding of these lines pivot around the preposition ‘of’ which points to two interpretative possibilities. The first implies that the world is Urizen’s possession, however, he is ‘View’d by sons of Eternity,’ which casts doubt over Urizen’s ownership. ‘Of Urizen’ can possibly imply that the ‘vast world’ is a component of his being, it is either part of, or simply is, Urizen. This understanding, I argue, fits better with the broader narrative about the continuous development of the world. It is an interpretation that better addresses the corporeality of the world as it transpires from Urizen’s body in the shape of a human heart, thus tethering his form and existence to this particular moment of creation.

The introduction of a created physical landscape feels somewhat closer to the biblical creation myth, but as mentioned earlier, there is no satisfactory origin story to be found. There is disillusion in the making of this world, and the acts of violence needed to initiate this creation are counterintuitive to the Genesis narrative. The visceral nature of Blake’s creation moves away from the more disciplined one found in the Bible, and resonates more with Snorri’s *Edda*. The rivers travel ‘in veins,’ mimicking the body’s circulatory system to travel down mountains before the world appears, ‘Like a human heart struggling & beating.’ Creation emulates the pain of a woman in labour, but as the blood flows freely down the newly-formed mountains, this new world echoes the seas ‘composed of [Ymir’s] blood; the mountain of his bones [...] mingled with the blood that ran from his wounds.’ The similarities between Blake’s description and the *Edda* are apparent. For both myths, the ecosystem of their respective worlds are crafted from either flesh and bone or bodily fluids. Ymir’s body forms the earth, and Urizen’s world emerges ‘like a human heart.’

Frye picks up this connection with Ymir but never develops it. Instead, he places Ymir in a list of primeval giants comparable to Urizen, including Adam Kadmon from the Cabbala and Atlas from Grecian mythology. He limits his comparison between Ymir and Urizen to a brief overview of the description as found in the *Edda* before acknowledging that it ‘has a



particularly Blakean touch.’<sup>67</sup> I am not arguing that Urizen is solely inspired by Norse myth, but rather, I want to call attention to the influence of specific Old Norse motifs that have been overlooked in favour of more familiar biblical and classical analogues. After a closer examination, it is clear that those two giants are the first created within their respective worlds and are also the foundations of the physical world. Paul Beekman Taylor notes that in Old Norse, ‘Giants are the first architects and artificers, as well as the primal matter of creation,’ thus reminding us of Ymir’s purpose in the Norse creation myth: his body is the world.<sup>68</sup> Urizen—as an architect and Creator—shapes the laws to govern the world, and his body is manipulated like the Norse giants to become ‘the primal matter’ of Blake’s creation. His corporeal identity therefore moves from one that not only engages with the Norse primordial darkness but also attaches physiological features to a terrestrial landscape that actively transforms a body into an ecosystem.

### ***The Seven Corporeal Ages: The Limitations of Biblical Body Metaphors***

The world is born violently from Urizen’s body to produce an evil ecosphere, ‘a black globe,’ that is situated in the north. Not only does this conflict with the Christian Eden, but it also diverges from contemporary visions of the North as cultural pioneers of liberty. As an important aspect of the Gothic commonwealth, liberty was considered part of Scandinavian constitutional practice with ‘the election of kings and the prerogatives of a democratic, general assembly.’<sup>69</sup> Gothic liberty became integral to eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism, especially when poets adopted these themes in relation to British liberty.<sup>70</sup> *The Edinburgh Review* noted that ‘hereditary nobility conjoined to property, is inherent in the Gothic polity,’ which is how ‘the Gothic nations alone solved the difficult problem of protecting the rights of the component

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<sup>67</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Beekman Taylor, *Sharing Story: Medieval Norse-English Literary Relationships* (New York: AMS Press, 1998), 131.

<sup>69</sup> Omberg, *Scandinavian Themes*, 54.

<sup>70</sup> Omberg, *Scandinavian Themes*, 91.

members, without weakening the commonwealth.<sup>71</sup> In *Northern Antiquities*, Snorri is romanticised and presented as a poet with ‘a love for this art which suggested to him the design of giving a new EDDA, more useful to the young poets than that of Sæmund.’<sup>72</sup> This perception could derive from Percy’s agenda to replace the image of a ‘barbaric North’ with a nation of poetic freedom and liberty: ‘I trusted we should find the causes of this their love of poetry, in the rolling passion of the ancient Scandinavians “for war,” in the little use they made of writing [...] What was first only conjecture, a later research hath enabled me to discover to have been the real case.’<sup>73</sup>

The *Edinburgh Review* also suggested that ‘the Gothic commonwealth, in short, is not a unit, of which the smaller bodies politic are fractions. They are the units and the commonwealth is the multiplicand [...] Every Gothic monarchy is, therefore, in the nature of a confederation.’<sup>74</sup> This arrangement of a specifically Norse body politic is assemblage-like, formed to reassert the freedom of progress through ‘relations of exteriority.’<sup>75</sup> This Gothic state formation, however, is an ‘aggregation of these communities under one authority [...] one leader,’ and so although supporting a flexible vision of a free society, it also maintains a hierarchy.<sup>76</sup> This version of Gothic liberty might have troubled Blake, but in the illuminated books, the Norsemen and their cultural artefacts come to embody both the cultivation of freedom and liberty, and also war, barbaric practices, and oppression. This paradox is important in the construction of Blake’s body politic that seems to simultaneously emulate and refute a Gothic liberty.

The North’s association with ‘the ancient Scandinavian virtues of personal and political liberties,’ appears to be parodied in *The Book of Urizen* as part of an extended critique of State Religion.<sup>77</sup> Urizen’s world is centred around a broken body and challenges the Christian

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<sup>71</sup> ‘The History of the Common Law of England,’ *The Edinburgh Review*, no. 72 (Feb, 1822): 292.

<sup>72</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, xxiii.

<sup>73</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, xx.

<sup>74</sup> ‘The History of the Common Law,’ 291.

<sup>75</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> ‘The History of the Common Law,’ 291.

<sup>77</sup> Cian Duffy, ‘Introduction: “the less known, but equally romantic, regions of the north”,’ *Romantic Norths: Anglo-Nordic Exchanges, 1770–1842*, ed. Cian Duffy (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 6.

universe which places God—a good and perfect spiritual being—at the core of its creation narrative. God exists alone before creation and His existence is not narrated by a prophetic voice like the völva, a Norse seeress, or the Eternals. The violent language in *The Book of Urizen* also moves away from Genesis and towards more pagan sources, like the Norse. In doing so, Blake challenges a perfect world as found in the Bible and instead presents a universe born from and moving further into oppression.

Ymir's presence in Urizen complicates the more Christian body metaphors found in *The Book of Urizen*. The limitations of biblical body metaphors become more and more evident as the poem progresses. The poem itself undermines 'the hegemonizing power of Christian monotheism,' specifically when Urizen embodies a dissected vision for his universal laws.<sup>78</sup>

Goss suggests that:

The history that proceeds from the body's creation repeats the lack of ground that the body is designed to conceal, and though the body becomes the ground of the known world, Blake's revision of Genesis marks the retroactive nature of the body's imposition.<sup>79</sup>

The Blakean body is constantly in revision and when it succumbs to the cycle of change, it breaks down orthodox Christian body metaphors. In *The Book of Urizen*, Blake's syncretism revises two specific biblical body metaphors: the Old Testament statue of Nebuchadnezzar and the New Testament Pauline philosophy of the 'one body in Christ.' Nebuchadnezzar's statue symbolised the fall of Babylonian tyranny:

The image's head was of fine gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the

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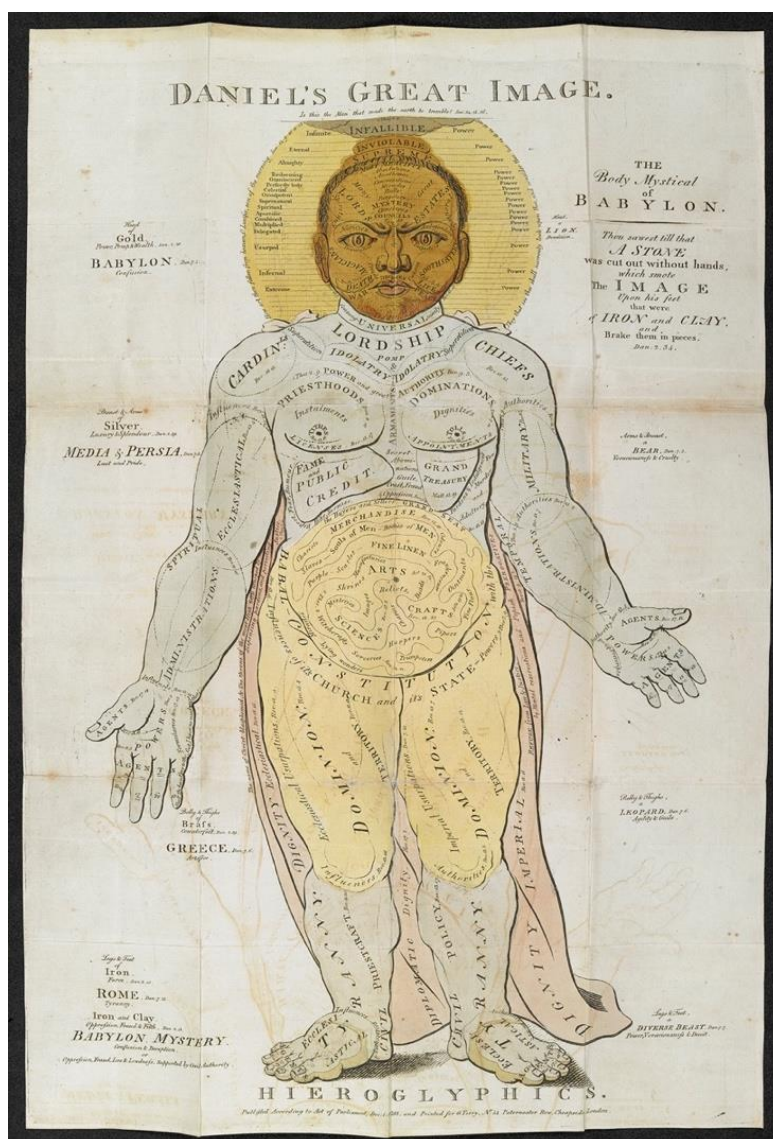
<sup>78</sup> Schock, *Romantic Satanism*, 43.

<sup>79</sup> Erin Goss, *Revealing Bodies: Anatomy, Allegory, and the Grounds of Knowledge in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 107.

stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.<sup>80</sup>

The devastation of the image is the destruction of a body representative of monarchical power.

This moment is comparable to when Los ‘beat on his fetters of iron’ (E75. 10:28), an action which might contextually reflect a blacksmith, but is still violent and has further connotations of physical persecution or punishment. The stone breaks Nebuchadnezzar’s statue and Los’ fetters restrict the body, both fostering negative associations of imprisonment and oppression.



**Figure 6:** Garnet Terry, *Frontispiece to A Description Accompanying an Hieroglyphic Print of Daniel's Great Image, etc.*, London: Published by G. Terry. [1793]

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<sup>80</sup> Dan. 2:32–35.

Nebuchadnezzar's idol embodies a tyrannical monarchy, an interpretation appropriated in eighteenth-century political discourse. An example of a satirical body politic inspired by the biblical tyrant is Garnet Terry's 1793 print and essay, *A Description Accompanying an Hieroglyphical Print of Daniel's Great Image*.<sup>81</sup> Here, the idol stands with arms outstretched, similar to Urizen with his Book of Brass. This grotesque body is further deformed by words and phrases etched on the surface to demarcate each section (fig.6). Words and phrases such as 'Ecclesiastical administration,' 'Tyranny,' and 'Civil Priestcraft,' are marked into the skin to demarcate each limb and organ.<sup>82</sup> Unlike Dent's prints, Terry's body politic does not attack specific political figures, but it is a monstrous idol that takes the religious body of Nebuchadnezzar to literalise the body as a corrupt foundation of the nation.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the body is 'broken to pieces together [...] no place was found for them.'<sup>83</sup> The statue in its entirety—including the broken pieces—are removed from the world. Similarly, Urizen's body reveals that a coherent body politic is unsustainable:

[...] a cold solitude & dark void  
The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd

Ages on ages roll'd over them  
Cut off from life & light frozen  
Into horrible forms of deformity  
Los suffer'd his fires to decay  
Then he look'd back with anxious desire  
But the space undivided by existence  
Struck horror into his soul.

(E77. 13:39–47)

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<sup>81</sup> For more on Nebuchadnezzar and Blake, see: Jon Mee, 'The Doom of Tyrants': William Blake, Richard "Citizen" Lee, and the Millenarian Public Sphere,' in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, and Christopher Hobson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 97–114; Peter Otto, 'Nebuchadnezzar's Sublime Torments: William Blake, Arthur Boyd, and the East,' in *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, ed. Steve Clark and Masashi Suzuki (London: Continuum, 2006), 260–71; and Joseph Viscomi, 'The Evolution of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58, no. 3/4 (1995): 281–344.

<sup>82</sup> Garnet Terry, *A description accompanying an hieroglyphical print of Daniel's great image, etc.*, London: G. Terry. MDCCXCIII. [1793], 9, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Dan. 2:35.

Both creator and created are removed from existence by entering another abyss. Like Nebuchadnezzar's statue, they are 'Cut off from life' and displaced into 'a cold solitude & dark void.' Despite his physical form, Urizen is presented as a collection of limbs and organs rather than as a complete body. This pattern of simultaneous creation and destruction reinforces how a positive action casts an unintentional negative outcome, thus impeding the creative process. Los allows his 'fires to decay,' exposing the impact of Urizen's 'horrible forms of deformity,' but the enjambment 'them/Cut' reveals this as a shared fate. Their individual and previously separate creative agencies are disabled and united in mutually wounded and deformed bodies.

Thomas Frosch suggests that 'the "creation" of man is an act of destruction, an attempt to annihilate his unfallen body and is thus portrayed as a torture or murder.'<sup>84</sup> Los' motives are supposedly one of creation and life, but his actions contradict this when he actively hinders movement and, in turn, life. He creates what he believes is the correct body for Urizen, but in doing so he also constructs a norm that is incompatible with the Blakean body. It should be clear by now that Urizen's body is one that inherently challenges this desire, felt also by Urizen himself, for a functioning, cohesive body politic through a simultaneous creation through destruction. The lack of internal organisation conflicts with his self-identification as Creator and Los' personal vision. When these two collide the outcome is rejection, and Urizen's new distressed state reflects the difficulties in consolidating the differences between them. Los' inability to forget a body enhances Urizen's suffering, as 'Restless turn'd the immortal inchain'd/Heaving dolorous! anguish'd!' (E75. 10:31–32). The rest of Urizen's fleshly creation can be read as both a chain of events executed by Los, and also a nightmarish vision that explores the body as an oppressive structure in itself.

Deformity collapses the identity between bodies. When they fall into this new void, Los and Urizen are removed from any prior standards or conceptions of the body. Whittaker observes that 'humanity falls when it fixes itself to the universe and seeks to define too rigidly

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<sup>84</sup> Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion*, 44.

the point of origin in order to find therein the justification for its laws,' something exemplified here by Urizen.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of Los' intervention, the world is Urizen's creation and remains under his laws, thus the body created for him conflicts with his initial vision. This is most clearly visible during the Seven Ages episode, where Urizen's body is further truncated and physically demarcated by Los into dismembered body parts. Urizen becomes a collection of limbs that blur the boundary between creator and created, eventually ending with a collective deformity. This deformity then also further illustrates how Urizen's aberrant body—as part of a creation narrative—challenges the conventional body politic trope by breaking down a unified body representative of institutionalised control.

In the Bible, Daniel's interpretation of the image addresses how each part of the statue foreshadows Nebuchadnezzar's complete loss of power when Babylon falls to pieces. In *The Book of Urizen*, Urizen's physical instability, his identity, and metaphorical significance remains unfixed despite the introduction of temporal movement. As Los creates each appendage, each stanza advances the progress of the body's division alongside an Age that passes over in 'a state of dismal woe' (E75–76. PL.10–13), a phrase that repeats like a chorus to summarise the creation of each dismembered limb or organ. These Seven Ages are defined into what Amanda Jo Goldstein calls a 'seven-stage cosmogony.'<sup>86</sup> These Ages, though, paradoxically become the limitations of the body itself while also dictating the body's appearance.

Later in the poem, the Seven Corporeal Ages become the main focus of Blake's critique of State Religion by drawing on the Pauline idea of the Body in Christ. Blake's relationship with Apostle Paul's letters was largely unenthusiastic, as Christopher Rowland explains, 'Blake's antipathy to devotion to a Bible or sacred code has its origin in the Pauline corpus.'<sup>87</sup> Rowland's discussion is limited to an investigation of the Divine Body motif within Blake,

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<sup>85</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 42.

<sup>86</sup> Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 41.

<sup>87</sup> Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 200.

though he also notes that Blake particularly disliked Romans 10:4: 'For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to every one that believeth.'<sup>88</sup> In the Book of Romans, Paul conceives a Christian Body, that is, the Christian church and congregation:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.<sup>89</sup>

This body is a community that mutually understands differences in strength and ability to unite people under the religious authority of Christ. It is a network of disparate bodies who exist as individuals, but are brought together through interior relations to form an organic, seamless whole. Urizen's body, though, resists this structure for an orthodox Christian community by showing how each part is crafted around his core identity as 'unknown,' rather than drawing disparate parts into a complete form.

This is further emphasised when a spinal system cages Urizen each stanza is divided by the passage of time, 'And a first Age passed over [...] a second Age [...] a third Age [...],' and so on (E75-6). The stanzas isolate each body part, suspending them in separate states of 'dismal woe,' for example:

Ribs, like a bending cavern  
And bones of solidness, froze  
Over all his nerves of joy.

(E75. 10:39–41)

Paul introduces a hierarchy within the Church, 'all members have not the same office,' but *The Book of Urizen* removes any sense of order as the body becomes unified in despair. The literal

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<sup>88</sup> Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 211; Rom. 10:4.

<sup>89</sup> Rom. 12:4–9.



limbs and organs have no coherent purpose: the Eyes hide as ‘two little orbs’ (E76. 11:13) and the Ears only appear after ‘The pangs of hope began,/In heavy pain striving, struggling’ (E76. 11:19–20). Born from anxiety and pain, these become ‘petrified/As they grew’ (E76. 23–24), thus losing their fleshly form.

Organs associated with nourishment are left unsatisfied:

In ghastly torment sick;  
Within his ribs bloated round,  
A craving Hungry Cavern;  
Thence arose his channel'd Throat,  
And like a red flame a Tongue  
Of thirst & of hunger appeard.

(E76. 13:4–9)

The Throat and Tongue appear insatiate, and as a collection of organs, this body becomes an inhospitable environment for the development of any unified community. Arguably, each organ and limb has a purpose much like Paul's Body in Christ, but they are left to languish within a failing body. Instead, they enact a body politic that does not perform in the sort of cohesive system suggested in the Bible.

Urizen's body condenses the movement of time, but as a narrative interested in creation, the emergence of humanity is still absent at this point. Los' intervention disintegrates Urizen's material form which is then transmuted into the metaphysical movement of time. Urizen's body is no longer privileged as the world itself, as he is forced to become part of Los' overarching vision. Instead of incorporating Pauline doctrine, where ‘we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another,’ Blake seems to present a body that reflects the warning at the end: ‘Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.’ This section might seem out of place in relation to the rest of the passage, but it in fact reinforces Paul's message. It is a warning that is echoed in other Bible verses that discuss correct behaviour within a Christian community. In 1 Timothy 1:5, Timothy advises the Church, ‘now the end of the

commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.<sup>90</sup> The emphasis placed on the Christian tenets of purity, moral conscience, and faith here clarifies Paul's admonition by stating why evil should be removed from the Body.

Although the second part of Paul's warning—'cleave to that which is good'—works with Timothy's guidance, it is in fact a reference to the Book of Psalms where King David wrote, 'depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.'<sup>91</sup> The explicit demand for the removal of evil asks for an active decision to be made by the individual. In Los' eyes, Urizen is indeed an evil that must be removed from his previous, unknown form. However, this new body is described as 'horrible forms of deformity' and Los' shock marks it as unfavourable. Even though Urizen is now recognisable, he retains an aberrant form due to Los' inability to identify him according to the laws already established in the world. In other words, Los fails to remove the chaos, and instead establishes a body that exemplifies older activities of law-making.

The Seven Corporeal Ages maintain the central theme of creation, and in number they echo the Genesis creation myth when God created the earth in six days and rested the seventh.<sup>92</sup> Beyond this connection, the seven-part dissected body is also a reference to the conception of ecclesiastical community. Paul wrote to the seven major churches of early Christianity in Asia Minor, also known as the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse by St. John of Patmos:

What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.<sup>93</sup>

These churches deviated in their faith, and so wanting to restore a healthy Christian body politic, Paul wrote his letters and St. John delivered a final divine warning in the form of the Book of Revelation. The number of Ages in *The Book of Urizen*, then, tethers together creation and apocalypse within the narrative. While this structure does emulate an asynchronous biblical retelling, it is also similar in structure with *Völuspá* which covers the movement of time from

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<sup>90</sup> 1 Tim. 1:5.

<sup>91</sup> Ps. 34:14.

<sup>92</sup> Gen. 1–2:3.

<sup>93</sup> Rev. 1:11.

creation to apocalypse in a single poem. This cosmogenic-eschatological chronicle of the world in the poem is mapped onto Urizen's disabled and syncretic body, developed through its relationship with the *ginnungagap* and Ymir, and made explicit with the Seven Corporeal Ages.

Urizen's incapacitated state is an incarnation of the failings of 'One King, one God, one Law.' The Body in Christ, or the Church, exists alongside the mutilated corpse of Ymir-as-the-world within the Urizen's aberrant body. Although this is in part due to Urizen's own embodiment of his oppressive theocracy, it arguably only comes into being due to Los' intervention and attempts to conceptualise the Blakean body as one that is formulaic and static, much like Paul's vision of the Church. The Christian doctrines of love, charity, and faith define the Body of Christ, but the syncretism present in Urizen reveals this to be an unrealistic invention of society. He cannot support his own body and so consequently, he cannot sustain a functioning body politic that depends on a cohesive structure.

### ***Liberation & Constraint in Blake's Norse Body***

After being placed back in the void, Urizen slowly regains his previous agency as Creator while Los languishes in pain. With this second attempt, Urizen's universal philosophy emerges:

Till a Web dark & cold, throughout all  
The tormented element stretch'd  
From the sorrows of Urizens soul  
And the Web is a Female in embryo  
None could break the Web, no wings of fire.

So twisted the cords, & so knotted  
The meshes: twisted like to the human brain

And all call'd it, The Net of Religion

(E82. 25:15–22)

This is the first time that 'Religion' is explicitly mentioned in the poem, and an unequivocal association between Urizen and State Religion is made. This net is 'Like a spiders web, moist,

cold, & dim' (E82. 25:10), but it is also personified as 'a Female in embryo,' returning to the imagery of childbirth and of the womb. The final Plate shows Urizen crouched and holding a net with his body while it drapes across his arms (fig.7). The net visually resembles umbilical cords, further emphasising the corporeality of Religion. Prenatal states were previously associated with Urizen's petrified form, but here it is reworked into the birth of a universal law, the 'Net of Urizen' (E83. 28:13). By being 'twisted like to the human brain,' religious corruption is embedded within the human cognitive system; it literally traps the mind.

Alongside the childbirth imagery, the Net embodies the establishment of a universal law that derives from Urizen's state of deformity. It is, however, unsuccessful in creating functioning bodies or a cohesive community, and the consequence is ossification:

Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:  
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow  
And hardening Bones began  
In swift diseases and torments,  
In throbbings & shootings & grindings  
Thro' all the coasts; till weaken'd  
The Senses inward rush'd shrinking,  
Beneath the dark net of infection.

(E82. 25:23–30)

This is an explicit account of the effects of Religion which physically transforms—hardens—the people. The list, 'throbbings & shootings & grindings,' captures the overwhelming pain as Religion manifests like a disease into a 'dark net of infection.'

'Infection' reinforces the idea of contamination. This is hinted visually on Plate 12 in Copy A where a skeleton curls into itself, perhaps literalising 'A vast Spine writh'd in torment' (E75. 10:37). This skeleton could also be the ossified body inflicted on humanity by Urizen (fig.8).<sup>94</sup> Considering these two interpretations, this plate visualises both Urizen's earlier

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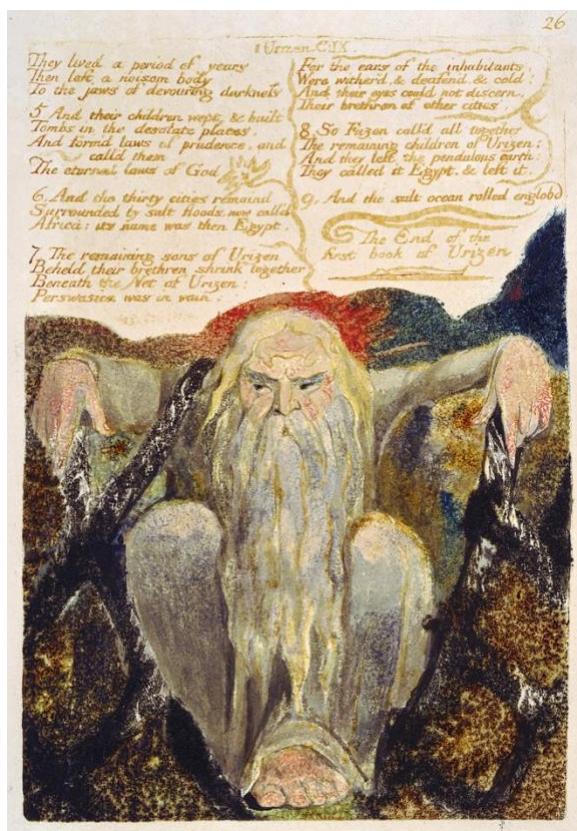
<sup>94</sup> David Worrall, 'The Designs,' in *William Blake's Illuminated Books: The Urizen Books*, ed. David Bindman and David Worrall, Vol.6 (London: William Blake Trust/The Tate Gallery, 1998), 34.

conditions, and that of the people who become enslaved by their ossified forms. The skeleton's suffering imitates Urizen's prior misery at the hands of Los:

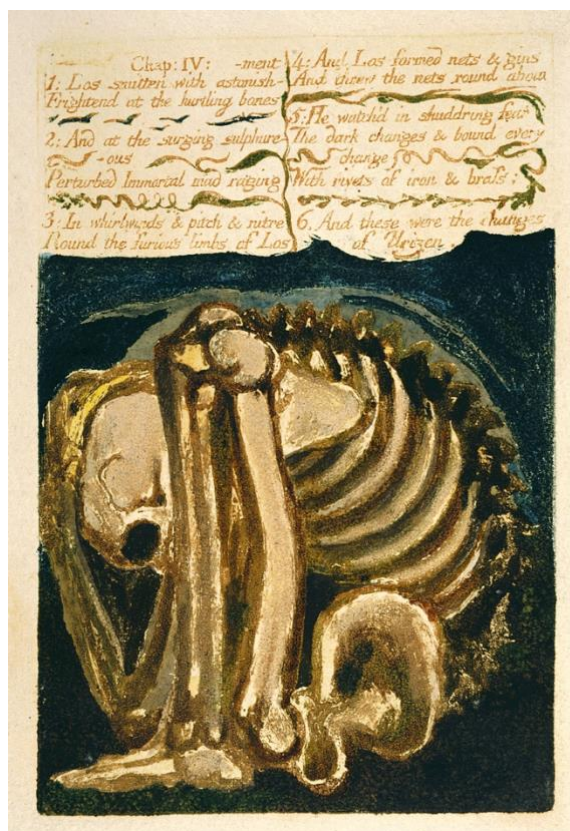
And their thirty cities divided  
In form of a human heart  
No more could they rise at will  
In the infinite void, but bound down  
To earth by their narrowing perceptions

(E83. 25:43–47)

The cities divide into the shape of a human heart, emulating the birth of Urizen's world. These lines challenge the idea of free will when the people are exposed to 'the infinite void' and become bound by 'their narrowing perceptions.' Urizen limits human experience through Religion by actively creating boundaries that prevents physical movement and consciousness. As a result, there is no freedom in this world and the people have no choice but to conform to the laws that imprison them.



**Figure 7:** William Blake, The [First] Book of Urizen, Copy D (1794), Plate 28. Relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring.  
The British Museum. © The William Blake Archive.



**Figure 8:** William Blake, The [First] Book of Urizen, Copy A (1794), Plate 12. Relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring.  
Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

The people live in darkness and are blinded by their environment. The motif of blindness and subsequent connotations of limited perception exemplifies State Religion restricting the freedoms of the people. The *Book of Urizen* ends with a quasi-Exodus when the sons of Urizen—specifically Fuzon—lead the children out of oppression:

So Fuzon call'd all together  
The remaining children of Urizen:  
And they left the pendulous earth:  
They called it Egypt, & left it.

And the salt ocean rolled englob'd  
(E83. 28:19–23)

Despite this note of liberation that imitates the Israelites leaving Egypt in the Book of Exodus, the poem does not end here. The final line, ‘the salt ocean rolled englob’d,’ could plausibly refer to the Red Sea which, after parting, ‘the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.’<sup>95</sup> With Fuzon as a pioneer of liberty, this vision could be of a son defying a father’s regime and his ‘Net of Religion.’ However, the language used throws this interpretation into contention.

The ocean at the end is ambiguous and is, I suggest, one which in part draws from Norse tradition. As mentioned earlier, there are two Norse creation myths found in *Völuspá*: one deriving from Ymir’s body and another where the world emerges from the sea. Earlier in the poem, Urizen speaks of his trials before forming his books. He declares:

[...] the winds merciless  
Bound; but condensing, in torrents  
They fall & fall; strong I repell’d  
The vast waves, & arose on the waters  
A wide world of solid obstruction  
(E72. 4:19–23)

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<sup>95</sup> Exod. 14:22.

This movement echoes Moses parting the Red Sea in Exodus, or Jesus walking on water in the Gospels.<sup>96</sup> Although arguably Urizen does not create the world from water, by repelling ‘The vast waves,’ he shapes its physical situation so that ‘A wide world of solid obstruction’ can emerge. Returning to the end of the poem then, ‘the salt ocean rolled englob’d’; it does not part or move in a way that can be compared to the Red Sea. The word ‘englob’d’ can be defined as ‘to enclose in, or as in, a globe,’ implying that either a new world is being formed here or one is closing in to imprison the children of Urizen.<sup>97</sup> It is not a moment of finality or resolution, but it is the beginning of the next chapter or another world.

The second creation emerges at the end of *Völuspá* post-Ragnarök, the Nordic Apocalypse, when the völva ‘sees, coming up a second time,/earth from the ocean, eternally green [...]’.<sup>98</sup> Here we have a poem where two creations—one drawn from a corpse, the other from water—frames the narrative. Percy states a lack of desire to translate *Völuspá*, though he does imply a conflation of these two different traditions, and the passage appears as part of Snorri’s *Edda*: ‘There will arise out of the sea, another earth most lovely and delightful.’<sup>99</sup> The ocean in *The Book of Urizen*, then, can gesture to a new world in a cycle of creation through destruction, and this theme is picked up later in *Jerusalem*.

The introduction of Norse myth into this conversation about liberty and nationhood complicates Fuzon as a Moses-figure, something that is reviewed in greater detail in *The Book of Ahania*. Blake’s syncretic practice and use of Norse creation motifs continues to emphasise the value he places on the *Edda* as a set of poetic tales similar to that of the Bible. The framework of Genesis can only take us so far, and those who read *The Book of Urizen* solely in relation to the biblical creation are in danger of inadvertently narrowing their scope. Sibylle Erle

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<sup>96</sup> Exod. 14:21; Matt. 14:22–23; Mark 6:45–56; John 6:16–21.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Englobe, v.,’ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>98</sup> Trans. Larrington, ‘The Seeress’s Prophecy,’ 11; [*Völuspá*, ‘Sér hon upp koma  
ǫðru sinni  
jörð ór ægi  
iðjagœna;’; 306.]

<sup>99</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 204, 164; [‘Upp skýtr jörðunni þá ór sænum ok er þá græn ok fōgr.’; 53]

suggests that the poem addresses ‘the creation of man and on how the human prototype acquires individual figures,’ but it is clear that one of the crucial differences between Genesis and Blake’s narrative is a conscious move away from the creation of man.<sup>100</sup> Although the poem addresses the loosely defined creation of a ‘man,’ Urizen’s self and the Blakean body cannot be read in such specific terms. Rather, the struggle surrounding his multifaceted form embodies Blake’s broader philosophical concerns with State Religion, and its development into a body politic.

Blake’s employment of different cultural myths exposes the pervasive nature of oppressive institutional systems, putting them under rigorous scrutiny. Urizen’s dismembered, deformed, and brutalised Norse body scrutinises the basic premise of a body politic and the limitations to this sort of political philosophy. Goldstein argues that the poem reveals ‘Urizen’s self-organization to be a forcible denial of social form’; it refutes the coming together of a coherent body politic.<sup>101</sup> Goss suggests that in Blake, ‘the body limits the world, and the narrowed world in turn limits the body’s capacity to experience it,’ thus as readers, we are naturally limited by our own epistemological boundaries.<sup>102</sup> Our inability to fully identify Urizen is an expected outcome. He is simultaneously an abstract darkness and a physical entity; he is the world and yet is removed from that world. Although he makes himself the ‘Law,’ this is counteracted by Los who later removes him from this position of universal authority. Reading Urizen through the narrow framework of a single creation myth or as a standardised body leads us further away from Blake’s attempts to challenge the status quo. Instead, Urizen is a multifaceted and versatile existence, whose interactions with himself and those around him reveal the world as one inherently filled with division and oppression.

Reading Ymir in Urizen complicates the authority of the Christian symbolism in the poem. Ymir’s presence denies the Bible and its orthodox teachings, only to introduce a different

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<sup>100</sup> Erle, *Blake, Lavater, and Physiognomy*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Goldstein, *Sweet Science*, 62.

<sup>102</sup> Goss, *Revealing Bodies*, 115.



point of origin that justifies Urizen's laws. The narrative's focus on Urizen's darkness and deformity reveals limitations of Genesis as a comparative model when thinking about the definition of creation itself. This examination of the body in *The Book of Urizen* has demonstrated an engagement with Northern antiquarianism that includes an interest in ancient Scandinavian lore, and a basic understanding of Norse myth. Taking these elements, Blake reinvents such sources within Urizen's body, one which exists to be revised and revalued, darkened and deformed. Urizen's aberrance is a consequence of his own totalitarian structures, but although his body denies identification, his mutable form subverts the familiar body metaphors to critique the fixation on order and hierarchy. The Norse analogues in *The Book of Urizen*, then, become part of this world's foundations, and from this point, Blake develops his critique on state institutions and their impact on a British body politic in the other illuminated books.

## II. Hanging Gods

### Addressing the Suffering Body

At the end of *The Book of Urizen*, Fuzon liberates Urizen's children from their father's tyranny. As a loose sequel, *The Book of Ahania* examines the increasing friction between Urizen, Fuzon, and Urizen's emanation, Ahania. The poem's overarching sense 'of conflict, human despair and suffering, and the effects of malign power' is embodied by each figure who show varying degrees of suffering—debilitation, death, and disembodiment—to develop Blake's critique of institutionalised religion.<sup>1</sup> The poem begins with a furious altercation between father and son, culminating in the death of Fuzon at the hands of Urizen, and Fuzon's corpse being nailed to the Tree of Mystery. The biblical allusions are prominent in the poem and have been thoroughly examined in scholarship, especially in relation to the idea of Fuzon's fate as a form of Crucifixion.

Tannenbaum envisages *The Book of Ahania* as a parody of the Pentateuch, and so believes it models itself on the Book of Exodus. Viewing Fuzon as a natural counterpart to Moses, Mee follows a similar line of thought to argue that, 'Fuzon is consistently placed in a mosaic role in the plots of both *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania*, but he is also figured in terms of Christ.'<sup>2</sup> Erdman proposes that Fuzon's death reflects the fall of Robespierre and 'a crucifying of the Moses of the Revolution,' while alternatively, James Mulvihill suggests that Fuzon represents energetic sexual desires when Ahania weeps by the tree 'on which passion has been crucified.'<sup>3</sup> Fuzon's crucifixion dominates most critical readings, though the poem is also understood as critiquing the doctrine of Atonement, where Fuzon's death comments on the

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<sup>1</sup> David Bindman, 'Introduction,' in *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, 226; Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> Erdman, *A Prophet against Empire*, 389; James Mulvihill, 'A Voice without Form: Blake's *Book of Ahania* and Song of Solomon,' *English Studies* 88, no. 5 (2007): 522.

perceived corruption of Christian theology.<sup>4</sup> As such, the politics of sacrifice, as initially compared to Christ's crucifixion, plays an integral part in understanding Fuzon and his relationship with Urizen.

However, closer attention to the treatment of Fuzon's body, and the role of sacrifice in the poem, permits us to read beyond these biblical analogues. Vincent De Luca asserts that 'the main plot of the work [...] draws its imagery (some biblical allusions notwithstanding) primarily from a repertoire of motifs from Norse mythology' that can be found in *Northern Antiquities*.<sup>5</sup> The suffering body in *The Book of Ahania* is established through eighteenth-century notions of Norse cultural practices and myth, specifically that related to priestcraft and the Druids. In scenes such as Urizen's interactions with Fuzon's 'deform'd' corpse (E86. 3:43), the influence of the eighteenth-century's interest in Odinic sacrifice and sun worship is clearly part of Blake's critique of State Religion. Odin and the Hanging God motif in *The Book of Ahania* has already been examined by scholars, with Mee arguing that Urizen's nailing Fuzon to the tree was inspired by Mallet, and that 'those details of *The Book of Ahania* taken from Mallet mark a continuation of Blake's druidic conception of Urizen.'<sup>6</sup> O'Donoghue develops this line of thought to remark that while Urizen seems like the Christian God, by nailing Fuzon to the Tree of Mystery, the scene also emulates Odin sacrificing his son Baldr.<sup>7</sup> I suggest that these observations can be furthered with a more rigorous examination of the poem and eighteenth-century discourse concerning Odin, sacrifice, and the Druids.

The suffering body in *The Book of Ahania* embodies a Urizenic State Religion that is built on, and sustained by, the oppression and disabling of its subjects. Fuzon's death draws attention to the lack of able-bodiedness in Urizen's body politic, partly through his deformity at the climax of the narrative. Taking the body as a social index, Turner suggests that 'bodily

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<sup>4</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 96–99; David Worrall, 'The Book of Ahania: Themes and Contexts,' in *William Blake's Illuminated Books: The Urizen Books*, ed. David Bindman and David Worrall, Vol.6 (London: The William Blake Trust/The Tate Gallery, 1995), 156.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent De Luca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 194.

<sup>6</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 95.

ideals supported hierarchies of power and prestige in eighteenth-century England.<sup>8</sup> Further developing the lack of a functioning body from *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania* presents a disabled head of state, a mutilated heir, and an abstract, disembodied voice. Urizen's desire for a body politic is rooted in 'One King, one God, one Law' (E72. 4:40), and yet his own obscurity and multifaceted form challenges his single-minded body politic. With the introduction of Fuzon and Ahania, there is further resistance to an able-body politic through a privileging of suffering. Fuzon reveals Urizen's vision as both unrealistic and unattainable, and with Ahania, they become a triad: father, son, and disembodied emanation or spirit.

### ***Eighteenth-century Priestcraft: Stukeley's Druids & Sayers' Priests***

The poem navigates the conflict between liberty and tyranny. With Fuzon's mutilated corpse embodying an oppressive body politic, the influence of eighteenth-century ideas of British druidism and their Scandinavian counterparts are visible in this symbol of Urizen's State Religion. Antiquarians such as William Stukeley, developed hypotheses about druidic worship and rituals. For example, in his dissertation on Abury, Stukeley proposes that Druids:

[...] consider'd the world as the general temple or house of god, and that all particular temples should have a proper regard to it. The east naturally claims a prerogative, where the sun and all the planets and stars arise: this therefore they accounted as the face and front of the world, or universal temple.<sup>9</sup>

The temple is both the world and is universal. There is a clear relationship here between druidic worship and nature, something that Percy also discusses in relation to ancient Norwegian temples and grottoes: 'it was offensive to the gods to pretend to inclose them within the circuit of walls.'<sup>10</sup> The relationship between law or worship and nature is also found in *The Book of Ahania* when Urizen sits 'on his dark rooted Oak' (E85. 3:16) to write 'In silence his book of

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<sup>8</sup> Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> William Stukeley, *Abury, A Temple of the British Druids, etc.*, London: printed for the author: and sold by W. Innys, R. Manby, B. Dod, J. Brindley, and the booksellers of London. MDCCXLIII. [1743], 50.

<sup>10</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 124–27.

iron' (E86. 3:64). Urizen's relationship with his Tree of Mystery plays out in an environment that imitates druidic groves and ancient Scandinavian grottoes. This, as I will discuss, further reaffirms his role as lawmaker.

In his poem *Stone Henge* (1792), Edward Jerningham—a member of Gray's circle and a correspondent of Anna Seward who penned *Herva at the Tomb of Argantyr* (1796)—conflates Norse tradition with the Druids. He demonstrates the eighteenth-century tendency to unite Norse myth and ancient British culture within an imagined pseudo-history:

Mysterious circles! from your gloom'd recess,  
The priest, perchance, the implicit train might bless;  
For furious Odin might obtest the skies,  
And bless a hecatomb for sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

The eighteenth-century's syncretic approach to world religions and myths meant that during the period, the studying of antiquity was 'an investigation of remarkable utility,' especially when antiquarians examined 'the genesis of beliefs, the development of acquired capacities, and the growth of customs and institutions.'<sup>12</sup> When Stukeley views druidism as an early iteration of Christianity, he asserts that:

We can evidently discover from [the memoirs of the Druids], that the Druids were of *Abraham's* religion intirely, at least in the earliest of times, and worshipp'd the Supreme Being in the same manner as he did, and probably according to his example, or the example of his and their common ancestors.<sup>13</sup>

In his *Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake states that 'Adam was a Druid, and Noah; also Abraham was called to succeed the Druidical age, which began to turn allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command, whereby human sacrifice would have depopulated the earth' (E542–43. *Descriptive Catalogue*: [p.41]). By connecting Abraham to the British druids, eighteenth-

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Jerningham, *Stone Henge*, Norwich: printed by J. Crouse and W. Stevenson, for J. Robson. MDCCXCII. [1792], 4.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), 132.

<sup>13</sup> William Stukeley, *Stonehenge, A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids*, London: printed for W. Innys and R. Manby. MDCCXL. [1740], 2.

century intellectuals, philosophers, and poets—including Blake—reworked and questioned the origins of humanity, consequently situating British history within a universal worldview of different religions.

Traditionally, Britain was thought to have roots in Troy, but as Whittaker notes, ‘Blake’s purpose is probably different – opposing rather than supporting the feudal and patriarchal values espoused in the genealogy of Brutus and his kingly descendants.’<sup>14</sup> During his search for alternatives to these more traditional narratives, I suggest that Blake uses Norse myth to critique this patriarchal genealogy. In the late eighteenth-century, the Druid often appeared as an emblem of priestcraft and state oppression in radical discourse, an example of which can be found in Daniel Isaac Eaton’s radical periodical, *Politics for the People* (1793–94). A contemporary of Blake and member of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), Eaton explicitly opposed the Church’s influence in state matters. This view was also visible in fellow LCS member James Parkinson’s loose history of England and its native people in Eaton’s periodical, written under the pseudonym ‘Old Hubert.’<sup>15</sup> In his sketch, Parkinson describes:

Their priests, the Druids, by the severity of their manners, and by the mysteriousness of their religious rites, had obtained so complete an ascendancy over them, as to be permitted, without exciting either murmur or resistance, to make very numerous sacrifices of their miserable devotees.<sup>16</sup>

The obscurity stresses the barbarity of druidic rituals while the Druids’ absolute supremacy is epitomised by the ‘very numerous sacrifices of their miserable devotees.’ The passage draws attention to the way druidism was seen as a symbol of an oppressive religious organisation, and that the Druids were figureheads who endorsed such structures.

In his tragedy ‘Starno: A Tragedy in Two Acts’—a name that might be inspired by the *Ossian* poem ‘Cath-Loda, a Poem’—Sayers suggests that by replacing ‘the mythology of the

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<sup>14</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> John Hindle, ‘A History of Parkinson’s Disease,’ in *Parkinson’s Disease in the Older Patient*, ed. Jeremy Playfer and John Hindle, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing, 2008), 5.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Old Hubert,’ ‘A Sketch of the most Memorable Events in the History of England, etc.,’ *Politics for the People. Or a Salmagundy for Swine* 1, no. 1 (1793, printed 1794): 10.

Saxons for the institutions and ceremonies of the druids' lesser known parts of Scandinavian religion 'might be introduced into dramatic poetry with tolerable effect.'<sup>17</sup> For Sayers, the Druids are part of Scandinavian rather than ancient British religious institutions, and throughout the first edition of 'Starno,' a chorus of Druids establishes the severity of Saxon law and custom. When narrating Starno's battle, they intercede for Hesus the Celtic god of war, 'well pleas'd to hear/Our chieftain's bloody vow,' which Sayers then notes is referring to the human sacrifice that was 'considered by the Druids as peculiarly acceptable to some of their gods.'<sup>18</sup>

Sayers' Druids are priests who oversee religious ritual. They are transformed into a dramatic component and framing device designed to elevate the effects of tragedy through the portrayal of human sacrifice. The tragedy revolves around Starno's daughter, Daura, who has fallen in love with Kelric, the war prisoner about to be sacrificed. The Druids meet in 'hallowed groves' where 'the god demands his victim,' and Daura cries out:

[...] ye bloody priests,  
Here plunge the holy knife and pour my blood  
To please the sullen god – save, save my Kelric.<sup>19</sup>

Their 'bloody' nature implicates the Druids as perpetrators of this barbaric ritual, while the repetition of 'bloody,' 'blood,' and 'save, save' emphasises the established, corrupt institution. This negative image of the Druids by Sayers is countered, however, by Iolo Morganwg, another poet associated with Johnson, who saw the specifically Welsh-inspired Druid as a template for the renovation of religion during the late eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

While they might be 'bloody priests' for Sayers, for Iolo, 'there is too much *Priestcraft* amongst every sect; too much *Kingcraft* in all, even *Republican*, Governments; yet there are

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<sup>17</sup> Frank Sayers, 'Starno: A Tragedy in Two Acts,' in *Dramatic Sketches*, London: printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXC. [1790], 84.

<sup>18</sup> Sayers, 'Starno,' 88.

<sup>19</sup> Sayers, 'Starno,' 87, 94, 96.

<sup>20</sup> Mee, 'Images of Truth New Born,' 190.

many *good Priests*.<sup>21</sup> Eager to defend Welsh tradition, Iolo suggests that Druids embody a Welsh cultural integrity:

We Britain's nervous tongue retain,  
In songs of high renown;  
It form'd the *Druid's* mystic strain,  
A language still our own:<sup>22</sup>

Here, the '*Druid's* mystic strain' does not represent a British voice, but captures a specific Welsh-inherited druid-bardism. The association between an ancient druidic language and 'a language still our own,' transforms the Druid into a symbol of an independent Welsh patriotism, one that further reinvents a nation's historic identity. Iolo detested the blending of Scandinavian mythology and Celtic culture, believing that druidism was merely a branch of bardism, as Blake also believed.<sup>23</sup> 'Bardism,' Strabone reminds us 'was not, in Iolo's scheme, just a historical relic preserved by rustics but the prophetic foundations of a future political order that will remake the world.'<sup>24</sup> Both Blake and Iolo, then, adopted the Bard as a self-fashioning device which was typical during the 1790s, where a political bardism signalled a sort of vision of liberty.

Butler believes Blake's association between Tyburn and druidism was inspired by Iolo, though there is a key difference between their views, because 'although [Blake] could imagine Druids and bards as almost synonymous, the former were strongly associated with the priestly appropriation of the visionary imagination.'<sup>25</sup> It seems that during the 1790s, Johnson was interested in publishing writers engaging with debates surrounding the Druids, precisely because of the implications concerning British political identity. While Iolo disliked Scandinavian influences, Sayers merged Saxon legends with Norse culture. In general, eighteenth-century antiquarians actively sought a relationship between Gothic and Scandinavian pasts to imagine

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<sup>21</sup> Iolo Morganwg, *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*, Vol.1. London: printed for the author, by J. Nicols; and sold by J. Johnson, et.al. MDCCXCIV. [1794], xix.

<sup>22</sup> Iolo Morganwg, 'A Song, usually sung by the SOCIETY of ANCIENT BRITONS in LONDON,' in *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*, Vol.2. London: printed for the author, by J. Nicols; and sold by J. Johnson, et.al. MDCCXCIV. [1794], 93.

<sup>23</sup> Mee, 'Images of Truth New Born,' 191.

<sup>24</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 239.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 172; Mee, 'Images of Truth New Born,' 190.



the British nations as being ‘founded in ancient resistance to oppression,’ which in turn then ‘supplied a new political rhetoric in the radical decade of the 1790s after the French Revolution.’<sup>26</sup> This is clear in both Sayers and Iolo, but Blake complicates the idea of an ‘ancient resistance to oppression,’ especially in *The Book of Ahania* where Fuzon’s body politic remains oppressive, even in its resistance. Although Mee argues that ‘after 1800 this idea of perverted and deformed religious institutions became fixed in Blake’s imagination with the idea of druidic sacrifice,’ I suggest that we can also find this in Blake’s work during the 1790s.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Blake’s Tree of Mystery: Yggdrasil, Liberty, & Atonement***

Blake’s interpretation of the Druids changed as his own philosophies and creative visions evolved, but there has been no substantial examination on how, in the illuminated books, Blake’s Druids are firmly rooted in eighteenth-century representations of Scandinavian religion. This also includes Blake’s Tree of Mystery and its relationship to the pervasive metaphor of the tree representing the nation and Fuzon’s death. Although the sacrificed body is important, it is not the poem’s central motif. Arguably, it is the Tree of Mystery that takes centre stage. The tree motif in the eighteenth century was saturated with varying political and philosophical values. It was widely adapted and utilised by both conservatives and radicals alike, who ‘made them suitable emblems for writers who portrayed an ancient constitution capable of gradual change as a growth of English soil.’<sup>28</sup> Susan Marks traces the motif’s development, beginning with Edmund Dudley’s sixteenth-century ‘Tree of Commonwealth,’ whose ‘roots are the Christian faith, the fair administration of justice, honest dealing, social concord, and peace with other realms.’<sup>29</sup> Moving through the Restoration to the eighteenth century, Marks notes how tree

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<sup>26</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 216.

<sup>27</sup> Mee, ‘Images of Truth New Born,’ 183.

<sup>28</sup> Tim Fulford, ‘Cowper, Wordsworth, Clare: The Politics of Trees,’ *The John Clare Society Journal* 14 (1995): 47.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Marks, *A False Tree of Liberty: Human Rights in Radical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 217.

planting and landscaping after 1688 ‘served as tokens of confidence in the future, and to that extent, earnest of the permanence of England’s Glorious Revolution.’<sup>30</sup>

The idea of a British liberty stemming from the Glorious Revolution was the foundation of Edmund Burke’s argument in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Here, Burke uses the oak as the traditional symbol of British nation and freedom to address the events in France:

Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine, that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field [...]<sup>31</sup>

Burke’s metaphor reassures readers that those with ‘importunate chink’ do not represent the masses that quietly find refuge under the ‘British oak,’ a tree that has similarities with the royal oak at Boscobel Wood, where Charles II supposedly hid to escape the Roundheads in 1651.<sup>32</sup>

For Burke, the oak embodied the British aristocracy, as shown in a letter to the Duke of Richmond:

You people of great families and hereditary trusts and fortunes, are not like such as I am [...] You, if you are what you ought to be, are in my eye the great oaks that shade the country, and perpetuate your benefits from generation to generation.<sup>33</sup>

The roots of the nation are seen as lying with the aristocracy, but with the rising tensions in France throughout the 1790s, there would have been many like Blake who refused to believe that the foundations of a free nation lay with such seemingly ancient and outdated hierarchies. Thomas Paine’s response in *Rights of Man* (1791) furiously demands, ‘lay then the axe to the root, and teach governments humanity. It is their sanguinary punishments which corrupt

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<sup>30</sup> Marks, *A False Tree of Liberty*, 222.

<sup>31</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, etc.*, London: Printed for J. Dodsley. MDCCXC. [1790], 126–27.

<sup>32</sup> Marks, *A False Tree of Liberty*, 222.

<sup>33</sup> Edmund Burke, ‘Letter to the Duke of Richmond (Nov 17, 1772),’ *Letters of Edmund Burke*, ed. Harold Laksi, 2002. *Past Masters Online*, 155.

mankind.<sup>34</sup> This metaphor appears in *Milton* where ‘The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife/But their Forms eternal Exist, For-ever’ (E132. 32[35]:37–38). Blake’s description opposes Burke’s notion of British liberty, and instead unites the Oak with the Christian metaphor of the Lamb, or Jesus, being sacrificed. This composite image speaks to the consequences of oppression in mind and being.

This merging of a traditional national symbol and that of Atonement is found throughout *The Book of Ahania*, where liberty becomes entangled with organisation and oppression. Critics suggest different sources for Blake’s Tree of Mystery, including the Tree of Knowledge, Yggdrasil, or the Upas Tree. The Upas—an extremely toxic plant—is also noted as a source for the Poison Tree found in Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* where an early reference to the Tree of Mystery can be found: ‘Soon spreads the dismal shade/Of Mystery over his head’ (E27. ‘The Human Abstract’:13–14). Mee notes that after gaining prominence in Erasmus Darwin’s poem *The Botanic Garden* (1791) that was engraved by Blake, the Upas was identified by Eaton as a noxious growth separate from the Liberty Tree that was associated with France.<sup>35</sup> With Yggdrasil, the presence of Norse traditions in *The Book of Ahania* emphasises the British claim to Gothic and Saxon liberty, one which Blake then reveals as a self-betraying system.

Harold Bloom, Mee, O’Donoghue, and Whittaker all note the similarities between the Tree of Mystery and Yggdrasil, the World Tree and central monument in Norse religion and culture.<sup>36</sup> The *Edda* describes Yggdrasil as a place: ‘There the gods must hold their courts each day.’<sup>37</sup> It is ‘of all trees the biggest and best. Its branches spread out over all the world and extend across the sky.’<sup>38</sup> During the eighteenth-century, Yggdrasil primarily appeared in

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution*, London: Printed for J.S. Jordan. MDCCXCI. [1791], 33.

<sup>35</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Harold Bloom, *Blake’s Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), 143; Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 97–98; O’Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 101; Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 118.

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Faulkes, ‘Gylfaginning,’ 17; [‘Þar skulu guðin eiga dóma sína hvern dag.’; 17]

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Faulkes, ‘Gylfaginning,’ 17; [‘Askinn er allra tréa mest ok beztr. Lím hans dreifask yfir heim allan ok standa yfir himni’; 17]

antiquarian poetry about Ragnarök. Using similar imagery found in *Stone Henge*, Jerningham's *The Rise and Progress of Scandinavian Poetry* (1784) describes Yggdrasil as 'the dread Ash,' where 'Three virgin forms in snowy vests array'd/Stand in the deep recesses of the shade'; he refers to the Norns: 'Urda, or the PAST; Verdandi, or the PRESENT; and Sskulda, or the FUTURE.'<sup>39</sup> Thomas James Mathias' ode, 'The Twilight of the Gods' (1781), describes 'Ydrasils prophetic ash.'<sup>40</sup> Mathias' Yggdrasil is cut down, destroyed and felled, and 'Nods to the air with sudden crash,' whereas in Percy's rendition of Ragnarök, 'the great Ash tree of Ydrasil is shaken' with no explicit mention of its destruction.<sup>41</sup> In all of these examples, Yggdrasil becomes significant as an emblem for the downfall of the gods.

Percy envisions liberty as disseminating from the North and emerging from the roots of a tree:

That spirit of liberty, arising from their climate, and from their rustic and military life, had received new strength from the opinions it had produced; as a sucker which shoots forth from the root of a tree, strengthens by embracing it.<sup>42</sup>

Northern liberty expands and flourishes by attaching itself to a strong body—a nation. Percy develops this metaphor in relation to the preservation of liberty in Germany and the north, 'as it were in the bud, ready to blossom and expand through all Europe, there to flourish in their several colonies.'<sup>43</sup> Percy's vision of Gothic liberty supports a Burkean view where tradition and monarchy have integral roles in upholding a nation, but this is not so clear cut in Blake.

Eighteenth-century mediations of Yggdrasil do not deviate too much from the original myth, and Percy explains that the World Ash has a root that leads 'among the giants, in that very place where the abyss was formerly' with another leading to 'Niflheim, or Hell.'<sup>44</sup> Blake's Tree

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Jerningham, *The Rise and Progress of Scandinavian Poetry*, London: printed for James Robson. MDCCLXXXIV. [1784], 6; Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas James Mathias, 'The Twilight of the Gods, or, the Destruction of the World,' in *Runic Odes. Imitations from the Norse Tongue*, London: printed for T. Payne et. al. MDCCLXXXI. [1781], 5.

<sup>41</sup> Mathias, 'The Twilight of the Gods,' 5; Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 165.

<sup>42</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 164.

<sup>43</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 164–65.

<sup>44</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 49; ['[...] með hrímpursum, þar sem forðum var Ginnungagap.']; 17]

of Mystery ‘grows over the Void/Enrooting itself all around’ (E87. 4:2–3), which O’Donoghue argues ‘recalls Yggdrasil even more insistently, for there are secrets deep beneath its roots’ while the Tree of Knowledge and the Cross are not connected to a void.<sup>45</sup> In eighteenth-century political imagery, the Ash is not as prominent as the Oak, the fictional Tree of Liberty, or the Upas. Eaton suggests that ‘the ash tree is destructive of vegetables which grow under it’ like the Upas, which also ‘will not suffer any animal or vegetable to exist within some miles of it.’<sup>46</sup> For Eaton, both these trees derive from the same Linnean class *Monandria*, thus justifying their similar destructive dispositions. Although it is unknown whether Eaton was aware of the importance of the ash in Scandinavian culture, it is clear that in light of his wider collaborations with writers such as Parkinson, the ash is also an emblem for tyrannical institutions.

The ash appears once in all of Blake’s work, specifically in *Jerusalem* where a forest is described:

[...] in the Forests

The Oak frowns terrible, the Beech & Ash & Elm enroot  
 Among the Spiritual fires; loud the Corn fields thunder along  
 The Soldiers fife; the Harlots shriek; the Virgins dismal groan  
 The Parents fear: the Brothers jealousy: the Sisters curse  
 Beneath the Storms of Theotormon & the thundring Bellows  
 Heaves in the hand of Palamabron who in Londons darkness  
 Before the Anvil, watches the bellowing flames: [...]

(E159. 16:3–10)

The ash mingles with other trees while the Oak is understandably singled out. The conflict described is reminiscent of the ‘hapless Soldiers’ (E27. ‘London’:11) and the ‘youthful Harlots curse’ (E27. ‘London’:14) in *Songs of Experience*. In the above passage, urban strife is framed and mirrored through the Forest’s discord when the trees ‘enroot/Among the Spiritual fires.’ The smithing motif is normally associated with Los, but here in *Jerusalem* it is reintroduced with Palamabron. Instead of an abstract Urizenic darkness, Palamabron is positioned in

<sup>45</sup> O’Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 95.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Tree of Liberty,’ *Politics for the People. Or a Salmagundy for Swine* 2, no. 9 (1794): 8–9.

‘London’s darkness,’ but there is an ever present danger with a forest fire threatening to overwhelm the city. In this example, nature and natural disaster become oppressive forces, and this association, I propose, originates in *The Book of Ahania* with the Tree of Mystery.

Whittaker suggests that the association between the Oak and memory ‘was to be an important part of Blake’s version of Druidism.’<sup>47</sup> Blake’s Tree epitomises the corruption of a Burkean British liberty, and with this symbol, he exposes State Religion at the heart of nationhood. Burke believed that liberty needed to be founded on legitimate forms of government sanctified by tradition, because ‘without them, liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long.’<sup>48</sup> Those who opposed Burke’s veneration of state tradition resented this logic, for example, in his satirical *A Political Dictionary* (1795), Charles Pigott defined ‘Liberty’ as:

An indispensable necessity of keeping game for other people to kill, with pains and penalties of the most arbitrary kind, should we think of appropriating the minutest article to use of our own families.<sup>49</sup>

Pigott envisaged traditional British ‘liberty’ as a means to enslave people further ‘with pains and penalties.’ In *The Book of Ahania*, Fuzon’s sense of freedom is entangled with the claims of legal authority. Tannenbaum believes that ‘Fuzon-Moses represents the passion for justice, the spirit of righteousness that quickly expends its vitality as it takes the form of doctrines, laws, and codes of living.’<sup>50</sup> The emphasis lies with Fuzon who captures both sides of Moses as liberator and lawgiver, but he remains bound by doctrines and codes to ultimately become an emblem for state religion.

With Northern antiquarian motifs and mediated druidic rituals, *The Book of Ahania* examines how Christian doctrines like Atonement, limit the freedoms of the people. Suffering is central to Atonement, which is in turn closely related to salvation. As a deist, Paine believed the

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<sup>47</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Pigott, *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words*, London: printed for D.I. Eaton. MDCCXV. [1795], 69.

<sup>50</sup> Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake’s Early Prophecies*, 226.

doctrine and the implied sacrifice to be remnants of ancient pagan rituals or human invention.<sup>51</sup> In more liberal eighteenth-century circles, Atonement was not seen as part of true Christianity. In *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782), Priestley describes it as ‘a gross misrepresentation of the character and moral government of God, and to affect many other articles in the scheme of christianity, greatly disfiguring and depraving it.’<sup>52</sup> Believing the doctrine to be inconsistent in the Bible, he continues:

[Our Lord] also compares his being raised upon the cross to the elevation of the serpent in the wilderness, and to seed buried in the ground, as necessary to its future increase. But all these representations are quite foreign to any thing in the doctrine of atonement.<sup>53</sup>

Priestley removes Atonement from the Gospel where Christ’s death is crucial ‘for the salvation of the world, to do the will of God, to fulfil the scripture prophecies, &c.’<sup>54</sup> In a letter to James Masquerier, Henry Crabb Robinson relays a conversation with Blake after the death of John Flaxman where ‘he spoke of the Atonement[,] Sait –[“]It is a horrible doctrine – if another man pay your debt I do not forgive it – [”].’<sup>55</sup>

When Britain warred with a republican France at the end of the eighteenth century, Blake recognised that State ideology relied on ‘the mystery of Sacrifice which Christianity had erected into the doctrine of Atonement.’<sup>56</sup> Matthew Green argues that Blake’s refusal of Atonement was ‘the endeavour of religion to achieve reconciliation.’<sup>57</sup> Green builds his argument on Derrida and Czech philosopher Jan Patočka who interprets Atonement as a contrast between a pagan plurality that overwhelms a Christian singular selfhood.<sup>58</sup> With this in mind,

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason. Parts I. & II., etc.*, Vol.1. London: Printed for, and Sold by all the Booksellers in Great Britain, and Ireland. MDCCXCVI. [1796], 19–22, 28, 36–37.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, Vol.1. Birmingham: printed by Piercy and Jones, for J. Johnson. MDCCLXXXII. [1782], 153.

<sup>53</sup> Priestley, *Corruptions of Christianity*, Vol.1, 160–61.

<sup>54</sup> Priestley, *Corruptions of Christianity*, Vol.1, 160.

<sup>55</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson, ‘Letter to James Masquerier,’ in *Blake Records*, ed. G.E. Bentley Jr. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 453.

<sup>56</sup> Florence Sandler, “Defending the Bible”: Blake, Paine, and the Bishop on Atonement,’ in *Blake and his Bibles*, ed. David Erdman (West Cornwall, Connecticut: Locust Hill Press, 1990), 45.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew Green, ‘Voices in the Wilderness: Satire and Sacrifice in Blake and Byron,’ *The Byron Journal* 36, no. 2 (2008): 122.

<sup>58</sup> Green, ‘Voices in the Wilderness,’ 124.

Green suggests that Atonement ‘describes a system of governance that controls individuals by means of a cultural framework,’ where life has the highest value and so the fear of death allows for the exploitation of humans.<sup>59</sup> Within this cultural framework, where communities revolve around mutual self-sacrifice, he concludes that death must be a fixed outcome that ‘both underpins the singularity of identity and allows for the sacrifice or subduction of the self.’<sup>60</sup> It is possible, then, to read *The Book of Ahania* as a satire on State Religion, especially with a body politic that develops around a ‘system of governance,’ entrenched in a corrupted religious code and embodied by both Fuzon and Urizen.

### ***Fuzon, Sun Worship, & the Myth of Baldr***

Fuzon’s mutilation is the climax in *The Book of Ahania*, with his deformity at death referring back to Urizen’s universal system established in *The Book of Urizen*. Although Fuzon’s initial bright and burning appearance is the antithesis to Urizen’s dark obscurity, when he dies he becomes dark and deformed. Textually and visually, this development re-addresses the standard scholarly connection made between Urizen and Odin, a ‘terrible and severe God; the father of slaughter; the God that carrieth desolation and fire.’<sup>61</sup> Fuzon becomes part of an ‘economy of substitution’—to borrow from Green—one where his death arguably replaces the death of Urizen’s State Religion.<sup>62</sup> In doing so, Fuzon perpetuates Urizen’s desire for ‘One King, one God, one Law.’

When Fuzon is ‘deform’d,’ there is a shift from a strong and virile presence to submitting to Urizen’s State Religion. The poem opens with a powerful picture of a youthful warrior who differs ideologically from his father:

Fuzon, on a chariot iron-wing’d  
On spiked flames rose; his hot visage

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<sup>59</sup> Green, ‘Voices in the Wilderness,’ 124–25.

<sup>60</sup> Green, ‘Voices in the Wilderness,’ 125.

<sup>61</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 86–87.

<sup>62</sup> Green, ‘Voices in the Wilderness,’ 124.



Flam'd furious! sparkles his hair & beard  
 Shot down his wide bosom and shoulders.

(E84. 2:1–4)

The caesura singles out Fuzon in an almost Homeric fashion, and the fast-paced layers of alliteration and sibilance energise this passage to draw attention to his physical appearance.<sup>63</sup>

Joseph Sterling, a friend of Percy, includes in his 1789 collection of poems some *Odes from the Icelandic* (1782). 'The Scald: An Ode' presents the death of chiefs as announced by the Northern skalds, and Sterling's vision of the warriors is striking:

Bright his kindling courage glows,  
 Fierce he shakes his frowning crest;  
 He grasps his sword, he burns with noble rage [...] <sup>64</sup>

Fuzon's appearance emulates a similar brightness and ferocity as these imagined northern warriors. While *The Book of Urizen* opens with 'a shadow of horror' (E70. 3:1), Fuzon here 'Flam'd furious,' and the disparity between father and son hints at an ideological—maybe even political—difference. Urizen embodies dark oppression and Fuzon is the bright future of liberation that he champions at the end of *The Book of Urizen*.

In terms of physical appearance, Fuzon seems to be able-bodied with a 'wide bosom and shoulders,' again countering Urizen who is described in fragmentary terms. Nevertheless, the distinction between father and son is soon blurred, when Fuzon:

On clouds of smoke rages his chariot  
 And his right hand burns red in its cloud  
 Moulding into a vast globe, his wrath

(E84. 2:5–7)

This smoke-filled entrance echoes the moment when Urizen appears from 'the bleak deserts/Now fill'd with clouds, darkness & waters' (E71. 4:1–2). In fact, Fuzon himself calls Urizen 'this abstract non-entity/This cloudy God seated on waters' (E84. 2:11–12) while also emulating his father's cloudy obscurity. This father-son relationship maps onto the biblical God

<sup>63</sup> For example, the *Iliad* begins with 'μῆνιν' or 'Rage.' See: Homer, *Iliad*. *Perseus Digital Library*.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Sterling, 'The Scald: An Ode,' in *Poems*, London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson. MDCCLXXXIX. [1789], 152.

and Christ, but there lacks any clear distinction or the hierarchical difference as found in the Bible. Instead, there is more evidence of them being one and the same.<sup>65</sup>

In Coleridge's short-lived periodical *The Watchman*, the poem 'Invocation to Liberty' uses images of clouds and human sacrifice to demonstrate the need for liberty:

Tho' clouds of darkness round us lour  
Eternal sunshine cheers the breast.  
Scar'd at thy frown, (with human Victims fed)  
Oppression shrinks aghast, and hides his blood-stain'd head<sup>66</sup>

In another of Sterling's Icelandic odes, 'The Twilight of the Gods,' Ragnarök begins when 'the clouds descend in streams of gore' so that 'His sacred beam the golden sun shall hide,/Nor spring nor summer shall enrich the plain.'<sup>67</sup> Although these two examples are mismatched in agenda—one addresses a political desire for liberty, and the other describes a mythological apocalypse—clouds of darkness and gore become indicators of ensuing conflict and oppression.

The ambiguity in Fuzon's nature is partly due to his sudden association with Urizenic tropes which, as previously discussed, emulate a Northern climate. In his *Letters from Scandinavia* (1796), William Thomson writes that 'we find the Laplander worshipping all the phenomena of nature: not a vapoury cloud arises from the marshes but is pregnant as it were with some genius or devil.'<sup>68</sup> The association between 'vapoury cloud' and superstition creates a meteorological trope that indicates ambiguity and uncertainty, whether the object is merely a cloud or a 'devil.' In *The Book of Ahania*, it is only revealed in stages that Fuzon revolts 'not to bring freedom to all but in an attempt to secure their own iron rule.'<sup>69</sup> His appearance 'on clouds of smoke,' then, is an early indication that rather than being a bright liberator of a dark world, he is a mirror of his father; Fuzon will propagate the organisation of religion.

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<sup>65</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 100.

<sup>66</sup> 'Invocation to Liberty,' *TW*, no. 4 (Mar 25, 1796): 100.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Sterling, 'The Twilight of the Gods: An Ode,' in *Poems*, London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson. MDCCCLXXXIX. [1789], 154.

<sup>68</sup> William Thomson, 'Letter XXXVIII,' in *Letters from Scandinavia*, Vol.2. London: printed for G.G. and J. Robinson. MDCCXCVI. [1796], 7.

<sup>69</sup> Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, 226; John Hutton, "'Lovers of Wild Rebellion': The Image of Satan in British Art of the Revolutionary Era,' in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, Christopher Hobson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 158.

Fuzon's dramatic entrance invokes Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but it also echoes mythological gods of war and sun. His 'chariot iron-wing'd' and 'his hot visage' suggests the kind of war strongly identified with Odin's religion in the eighteenth century, an association Blake states when 'in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a Code of War' (E67. 3:30).<sup>70</sup> There are particular resonances between Fuzon and Percy's descriptions of the Norse gods Thor and Baldr. According to Percy, 'it is probable that a great many people venerated [Thor] also, as the intelligence who animated the Sun and Fire'; he etymologises and connects Thor to the Scythian divinity Goeto-Syrus which he explains: 'Syr, or *Seir*, which the Persians employed to denominate the Sun, seems to be the same with *Thor*, only in a different dialect.'<sup>71</sup> The association between Thor and the sun continues throughout *Northern Antiquities*, but in original Norse myth Baldr is the one primarily associated with the sun.

*Northern Antiquities* describes Baldr as 'so handsome in his person, and of so dazzling a look, that he seems to dart forth rays of light,' before noting him as related to the Celtic god Belenus who follows a similar etymology to Thor.<sup>72</sup> In modern Norse scholarship, Baldr is a pagan god who seemingly embodies both Nordic heathen practices and emerging Christian influences. In *Gylfaginning*, Baldr is described as 'so fair in appearance and so bright that light shines from him,' but in *Skáldskaparmál*, Baldr's kennings also note him as 'god of lamentations.'<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this is a reflection of his role in Ragnarök where his death initiates the fall of the Æsir, but regardless, Baldr returns after the apocalypse with a new world:

There will arise out of the sea, another earth most lovely and delightful:  
covered it will be with verdure and pleasant fields [...] thither come  
BALDER and HODER, from the mansions of the dead. They sit down and

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<sup>70</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 100.

<sup>71</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 67–68.

<sup>72</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 70; ['hann er svá fagr álitum ok bjartr svá at lýsir af honum[...]; 23.]

<sup>73</sup> Trans. Faulkes, 'Gylfaginning,' 23; Snorri Sturluson, 'Skáldskaparmál,' in *Edda*, trans. and ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Everyman, 1995), 74; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1998), ['gráta guð'; 17].

converse together; they recal to mind the adversities they have formerly undergone.<sup>74</sup>

Alongside his pagan associations with light and sun, we can speculate that Baldr's return post-Ragnarök is a Christ-like resurrection, especially in light of Snorri's Prologue which, as discussed earlier, projects a Christian rationale over the *Edda*. Although this connection between Baldr and Christ might not have been made during the eighteenth century, Blake captures a similar syncretic view of world religions with Fuzon's dual-status as a potential sun god and his future pseudo-crucifixion on the Tree of Mystery.

Percy claims that 'Belen and Balder came from the same origin, that is, from the Phrygian word Bal or Balen, which signified King, and which they formerly applied to the sun.'<sup>75</sup> Both names appear in Sayers' *Dramatic Sketches*. In 'The Descent of Frea,' Baldr is characterised as 'God of the sun,' thus making this association more explicit.<sup>76</sup> In 'Starno,' the Druids invoke Belenius before Kelric's sacrifice:

God of the shining day,  
Whose golden locks  
In splendor wave  
And scatter liquid light [...]  
Belinus, in yon radiant path,  
Did e'er thy piercing eye behold  
A scene of blacker woe?<sup>77</sup>

This juxtaposition between Belinus on his 'radiant path' and the 'scene of blacker woe' concludes the first act. The tension between encroaching death and the sun's typical association with prosperity further emphasises the barbarity in this display of druidic priestcraft. From this passage, we can see that in Sayers' Scandinavian-influenced tragedy, the sun god is a pagan

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<sup>74</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 165–66; ['Upp skýtr jöðunni þá ór sænum ok er þá græn ok fōgr [...] Því næst koma þar Baldr ok Høðr frá Heljar. Setjask þá allir samt ok talask við ok minnask á rúnar sínar ok ræða of tíðindi þau er fyrrum hōfðu verit [...]'; 53–54.]

<sup>75</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 73.

<sup>76</sup> Frank Sayers, 'Descent of Frea,' *Dramatic Sketches*, London: printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXC. [1790], [n.p.].

<sup>77</sup> Sayers, 'Starno,' 98.

mythological motif that illuminates the savageness of ancient British druidism, and the unnatural control religious institutions have over political events.

Although the eighteenth century portrayed Odin as either a god of war or liberator in the face of Roman corruption, he was also associated with priesthood. Thomson discusses ‘Odinism,’ stating that ‘Odin, the first king of the North, discerned the influence which religious enthusiasm had over the minds of his people: he joined the office of priest to that of king.’<sup>78</sup> This merging of warrior, priest, and king is based on the power of religion as a mode of influence, something that is also echoed by Blake in Urizen’s characterisation. For Thomson, Odin takes on the role of lawmaker, sovereign, and religious leader; he distinguishes Odin from sun worship, stating that ‘the religion of the ancient Scandinavians, before the arrival of Odin from Scythia, would appear to have been very simple: they worshipped the sun, in which they supposed the chief deity to exist.’<sup>79</sup> The arrival of Odin signals the advent of a complicated religious system that supersedes the ‘very simple’ sun worship with ‘a less innocent mode of worship.’<sup>80</sup>

Although Thomson acknowledges that sun worship was primarily the practice of ancient barbarous nations, he develops the sun as a god while imagining the worship of Odin as one that is more corrupt and savage.<sup>81</sup> In fact, during the eighteenth century, ancient sun worship was being re-evaluated. These developments were largely influenced by Constantin-François Volney’s *Ruins: A survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, a translation of which was published in 1795 by Johnson. In his survey, Volney challenges Hebraic religion as absolute truth, believing that through the influence of other nations, ‘the theology of Zoroaster was consecrated by the children of Moses.’<sup>82</sup> For Volney, the history of the Israelites and ‘the religion of Moses thus underwent a second alteration,’ being subjugated by ‘the Egyptians,

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<sup>78</sup> Thomson, ‘Letter XXXVIII,’ Vol.2, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Thomson, ‘Letter XXXVIII,’ Vol.2, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Thomson, ‘Letter XXXVIII,’ Vol.2, 15.

<sup>81</sup> Thomson, ‘Letter XXXVIII,’ Vol.2, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Constantin-François Volney, *The Ruins: Or A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, trans. from the French. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXCV. [1795], 285.

Syrians and Arabs,’ who by ‘entering this open country, introduced their tenets.’<sup>83</sup> As such, he conceives Christianity as a variation on pagan sun worship, where ‘God the sun had his chariot and horses painted in the palaces of kings.’<sup>84</sup> This belief underlies Volney’s broader argument that all religions derive from the same source and that ‘you will find that the whole history of the spirit of religion, is merely that of fallibility and uncertainty of the human mind.’<sup>85</sup> Throughout all of Blake’s work, it is clear that he similarly believed that ‘The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius’ (E1), though unlike Volney, Blake did not completely discount religion altogether.

Biblically speaking, Fuzon as the sun links to the Phoenician sun god Baal—a name that echoes Percy’s etymology where Belenus/Baldr is associated with the Phrygian god Bal—and the Egyptian god Re who is in part an apotheosis of the Egyptian Pharaohs. Egypt—a nation associated with the origins of priestcraft in the eighteenth century—appears at the end of *The Book of Urizen* when Fuzon leads the sons and daughters out of oppression. With its associations to apotheosis and sun worship, the return of Egypt in *The Book of Ahania* identifies Fuzon as a force similar to Urizen. When Fuzon wages war, ‘the fiery beam of Fuzon/Was a pillar of fire to Egypt’ (E85. 2:44–45) until Los takes the pillar of fire and ‘beat in a mass/With the body of the sun’ (E85. 2:47–48). This beam—the weapon that eventually injures Urizen—is again reminiscent of the Book of Exodus when the Israelites reach the Red Sea:

And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea,  
even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to  
pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the  
Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of  
the Egyptians [...]<sup>86</sup>

Initially, *The Book of Ahania* seems to confirm Fuzon as a quasi-Moses with his pillar of fire, but there is still some ambiguity. Although ‘to Egypt’ could infer either directional motivation

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<sup>83</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, 284.

<sup>84</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, 284.

<sup>85</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, 295.

<sup>86</sup> Exod. 14:22–24.

or possession, this interpretation exposes a contradiction in Fuzon's liberating energy. Rather than being a pillar of fire that 'troubled the host of the Egyptians,' as found in the Bible, Fuzon's 'fiery beam' is associated with the Egyptians themselves. He is either leading the children of Urizen back to Egypt, or embodies a divine intervention that favours the Egyptians. With this imagery, Blake subverts the Bible to portray Fuzon as a sun god and also part of a pagan culture that was thought to have corrupted Christianity.

Fuzon's characterisation suggests that some sort of superstitious sun worship is part of Urizen's religious organisation. The language and imagery of *The Book of Ahania* reveals that Blake's syncretic account of the origins of priestcraft is way more immersed in Norse sources than is often recognised. If Fuzon is in fact a version of a sun god and embodies a religion more primitive than Urizen's 'Odinism,' there needs to be a closer examination of his eventual darkness and deformity. Taking inspiration from Scandinavian myth, I argue that Blake develops Fuzon's suffering body in light of priestcraft. One of Urizen's defining features is his self-proclaimed title as Creator, and yet moments before death, Fuzon similarly declares, 'I am God. said he, eldest of things!' (E86. 3:38). Both Fuzon and Urizen are like Odin, a warrior king who defines himself as a god. The euhemerization of the Æsir is first mentioned in the *Edda's* Prologue but is detailed in *Skáldskaparmál*:

Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than in which it is presented at the beginning of this book [...] and after that about the Turks, how the people of Asia, known as Æsir, distorted the accounts of the events that took place in Troy so that the people of the country would believe that they were gods.<sup>87</sup>

The euhemerization of Æsir—from the Norse *Asiamenn*, as in 'Asia men'—found its way into eighteenth-century accounts of Odin and his apotheosis. For example, in Sterling's dissertation,

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<sup>87</sup> Trans. Faulkes, 'Skáldskaparmál,' 64–65; ['En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannynði þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar [...] ok þá næst frá Tyrkjum, hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fólsoðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúa þá guð vera.']; 5.]

he explains that ‘Odin, the founder of the Gothic mythology, was an Asiatic, and that he had introduced into Scandinavia those doctrines which had been predominant in his own country.’<sup>88</sup>

In a ‘Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the ancient Germans,’ Coleridge writes that ‘Sigge, the son of Fridulf, commanded the Ases [...] as the priest of Odin, he assumed the name of that Deity.’<sup>89</sup> Although Sigge is named leader of the Ases rather than Odin, he still serves the same purpose: to ground this mythological figure in history and explain the warrior’s deification. Sigge is still a ‘priest of Odin,’ and for the rest of the account is referred to as Odin himself. Thomson also explains that ‘Odin assumed the deity; and after *his death*, the Goths could not offer to warrior gods fruits and flowers: nay, the blood of beasts was deemed too mean an offering and human victims were dragged to the altars.’<sup>90</sup> Odin’s death has a significant cultural impact, especially when the warrior-king’s self-apotheosis becomes a prelude to barbaric religious rituals, replacing animals with humans in sacrifice.

In a similar fashion, the self-apotheosis of Fuzon is a precursor to a scene that evokes human sacrifice, and through his death he comes to represent State Religion. When Fuzon calls himself a god, ‘Sudden sings the rock, swift & invisible/On Fuzon flew, enter’d his bosom’ (E86. 3:39–40), killing him outright. The immediate juxtaposition between Fuzon’s apotheosis and his death suggests a correlation between his identification as part of an oppressive religious hierarchy, and his downfall. The sibilance and enjambment stress the quick succession of events, and in just over a line, Fuzon is mutilated and slaughtered. Referring back to the discussion on *The Book of Ahania* as a critique of Atonement, although this is discussed in relation to Fuzon’s crucifixion, I argue that his actual death preceding the hanging is also a crucial part of Blake’s assessment. Atonement depends on suffering, with the end goal being reconciliation within a religious hierarchy. Urizen, as the original King, God, and Law, is

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<sup>88</sup> Joseph Sterling, ‘Odes from the Icelandic; with a Dissertation and Notes,’ in *Poems*, London: printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson. MDCCLXXXIX. [1789], 146.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the ancient Germans,’ *TW*, no. 3 (Mar 17, 1796, Bristol: published by S.T. Coleridge. London: printed for Parsons): 67.

<sup>90</sup> Thomson, ‘Letter XXXVIII,’ 15.



envisaged as a corruption of religion, but he is not the one who dies; Fuzon takes that role.

However, unlike Christ who dies to bring salvation, Fuzon subverts the doctrine of Atonement and dies to propagate Urizen's organised religion. He is a candidate for sacrifice not only because he mirrors his father's ideology, but because he embodies State Religion through his deformity.

### ***Crucifixion, Odinic Sacrifice, & State Religion***

Fuzon's deformity and death resonates deeply with Norse myth and eighteenth-century narratives concerning ancient Scandinavian rituals. On impact:

His beautiful visage, his tresses,  
That gave light to the mornings of heaven  
Were smitten with darkness, deform'd  
And outstretch'd on the edge of the forest  
(E86. 3:41–44)

The repetitive pronoun 'his' once again draws attention to Fuzon's Baldr-like physical appearance, but 'Deform'd' is emphatically placed at the end of the line; its impression is heightened by the alliteration with 'darkness' preceding the caesura. There are clear echoes with *The Book of Urizen* where Los and Urizen are 'Cut off from life & light frozen/Into horrible forms of deformity' (E77. 13:42–43). In this context, the language used echoes contemporary mediations of Norse myth, for example Mathias' ode.

Mathias was a prominent anti-Jacobin and verse satirist interested in the North and Chatterton. Inspired by *Northern Antiquities* and Gray, he wrote his 'Runic Odes' in 1781 with the first ode based on *Völuspá's* account of Ragnarök.<sup>91</sup> He covers key moments such as when 'Ymir hath his course begun,/Rival of th'unwearied Sun,' and when a 'serpent dread, of dateless

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<sup>91</sup> Jon Mee, 'Satire in the Age of the French Revolution,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Satire*, ed. Paddy Bullard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 676; Robert Rix, 'Thomas James Mathias, 1753/4–1835,' in *Norse Romanticism: Themes in British Literature 1760–1830*. March 2012. *Romantic Circles Website*.

birth,/Girds the devoted globe of earth.<sup>92</sup> Mathias' Ragnarök begins with Ymir and creation, before describing a 'plumed Monarch' who:

[...] with corpses strew'd,  
He fates his maw with bleeding food:  
While the vessel's floating pride  
Stems durations rounding tide.<sup>93</sup>

Antiquarians such as Mathias or Percy painted the horrors of Scandinavian as at odds with the progress made in British liberty. Blake and Sayers, it seems, rely on the darker aspects of Norse culture, viewing them as still vitiating British culture and politics. Nevertheless, there is a similarity here in Matthias and Blake's language and imagery. Recalling Thomson's 'Odinism' and its corruption of simple Scandinavian sun worship, perhaps the darkness in Blake similarly represents the influence of a larger, belated, and more powerful religion that overwhelms a simpler religious expression. The influence of Ragnarök, then, creates patterns between darkness and deformity that were further developed in Blake's later illuminated books.

The enjambment embodies Fuzon's position as 'outstretch'd.' The effect suggests a Crucifixion-like image, though its specific placement 'on the edge of the forest' resonates more strongly with the groves of Uppsala. The landscape surrounding Fuzon is evocative of druidic groves and the hanging corpses of sacrificial victims found in Stukeley's accounts of Stonehenge and Abury. *Northern Antiquities* also describes such rituals:

This, which was named ODIN'S GROVE, was full of the bodies of men and animals who had been sacrificed. They afterwards took them down to burn them in-honour of Thor or the sun [...] In whatever manner they immolated men, the priest always took care in consecrating the victim to pronounce certain words, as, "I devote thee to Odin." "I send thee to Odin." Or, "I devote thee for a good harvests; for the return of a fruitful season."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Mathias, 'The Twilight of the Gods,' 2.

<sup>93</sup> Mathias, 'The Twilight of the Gods,' 2.

<sup>94</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 136–37.

This description follows prior discussions on the prophetic nature of sacrifice, where ‘the priests inferred what success would attend the enterprize.’<sup>95</sup> The hanging bodies in ‘Odin’s Grove’ are an act of consecration. The mingling of the prophetic with sanctification at Uppsala changes the relationship between corpse and tree from a Christian Atonement and spiritual renewal, to one of human gain and insight.

The cultural practice of hanging corpses to honour Odin derives from a Norse myth that recounts the god’s pursuit for knowledge. The eddic poem *Hávamál*—quoted in part in *Northern Antiquities*—recounts a first-person narrative where Odin hangs from Yggdrasil for nine nights in a sacrifice from himself to himself:

I know that I hung on a windswept tree  
 nine long nights,  
 wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,  
 myself to myself  
 on the tree which no man knows  
 from where its roots run.<sup>96</sup>

Norse scholars sometimes relate this passage to the Crucifixion, as both Christ and Odin hang from trees and are both ‘wounded with a spear.’ As Gabriel Turville-Petre explains, this episode could be seen as ‘a pagan reflexion of Christ on the Cross. The similarities between the scene described here and that on Calvary are undeniable.’<sup>97</sup> However, Jens Peter Schjødt argues that

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<sup>95</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 135.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Sayings of the High One,’ in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32.

[*Hávamál*,

‘Veit ek at ek hekk  
 vindga meiði á  
 nætr allar níu  
 geiri undaðr  
 ok gefinn Óðni,  
 sjálfr sjálfum mér,  
 á þeim meiði  
 er manngi veit  
 hvers hann af rótum renn.’; 350.]

<sup>97</sup> Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 42.

‘the myth of Óðinn’s self-hanging must be unambiguously understood as the expression of a pagan thought complex.’<sup>98</sup>

The association between Odin and the spear has a deeper cultural significance that goes beyond a Christianisation of pagan sources. The spear was Odin’s preferred weapon, with his own being named *Gungnir*, hence his kennings ‘geirs dróttin’ (Lord of the Spear) and ‘Gungnis váfaðr’ (Gungnir’s shaker).<sup>99</sup> Turville-Petre reads Odin’s hanging on Yggdrasil alongside medieval visions of Christ hanging from a rood-tree with no roots, and yet the self-immolation of Odin has other cultural associations that are noted in eighteenth-century travel writing.<sup>100</sup> Odin’s association with the ‘gálga’ is found in Uno von Troil’s *Letters on Iceland* (1780), written while observing Joseph Banks’ 1772 voyage. In a letter to Baron Axel Lejonhufwud, von Troil discusses Icelandic poetic metre and kennings, taking as an example the kenning ‘sylgs gálga’ which he translates as ‘at the gallows of Odin’s Shield,’ or ‘the arm on which it is usual to wear the shield.’<sup>101</sup> He thus demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between Odin and death by hanging.

There is perhaps a more obvious connection between Odinic sacrifice and Blake’s Fatal Tree at Tyburn, but the significance of Odin’s self-hanging in the Norse carries into *The Book of Ahania*, even though Blake would not have known the true cultural value of this image. Odin’s death and the ceremonial stabbing with a spear is a mythic prototype for a symbolic death, one where by dying he is transformed.<sup>102</sup> Schjødt proposes that ‘if the act of dying itself is regarded as a destruction, then it must be so considered, just as it is the case in all initiation rituals that make use of death-rebirth symbolism.’<sup>103</sup> Percy translates *Hávamál* as ‘The Sublime Discourse of Odin’ and suggests that the maxims that make up the poem are part of a moral system.<sup>104</sup> He

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<sup>98</sup> Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*, trans. Victor Hansen (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008), 177.

<sup>99</sup> Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 43.

<sup>100</sup> Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 43.

<sup>101</sup> Von Troil, *Letters on Iceland*, 201–202.

<sup>102</sup> Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 179–80.

<sup>103</sup> Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 194.

<sup>104</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 205.

notes that Resen's Latin translation of *Hávamál* differs from Mallet's own interpretation, but despite stating that out of the 120 stanzas 'there are very few which are not good and sensible,' he does not translate the poem in its entirety and omits the verses concerning Odin.<sup>105</sup> While there is no record of Blake reading Resen's *Edda*, the similar language and imagery in Fuzon and Odin's hanging is curiously provocative, especially when, after examining the details, Fuzon's death and his relationship to the Tree of Mystery evokes Odinic sacrifice.

Through this association with Odin, Fuzon becomes another symbol of religious institution. When nailed to the Tree, his image complements a plate found in *The Book of Urizen*. This design shows a serpent coiling around a hanging figure. The design itself changes in composition and location in different copies, for example, Copy A Plate 9 shows three bodies, while Copy D Plate 5 reveals a solitary hanging form (fig.9). Despite the deviations in design, the visual impact of these hanging figures can be read in relation to Fuzon. In Copy A, a snake coils around the central outstretched figure while the others are tied with rope and hang in the background clutching their heads. The number of bodies here could be a reference to the Crucifixion, where two thieves were crucified alongside Christ.<sup>106</sup> When compared to Copy D, however, there is scope for an interpretation that goes beyond the Bible.

The central figure in Copy D and Copy A remains the same, but in the latter, there are no other figures in the background. Both copies were printed in 1794 and could have been around Blake's workshop as he created *The Book of Ahania*.<sup>107</sup> The central figure hangs with his arms outstretched, perhaps an inversion of Urizen holding his book, but while Urizen emulates Moses, the upside down body mimics the Petrine Cross. The background in both copies resembles fire, with the striking vertical lines looking almost like overgrowth or a forest. According to Percy, Odinic sacrifice was a process where 'the bodies were afterwards burnt, or

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<sup>105</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 205–206.

<sup>106</sup> Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27–28; Luke 23:32–33; John 19:18.

<sup>107</sup> Due to Blake producing the illuminated books in 'highly concentrated periods,' these two copies and *The Book of Ahania* belong to the same production period. See: Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 155.

suspended in a sacred grove near the temple,' an vision that is echoed here.<sup>108</sup> It is unclear what the design is actually trying to portray, especially as it does not reflect the text on the plate, but we can speculate that it could be a depiction of human sacrifice, a motif that is then carried into *The Book of Ahania*.



**Figure 9:** LEFT. William Blake, *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Copy A (1794), Plate 9. Relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring. Yale Center for British art. © The William Blake Archive.

RIGHT. William Blake, *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Copy D (1794), Plate 5. Relief etching, colour printed with hand colouring. The British Museum. © The William Blake Archive.

Both *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania* address the development of priestcraft, and so it is not surprising that the designs insert both druidic and biblical symbols associated with law-making. This plate from *The Book of Urizen* also resonates with the Gospel of John, ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.’<sup>109</sup> This passage refers to the Old Testament narrative about sin and plague that also foreshadows Christ’s Crucifixion.<sup>110</sup> Disease surrounds Fuzon’s deceased body, ‘Round the pale

<sup>108</sup> Percy, NA, Vol.1, 136.

<sup>109</sup> John 3:14.

<sup>110</sup> Num. 21:8–9: ‘The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.’

living Corse on the Tree/Forty years flew the arrows of pestilence' (E88. 4:36–37), which not only echoes the forty years the Israelites wandered the desert, but also recalls the plagues of Egypt and the bronze serpent Moses used to heal the Israelites in the desert.

Christopher Hobson suggests that the serpent is more strongly associated with Orc, but there are also connections to Fuzon and his embodiment of State Religion.<sup>111</sup> O'Donoghue's claim that the Tree of Mystery is related to Yggdrasil can be furthered through the serpent motif. Yggdrasil's third root stretches to *Niflheim*, 'and under this root is the fountain *Vergelmer*, whence flow the infernal rivers: this root is gnawed upon below by the monstrous serpent *Nidhoger*.'<sup>112</sup> After becoming injured by his son, Urizen resides in a void when:

[...] an enormous dread Serpent  
Scaled and poisonous horned  
Approach'd Urizen even to his knees  
As he sat on his dark rooted Oak.

(E85. 3:13–16)

After Fuzon's death, we discover that the poison of the 'dread Serpent' is a product of Urizen's injury:

[...] and Urizen seated  
On black clouds his sore wound anointed  
The ointment flow'd down the void  
Mix'd with blood; here the snake gets her poison

(E86. 3:47–50)

The similarity between 'anointed' and 'ointment' linguistically unites priestcraft with kingship. It recalls the ritual of anointing sovereigns as found in the Old Testament and also King George III's coronation, where the anointing was a sacred part of the ceremony.<sup>113</sup> 'Starno' also describes an anointing when the Druids consecrate Kelric's blood for sacrifice, when Starno

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<sup>111</sup> See: Christopher Hobson, 'The Myth of Blake's "Orc Cycle",' in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, Christopher Hobson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 5–36.

<sup>112</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 49; ['ok undir þeiri rót er Hvergelmir, en Níðhoggr gnagar neðan rótna.']; 17]

<sup>113</sup> For example, in 1 Samuel 16:13: 'then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed [David] in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.'; Church of England, *The Form of and Order of the Service that is to be performed [...] in the coronation of their Majesties King George III. and Queen Charlotte, etc.*, London: Printed by Mark Baskett, Printed to the King's most Excellent Majesty; and by the Assigns of Robert Baskett. MDCCLXI. [1761], 34–38.

proclaims, 'Hail, Hesus, hail,/To thee we pour/The consecrated blood.'<sup>114</sup> This action in *The Book of Ahania*, then, consolidates Urizen 'as both a druidic and biblical figure,' with his oozing wound reminding readers of his suffering and sexual disabling.<sup>115</sup>

The serpent image is prevalent in eighteenth-century conceptions of druidism, emphasised by Stukeley who discusses the Hakpen, or 'snakes head temple on Overton hill.'<sup>116</sup> This specific formation—likened to a snake in design—is a British druid temple Stukeley believes 'was that of the *Mosaick* tabernacle. We may well assert this to be ancients than that time; as the largest, so probably one of the most ancient in the *Britannic* isles.'<sup>117</sup> Urizen's relationship with the Tree, though, is far more complicated than this. In *The Watchman*, Coleridge prints part of his *Religious Musings* (1796) under the title 'The Present State of Society.' The extract feels apocalyptic in the Norse sense, especially when:

[...] From the tree  
Of Knowledge, ere the vernal sap had risen,  
Rudely disbranch'd. O *blest* Society!<sup>118</sup>

Not only does this particular moment include a dis-branched Tree of Knowledge, but it continues with a vision of a Lion, Hyena, and Serpent who 'plants his vast moon-glittering bulk.'<sup>119</sup> The traditional connection between the Tree of Knowledge and serpent in the Garden of Eden is unmistakable, but with its 'glittering bulk,' the serpent is also evocative of Jörmungandr at Ragnarök and Nidhöggr by Yggdrasil. 'Plant' could mean either to establish oneself or to place something to grow, and so the ambiguity of the word further ties the serpent to the tree. The rooting of the monstrous within the landscape is a disruption of the natural order, and Coleridge's apocalyptic vision here literally severs the traditional Tree of Knowledge, enhancing it with perhaps more Nordic influences.

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<sup>114</sup> Sayers, 'Starno,' 109.

<sup>115</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 99.

<sup>116</sup> Stukeley, *Abury*, 38–39.

<sup>117</sup> Stukeley, *Abury*, 37.

<sup>118</sup> 'The Present State of Society,' *TW*, no. 2 (Mar 09, 1796): 45.

<sup>119</sup> 'The Present State of Society,' 45.



Coleridge's periodical asks readers to contemplate the relationship between Christianity and politics, 'that all may know the truth;/And that the truth may make us free!'<sup>120</sup> The extract from *Religious Musings* carries explicit connotations with regards to religion in society and late eighteenth-century political events. The Tree of Mystery has a relationship with the disabled body that begins long before Fuzon's death. In the timeline of the poem, Urizen's 'dark rooted Oak' emerges as he sits on a rock:

Soon shot the pained root  
Of Mystery, under his heel:  
It grew a thick tree; he wrote  
In silence his book of iron:

(E86. 3:61–64)

The connection between tree and heel might seem obscure—perhaps dredging up associations with Achilles—but nevertheless, it implies weakness and physical vulnerability. If we consider the Tree as a manifestation of Urizen's law-making, this must then also include Fuzon's recapitulation of the same tyrannical structures through death.

When Urizen takes his dead son to the Tree of Mystery:

With difficulty & great pain; Urizen  
Lifted on high the dead corse:  
On his shoulders he bore it to where  
A Tree hung over the Immensity

(E86. 3:51–54)

*The Book of Ahania* is asynchronous in its narrative, and so Urizen's movement is a repetition of an earlier moment. Straight after Fuzon's death, the narrative launches into the history of the Tree where we learn that prior to events:

He with difficulty and great pain  
Brought his Books, all but the Book  
Of iron, from the dismal shade

(E87. 3:72–73, 4:1)

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<sup>120</sup> *TW*, no. 1 (Mar 01, 1796): 1.

This similarity in Urizen's emotional reaction and physical action in these two moments further implicate Fuzon as the embodiment of State Religion. Urizen's interaction with his books and Fuzon is reversed. He arguably displaces the physical laws themselves with a substitute: the corpse of his son.

The Tree of Mystery, as established, alludes to contemporary notions of priestcraft through its environment and self-propagation. In his fictional history of the Tree of Liberty, Eaton presents another arboreal metaphor for the dissemination of freedom in America:

For they not only found themselves at liberty to plant as many as they pleased but they were likewise agreeably surprised to find the soil so peculiarly favourable to the young plants, that they sent out immediately the most luxuriant branches, and produced plenty of fruit.<sup>121</sup>

Blake subverts this with a similar image of propagation in *The Book of Ahania*, but instead of liberty, it is the Tree of Mystery that sends 'immediately the most luxuriant branches':

[...] bending its bough  
Grew to roots when it felt the earth  
And again sprung to many a tree.  
(E87. 3:65–67)

The Tree of Mystery creates a grove of repressive institutionalism where, 'On the topmost stem of this Tree/Urizen nail'd Fuzons corse' (E87. 4:7–8). Green argues that the Tree is a conflation of the Tree of Knowledge and the Crucifix to make 'a link between the doctrines of mystery and atonement, thus parodying the twin heresies that Priestley traces to the impact of paganism on the early church.'<sup>122</sup> Mee also reads this scene as a subversion of the Crucifixion, further suggesting that by engaging with Priestley's critique of Atonement, Blake 'points to the continuities between pagan religion and Christianity which radicals like Paine and Eaton were also stressing in the 1790s.'<sup>123</sup> *The Book of Ahania*, it seems, moves beyond this critique of Atonement to think about the wider implications of religious organisation, where the landscape

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<sup>121</sup> 'Tree of Liberty,' 8.

<sup>122</sup> Matthew Green, *Visionary Materialism in the Early Works of William Blake* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 42.

<sup>123</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 100.

evolves and the Tree is no longer a singular monument, but proliferates Urizen's tyranny after it has 'sprung to many a tree.'

Fuzon's mutilation assimilates contemporary re-imaginings of a British history with the North. When Ahania re-enters the narrative, the Tree becomes the 'Tree of Fuzon' (E88. 4:47). By recognising it as being of Fuzon, or at one with him, he becomes a symbol of religious institution. Briefly returning to Urizen, the patriarch's injury reveals a body politic in need of reinforcement which is then achieved through the death of Fuzon. As the head of his organised religion, Urizen's wounded and suffering body defines the body politic, and when attacked:

The cold loins of Urizen dividing.  
Dire shriek'd his invisible Lust  
Deep groan'd Urizen! [...]  
He groand anguishd & called her Sin,  
Kissing her and weeping over her;  
(E84–85. 2:29–35)

Urizen's injury is reinforced by the appearance of Ahania who becomes associated with sexual sin, indicated by his 'invisible Lust' and her emergence from his 'cold loins.' Ahania's presence challenges the wholeness of Urizen's body politic, and when she is disposed, 'She fell down a faint shadow wandring/In chaos and circling dark Urizen' (E85. 2:38–39). She is a personification of Urizen's injury, further exemplified by her orbit where she seemingly becomes 'excessive to traditional social circuits of interaction and as the *objects* of institutionalized discourses.'<sup>124</sup>

From this point onwards, Urizen is sexually disabled but this injury empowers him to create more laws. The suffering body, then, aids Urizen's agenda in reinforcing his State Religion. According to Mitchell and Snyder, disability is a state that 'defies correction and tends to operate according to its own idiosyncratic rules.'<sup>125</sup> Aberrancy is a politically charged

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<sup>124</sup> David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, 'Introduction: Disability Studies and the Double Bind of Representation,' in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>125</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, 'Introduction,' 3.

condition that imbues the disabled body with notions of hierarchy and social structure. Urizen is a figure who defies correction and further maintains his systems by killing his son. In light of this, the formation of the body politic in *The Book of Ahanian* is one where ‘the coding of body parts and their selective function or dysfunction is part of a much larger system of signs and meanings in society and is constructed as such.’<sup>126</sup>

*The Book of Ahanian* is about conflict and the propagation of political and religious structures. Suffering becomes part of the fabric of the poem, where characters howl, groan, lament, and destroy each other. The interactions between father and son revolve around individual conflicts that result in the sacrifice of a body to the other’s self-serving system. Fuzon’s characterisation is far more complex than just being a Christ or Moses-figure to be sacrificed, because beyond the critique of Atonement he is associated with Odinic sacrifice and pagan sun worship. Through the motif of the Hanging god and druidic sacrifice, the son establishes the father’s State Religion by manifesting the severity and barbaric nature of ancient Scandinavian religious practices. Thus, Fuzon becomes an extension of Urizen and also the embodiment of corruption.

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<sup>126</sup> Lennard Davis, ‘Nude Venuses, Medusa’s Body, and Phantom Limbs: Disability and Visuality,’ in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 54.

### III. Nervous Fibres & Bloody Veins

#### Embodiment & the Unbodied Emanation

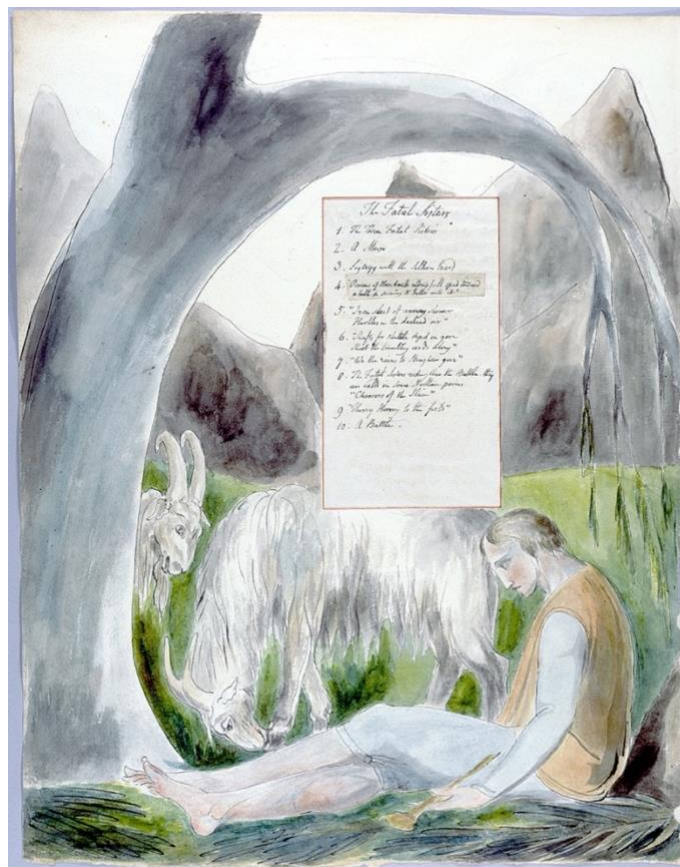
While the Druid was frequently presented as an emblem of priestcraft during the eighteenth century, the Bard was a figure of liberty that centred around different cultural legacies. The Bard's contested national heritage placed it within the emergent Celtic revivalism that began with works such as *Ossian*. These competing national narratives were part of a general British Northern antiquarianism, but through this particular figure, the British nations attempted to distinguish themselves throughout the period. In what is perhaps the best known poem on the subject, Gray's 'The Bard' presents ancient Welsh resistance against England through a Welsh bardic voice, and this influential poem became a mainstay in late eighteenth-century interpretations of the figure and the associated motifs. Flaxman commissioned from Blake the *Illustrations* to Gray's Poems (c.1797–98) as a personal gift for his wife. In the *Illustrations*, Blake reimagines Gray's subject matter using the same format as his commercial work on Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (c.1795–97). His edition includes cut windows in the paper and inserted text from the 1790 John Murray octavo edition of Gray. Blake also includes blank versos for each poem with his own invented subtitles to summarise each narrative, for example, in 'The Fatal Sisters,' he lists ten moments either as summaries or direct quotations: 'A Muse,' and "'Hurry Hurry to the field'" (fig.10). This editorial and visual intervention is an example of Blake's engagement with Gray's Norse subjects beyond that found in 'Gwin' and 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard.' Arguably, Flaxman's commission prompted a re-engagement with Gray's ancient Northern landscape which then, I argue, influenced Blake's later illuminated books.

Gray's Norse odes established him as a source of poetic motifs used throughout the period, but it is through the Bard that Gray reimagines 'English literary history as an inheritance not just from the classical world but from the medieval Northern nations as well.'<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> Strabone, *Poetry and British Nationalisms*, 174.

cultural sources intersect through the recurring weaving motif found in ‘The Bard,’ ‘The Fatal Sisters,’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘The Descent of Odin.’ In these three poems, Gray transforms weaving into a symbol of resistance and rebellion by associating it with a fatalism that ensnares humans within destinies that seem to be laid out by powerful, mythological beings. The motif appears most clearly in Blake’s manuscript *The Four Zoas*, and the illuminated books *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. In relation to Norse myth, however, *Milton* reveals the clearest similarities between Gray’s use of the motif and the weaving emanations who actively unmake and remake Milton’s body in the image of Urizen’s State Religion.



**Figure 10:** William Blake, Verso Page to ‘The Fatal Sisters,’ in Illustrations to Gray’s ‘Poems’ (1797–98). Object 66. Pen, ink, and watercolour over pencil.  
Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

*Milton* expands on and addresses the effects of Urizen’s developing establishments within a body metaphor. Fallon proposes that in the poem, Blake ‘remained committed to popular liberty, but his complex vision integrates the renewal of the body of the nation

synechdochically within a more universal human restitution figured in the Divine Humanity.’<sup>2</sup>

This premise relies on reading Ololon as a contrary to Milton and contributing to the creation of Jesus as ‘a Garment dipped in blood/Written within & without in woven letters’ (E143.

42[49]:12–13). Fallon’s general argument follows his view that a utopian body politic is central to Blake’s approach, but this garment is also ‘A Garment of War’ (E143. 42[49]:15). These moments of renewal are also countered by certain emanations who are central to Blake’s critique of state formation.

The emanations intervene through material creation, specifically the weaving of woofs, webs, and bodies. Kathryn Sullivan Kruger notes that in eighteenth-century Britain, weaving was entirely a masculine production while spinning was the domain of women.<sup>3</sup> Both Gray and Blake persist with an older literary and mythological association between women and weaving. For Blake, the motif elevates the emanations into creators in their own right; they are women-bodies who come to both proliferate and embody certain State functions. Taking the end of Book One as an example, ‘The Daughters of beauty look up from their Loom & prepare./The integument soft for its clothing with joy & delight’ (E126. 28[30]:19–20). The ‘integument’ is a medical term for an outer layer—that is, the skin—that protects what lies beneath the surface. It is typically a tough coating, but by calling it ‘soft for its clothing,’ Blake both subverts the purpose of an integument and evokes a corporeality within textile production. It is also a delusion, where rather than a cushioning protection, it is in fact imprisoning; it speaks to Blake’s sense of what religion purports to be and what it achieves.

The emanations are integral to the literal creation of the body. In their hands, the body politic becomes something made and maintained, but only as so far as it functions alongside pre-existent codes. In the lines following the Daughters and the woven integument:

But Theotormon & Sotha stand in the Gate of Luban anxious  
[...] they fabricate soothing forms

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<sup>2</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, *Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press, 2002), 87.

The Spectre refuses. he seeks cruelty.

(E126. 28[30]:21–24)

New bodies are ‘fabricated,’ a word that suggests an invented, fictional form as well as literal fabrics, weaving, and material production. This language draws on the Daughters and their weaving, but the focus is on Sotha and the Spectre’s refusal of such forms, thus lending this scene a particularly Norse-inspired tone. Sotha is the enigmatic figure associated with the Code of War, the North, and Odin. His appearance here reminds readers of Blake’s attitude towards religion: it can be codified and militarised into a sort of State Religion, but also have the potential to be redeemed. The ‘soothing’ bodies fabricated by Sotha and Theotormon contrast the ideologies of war that have been established up until this point, and also the Spectre’s search for cruelty. Their soothing forms become an embodiment of delusion. Through the weaving motif, this militarised version of Norse religion—typically embodied by Sotha’s Code of War—becomes part of the emanations’ role to codify fatalistic bodies into a body politic.

### ***Codifying the North: Woman-bodies, Space, & Abjection***

The webs, veils, and woofs found throughout *Milton* further systematise the establishments examined in the earlier illuminated books. These physical textures and the organisations they symbolise are not merely external creations, but are intimately—and sometimes literally—internalised by the emanations. In essence, the emanations become the ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ (E27. ‘London’:8) that limit the body politic that is simultaneously formed and disassembled through their weaving. The woman-body carries a strain of dark fatalism that is developed throughout the later illuminated books. This feature, I suggest, is partly inspired by Gray’s mediation of Valkyries, servants of Odin, and völvur, prophetesses from Norse myth. As such, ancient Scandinavia as a place of organised religion and law becomes embedded within the work and representation of the emanation.

The gendered division between male being and female emanation could reflect the theological view purported by Geddes who believed Eve was a part of Adam, and so when God



made Adam in his own image, ‘woman’ was already inherently part of this configuration.<sup>4</sup> This hybridity is found in *Milton* where:

Then on the verge of Beulah he beheld his own Shadow;  
A mournful form double; hermaphroditic: male & female  
In one wonderful body. [...]

(E108. 14[15]:36–38)

Milton’s Shadow is both a ‘mournful form double’ and ‘one wonderful body,’ perhaps determining an idealised integrated form that is disastrous when fragmented and sexed. This gendering gestures towards both the complex sexual politics evident throughout the illuminated books, and Blake’s categorising of roles and agencies within an emerging body politic.

Scholars have tended to view female emanations as working to unify with a male body once separated, thus they reinforce an implicit hierarchy within the poetry. In relation to male beings, Susan Matthews suggests that the relationship between male and female differs throughout Blake’s career, with early poems showing male penetration of female bodies and later works visualising female penetration into masculine spaces.<sup>5</sup> Although, as Helen Bruder notes, Blake reaches a ‘historically specific imaginative limit in his thought about women’s rights and roles,’ the emanations are still powerful agents within the body politic they inhabit.<sup>6</sup> In terms of conflict, Matthews suggests that there is a male world of conflict that is superior to a female idyll.<sup>7</sup> Rachel Billigheimer similarly argues the masculine beings symbolise war and death, and so their reunion with female Emanations occurs within an ‘archetypal man symbolising the redemption of humankind.’<sup>8</sup> Outside of any explicit gendering, emanations are

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<sup>4</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 160–62.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 180.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Bruder, *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 54. Scholars taking a Gender Studies perspective have analysed the women and emanations across varied contexts, such as colonialism, marriage, and metaphors of weakness. See: Anne Mellor, ‘Sex, Violence, and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft,’ *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58, no. 3/4 (1995): 345–370; Susan Fox, ‘The Female as Metaphor in William Blake’s Poetry,’ *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1977): 507–519.

<sup>7</sup> Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Billigheimer, ‘Conflict and Conquest: Creation, Emanation and the Female in William Blake’s Mythology,’ *Modern Language Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 96.

Blakean bodies in that they are mutable and challenge our perceptions of corporeality. They are also spaces of interpretation that encompass varied cultural frameworks, and as such are liminal or undeterminable—to recall Nancy, they are ‘places of existence.’<sup>9</sup> Emanations, then, are mobile forms and spaces that function in relation to their male counterparts, but the view that conflict, war, and death remain in a masculine domain, while female spaces are idyllic, is not always the case. This is particularly true in *Milton* where it is the woman-body that is vindictive, militant, and an active part of the institution of war.

The woman-body in *Milton* adopts belligerent characteristics taken from Gray’s Valkyries and the völva from ‘The Descent of Odin.’ They re-incorporate resistance into an able-body politic by becoming bodily excesses that weave fatalistic structures into the Blakean body, thus demonstrating the beginning of a disintegrating body that is then further developed in *Jerusalem*. The emanations become trapped within fatalistic cycles of their own making, and so in *Milton* they fall into two broad roles. Firstly, emanations are spaces of intervention that challenge the problematic schema for a ‘whole’ or ‘perfect’ body. This in turn allows room for the amendment of such metaphors using versions found in earlier illuminated books. Secondly, they are ‘unbodied,’ as in, they are far removed from an ableist notion of a body. In this form, they continue to advocate for Urizen’s laws through acts of self-making and material production. In these ways, emanations become their own creators while simultaneously codifying within themselves the institution of war.

Scholars have not yet noted that ‘emanation’ is also used in *Northern Antiquities* by Percy to explain the hierarchy of deities in Norse religion and myth:

From this supreme God were sprung (as it were emanations of his divinity) an infinite number of subaltern deities and genii, of which every part of the world was the seat and temple. These intelligences did not barely reside in each part of nature; they directed its operations, it was the organ or

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 15.

instrument of their love or liberality to mankind. Each element was under the guidance of some Being peculiar to it.<sup>10</sup>

‘Emanation’ here clarifies what is seen as the relationship between a supreme God, who could be likened to the Christian God, and the pagan nature deities. According to this definition, the Æsir and Ásynjur emerge as emanations to become the guiding principles for nature. The definition of these universal bodies, and their division into specific divine roles, works alongside Blake’s emanations who are also aspects of larger beings. This reveals a more innate connection between ancient Scandinavian culture—in particular Odin’s Code of War—and the woman-body. The perceived rigidity of this Nordic hierarchy, however, might have been seen by Blake as a perversion or reification of an otherwise inspired culture.

Unlike Percy’s explanation in *Northern Antiquities*, in his *Dictionary*, Samuel Johnson defines ‘emanation’ as ‘the act of issuing or proceeding from any substance,’ or ‘that which issues from another substance; an effluence; effluvium.’<sup>11</sup> This is also an important definition in relation to Blake’s emanations who are marginalised excesses as well as a portion of a larger being. As an effluvium, though, the emanation breaks down the larger body’s ontological value. These women-bodies are not static like Urizen, who—although mutable—petrifies when affected by his environment. The emanations are agents of change rather than the object to be changed, thus their inherent state is one of movement. Sara Ahmed builds on Nancy and takes the skin—a border or frame—as performative in the destabilising of logic. She argues that it calls:

[...] into question that exclusion of the other from the subject and risking the subject’s becoming (or falling into) the other. [...] The skin may open out a moment of undecidability which is at once a rupture or breakage, where the subject risks its interiority, where it meets and leaks into the world at large.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 79.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Emanation, n.s.’ *A Dictionary of the English Language. Johnson’s Dictionary Online*.

<sup>12</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 45.

A body, once opened, is broken down by its own ontological value and so enables those viewing to question the exclusionary nature of its physical form. In the illuminated books, the emanations capture this movement between the boundaries of humanity and humanness. They may weave the limitations of the body, but they also function as effluvia that breaks down the exclusive body politic.

Kristeva defines abjection as ‘something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.’<sup>13</sup> In terms of larger assemblages, DeLanda proposes that bodies ‘exist as part of populations: populations of interpersonal networks, organizations, coalitions and government hierarchies.’<sup>14</sup> Consequently, neighbourhoods demarcate spatial territories that seem concrete, but they are in fact formed of social activities that are ‘without a well-defined spatial jurisdiction or a homogenous internal composition.’<sup>15</sup> When emanations interfere with the structure of a larger body, they break down its arrangement as an organic totality. They are the undefined spaces that allow the ‘interpersonal networks’ and hierarchies of a body politic to remain unfixed. Thus, it is through their abject state that they continue to define the body despite their liminality.

Enitharmon emerges from Los after he fails to create a functioning body for Urizen. Ahania is torn from Urizen’s side after he is disabled by Fuzon. In both of these cases, the emanation is an excess that becomes a physically distinct subject after a moment of failure or change. Looking more closely at Ahania, when she divides from Urizen, she becomes ‘Ahania (so name his parted soul)’ (E84. 2:32). The parenthesis carves the line and becomes demonstrative of the moment of abjection, especially as it works in two ways: the parenthesis demarcates the division between Urizen and Ahania, and it also pushes her to the margins of the

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<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” from *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, in *Classic Readings on Monster Theory*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Marcus Hensel, Vol.1 (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), 69.

<sup>14</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 34.

line, thus defining her as abject. Ahania's position on the peripheries of Urizen's body defines her as an excess of effluvium, one that is specifically named 'Sin' (E84. 2:34).

Ahania does not appear in *Milton*, but I propose that her form is a developmental model that clarifies certain aspects in the relationship between emanation and larger being. She is the environment surrounding Urizen as well as an independent being, but the most obvious trait is that she has no physical form. She wanders as a disembodied voice:

She fell down a faint shadow wandring  
In chaos and circling dark Urizen,  
As the moon anguishd circles the earth;  
Hopeless! abhorrd! a death-shadow,  
Unseen, unbodied, unknown,  
The mother of Pestilence.

(E85. 2:38–42)

Her description as 'Unseen, unbodied, unknown' echoes Urizen's 'Unseen, unknown' (E70. 3:10) state. The repetition of this trope is unsurprising, especially when Ahania is likened to the moon which is a satellite. In this guise, she exists as her own entity but cannot be viewed outside the remits of another existing body. As an abjection, Ahania transforms into a space of her own accord—marginalised and discarded—but is actively defined and perceived in relation to an external body. The characteristic that distinguishes her from Urizen is the denominator 'unbodied.' While Urizen is either an unformed darkness or takes on a lithic form, Ahania is marked as both a negative space and an excess, specifically, Urizen's Sin.

This interaction between Urizen and Ahania is a useful starting point when considering the role of the emanations. Ahania is a body incomplete; she epitomises the lack of a well-defined spatial region or homogenous form. Although she is not completely voiceless or without agency, she remains subordinate due to her subaltern position in the margins. As a model for the other emanations, Ahania then reveals that although marginalised, the woman-body is a vehicle for the disintegration of the body politic. Through their interference from their margins and their consequential abject status, the emanations disassemble the body, forcing it into endless cycles of reformulation.

## ***Textual Embodiment II: The Völva Refrain***

Peter Otto's study, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence* (2000), discusses fragmentation and fragment poetry as offering 'a privileged glimpse of the artist at work, while leaving room for an active audience.'<sup>16</sup> In comparison to *The Four Zoas*, the illuminated books are more 'complete' in that they are not manuscripts but finished engraved products, and yet the inconsistencies between copies opens them up to being perceived as more fragmentary than initially thought. Connolly sees textual production as a metaphor for the human body itself, where the abject is something excluded from the fixed parameters of a book or body.<sup>17</sup> The abject can inform the subject matter from the margins. Joshua argues that 'the fragment poem [...] derives from deformity aesthetics,' and as such, 'it is important to acknowledge that the language of incompleteness and dysfunction used in the discussion of deformity, while it signals its presence, is pejorative.'<sup>18</sup> In *Milton*, however, this language of fragmentation reveals a reformation of the body politic's parameters.

For Douglas, the margins are places of danger and abnormal position; it is where 'the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points.'<sup>19</sup> Connolly notes that Blake is concerned with 'the orifices of the body,' an interpretation that can be further developed in light of deformity aesthetics.<sup>20</sup> In the margins of *Milton*, there are literal bodies and other woven forms that are unstable or—in terms of eighteenth-century visual aesthetics—they are 'something that exhibits irregularity, disproportion, disharmony, asymmetry, peculiarity, sickness, and decay.'<sup>21</sup> The emanations that occupy these spaces are

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<sup>16</sup> Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Essaka Joshua, 'Picturesque Aesthetics: Theorising Deformity in the Romantic Era,' in *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text*, ed. Michael Bradshaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 30.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 150.

<sup>20</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 3–4.

<sup>21</sup> Joshua, 'Picturesque Aesthetics,' 31.

deformed and sometimes disabled, but although their agency is reduced, it is not nullified. Rather, they hold positions of power through their marginal status, which in turn further emphasises their deformity. As part of a male being's selfhood, the emanations embody the fragmentation of human personality and the divisible aspects of the soul. Laura Quinney suggests that in *Milton*, while the poet himself realises he needs to annihilate Selfhood, 'Blake does not call for the recovery of a "true self"' that is to be "another form of egotism traveling in an idealistic disguise."<sup>22</sup> Instead, the body remains an open-ended, indefinite space that continues to revolve around itself.

The woman-body fractures the textual and visual spaces it inhabits, but 'The nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs/Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite' (E104. 10[11]:6–7). The juxtaposition of 'Finite' and 'Infinite' brings life and the Female Space into opposition, where the progression of one means the regression of the other. Thus, the woman-body entraps humanity. These discrepancies become irregularities within the larger body politic to challenge any normative version of the metaphor. As irregularities and abjections, the emanations intervene in a typical process of cultural signification, where 'bodies and signifying systems is the precondition both of an ordered, relatively stable identity for the subject and of the smooth, regulated production of discourses and stable meanings.'<sup>23</sup> This intervention takes many forms, but is most evident in the emanation's voice and their weaving.

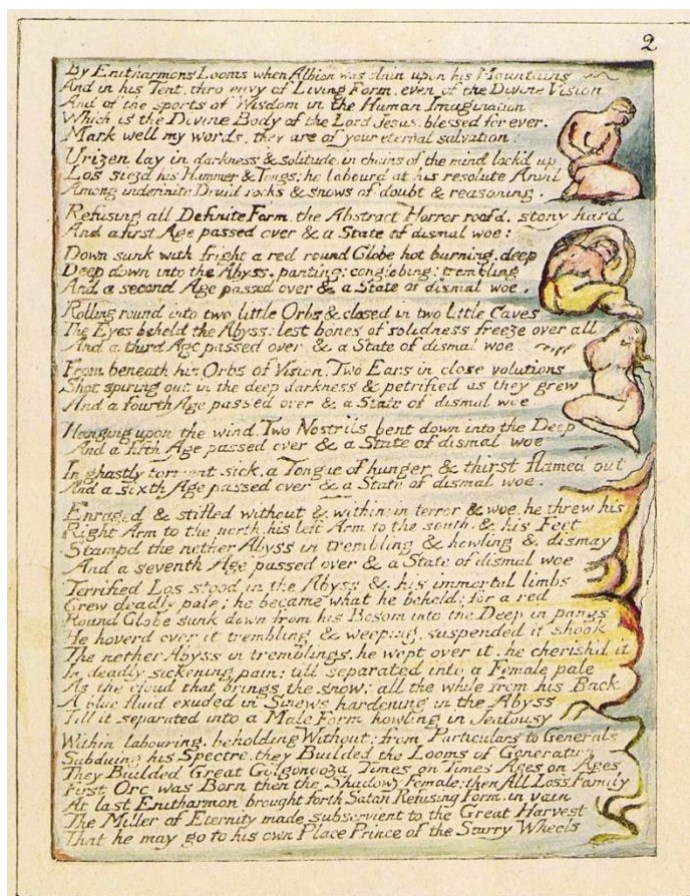
The woman-body personifies a negative fatalism that promotes a static and absolute worldview, introducing pre-written outcomes and new limitations on the immediate faculties. As a consequence it problematises the idea of a homogenous form. The fatalistic cycles that are woven by the emanations generate bodies that are 'born' into entrapment. *Milton* marginalises incoherent, rebellious women to the textual edges, only to give them a new agency from this marginality to control or disrupt the narrative. After the Preface, *Milton* opens with an

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<sup>22</sup> Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Gross, 'The Body of Signification,' in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990), 81–82.

invocation to the Daughters of Beulah. Plate 3 recounts the Seven Corporeal Ages but further situates Urizen's re-birth 'Among indefinite Druid rocks' (E97. 3:8) while explicitly stating that Los 'became what he beheld' (E97. 3:29). This condensed version is an addition found only in Copies C and D, printed c.1811 and 1818 respectively (fig.11), while Copies A and B, both printed c.1811, exclude this plate altogether.



**Figure 11:** William Blake, *Milton: A Poem*, Copy C (c.1811), Plate 3. Relief and white-line etching, hand coloured. New York Public Library. © The William Blake Archive.

The design of this inserted plate captures the cyclical movement demonstrative of a creation-fall motif. Plate 3 further encodes the weaving motif with a fatalism designed to trap the body. The plate's own ephemeral nature—being present in some but not all copies—is significant. To the right, there are literally marginalised women-bodies that are bound and placed next to the text. They sit twisted and are largely undefined with their hands placed together, hinting at restriction. Their fluid corporeality embodies how weaving becomes a vehicle for creation. Although text and design do not necessarily work in tandem, they do co-



exist on the page, where their simultaneous harmony and friction opens up interpretation. On this particular plate, there is arguably a connection between these bound women-bodies and the Seven Corporeal Ages, a moment that strives to form a ‘whole’ body, but—as we know—results in oppression and deformity.

The poem moves from describing the Seven Corporeal Ages to Enitharmon’s Looms and the first mention of weaving:

Three Classes are Created by the Hammer of Los, & Woven

By Enitharmons Looms [...]

Mark well my words. they are of your eternal salvation:

(E96. 2:26, 3:1–5)

The ‘Three Classes’ refer to the Calvinistic doctrine of the Elect, Redeemed, and Reprobate, and so here, the woven forms embody the spiritual subjugation enacted by this doctrine. The marginalised bodies on the plate are most likely the Daughters of Enitharmon working the loom, weaving themselves into confinement. Remembering that the female space transforms life until it becomes finite while remaining infinite itself, these bodies then enact the beginning of creation. They echo Urizen who threw ‘his/Right Arm to the north, his left Arm to the south, & his Feet/Stampd the nether Abyss’ (E97. 3:24–26). When Urizen is ‘Enraged & stifled without & within: in terror’ (E97. 3:24), his senses condense—they turn finite—through the body created by Los. The Daughters partake in this moment, and their own bodies, seen in the design, become a definitive barrier—another edge—that define the textual space as female and finite.

These emanations are conditioned by their own pre-formed scheme, and they capture the beginning of creation within themselves. Cast into a position of subjugation, these emanations could depict the early stages of division from a male power, when ‘a Female pale/As the cloud that brings the snow: [...] separated into a Male Form howling in Jealousy’ (E97. 3:33–36).<sup>24</sup> If so, they then become metaphors for the negative impact of institutions on a

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi, ‘The Designs,’ in *William Blake’s Illuminated Books: Milton a Poem and the Final Illuminated Works*, ed. David Bindman, Robert Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, Vol.5 (London: The William Blake Trust/The Tate Gallery, 1998), 21.

body politic, figured in corporeal cycles. As well as delineating the boundaries of Urizen's deformity, the women-bodies are also still excesses to this creation as visualised by their distortion, specifically their legs that are congealed into single masses. Here is an iteration of a body that typifies the breakdown of language which is further highlighted on the next plate. Plate 4—also only found in Copies C and D—foreshadows the emanations preparing their victims 'Among indefinite Druid rocks' (fig.12). The body placed on the central rock is ambiguous in form and it kneels in subjugation, ready to be sacrificed. Unlike the two standing figures and one in the corner, this one echoes the three on the previous plate. Whether this central figure is male or female is not important in this case, because as another bound body situated within a druidic setting, it draws attention to a self-sacrificing system where creation within a self-made institution leads to self-destruction.

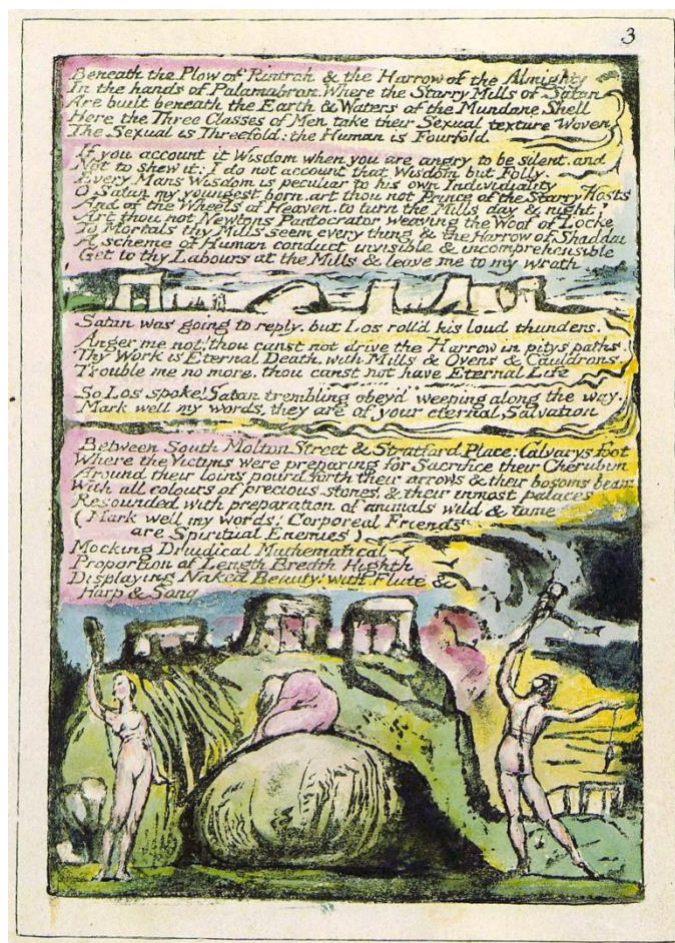
These bodies introduce a recurring motif of constraint that becomes embodied within a subaltern position. It is also reinforced with a refrain that occurs throughout the opening plates: 'Mark well my words. they are of your eternal salvation.' This line, which appears five or six times in *Milton*, is a stylistic interlude that punctuates the narrative and controls the verse flow. This sort of poetic formula is also present in *Völuspá* where the völvu has a refrain, 'do you want to know more: and what?' which begins just before Höðr kills Baldr and initiates Ragnarök.<sup>25</sup> This sort of interjection is also found in *Baldrs draumar* where the völvu demands, 'Reluctantly I told you, now I'll be silent.'<sup>26</sup> In 'The Descent of Odin,' Gray translates this as 'Leave me, leave me to repose,' which is perhaps more dismissive in its tone than the original Norse, and is arguably more similar to Los' request: 'Trouble me no more. thou canst not have

<sup>25</sup> Trans. Larrington, 'The Seeress's Prophecy,' 10; [*Völuspá*, 'Vituð ér enn – eða hvat?'; 304].

<sup>26</sup> 'Baldr's Dream,' in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 236; [*Baldrs draumar*, *Eddukvæði: Volume I Goðakvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 447; 'Nauðug sagðak/nú mun ek þegja.']

Eternal Life/So Los spoke! [...] / Mark well my words, they are of your eternal Salvation' (E98.

4:18–20).<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 12:** William Blake, *Milton: A Poem*, Copy C (c.1811), Plate 4. Relief and white-line etching, hand coloured. New York Public Library. © The William Blake Archive.

The völvu refrain re-inserts a female prophetic voice into a broader mythological narrative. In 'The Fatal Sisters' and other eighteenth-century imitations of Norse poetry, these refrains were emulated with an inserted parentheses. These narrative breaks have a similar effect to those found in *Milton*, for example in Sterling's 'The Twilight of the Gods':

Grim Surtur, whom black fire surrounds;  
(Grim Surtur of tremendous name)  
Launces a deluge of devouring flame:<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Gray, 'The Descent of Odin,' in *Poems by Mr. Gray. A New Edition*, London: Printed for B. Long, and T. Pridden. MDCCLXXI. [1771], 84.

<sup>28</sup> Sterling, 'The Twilight of the Gods: An Ode,' 156.

In this example, the aside is an opportunity to emphasise and gloss certain mythic subjects, here, Surtur. In Gray, the parentheses work like a choric voice to support the main narrative; they provide a commentary on the main action. ‘The Fatal Sisters’ produces variations on ‘(Weave the crimson web of war),’ thus explicitly connecting war imagery with the prophetic, a technique also found in ‘The Bard.’<sup>29</sup> The *Milton* refrains are closer to that of Gray than of Sterling, even when there is variation. Plate 4 deviates from the standard ‘Mark well my words’ and instead, when the chorus remarks, ‘(Mark well my words! Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies)’ (E98. 4:26). Not only is the complete phrase different from the earlier versions, but it is contained within a parenthesis which imitates the style of eighteenth-century mediations of the völvu refrain.

The plate ends with male weavers, Los and his Spectre, creating the ‘Looms of Generation’ (E97. 3:38) that give sexual textures to human life. Goldstein sees generation as ‘a synecdoche for postlapsarian history, the ongoing fall into sexual reproduction and corollary systems of subjective embodiment, moral and natural law.’<sup>30</sup> It encompasses world history and participates in a repetitive transformation that pulls away from a pre-formed body created by a greater divine power. A generated body is not self-formed, but rather, it is shaped or is in the process of being shaped by multiple actors.<sup>31</sup> The emanations exemplify this when they emulate the cycles of oppression, restriction, and failure within their physical form.

An example of this is the Miltonic Six-fold Female. After Milton falls and enters Blake’s foot, he sees the ‘Three Heavens of Beulah’ (E110. 15[17]:51) embodied by his wives and daughters:

& they distant view’d his journey  
In their eternal spheres, now Human, tho’ their Bodies remain clos’d  
In the dark Ulro till the Judgement: [...]

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Gray, ‘The Fatal Sisters,’ in *Poems by Mr. Gray. A New Edition*, London: Printed for B. Long, and T. Pridden. MDCCLXXI. [1771], 75.

<sup>30</sup> Amanda Jo Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 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), 166.

<sup>31</sup> Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 170.

In conflict with those Female forms, which in blood & jealousy  
Surrounded him, dividing & uniting without end or number.

(E110. 17[19]:3–8)

These female forms are a part of Ulro, the material and vegetable world beneath Beulah that is filled with delusions. This is a place of judgement and restriction rather than inspiration. This manifests within the violent Miltonic Female when they surround Milton ‘in blood & jealousy’ while ‘dividing & uniting.’ In this moment, they create a cycle of fatalistic creation, emulating Urizen’s separation ‘Space by space in his ninefold darkness’ (E70. 3:9).

Emulating Moses and Urizen, Milton is tasked to write ‘In iron tablets’ (E110.

17[19]:10) as his wives and daughters sit with him:

They sat rangd round him as the rocks of Horeb round the land  
Of Canaan: and they wrote in thunder smoke and fire  
His dictate; and his body was the Rock Sinai; that body,  
Which was on earth born to corruption: & the six Females  
Are Her & Peor & Bashan & Abarim & Lebanon & Hermon  
Seven rocky masses terrible in the Desarts of Midian.

(E110. 17[19]:12–17)

The act of writing on iron is a sign of Milton’s failure as it makes him complicit with Urizen’s law-making. Although Urizen writes his laws in the Book of Brass, it is the Book of Iron in *The Book of Ahania* that becomes associated with the Tree of Mystery. The women multiply and help Milton consolidate new laws. They also further develop known motifs, such as petrification, when they echo Urizen’s lithic body from *The Book of Urizen*. The Miltonic Female embodies Moses, Mount Sinai, and the ten commandments through their petrification. They create further dissonance when their Sixfold self multiplies into ‘Seven rocky masses.’ Milton, too, turns into ‘the Rock of Sinai,’ a body ‘born to corruption,’ and so altogether, they become united in this oppressive transformation. However, it is the emanation that carries the most transformative and generative power, as this moment is a result of their prior conflict and multiplication. Thus, in this example, the woman-body intervenes the larger body to disrupt and rework its physical boundaries.

Many mentions of iron in Blake refer to chains or armour, another nod towards restriction and war. There are also some association between iron as a material of oppression and apocalyptic transformation. For example, in *Jerusalem*, the Western Gate of Eden is ‘towards Generation, iron [...] But all clos’d up till the last day, when the graves shall yield their dead’ (E156. 13:9–11). Gray similarly associates iron with death and apocalypse. In ‘The Descent of Odin,’ when Odin and the völvu finally recognise each other, Gray takes liberties with the translation of the final stanza. He creates an image of finality but also elevates the female-prophet’s voice as an important indicator of apocalyptic change. In *Baldrs draumar*, the völvu exclaims:

Ride home, Odin, and be proud of yourself!  
May no more men come to visit me,  
Until Loki is loose, escaped from his bonds,  
And the Doom of the Gods, tearing all asunder, approaches.<sup>32</sup>

Larrington’s modern translation here of the völvu’s request for Odin to leave her in peace—‘meirr aptt á vit’—gives more of an impression of fatigue in irritation. Gray’s rendition captures these emotions, but he also further indulges in his translation, turning the lines into something more vivid and violent:

Hie thee hence, and boast at home  
That never shall Enquirer come  
To break my iron-sleep again,  
Till LOK has burst his ten-fold chain:  
Never, till substantial Night  
Has reassum’d her ancient right;  
Till wrap’d in flames, in ruin hurl’d,

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<sup>32</sup> Trans. Larrington, ‘Baldr’s Dream,’ 237; [*Baldrs draumar*, ‘„Heim ríð þú Óðinn, ok ver hróðigr! svá komir manna meirr aptt á vit, er lauds Loki líðr ór þöndum ok í ragna rök Rjúfendr koma.“’; 448.]

Sinks the fabric of the world.<sup>33</sup>

The general ideas are still here: the völva asks Odin not to disturb her again until Ragnarök. However, the line ‘To break my iron-sleep again’ carries a greater finality to it than the original Norse and most modern translations. This is the partly due to the phrase: ‘iron-sleep.’ This description creates continuity between the völva’s foresight and Loki’s prophetic escape through the rhyme of ‘again’ and ‘chain.’ In this scene, readers are reminded that although technically the myth of Ragnarök begins with Höðr killing Baldr, the actual downfall of the Æsir lies with Loki’s escape. In Norse myth, the binding of bodies and fatal cycles are integral parts of the apocalyptic narrative, and something similar is presented in *Milton* through a specifically female prophetic voice.

### ***The Norns & the Female Voice***

In eighteenth-century religious discourse, self-styled female prophets ‘positioned their visionary works as ethical interventions in the destiny of humankind.’<sup>34</sup> Orianne Smith suggests that ‘throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, words were often considered to have magical properties that could be dangerous if not strictly monitored by the authorities,’ and that these perceived associations were central to the eighteenth-century interest in ‘the primordial power of female enthusiasm.’<sup>35</sup> Although Blake’s emanations are not explicitly described as prophetic, they do carry certain qualities that are also characteristics of ancient sibyls from Classical tradition and völur from Norse myth. However, rather than being ‘ethical interventions,’ a closer comparison between the emanation and the völva reveals the ways in which the emanation’s voice exposes the pressures of organised religion.

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<sup>33</sup> Gray, ‘The Descent of Odin,’ 85–86.

<sup>34</sup> Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786–1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Romantic Women Writers*, 2, 37, 40.

In eighteenth-century poetry, there was a desire to regulate and remove these female figures from imagined communities or the reader's view.<sup>36</sup> Arguably, Blake does the opposite by giving emanations a powerful agency that can control the narrative despite their position in the margins. For example, *The Book of Los* opens with:

Eno aged Mother,  
Who the chariot of Leutha guides,  
Since the day of thunders in old time

Sitting beneath the eternal Oak  
Trembled and shook the stedfast Earth  
And thus her speech broke forth.

(E90. 3:1–6)

O'Donoghue argues that Eno is not like the sibyl associated with Yggdrasil, but by sitting under the oak there is a stronger druidic association.<sup>37</sup> However, I suggest that this invocation remains reminiscent of the general mythological trope of calling upon a seeress. The opening image of an 'aged Mother' under an 'Eternal Oak' engages with a range of motifs we have already discussed: druidism and contemporary political discourse concerning liberty. Beyond this, when Eno shakes the earth, with her voice violently breaking out, there is a clear resemblance to Nordic prophetic visions, for example in *Völuspá* where a völva commands the movement of time.<sup>38</sup>

Eno's entrance is dramatic and is evocative of storms, perhaps even natural disaster. Her control of the narrative, 'And thus her speech broke forth,' frames the rest of *The Book of Los* which then becomes her prophetic vision. By likening her to the völva as well as an eighteenth-century female-prophet, Eno embodies 'the regeneration of society through the agency of a new spiritual woman.'<sup>39</sup> Her voice emulates Gray's description of the völva in 'The Descent of Odin,' when the god seeks knowledge of Baldr's death:

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<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Romantic Women Writers*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 99.

<sup>38</sup> O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Romantic Women Writers*, 47.



The Father of the powerful spell [...]  
 (The groaning earth beneath him shakes),  
 Till full before his fearless eyes  
 The portals nine of hell arise.<sup>40</sup>

When comparing Gray's version of the völvu's appearance with Amos Cottle's verse translation, 'The Song of the Traveller, &c.,' there are clear similarities in image and word choice when describing the environment's movement and the völvu's prophetic speech.

Trembling earth the God confest!  
 Towards the east then bent his way,  
 Where low beneath the sorceress lay.<sup>41</sup>

Although Cottle's translation post-dates *The Book of Los*, the replication of imagery with 'the trembling earth' in relation to a female-visionary figure is important to note. Blake could not have been influenced by Cottle's rendition of *Baldrs draumar*, but his language does reveal an engagement with established visions of Norse subjects.

There is also an interaction between Odin and a völvu in *Völuspá*. During the transitional strophe 29—as found in the *Konungsbók* edition—Schjødtt notes that 'we learn that the völvu is sitting outside alone, and thus she is in a situation that can be designated as liminal as a matter of course.'<sup>42</sup> In Norse myth, the völvu embodies a transitional space between life and death; she is a corpse reanimated for the purposes of prophetic intervention. The Norse female-prophet, unlike a Classical sibyl, is not physically whole, but despite this incapacitated state, her prophetic insight is highly sought after. The association between prophecy and an impaired, incapacitated body, is part of Norse tradition and is a trope found in 'Night the First' from *The Four Zoas*, where 'Enion blind & age-bent wept upon the desolate wind' (E310. [N1].

[Pg.17]:1). Looking at Tharmas and Enion, Otto argues that the division of active male and

<sup>40</sup> Gray, 'The Descent of Odin,' 82.

<sup>41</sup> Amos Cottle, *Icelandic Poetry, or The Edda of Saemund*, Bristol: Printed by N. Biggs, for Joseph Cottle. MDCCXCVII. [1797], 220.

<sup>42</sup> Schjødtt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 219; strophe 29 in the *Hauksbók* manuscript of *Völuspá* describes 'whether the Æsir should yield the tribute/or whether all the gods should share sacrificial feasts,' and therefore differs from the *Konungsbók* which remains the focus of this thesis. See: trans. Larrington, 'The Seeress's Prophecy (Hauksbók),' 278.

passive female powers here is predicated on the idea that ‘the body is no longer the embodiment of the self but *the horizon of the self’s constituted world*,’ though Enion is the margin that defines the centre.<sup>43</sup> In light of a Norse *völva*’s liminal state and the body as a horizon, the emanation’s non-normative corporeality transforms them into a boundary that can generate and regenerate. In relation to epigenesis, Goldstein suggests that Blake’s epigenetic generation ‘operates [...] on the micrological scale of a being’s mutability over the span of its own life.’<sup>44</sup> Most scholars define Ahania with her ‘lamenting voice’ (E88. 4:45), and in a similar fashion, Eno’s voice frames *The Book of Los*.

Lamentation is ‘the initial identifying expression of an emanation, which is, in turn, the embodiment of lamentation.’<sup>45</sup> Ahania—whose name is perhaps an onomatopoeia of lamentation—is an example of this embodiment. A lament can be defined as a breakdown of language which in turn can enact this ‘instability of bodily borders’ as a vocal rupture.<sup>46</sup> Taking Ahania, Nelson Hilton reads her as a continuation of Oothoon’s cry from Blake’s earlier poetry, one of ‘frustrated desire and intellectual vision.’<sup>47</sup> From a psychoanalytical perspective, Patricia Cramer argues that as Urizen’s emanation, Ahania balances the faculty’s desire for separation with the opposite need for reunion, which is perhaps a more stable relationship than what is actually presented. She explains that Ahania’s voice and ‘spontaneous appearance at the end of the Urizen myth is an indication that Urizen’s separation from his eternal roots has become dangerously suicidal.’<sup>48</sup> Considering Ahania’s important role as part of Urizen’s consciousness—albeit somewhat rejected—her lack of corporeality continues to fragment the body politic. As an unbodied voice, she retains her agency through a *völva*-likeness that is, in part, inspired by the Norns.

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<sup>43</sup> Otto, *Blake’s Critique of Transcendence*, 54–55.

<sup>44</sup> Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 165.

<sup>45</sup> Nelson Hilton, *Literal Imagination: Blake’s Vision of Words* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>46</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Oothoon herself is typically read as the product of Blake’s engagement with Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). See: Hilton, *Literal Imagination*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia Cramer, ‘The Role of Ahania’s Lament in Blake’s “Book of Ahania”’: A Psychoanalytic Study,’ *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 83, no. 4 (1984): 525.

Like Fuzon, Ahania is associated with the Tree of Mystery, and after ‘Fuzon groand on the Tree’ (E88. 4:44):

The lamenting voice of Ahania  
Weeping upon the void.  
And round the Tree of Fuzon:  
Distant in solitary night  
Her voice was heard, but no form  
Had she: but her tears from clouds  
Eternal fell round the Tree

(E88. 4:45–51)

Her position at the foot of the tree is comparable to Mary in the Crucifixion narrative. The Gospels vary slightly in their account, but they state that the women who were part of Jesus’ ministry either ‘stood afar off,’ ‘looking on afar off,’ or ‘beholding afar off.’<sup>49</sup> Only the Gospel of John mentions that ‘now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.’<sup>50</sup> While Ahania’s weeping echoes these Biblical women, her purposeful position under or around the Tree is, I suggest, to some degree inspired by Norse myth as part of Blake’s syncretic practice.

The Norns—Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld—reside at the foot of Yggdrasil:

There stands there one beautiful hall under the ash by [Weird’s well], and out of this hall come three maidens whose names are Weird, Verdandi, Skuld.  
These maidens shape men’s lives. We call them norns.<sup>51</sup>

Although they are generally compared to the Fates, the Norns are also associated with völvur. ‘Good norns,’ Snorri explains, ‘ones of noble parentage, shape good lives, but as for those people that become the victims of misfortune, it is evil norns that are responsible.’<sup>52</sup> Although

<sup>49</sup> In Matt. 27:55, ‘many women were there beholding afar off which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him,’ while Mark 15:40 states, ‘there were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome.’ Finally, Luke 23:49 relates ‘and all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.’

<sup>50</sup> John 19:25.

<sup>51</sup> Trans. Faulkes, ‘Gylfaginning,’ 18; [‘Þar stendr salr einn fagr undir askinum við [Urðar brunnsins], ok ór þeim sal koma þrjár meyjar þær er svá heita: Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. Þessar meyjar skapa mönnum aldr. Þær köllum vér nornir.’; 18].

<sup>52</sup> Trans. Faulkes, ‘Gylfaginning,’ 18; [‘Góðar nornir ok vel ættaðar skapa góðan aldr, en þeir menn er

their names literalise the different tenses of the Norse verb *verða* meaning ‘to be’ and *skulu* meaning ‘shall be,’ the Norns are not just figures of fate. They are fluid presences who represent the flow of destiny and they cannot be tied down to specific futures; they occupy a state of liminality.

The Norns are also carers of Yggdrasil which is an *axis mundus* of Norse religion and culture due to its position as the World Tree:

It is also said that the norns that dwell by Weird’s well take water from the well each day and with it the mud that lies round the well and pour it up over the ash so that its branches may not rot or decay.<sup>53</sup>

In a similar fashion, Ahania arguably upholds Urizen’s State Religion when she roams next to the Tree, bemoaning her separation from ‘bright Urizen my king!’ (E89. 5:7). Ahania’s speech at the end of *The Book of Ahania* is one that lauds Urizen, reiterating his role as king and creator. Thus, alongside her identity as an aspect of Urizen’s self, through her lament and voice, Ahania reinserts herself into the narrative and maintains Urizen’s capacities.

Snorri’s explanation that the Norns are not wholly good or evil demonstrates a spectrum of goodwill and harm. Similarly, the emanations cannot be conceived as the uncontrollable evil removed from the male beings because, in light of the Spectres and the liminal characteristics of the emanation, they have some moral ambiguity.<sup>54</sup> In the later illuminated books, the woman-body either actively propagates oppressive institutionalism, or gestures towards the corruption of human society. In *Milton*, they re-codify the able-body politic to become more aggressive mediators of State structures, for example:

While the Females prepare the Victims. the Males at Furnaces  
And Anvils dance the dance of tears & pain. loud lightnings  
Lash on their limbs as they turn the whirlwinds loose upon  
The Furnaces, lamenting around the Anvils [...]

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fyrir ósköpum verða, þá valda því illar nornir’; 18].

<sup>53</sup> Trans. Faulkes, ‘Gylfaginning,’ 19; [‘Enn er þat sagt at nornir þær er byggja við Urðar brunn taka hvern dag vatn í brunninum ok með aurinn þann er liggr um brunninn, ok ausa upp yfir askinn til þess at eigi skyli limar hans tréna eða fúna’; 19].

<sup>54</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 157.

(E98. 5:15–18)

Although the anvil is most often associated with Los and his poetic inspiration, here it becomes part of a sacrificial scene where the Females prepare the victims. The presence of a female body within a previously masculine role of creation transforms this motif into an indicator of the emanation's position as propagators of Urizen's laws. While we must not assume that all emanations exhibit immorality, in *Milton* they tend to support the structures of their environment which are, in the poem, of Urizen's making.

The relationship between a powerful female visionary and a tree continues when Enitharmon calls on her daughters and consequently transforms Los:

Los heard in terror Enitharmons words: in fibrous strength  
His limbs shot forth like roots of trees against the forward path  
Of Miltons journey. Urizen beheld the immortal Man

(E111. 17[19]:34–36)

It is Enitharmon's words that turn Los into a form which resonates with druidic groves and the Tree of Mystery. This physical reaction to a female voice emphasises the disruptive power of the emanation. Butler believes that Blake's views of the Druids became increasingly hostile after reading Edward Davies' book, *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids* (1809).<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, she argues that Blake's interest in a 'predatory femininity' combines with a 'preoccupation with druidical cruelty, to produce a plausible impression of a complete society, deceitful, perverted, but also whole, organic and perhaps impregnable.'<sup>56</sup> The above passage is an example of this, as Enitharmon's power reveals the origins of a predatory nature when she physically alters Los and moves 'against the forward path/Of Miltons journey.'

In Jerminham's *Rise and Progress*, the Norns are 'Three virgin forms in snowy vests array'd' who 'Stand in the deep recesses of the shade,' that is, of Yggdrasil.<sup>57</sup> The exact phrase 'snowy vests' does not appear in Blake, but as discussed earlier, snow in the illuminated books

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<sup>55</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 178.

<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Mapping Mythologies*, 179.

<sup>57</sup> Jerminham, *The Rise and Progress*, 7.

is commonly associated with institutional oppression and Urizen. For an example outside of *The Book of Urizen*, in the cancelled *America* plates, George III sits with his council and:

[...] all rose before the aged apparition;  
His snowy beard that streams like lambent flames down his wide breast  
Wetting with tears, & his white garments cast a wintry light.  
(E58. b:15–17)

Urizen's wintry appearance here is accompanied by 'the northern drum' (E58. b:18) and is followed by Sotha who 'held the northern helm,/Till to that void it came & fell' (E58. b:21–22). The arrival of Urizen, Sotha, and the snow motif in *America* foregrounds the oppression that underwrites the laws of the world.

Elsewhere, 'snowy' is associated with female bodies. In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (composed 1793), 'Oothoon weeps not: she cannot weep! her tears are locked up;/But she can howl incessant writhing her soft snowy limbs' (E46. 2:11–12). *Jerusalem* also describes, 'When with a dreadful groan the Emanation mild of Albion./Burst from his bosom in the Tomb like a pale snowy cloud' (E197. 48:47–48). A plate in *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (composed 1793, c.1818) also adopts a weaving theme. A female emerges from the Eternal Man, merging to 'A dark Hemaphrodite' where 'Round her snowy Whirlwinds roard' (E268. 5:15–18). In each of these cases, 'snowy,' when referring to a female figure, indicates a moment of pain, darkness, and oppression. Thinking back to Jerningham's Norns, then, with their 'snowy vests,' this motif and image seems to resonate with the emanations. This is further emphasized through an association with Gray's Fatal Sisters.

### ***Gray's Fatal Sisters, Valkyries, & Cycles of Death***

The Norns embody oppression through their relationship with Yggdrasil, just like Ahania who becomes associated with the Tree of Mystery. Sayers believed that the Fatal Sisters were 'Nornies' and 'were three in number,' even though Gray noted that they were Valkyries.<sup>58</sup> This

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<sup>58</sup> Sayers, 'The Descent of Freya,' 5.

blurring of identity can be found in Blake's *Illustrations* where he depicts only three Fatal Sisters. Both O'Donoghue and Clunies Ross suggest that, despite Gray's numbering the Valkyries as a set of twelve rather than three, Blake must have associated the Valkyries with the Fates, an interpretation that was common among late eighteenth-century readers, including Sayers.<sup>59</sup> In Blake's *Illustrations*, the Norn and the Valkyrie merge into a single prophetic and powerful female body. On the title design to the poem, the Sisters wear scaled armour and tight-fitted helmets, almost to the point where the armour begins to look like skin and part of their bodies (fig.13). The Valkyries stand in martial unity, 'dehumanised in military review.'<sup>60</sup> When the limbs of the women intertwine, the design anticipates the weaving of fate that is the subject of the poem. The hands of the two Sisters from the right—visible past the title box—are clasped together, fingers interlocking and arms folding on top of each other. The left and right figures mirror each other—gaze averted—while the central Sister looks directly at the reader. This uniformity reveals a conditioning, where the militarisation of the woman-body becomes a prescriptive pattern of restriction and a body codified by war.

Returning to the Miltonic Female, there is a visual example of its sixfold form on Plate 41[48] that develops earlier descriptions of Milton's wives and daughters. The design reveals a fluid woman-body that encodes a fatalism within its form (fig.14). Similar to Blake's rendition of the Fatal Sisters, the symmetry of the Sixfold Miltonic Female is amplified through their synchronised and fused limbs to create the effect of bodies literally woven together. The Female folds into itself to become 'whole' when the individual women link arms to show spiritual harmony.<sup>61</sup> At first, the idea of harmony seems to conflict with their description as hostile, lithic forms that hinder Milton's progress, but in comparison to the design of the Fatal Sisters, the Miltonic Female's body in fact elaborates on the relations of exteriority within the body politic.

<sup>59</sup> O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth*, 96; Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse*, 141.

<sup>60</sup> Tayler, *Blake's Illustrations to Gray*, 111.

<sup>61</sup> Essick and Viscomi, 'The Designs,' 34.



**Figure 13:** William Blake Title Page to 'The Fatal Sisters,' in Illustrations to Gray's 'Poems' (1797–98). Object 67. Pen, ink, and watercolour over pencil. Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.



**Figure 14:** William Blake, Milton: A Poem, Copy C (c.1811), Plate 41[48]. Relief and white-line etching, hand coloured. New York Public Library. © The William Blake Archive.

In Gray's preface the Sisters work in groups, and after finishing, 'they tore the web into twelve pieces, and (each taking her portion) galloped six to the North, and as many to the South.'<sup>62</sup> Emanations also bind material creation and they consequently propagate a delusion of State institutions. This vision manifests in webs, nets, veils, and woofs which in turn become tools of intervention within the body politic. The creation of such objects echo earlier iterations, such as Urizen's Net of Religion. Sullivan Kruger sees the woven web as an act of creation that is a development of epistemological existence. She proposes that, 'thought, like a web, is spun from the body of a thinking, creating being [...] human beings participate in a system that clothes society with the fabric of belief as well as the fabric of cloth.'<sup>63</sup> With this view, traditional women's work becomes part of creation and a propagation of systems, something already established in the illuminated books when the Net of Religion takes on female form,

<sup>62</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 72.

<sup>63</sup> Sullivan Kruger, *Weaving the Word*, 26.



‘the Web is a Female in embryo’ (E82. 25:18). This Net epitomises a system that enslaves others; it is ‘twisted like to the human brain’ (E82. 25:21), thus embedding itself within a corporeal world.

In *Milton*, this motif is further developed with the Webs and Woofs of Life and Death, all of which become part of the creation of War and Religion. For Blake, female practices produce mental or ideological structures that enslave the mind; these also take the shape of institutions. Emanations spin and weave a system that becomes the foundations of the ruling body politic. Taking inspiration from Gray, Blake creates a linguistic loopback in his poetry to reveal how the emanations weave fatalistic assumptions into the body, and as such, are perpetrators of oppressive institutions. Before examining this in more detail, I want to briefly address the weaving motif in Gray’s odes and how it captures seemingly antithetical ideas—an expression of liberation and anti-monarchical sentiment in ‘The Bard,’ and bellicose fatalism in ‘The Fatal Sisters’—only to forge a semblance between these two depictions.

Although not a Norse subject, ‘The Bard’ draws upon Gray’s wider knowledge of Northern antiquities in his account of the resistance to empire. The Bard and his allies ‘weave’ the ‘winding sheet of Edward’s race,’ and a footnote about the motif directs readers to ‘the Norwegian Ode that follows.’<sup>64</sup> Using the familiar parenthetical device, ‘The Bard’ punctuates the narrative on alternate lines with a choric intercession:

Edward, lo! To sudden fate  
(Weave the woof. The thread is spun)  
Half of thy heart we consecrate  
(The web is wove. The work is done).<sup>65</sup>

The effect is similar to the invocations found in ‘The Fatal Sisters.’ In Blake’s *Illustrations*, the moment where Edward mourns his queen’s death is placed alongside the lines where the Bard

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Gray, ‘The Bard: A Pindaric Ode,’ in *Poems by Mr. Gray. A New Edition*. London: Printed for B. Long, and T. Pridden. MDCCLXXI. [1771], 60.

<sup>65</sup> Gray, ‘The Bard,’ 64.

spins fate. The enjambment of 'fate/consecrate' moves us into the rhythmic parenthetical chants, and the rhyme 'spun/done' emphatically stresses the definitiveness of the Bard's weaving.

In Blake's title design, the Bard is clearly associated with weaving. He grips harp strings that travel across the page as if they were part of a loom (fig.15). The harp-loom is gory with a colouration imitating dripping blood; it is, once again, reminiscent of Urizen's Net of Religion. Tayler believes that the Bard is weaving Edward's fate as he holds 'several huge, blood-dripping ropes that appear to be the strings of a gigantic harp and, in the poem's imagery, the threads of the "winding sheet" for "Edward's race" that is woven by the bard's song.'<sup>66</sup> Beyond the Bard holding his harp-strings of fate, the dark fatalism within the image is further emphasised by the fact that this is a tragic retelling of historical events. Despite the Bard condemning the English tyrannical oppression 'with a master's hand and prophet's fire,' the ode ends with him falling 'headlong from the mountain's height,/Deep in the roaring tide he plung'd to the endless night.'<sup>67</sup> The simple contrast between the light of prophetic fire to the darkness of death stresses this negative fatalism, that despite his resistance, the Bard was always destined for death. Blake's title design might not show any visible woof or active weaving as the Bard merely holds the strings, but perhaps this is a moment where he is unable to weave the fate he wishes, knowing that he is doomed to follow his kind in inevitable death.

Gray's weaving motif in 'The Bard' was taken from 'The Fatal Sisters,' where the women demand readers 'see the griesly texture grow,/( 'Tis of human entrails made).'<sup>68</sup> Blake captures the violence of the lines through the animated postures and movements of the women (fig.16). The weights are 'Each a gasping Warrior's head'; the decapitated skulls are placed within a traditionally feminine domain, and as a result, the Fatal Sisters impinge on the masculine world of warfare.<sup>69</sup> The casualties of the battlefield are re-invented by the women who—like the Bard—determine the outcome of battle:

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<sup>66</sup> Tayler, *Blake's Illustrations to Gray*, 95–96.

<sup>67</sup> Gray, 'The Bard,' 38, 68.

<sup>68</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 74.

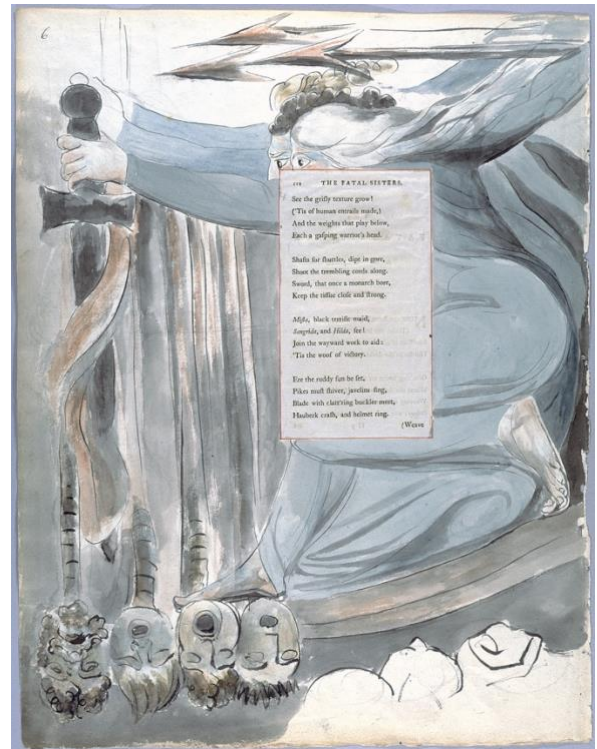
<sup>69</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 74.

Glitt'ring lances are the loom.  
 Where the dusky warp we strain,  
 Weaving many a Soldier's doom [...]<sup>70</sup>

Alliteration intertwines the women and their work with the weapons of warfare, thus the act of weaving becomes synonymous with female intervention in a male-dominated arena. On the following pages where Blake visualises the women on the battlefield itself, the men are disembodied and are left either unfinished in their composition, or as an incoherent pile of limbs and heads. The Fatal Sisters continue to physically dominate the pages where they are either weaving or riding horses, transforming into the 'twelve gigantic figures resembling women,' as described in the Preface.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 15:** William Blake, Title Page to 'The Bard,' in Illustrations to Gray's 'Poems' (1797–98). Object 55. Pen, ink, and watercolour over pencil. Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.



**Figure 16:** William Blake, 'The Fatal Sisters,' in Illustrations to Gray's 'Poems' (1797–98). Object 72. Pen, ink, and watercolour over pencil. Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

The Fatal Sisters are Valkyries situated at an eleventh-century battle in Ireland where, 'on Christmas-day, the day of the battle, a native of Caithness in Scotland, saw at a distance a

<sup>70</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 74.

<sup>71</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 72.

number of persons on horseback, riding full speed towards a hill, and seeming to enter it.’<sup>72</sup> By placing women from Norse myth into a Celtic setting, Gray conflates cultures to elevate the sublime in his poetry. However, the weaving motif that is used in both ‘The Bard’ and ‘The Fatal Sisters’ slightly differ. The Sisters figuratively ensnare and literally enact death through their creations. They are part of a greater mythological system that involves the afterlife, Odin, and Valhalla. Their woven webs become literal webs of death, whereas in contrast, ‘The Bard’ takes the motif as an act of defiance. His weaving punctuates moments of rebellion against oppression and monarchy. However, despite his resistance, the Bard as a voice of liberty does not prevail and eventually he succumbs to the English forces; thus the motif is once again associated with death.

Blake’s designs for both poems establishes a relationship between material creation and corporeality that creates a visually gruesome effect. In *Milton*, the body is ‘at once the bound, if penetrable, space and the radically unbound penetrating movement of feeling [...] a form and force at once embodied and disembodied.’<sup>73</sup> When Enitharmon works with Los to create the Three Classes of Men, she weaves another web:

Her Looms vibrate with soft affections, weaving the Web of Life  
Out of the ashes of the Dead; [...]  
The Web of Life is woven: & the tender sinews of life created  
(E100. 6:28–34)

Occurring soon after Los creates a body for Urizen, Enitharmon takes charge of creation. Although the Three Classes are ‘regulated by Los’s hammer’ (E100. 6:35), humanity itself is woven by Enitharmon into a ‘web of Life.’ The phrase might suggest positive associations, but this web echoes the ‘Net of Religion.’ There is a stronger association with oppression than connectedness, as the enjambment moves this web into ‘the ashes of the Dead.’ Life and Death combine in this moment of creation to subvert traditional associations between ash and dust in

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<sup>72</sup> Gray, ‘The Fatal Sisters,’ 71.

<sup>73</sup> Joel Faflak, ‘Blake’s *Milton* and the Nonlife of Affect,’ *The Wordsworth Circle* 50, no. 1 (2019): 45.

the Bible and Book of Common Prayer.<sup>74</sup> This then further emphasises the fatalism within Enitharmon's web, thus revealing that in the hands of an emanation, ash and dust become the materials of life.

The juxtaposition between 'tender sinews' and the ashes is reminiscent of the Fatal Sisters who create 'webs of death' and 'Keep the tissue close and strong.'<sup>75</sup> Their creations are made from literal bodily excess, and similarly, Enitharmon's webs are created from remnants of human existence. This 'web of Life' forms the Three Classes that 'take their Sexual texture Woven' (E97. 4:4), to then further progress until 'All things begin & end in Albions ancient Druid rocky shore' (E100. 6:25). Weaving, then, becomes an intervention during a moment of crisis, where the re-formulation of the body permits the re-formulation of humanity through the emanation. This particular web created by Enitharmon is an example, as it is one that rebuilds a supposedly uninspired religious doctrine that becomes tied to an 'ancient Druid rocky shore.'

### ***Webs & Woofs: Weaving a Body Politic***

The Valkyries determine who enters Valhalla, but the reality of their actions is destructive. Similarly, although renewal comes after death, the outcome in *Milton* is not positive. Renewal takes an apocalyptic strain, where webs and woofs are cast to signal impending doom. In a passage that is arguably the most Gray-like, Tirzah and her sisters weave fatalistic creations to encompass the whole world:

Weave the black Woof of Death [...]

The stamping feet of Zelophehads Daughters are coverd with Human gore

Upon the treddles of the Loom, they sing to the winged shuttle:

(E128. 29[31]:56–59)

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<sup>74</sup> The burial rite that appears in the *Book of Common Prayer*, 'we therefore commit *his* body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body [...],' is based on Gen 3:19: 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' See: Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer*, Oxford: Printed by W. Jackson and W. Dawson, Printers to the University. MDCCXCIII. [1793], 217.

<sup>75</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 74, 76.

The ‘stamping feet’ and singing women at the loom, ‘coverd with Human gore,’ vividly captures the vigorous movements of Gray’s Sisters who work with ‘shafts for shuttles dipt in gore,/Shoot the trembling cords along.’<sup>76</sup> In this rousing finish to Book One death, as embodied by the woven object, is cast across the world and becomes a perversion when Rahab and Tirzah—representing a false materialism—ensnares rather than frees humanity.

The final line of Book One declares, ‘Such is the World of Los the labour of six thousand years’ (E128. 29[31]:64). As propagators of Urizen’s State Religion, the emanations transform the world of inspiration associated with Los by overlaying physical and spiritual death over Albion:

The River rises above his banks to wash the Woof:  
He takes it in his arms: he passes it in strength thro his current  
The veil of human miseries is woven over the Ocean  
From the Atlantic to the Great South Sea, the Erythrean.

(E128. 29[31]:60–63)

The Thames washes and drags it through the city towards the ocean, and then to the rest of the world. This development epitomises the previous lines about Albion’s rocky shore and is stressed again later, where:

O dreadful Loom of Death! O piteous Female forms compelld  
To weave the Woof of Death, On Camberwell Tirzahs Courts  
[...]  
On Highgates heights magnificent Weaves over trembling Thames  
To Shooters Hill and thence to Blackheath the dark Woof! Loud  
Loud roll the Weights & Spindles over the whole Earth let down

(E135. 35[39]:7–14)

The vocative address towards the loom itself intensifies the action of the emanations who are ‘compell’d,’ a verb that marks their lack of control. Thinking back to Plate 3 there is, on the one hand, a relationship between compulsion and constraint embodied within the emanations, and a role as torturers on the other; they are forced into this position to weave a fated oppression.

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<sup>76</sup> Gray, ‘The Fatal Sisters,’ 74.

The emanations demarcate the boundaries of humanity with a spiritual and physical death that is woven into the body and the nation itself. In Gray's poem, after the fate of the battle has been created, the Valkyries declare, 'Sisters, cease, the work is done.'<sup>77</sup> This sort of definite end point is not apparent in *Milton*, and instead there is an infinite expansion that captures a never-ending world of oppression and limitation. While the Sixfold Miltonic Female does not show disharmony in their infinite form, they represent an unnatural distortion of the human body. Not only that, but their infinite expansion is purposeful in its disruption. In Ulro, they participate in the propagation of the Polypus, the core of the material world that narrows perception:

Then view'd from Miltons Track they see the Ulro: a vast Polypus  
Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing  
A self-devouring monstrous Human Death Twenty-seven fold  
Within it sit Five Females & the nameless Shadowy Mother  
Spinning it from their bowels with songs of amorous delight  
And melting cadences that lure the Sleepers of Beulah down  
The River Storge [...]

(E134. 34[38]:24–30)

We might be able to trace the Polypus back to Darwin and the polypus mentioned in *The Botanic Garden*, but here, it is woven by and is a part of the woman-body.<sup>78</sup> Hisao Ishizuka argues that Enlightenment medicine used 'fibre theory' to view the nervous system, where fibre was considered the original material of the human body.<sup>79</sup> He reads *The Four Zoas* alongside mid-eighteenth 'versification of the body,' where poet-scientists such as Richard Blackmore and Darwin use the language of fibre to reveal God's creation.<sup>80</sup> Goldstein similarly suggests that 'Blake depicts livable form as a fabric of many hands whose psychobiological nerves and fibers link individual selves to supra-individual contexts and forces.'<sup>81</sup> As a mass of 'living fibres,'

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<sup>77</sup> Gray, 'The Fatal Sisters,' 76.

<sup>78</sup> Erasmus Darwin, 'Note XXVII.—Shell Fish,' in *The Botanic Garden; a Poem in Two Parts*, Vol.2. London: Printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXCI. [1791], 72–73.

<sup>79</sup> Hisao Ishizuka, 'Enlightening the Fibre-Woven Body: William Blake and Eighteenth-Century Fibre Medicine,' *Literature and Medicine* 25, no. 1 (2006): 73–74.

<sup>80</sup> Ishizuka, 'Enlightening the Fibre-Woven Body,' 76.

<sup>81</sup> Goldstein, *Sweet Science*, 40.

then, Blake uses both textile and physiological language to describe the Polypus, revealing it to be a ‘self-devouring monstrous Human Death’; it is a network of self-destruction that restricts the soul and body.

Six women weave the Polypus from the inside. Although they are not explicitly defined in this manner here, the emanations are sometimes labelled as ‘Daughters,’ thus hinting at an existing maternal relationship. Perhaps it is a too simple idea that the woman-body—specifically a maternal one—proliferates other forms and beings, and that the female form is one of life. Annika Mann claims that Blake identifies ‘the mother’s body, her womb, as measuring the distance between literary and literal generation.’<sup>82</sup> She suggests that the womb-imagery in *The Book of Urizen* serves a generative function, where the female body incorporates a distorted view of creation. In *Milton*, the landscape of Ulro and the Polypus is woven ‘from their bowels with songs of amorous delight.’ The bowels are possibly a grotesque substitute for the womb, with the spinning of Human Death to be like intestines or—to continue the pregnancy imagery—is in fact the twisting of umbilical cords.

The mother’s body can also portray social degeneration through the motif of disease. Mann connects generation in *The Book of Urizen* with the disease that ossifies the people at the end of the poem. Furthermore, she proposes that Enitharmon encompasses ‘the infection of feeling that renders time ineffectual, that determines and contains all bodies as forms defined by their vision of others’ feelings.’<sup>83</sup> The manifestation of corruption as disease extends from Enitharmon in *The Book of Urizen* to Ahania who is ‘The mother of Pestilence’ (E85. 2:43), and then to the emanations in *Milton* who are ‘Priestesses infolded in Veils of Pestilence, border’d/With War; Woven in Looms of Tyre & Sidon by beautiful Ashtaroth’ (E137.

37[41]:23–24). Earlier, disease manifests as a covering:

And Jehovah was leprous; loud he call’d, stretching his hand to Eternity

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<sup>82</sup> 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), 142.

<sup>83</sup> Mann, ‘Writing Generation,’ 157.



For then the Body of Death was perfected in hypocritic holiness,  
Around the Lamb, a Female Tabernacle woven in Cathedrons Looms

He died as a Reprobate. [...]

(E107. 13[14]:24–27)

The Lamb is a better known as a symbol for Jesus in Christian liturgy and symbolises the union between divinity and humanity. This leprous body is placed ‘Around the Lamb,’ creating another disjunction between a physicality and a vision where, like a sarcophagus—in the original Greek *σάρξ* (flesh) and *φαγεῖν* (to eat)—this body is an outer layer reminiscent of the integument from earlier. The leprous body is ‘perfected in hypocritic holiness,’ highlighting how perfection is only achieved through falseness. This vision revisits the idea of a Christian body politic only to challenge the metaphor by using a woven, diseased Body of Death.

Cathedron’s Looms creates the ‘Female Tabernacle woven,’ which at first seems like a variation on 1 Corinthians 6: ‘know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?’<sup>84</sup> In Hebrews 9, Christ’s body is also likened to that of a tabernacle:

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building [...] but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.<sup>85</sup>

There is no eternal redemption in *Milton*, but instead Christ ‘died as a Reprobate,’ a figure defined in the poem as ‘form’d/To destruction from the mothers womb’ (E100. 7:2–3). The maternal imagery is once again subverted because rather than giving life, women create death.

These examples describe the consequences of a corrupted religion and its eventual impact on Albion. The emanations are revealed to be central to the creation of religion. Taking once again the language of fibre, Natural Religion is given a corporeal form when woven into a body politic:

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<sup>84</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19.

<sup>85</sup> Heb. 9:11–12.

Because Ahania rent apart into a desolate night,  
 Laments! & Enion wanders like a weeping inarticulate voice  
 And Vala labours for her bread & water among the Furnaces  
 Therefore bright Tirzah triumphs: putting all beauty  
 And all perfection, in her cruel sports among the Victims,  
 Come bring with thee Jerusalem with songs on the Grecian Lyre  
 In Natural Religion! in experiments on Men,  
 Let her be Offerd up to Holiness! [...]

(E113. 19[21]:41–48)

All the tropes associated with the emanations converge in this passage. Ahania laments and Enion wanders ‘like a weeping inarticulate voice.’ Vala sits ‘among the Furnaces’ that become the foundations of Jerusalem in Lambeth’s Vale, ‘where they were laid in ruins/Where they were laid in ruins from every Nation & Oak Groves rooted’ (E99. 6:15–16). In coming together, these motifs become a prelude to Tirzah’s sacrificial experiments.

Perhaps Tirzah is the druidic figure from Plate 4 who prepares victims for sacrifice. She is described as being ‘all perfection,’ creating a disjunction between the emanation as an abjection and the woman-body as an idealised form. If she is ‘perfect,’ then the markers of such a denomination differ from our own perception. Tirzah propagates sacrifice and barbaric practices associated with a benighted outlook, and so with this description, Blake critiques the desire for a perfected body. Tirzah takes the lead in creating a body for Natural Religion:

[...] Tirzah numbers her;  
 She numbers with her fingers every fibre ere it grow;  
 Where is the Lamb of God? where is the promise of his coming?  
 Her shadowy Sisters form the bones, even the bones of Horeb:  
 Around the marrow! and the orb'd skull around the brain!  
 His Images are born for War! for Sacrifice to Tirzah!  
 To Natural Religion! to Tirzah the Daughter of Rahab the Holy!  
 She ties the knot of nervous fibres into a white brain!  
 She ties the knot of bloody veins, into a red hot heart!  
 Within her bosom Albion lies embalmed, never to awake  
 [...] She ties the knot of milky seed into two lovely Heavens

(E113. 19[21]:48–60)

The emergent body has no functioning organs except for the brain and heart. Gray's Sisters use corpses to weave their 'crimson web of war,' and here in *Milton* the death of the mind is almost synonymous with the woven Religion. The 'shadowy Sisters' form the skeleton and Tirzah herself manipulates the fibres, twisting and knotting them into the internal organs. The violent and vivid imagery is intensified with the repetition: this is not a moment of gentle nurturing or creation. It is, once again, an echo of the creation of Urizen's net. This passage is central to Blake's critique of a religious body politic that is also part of a nation State. We can assume that—like the Polypus emerging from the bowels of the Shadowy Mother—Tirzah spins this body from herself, as 'Within her bosom Albion lies embalmed, never to awake.' Once again the embalming motif connects life and death within a female space. When the body is dismembered, this moment of creation turns into a vision of a victim being readied for sacrifice.

The women in *Milton* come to symbolise religious oppression and the propagation of such structures through war. After weaving a new Religion, the emanations claim to be self-righteous 'With cruel Virtue: making War upon the Lambs Redeemed;/To perpetuate War & Glory' (E117. 22[24]:44–45). They are the spaces where humanity becomes subjected to different models of restriction. As such, the woman-body is a site of radical acts of disabling, where disillusion and Albion's diseased self—further developed in *Jerusalem*—is foreshadowed. The textile nature of the body becomes the foundations of a fatalism that prevents transcendence:

Are those who contemn Religion & seek to annihilate it  
 Become in their Femin[in]e portions the causes & promoters  
 Of these Religions, how is this thing? [...]  
 (E141. 40[46]:9–11)

This clear connection between feminine spaces and restriction becomes further entangled with religion. This is then further emphasised by the recurring weaving motif:

[...] Cambel & Gwendolen wove webs of war & of  
 Religion, to involve all Albion's sons, and when they had  
 Involv'd Eight; their webs roll'd outwards into darkness  
 [...] Such are the Generations of the Giant Albion,

To separate a Law of Sin, to punish thee in thy members.

(E150. 7:44–50)

Similar to the Valkyries who portion out their web and ride through the darkness, Cambel and Gwendolen rally the Sons of Albion to disseminate a law of religious punishment. They entrap the Sons into existing cycles of self-destruction, thus demonstrating the impact of their intervention on both the system that enslaves them and the body itself.

The religious body in *Milton* emerges deformed and disfigured, with the woman-body actively developing this form. Through the emanations, Blake critiques the crafting of a nation or ‘national body’ that demands a coherent structure. Generation, as discussed, is a clear example of this. While Mann reads ‘generation’ in relation to the maternal body, Goldstein suggests that ‘Blake depicts liveable form as the outcome of social conformation: the biological body as a fabric of many hands.’<sup>86</sup> According to *Milton*, the ‘Generated Body’ is associated with gardens and buildings, spaces that are regulated and cohesive:

And every Generated Body in its inward form,  
Is a garden of delight & a building of magnificence,  
[...]  
Continually woven in the Looms of Enitharmons Daughters  
In bright Cathedrons golden Dome with care & love & tears

(E123. 26[28]:31–36)

This body is likened to both a garden and a building; it is a reified vision of ‘forms of worship’ (E38. PL.11). Cathedron has a ‘golden Dome,’ gesturing towards the similarity between its name and ‘cathedral.’ Not only is Cathedron the location of the looms, but this extra detail connects a symbol of institution with the emanations who create the laws of such places.

This Generated Body is in continuous flux and it echoes the growth of the Polypus. Here, Blake shows that ‘beings *live* by complicit coproduction of the discursive and symbolic constraints that give them viable form [...] the biological life of the body cannot be summoned as a source of pure “ontopoetic power” to resist disciplinary organization.’<sup>87</sup> Goldstein draws on

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<sup>86</sup> Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 165.

<sup>87</sup> Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 171.

‘the heroic, idealist myth of self-generation’ in *The Book of Urizen* to make her case, but it is clear that Enitharmon’s daughters also partake in this movement in *Milton*.<sup>88</sup> The Generated Body and the concept of Generation itself is one of self-propagation, where the emanations are both weavers and the woven product of their actions. Urizen’s self-organisation is enacted through petrification and ossification, but with the emanations, self-organisation becomes a means of reformulating existing structures. We see this in greater detail in *Jerusalem* where ‘the Religion of Generation which was meant for the destruction/Of Jerusalem, become her covering, till the time of the End’ (E150. 7:63–64). The apocalyptic framing of Generation in textile form transforms Religion into a shroud, another recurring motif detailed in *Jerusalem*.

The grotesqueness of Gray’s Norse Odes becomes part of Blake’s re-imagining of the corporeal form and its conceptual limits. Gray’s Fatal Sisters craft nets from literal bodily excess which is also visible in Blake’s treatment of the emanations, though Blake’s women-bodies also come to embody specific conditions that prevent the body from coming together. The emanations also demonstrate the various problems in conceiving a complete body politic. They are just as unidentifiable and unknowable as Urizen as well as abjections that further prevent the formation of an able-body politic. The woman-body becomes a transformative space where different models of restriction are enacted and embodied. Weaving becomes the method through which the emanations create the literal fabric and systems of the world they inhabit. Blake’s emanations emerge from the same system as the cycles they propagate, and as such they emphasise the problematic nature of Urizen’s institutions. *Jerusalem* picks up the ideas explored in *Milton*, further developing the cycles of fatalism, disease, and sacrifice that affect the body politic. In this illuminated book, Albion’s body seemingly comes together, but I suggest that it does not achieve a final form. Instead, the ‘national body’ in *Jerusalem* is in constant jeopardy, partly because of the vindictive emanations. The foundations of this conflict are developed in *Milton* to be then consolidated in Blake’s final illuminated book.

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<sup>88</sup> Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 173.

## IV. Albion, the Universal Man

### The Diseased & Deformed Body Politic

*Jerusalem* explores a pseudo-historical British antiquity through a myriad of aberrant, suffering, and fatalistic forms that come together as an assemblage. It is in Albion, the Universal Man, that we find the clearest vision of the Blakean body as a space where wholes react to their component parts and do not result in ‘a seamless totality.’<sup>1</sup> This final illuminated book critiques the ‘functionality’ of the nation state through Albion who becomes a vehicle for questioning what is necessary for state formation. The different components of Albion’s form simultaneously propagate and destroy his diseased and deformed body politic, thus revising this political trope. The poem takes on the Biblical apocalyptic trope in a way that Frosch believes details ‘the process of redemption’ that leads to a resurrection and unity, where ‘spiritual and sexual are indistinguishable; indeed the risen body subsists in their new identity.’<sup>2</sup> Although he notes that ‘renewal for Blake is not a transcendence but a reorganization of the given,’ he maintains that Albion’s body is renovated and as such unites under a new form.<sup>3</sup> Whittaker argues that although *Jerusalem* is enigmatic, there are four clear sections and narrative progression that ends with Albion’s return to the Divine.<sup>4</sup> Albion’s body, then, is typically read as one that moves towards salvation or a unified whole, with the narrative recounting the fall, trials, and re-emergence of Albion through familiar Blakean motifs. However, a closer examination of Albion’s body reveals some resistance to the idea of ‘perfection’ or unified restoration. The poem instead questions traditional ableist body politic models to reveal that attempts at apocalyptic renewal cannot reform the oppression that lies at the heart of the nation. This re-imagining of Albion’s corporeality complicates any sort of movement towards a physical or spiritual transcendence.

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<sup>1</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 118–19.

<sup>2</sup> Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion*, 88, 173.

<sup>3</sup> Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Whittaker, *Divine Images*, 289.

Fallon suggests that '*Jerusalem* continues Blake's efforts to demystify state religion and superstition, now more self-consciously in the service of a Christian vision,' further proposing that throughout the poem, Blake 'transforms the idea of personal apotheosis into collective Christian deification, imagining in Jesus a non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, and universal form in which humans truly live together.'<sup>5</sup> It is true that *Jerusalem* clearly advocates a Christian vision, but I would add that due to Blake's syncretic practices, the presence of other cultural myths in the poem also deserve as much attention. By reading the poem through alternate cultural frameworks, this 'non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, and universal form' is further examined. Fallon's reading, while insightful and productive, is an extension of his claim that Blake's body politics point towards renewal, where 'a sublime utopian body politic combining unity and heterogeneity, dynamic energy, and harmony' is being formed.<sup>6</sup> While I agree with Fallon's observations on the heterogeneity of form, I want to counter-propose that the idea of a universal or collective form is somewhat more ambiguous than he proposes. In light of Blake's Northern antiquarianism, the body does not move towards completion. The potential for utopia may be present, but Albion's body, I argue, is more open-ended than we might initially believe.

Albion is an iteration of the Blakean body in that he exists within the diegesis of the poem while forming the framework of the world that is being explored. He is a deformed body politic that critiques a British nationhood by developing the different aberrant bodies found in earlier illuminated books. The unknowable and unbodied form, first discovered in *The Book of Urizen*, is captured by the Spectres who problematise a congruent body politic. Blake reinvents the models of suffering, sacrifice, and priestcraft found in *The Book of Ahania* by revisiting the Druid motif to explore the disfiguring of Albion. The role of the emanations in both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is relatively the same: the woman-body remains a powerful tool of intervention. However, in *Jerusalem* the emanations work within the nation's body, thus their fatalistic and vindictive mediation becomes part of the re-invention of a 'British' body politic.

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<sup>5</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 252.

<sup>6</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 237.

Albion epitomises the effects of resisting or submitting to failing national systems, and so it is tempting to read *Jerusalem* as a sequence of allegories on contemporary events, such as one proposed by Erdman who reads the poem as an allegory for the Napoleonic wars. He argues that ‘the motif of *Jerusalem* is *Peace without vengeance*, and Waterloo appears not as a time of last judgement but as one more bonfire of Druid slaughter lighting up the solitary figure of the poet meditating on man’s “criminal” inhumanity.’<sup>7</sup> Beyond strict allegorical readings, scholars such as Catherine McClenahan propose that ‘Blake creates Albion and related personifications to explore the social construction of individual, familiar, national, and imperial identity imaged as masculine in conservative English writers,’ while for Steve Clark, Blake’s anti-Catholicism turns *Jerusalem* into a ‘dystopian vista of church-empire dominating Western culture,’ where Albion’s disease represents religious imperialism in need of evangelical regeneration.<sup>8</sup> According to Fallon, the poem reveals a choice between ‘a civilised form of liberal patriotism personified by Jerusalem, and an allegiance to the militarised nation-state, the spectral shadow Vala,’ but this distinction remains unclear when liberty merges with a militant intervention.<sup>9</sup> Although it may be that ‘Albion’s body is an index of the health of the body politic,’ the proposition that Albion becomes a ‘vigorous body politic’ by the end of the poem is not so apparent.<sup>10</sup> Upon closer examination, there is renewal, but this does not always equate to a final end. Moving away from the more explicit Christian interpretations, then, a re-examination of Albion through Blake’s Northern antiquarianism reveals a body politic that is ambiguous in its final form; it remains unfinished.

Whittaker argues that Blake, in line with the general period’s later antiquarianism, ‘encouraged a sense of unity away from regional identities and towards the nation state [...]

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<sup>7</sup> Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, 427.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine McClenahan, ‘Albion and the Sexual Machine: Blake, Gender and Politics, 1780–1795,’ in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, Christopher Hobson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 301; Steve Clark, ‘*Jerusalem* as Imperial Prophecy,’ in *Blake, Nation, and Empire*, ed. Steve Clark and David Worrall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 170, 177.

<sup>9</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 257–58.

<sup>10</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 267–68.



Albion henceforth became a definite *thing*.<sup>11</sup> This mid to late-eighteenth century English antiquarianism strove to merge disparate cultures through linguistic and etymological connections. The unity pinpointed by Whittaker might establish Albion as an identifiable thing, but this does not mean he is exclusive in form. A way in which Blake explored this was through the epic form, a style often linked with the reinvention of Britishness. *Jerusalem* was composed and printed between 1804 and 1820, a time where there was a renewed interest in the epic form and its relationship with antiquity. For example, both Joseph Cottle and Southey adopted the epic genre to examine and revitalise antique histories, some of which were rooted in Britain. Southey's 1805 historical epic *Madoc* follows the titular figure, a legendary Welsh prince who sailed to America during the twelfth century. In the previous year, Cottle published *Alfred* which was written in the Homeric style. *Jerusalem* subverts the form to question the discrepancies within Albion's corporeality, consequently refuting an able-body politic. Institutions such as religion, law, and war, prevent cogent union between the personified British nations who reside within Albion himself. The poem then questions the concept of 'Britishness' by exploring a fragmented body politic metaphor.

Although Colley states that we cannot 'interpret the growth of British national consciousness in this period in terms of a new cultural and political uniformity,' she maintains that 'a unitary political discourse was able to emerge.'<sup>12</sup> This renewed sense of nationhood, she argues, persisted throughout the eighteenth-century through the development of shared identities such as religion.<sup>13</sup> Blake seems to critique this vision of 'Britishness' in *Jerusalem* where there is a body that resists unification. This reinforces what Mark Trevor Smith sees as 'the fundamental paradox, pervasive in Blake,' that is, 'disaster and blessing are inextricable; the fallen and the visionary, although opposed, cannot be separated.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 363, 373.

<sup>13</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 363.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Trevor Smith, 'Striving with Blake's Systems,' in *Blake and his Bibles*, ed. David Erdman (West Cornwall, Connecticut: Locust Hill Press, 1990), 158.

*Jerusalem* exhibits a sustained engagement with Northern antiquarianism by refashioning earlier Norse-inspired motifs, this time in relation to Albion. The interaction between oppositions is captured within a vision of an Apocalypse, but one which I suggest is coloured by Norse tradition. The Ragnarök resonances in the poem add ambiguity and fragmentation, highlighting the ways in which Albion's body politic resists completion. When the different internal components—the zoas, emanations, and spectre—attempt to fashion a stable form, the exterior boundaries of Albion's body force them to face a problematic corporeality. The narrative revolves around a diseased and deformed body politic that eventually also becomes apparent to Albion himself:

[...] drivn forth by my disease  
All is Eternal Death unless you can weave a chaste  
Body over an unchaste Mind! [...]  
(E166. 21:10–12)

While 'weave' reiterates the idea of creativity bound up with restriction, the passage in fact draws attention to the juxtaposition between 'chaste/unchaste' and 'Body/Mind.' By bringing to the forefront the physical-spiritual duality that is continually contested throughout Blake's poetry, Albion's solution is revealed as questionable. The 'Body' is indicative of a system that echoes Los' earlier desire to arrange and organise something that is impossible to contain. The 'Body/Mind' juxtaposition exposes a subversive falsity: a woven body—a system—to control the mind will merely cover the blemishes rather than tackling the infection at the core. The alliterative dental consonant, 'drivn,' 'disease,' and 'Death,' successively captures a degenerative movement, linking together the energy, subject, and consequence while also emphasising the futility of this decaying body politic.

Albion's problems are, quite simply, rooted in a disease that manifests and deforms the body politic. Wright argues that 'disease is a powerful metaphor for the vehicle by which hybridity is generated,' and develops Colley's view to assert that Blake wants to 'fictively generate a New Jerusalem that assimilates rather than, as in earlier works, celebrates,

difference.<sup>15</sup> Although the motif does gesture towards a composite body politic, *Jerusalem* does not assimilate difference. Instead, I suggest that Blake uses the motif to explore a ‘British’ nationhood that is unattainable. The body in *Jerusalem* remains consistent with its representation in the other illuminated books in that it is transitional. As I will discuss, the body’s final form and the moments leading up to this end continue to subvert and challenge the able-body politic model, and consequently, a vision of a unified British nation.

### ***Blake’s Apocalypse: Ragnarök, the Spectres, & Vala***

The biblical Apocalypse, as found in the Book of Revelation, provides useful direction in approaching *Jerusalem*’s symbolism. However, like to the Genesis narrative with Urizen’s body, the Apocalypse does not fully account for all of Albion’s attributes. The trajectory of the biblical narrative does not comfortably map onto *Jerusalem*, especially since it moves towards a final reunion with God:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: [...] And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.<sup>16</sup>

The Millennium begins with re-integration, where the Divine and humanity cohabit a new earth in the moment of transcendence. In this reunion, men successfully become ‘one body in Christ,’ as preached by Apostle Paul.<sup>17</sup> It advocates a sort of transcended finality which is a suggested outcome in *Jerusalem* but is, I argue, not presented as an actuality for Albion.

Unlike *The Book of Urizen*, *Jerusalem* does not address the specifics of the Pauline body politic, but instead Blake challenges the necessary steps set out in the Bible to reunite with God: ‘he who waits to be righteous before he enters into the Saviours kingdom, the Divine

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*, 137, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Rev. 21:1–3.

<sup>17</sup> Rom. 12:5.

Body; will never enter there' (E145. 3: 'To the Public'). In doing so, the poem's narrative explores an alternate Apocalypse that does not end in a complete renewal of body and spirit. In the Book of Revelation, there is no explicit description of degenerating bodies, and the Christian dualism privileges a spiritual change to the complete transcendence of a physical body. The relationship between the spiritual and the corporeal in *Jerusalem* is not that simple and is far more ambiguous. Alternatively, the events of Ragnarök have distinct similarities to Blake's own apocalyptic vision, as it advocates a more indefinite relationship between the physical and spiritual in its resolution. *Northern Antiquities* situates Ragnarök within a body: 'In that great day all the inferior Divinities, whether good or bad, shall fall in one great conflict back again into the bosom of the Grand Divinity; from whom all things have proceeded, as it were emanations of his essence, and who will survive all things.'<sup>18</sup> It is a scenario that develops from the hierarchical organisation of the Æsir as subaltern deities and emanations subsumed under a Supreme Being, a delineation clearly driven by Percy's Christian views. In this light, Ragnarök is an event where independent parts reunite within a greater spiritual Divine body to wage war and eventually fall apart.

In an extended note, Percy explains at great length his belief that Ragnarök is an iteration of Stoic doctrine:

[The Æsir] were not to be absolutely annihilated; but to be once more reunited, by dissolution, to the soul of the world; being resolved and melted into that intelligence of fire, into that eternal and universal principle, from which they had originally been emanations.<sup>19</sup>

Here is a clear alternative to the biblical Apocalypse, where a divine body politic exists through the interaction of different parts rather than through transcendence and renewal. The reunion of emanations and deities occurs through 'dissolution,' and the bodies dissolve—melt—into 'intelligence of fire' and an 'eternal and universal principle.'

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<sup>18</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 171–73.

A play on the apocalyptic trope, destruction becomes the mode of preservation to foreshadow the inevitable fall of Albion and his relapse into further devastation. As an alternate apocalypse, I suggest that the friction between the subaltern deities and the subsequent events of Ragnarök are present in the development of Albion. *Jerusalem* develops forms that embody systems part of the body politic, the consequences of which finally come to light:

In anguish of regeneration! in terrors of self annihilation:  
Pity must join together those whom wrath has torn in sunder,  
And the Religion of Generation which was meant for the destruction  
Of Jerusalem, become her covering, till the time of the End.

(E150. 7:61–64)

Generation, as previously discussed, is a synecdoche representing postlapsarian history.<sup>20</sup>

Although this Religion is supposed to destroy Jerusalem, it instead becomes a covering which implies protection, but considering earlier descriptions of covers and woven fabrics the motif would suggest otherwise. The ‘Religion of Generation’ is another attempt to stabilise an unstable Blakean body. It is yet another development of Urizen’s ‘Net of Religion’ and further anticipates Albion’s speech about weaving a chaste Body for an unchaste mind. As such, this ‘covering’ could be a protective garment transformed into a shroud—another recurring motif—or a disguise that hides true religion. This in turn gestures towards the self-destructive nature of Albion’s systems. After hiding Jerusalem, Albion’s suffers the ‘terrors of self annihilation.’ Although the principle itself often seems positive in Blake, the casting away of ego-selfhood to discover freedom separate from a fixed nationhood exacerbates the ruptures within the body politic.

Blake’s aversion to religious laws that are understood as universal systems is clearly presented in *The Book of Urizen*, but while Urizen’s corporeality questions what it means to be created or have a creation narrative, Albion’s body expands on already extant structures. The Spectres take on a Urizenic semblance and convey the ramifications of perpetuating universal organisation. Their appearance within *Jerusalem* problematise the conception of the body as a

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<sup>20</sup> Goldstein, ‘William Blake and the Time of Ontogeny,’ 166.

complete and unified entity. Like the emanation, the Spectre emerges with the division of good and evil and it represents rational Selfhood. In *Milton*, it is described as a ‘Negation’ or a ‘false Body’ (E142. 40[46]:34–35); it is an abstraction that exists within another form. Fallon argues that the Spectre functions like a contrary, while Connolly offers an alternate definition where it is the ‘material human body,’ and as such its function ‘as the working agent of the human appears alongside the possibility of the spectre being less deluded than the human he separated from.’<sup>21</sup> If we are to accept Connolly’s interpretation, we face another paradox. ‘Spectre’ itself evokes an unbodiedness and a certain unknowability—much like Urizen or Ahanian—and particularly during the eighteenth century, the term would have been more associated with ghostliness than physicality.<sup>22</sup> This obscurity is at odds with its symbolic value as a ‘material human body.’ While at first this tension feels counter-intuitive, these two aspects of the Spectre in fact help define the Blakean body as incoherent.

Albion’s Spectre exemplifies Urizenic law, not only as a disruptive presence, but as an actively self-destructive component. It is ‘A murderer of its own Body: but also a murderer/Of every Divine member: it is the Reasoning Power’ (E153. 10:12–13). The repetition of ‘murderer’ frames and reiterates the ruinous nature of the Spectre who targets ‘its own Body.’ The description marks both the literal limits of the line and, through enjambment, pulls readers away from the larger scale of Albion’s body to the detail of ‘every Divine member.’ The Spectre’s self-destructiveness continues when:

Los took his globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions  
Bosom, [...]  
And saw every Minute particular of Albion degraded & murderd  
But saw not by whom; [...]  
(E194. 45[31]:3–8)

The loopback between ‘every Divine member’ and ‘every Minute Particular’ reiterates Albion’s murder, which in turn challenges the Universal Man as a coherent body politic. Los’ exteriority

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<sup>21</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 252; Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 167–68.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Spectre, n.s.’ *A Dictionary of the English Language. Johnson’s Dictionary Online*.

emphasises Albion's body as a vessel where different members of the body politic confront each other in violent conflict, much like the 'inferior Divinities' in Percy's version of Ragnarök.

The Spectre emphasises the inconsistencies within the Blakean body. Urizen, as discussed earlier, is an example of an illogical form where he is both the darkness and yet a physical entity existing within that same darkness. Similarly, Albion exists within others, only for them to exist as parts of himself. A narrator declares at the beginning of *Jerusalem*, 'Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:[...] Ye are my members O ye sleepers of Beulah, land of shades!' (E146. 4:19–21). There is a clear biblical resonance with Jesus who, after feeding the five thousand, explains that 'whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.'<sup>23</sup> The compounding of bodies within each other creates a paradox within Christian orthodoxy and was part of antinomian—perhaps even specifically Moravian—thought, where followers believed that through a 'justification by faith,' they were already redeemed within Christ's body and did not have to obey moral or natural laws.<sup>24</sup> In response, Albion 'away turns down the valleys dark;/[Saying. *We are not One: we are Many, thou most simulative*]' (E146. 4:22–23). Albion's answer is deleted on the plate, with the words only faintly visible on the 1827 Copy F (fig.17). Reconstructed by Erdman, if we take this to be a fairly accurate restoration of the text, Albion refutes a vision of unity. The literal absence of line, however, renders the voice almost silent and spectral; it embodies Albion's attempt to turn away which is consequently denied.

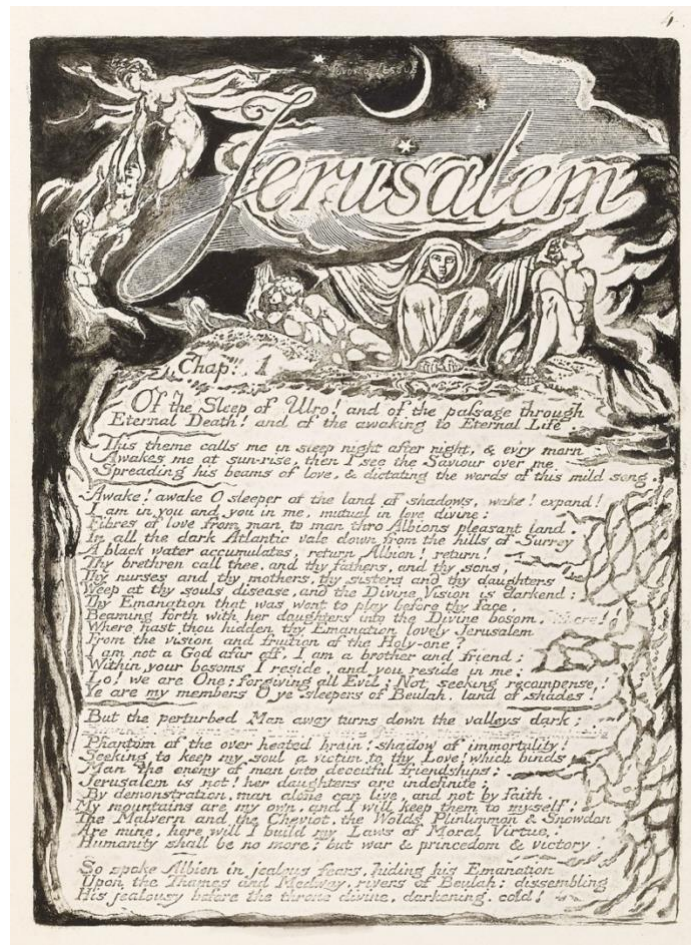
Despite his insistence that '*we are Many*,' the different components of Albion's body politic merge, though not to much positive effect. He is a nation state without an organic form where each part is intrinsic to each other, meaning that the replication of internal figures does not necessarily equate to a homogenising of the body. Rather, it becomes a precursor to further

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<sup>23</sup> John 6:54–56. A similar sentiment is found in John 15, where 'Abide in me, and I in you' is repeated in different ways.

<sup>24</sup> Keri Davies and David Worrall, 'Inconvenient Truths: Re-historicizing the Politics of Dissent and Antinomianism,' in *Re-envisioning Blake*, ed. Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude, and Angus Whitehead (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45.

devastation. Just like when Los mimics Urizen's deformity, the now familiar phrase 'he became what he beheld' (E97. 3:29) is scattered throughout *Jerusalem* to intensify the failing attempts at formulating a cohesive body politic. For example, when the Daughters of Albion divide Luvah into three bodies in sacrifice, 'They looked on one-another & became what they beheld' (E177. 30[34]:50). Later, all those who see Reuben's dismembered and deformed body 'fled howling and gnawed their tongues/For pain: they became what they beheld[.]' (E178. 32[36]:8–9). Mimicry reimagines the internalised experience into an external physical transformation. The decline of the body, as advanced by these transfigurations, crucially develop Albion and his role as the Universal Man, only to undermine a universality or a 'whole' form.



**Figure 17:** William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Copy F (c.1827), Plate 4. Relief and white-line etching with hand colouring.

Morgan Library and Museum. © The William Blake Archive.

In *Jerusalem*, Blake advocates for an open-ended body; he refutes the correlation between unity and a desirable outcome. The later illuminated books explore the impact of a



Urizenic system on a larger scale, and so although the Spectre disrupts the internal arrangement of the body, it is Albion himself who is the problem. As a being made by others, but also the landscape itself, the Universal Man is a self-destructive body politic. When the Family Divine look to Albion, they are ‘Strucken with Albions disease they become what they behold;/They assimilate with Albion in pity & compassion’ (E187. 39[44]:32–33). Their assimilation, described as ‘pity & compassion,’ does not necessarily mean unity. They remain separated from their Emanations and Spectres, and ‘The Slumbers of Death came over them around the Couch of Death [...] among the Oaks of Albion’ (E187. 39[44]: 35–37). Their ‘pity & compassion’ does not result in renewal or transcendence. Instead, this occurs in a setting once again evocative of a druidic grove, and assimilation is recast as a mode of self-destruction.

Los’ description of the Spectre further reveals the impact of this assimilation. In response to Ulro and the vegetating world, Los despairs: ‘Why dost thou thunder with frozen Spectrous wrath against us?/The Spectre is, in Giant Man; insane, and most deform’d’ (E179. 33[37]:3–4). The language here—‘insane’ and ‘deform’d’—is ableist, but in light of Joshua’s alternate terms ‘capacity’ and ‘incapacity,’ the Spectre’s deformity denotes the disconnect between mind and body. This then emphasises the Spectre’s incapacity; it has no role within this body politic.<sup>25</sup> If there is such a thing as a unified body politic in *Jerusalem*, it aesthetically challenges conventional understandings of what the body should be. Albion functions as Quayson believes disability or aesthetic nervousness symbolically enacts; he ‘returns the aesthetic domain to an active ethical core that serves to disrupt the surface of representation.’<sup>26</sup>

After Los’ speech, Albion falls asleep, leading to a familiar trope: the petrified body. Petrification or ossification is a key motif in all of the illuminated books, beginning with Urizen who petrifies as an act of self-preservation to then reify his self-made systems. When Milton becomes Mount Sinai, he embodies the detrimental effects of Urizen’s laws. When the Sixfold Miltonic Female transmutes into the seven rocks of Midian, they reveal their powers of

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<sup>25</sup> Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 19.

generation. In all these examples, the lithic form is an attempt to stabilise the body and reify the systems at play. Albion undergoes a similar physical transformation:

His face and bosom with petrific hardness, and his hands  
And feet, lest any should enter his bosom & embrace  
His hidden heart; [...]

(E179. 34[38]:1–3)

The petrification becomes a ‘revengeful covering’ (E179. 33[37]:12) and its purpose is to fix the physical limitations of Albion’s body. The alliterative ‘His hidden heart’ conclusively determines an inability to view or understand Albion when his emotional and physical capacities become closed off from the world. This inwardness, however, is not just a protective measure: it signals an apocalyptic transition where death presupposes a new reality.

At this point, Vala appears and her aggression provides the narrative’s driving force when she transforms petrification into a means of preservation. Lucy Cogan has suggested that Blake attempts to deal with the failure of his visionary project in the 1790s by creating Vala as the ‘seductive but deceptive temptress “false hope”.’<sup>27</sup> Frye follows Stenberg’s suggestion that Vala is named after *Völuspá*, and Morton Paley believes that one of Vala’s prototypes could be ‘the goddess Vala in the Elder Edda,’ though no such deity exists.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that her name has etymological origins in ‘völva,’ which we know to mean ‘prophetess’ or ‘seeress,’ as it was also translated by eighteenth-century antiquarians. Certainly, a Nordic context for Vala is invoked by the fact she appears with ‘Thor & Friga’ among ‘Chaotic Rocks of the Druids/Where the Human Victims howl to the Moon’ and ‘Dance the dance of death’ (E214. 63:8–10).

Vala weaves with the Daughters of Albion to create bodies:

So sang she: and the Spindle turnd furious as she sang:  
The Children of Jerusalem the Souls of those who sleep  
Were caught into the flax of her Distaff, & in her Cloud

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<sup>27</sup> Lucy Cogan, *Blake and the Failure of Prophecy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 159.

<sup>28</sup> Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 270; Morton Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake’s Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 189.

To weave Jerusalem a body according to her will

(E237. 80:32–35)

Instead of a net or veil, she catches the Children by weaving them into flax and cloud. This woven garment becomes the material world as the Atlantic begins ‘to Vegetate & Petrify/Around the Earth of Albion. among the Roots of his Tree’ (E208. 59:3–4). Prior to this moment though, Vala murders and embalms Albion, presenting destruction as an act of preservation:

But I Vala, Luvahs daughter, keep his body embalmd in moral laws

With spices of sweet odours of lovely jealous stupefaction:

Within my bosom, lest he arise to life & slay my Luvah

(E236. 80:27–29)

Emulating traditional embalming processes with spices and oils, ‘moral laws,’ and ‘jealous stupefaction,’ the body remains in stasis, but this petrified form, it turns out, is unsustainable.

### ***Universal Disease: Leprosy, Systems, & the Patriarchal Body***

Disease is a persistent agent of disintegration that causes the body politic to break down even further. Jennifer Davis Michael asserts that Albion ‘is indeed sick, but his sickness is the consequence of division and alienation among members, not contamination of one group by another.’<sup>29</sup> Further to this, disease breaks down the body politic by proliferating corruption through the network of beings that reside within Albion. In a discussion of ‘the rhetorical trick of figuring political subjects as incorporated and united into a single body,’ Catherine Packham suggests that a body politic transforms ‘those who might be considered as radically at odds into constitutive parts of a unified whole, achieving an expression of corporeality or aggregation in the face of seeming difference.’<sup>30</sup> In light of *Jerusalem*, Blake seems to suggest that this ‘trick’ was hard to sustain in practice.

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<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Davis Michael, ‘The Corporeal City in Blake’s *Milton* and *Jerusalem*,’ *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 29, (2000): 109.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 98.

Albion's compromised body generates minor disruptions that then initiate larger upheavals: the interdependence of different functions, in Joshua's terms, breaks down. Take the end of Chapter One in *Jerusalem*, for example, where the poem looks beyond England:

In the Exchanges of London every Nation walkd  
And London walkd in every Nation mutual in love & harmony  
Albion coverd the whole Earth, England encompassed the Nations,  
Mutual each within others bosom in Visions of Regeneration;

(E170. 24:42–45)

The London Royal Exchange evokes the idea of London as the centre of global trade made famous by Addison's description of it as 'an Assembly of Country-men and Foreigners consulting together upon the private Business of Mankind, and making this Metropolis a kind of *Emporium* for the whole earth.'<sup>31</sup> Addison's idea of a *doux commerce* where nations are 'united together by their common Interest' is undercut in Blake's reworking by a darker vision of delusion.<sup>32</sup> The Anglo-centric body politic proposes itself as a universal structure in *Jerusalem*, but Blake subverts this Addisonian vision as a fiction. The mutual 'love & harmony' and 'Visions of Regeneration' noted here are illusions that mask an underlying violence and exploitation. The intense sequence of caesura and alliteration, 'Earth, England,' reveals an ironic narrowing of perception. The fate of the 'Exchanges of London' are part of Scotland's description of Albion's self-destruction and degeneration: 'but now no more/No more shall I behold him, he is close in Luvahs Sepulcher' (E170. 24:50–51).

Scotland feels the effects of this disintegration when Albion's 'snows fall on me and cover me, while in the Veil I fold/My dying limbs' (E169. 23:35–36). Snow imagery in *Milton*, as well as being associated with Norns and emanations, becomes an indicator of a specific type of disease:

First Milton saw Albion upon the Rock of Ages,  
Deadly pale outstretchd and snowy cold, storm coverd;

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Spectator, no. 69 (May 19, 1711),' in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, Vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 293.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Spectator, no. 69,' 294–95.

A Giant form of perfect beauty outstretchd on the rock  
In solemn death: [...]

(E109–110. 15[17]:36–39)

The blizzard symbolises infection as a mode of circulating death. This is perhaps an early example of Albion's desire to 'weave a chaste/Body over an unchaste Mind,' but it is also evocative of a skin condition. Wright argues that 'while anyone who is healthy fully embodies the definition of health, a patient with a disease never fully embodies the disease – one *is* healthy, and one *has* a disease.'<sup>33</sup> As such, Albion's disease is an infection that symbolises the law of nations founded on an Anglo-centric authority, and it manifests by spreading Urizenic systems across the body politic.

In 'The Everlasting Gospel,' a fragmentary and incomplete poem from Blake's notebook, entry F questions the concept of chastity as a manifestation of these systems:

Wherefore has[t] thou writ these Laws  
And Created Hells dark jaws  
My presence I will take from thee  
A Cold Leper thou shalt be  
Tho thou wast so pure & bright  
That Heaven was Impure in thy Sight

(E521. 'The Everlasting Gospel,' pgs.48–52 [f]:31–36)

In the Bible, leprosy is first mentioned in Exodus 4:6 when Moses receives his calling from God, 'Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow.'<sup>34</sup> In *Marriage*, Jesus breaks Mosaic law, 'I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules' (E43. 'A Memorable Fancy':PL.23–24). Contrary to biblical presentation, Jesus is a leper, and thus He embodies the oppressive nature of law itself.

In *Jerusalem*, though, this biblical nexus is complicated by a Nordic reference: 'The Sun fled from the Britons forehead: the Moon from his mighty loins:/Scandinavia fled with all

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Exod. 4:6.

his mountains filld with groans' (E169. 24:10–11).<sup>35</sup> The fleeing Sun symbolises nature's complete rejection of Albion, resonating with the beginning of Ragnarök, where 'Winter, during which the snow will fall from the four corners of the world: the frost will be very severe; the tempest violent and dangerous; and the sun will withdraw his beams.'<sup>36</sup> Darkness, in most traditions, is a signal of the end of times and in *Jerusalem*, this earlier episode is reproduced almost exactly in a later scene during a sacrifice:

[...] he is hurried afar into an unknown Night  
He bleeds in torrents of blood as he rolls thro heaven above  
He chokes up the paths of the sky; the Moon is leprous as snow:  
Trembling & descending down seeking to rest upon high Mona:  
Scattering her leprous snows in flakes of disease over Albion.

(E219. 66:76–80)

A leprous moon covers Albion with 'torrents of blood,' gesturing towards an apocalyptic scene. The gruesome vision echoes Urizen's body turning into the world, a connection further emphasised when Albion's own body becomes the landscape.

The moon seeks respite 'upon high Mona,' a reference that might seem strange, but can be linked to Gray and possibly Sayers. In 'The Triumphs of Owen: A fragment,' Gray takes inspiration from Evans Evans and describes Owen as 'The Dragon-Son of Mona.'<sup>37</sup> In Sayers' 'Moina: A Tragedy,' a chorus of bards identify the eponymous heroine as a child beloved by Frea: 'Three lingering drops of mead divine,/Thro' thy tender frame distilling,/They form'd thy snowy limbs to grace [...].'<sup>38</sup> The 'snowy' reference to Moina's complexion resonates with both Blake's leprous imagery and Jerningham's description of 'Three virgin forms in snowy vests

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<sup>35</sup> A connection between the Moon, leprosy, and disease can also be found in a letter to Thomas Butts: 'The Moon that glowd remote below/Became leprous & white as snow/And every Soul of men on the Earth/Felt affliction & sorrow & sickness & dearth' (E722. 'To Thomas Butts, (Nov 22, 1802)':73–76).

<sup>36</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 159; ['Mikil tiðindi eru þaðan at segja ok mǫrg. Þau in fyrstu at vetr sá kemr er kallaðr er fimbulvetr. Þá drífr snær ór ǫllum áttum. Frost eru þá mikil ok vindar hvassir. Ekki nýtr solar.']; 49]

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Gray, 'The Triumphs of Owen,' in *Poems by Mr. Gray. A New Edition*, London: Printed for B. Long, and T. Pridden. MDCCLXXI. [1771], 90.

<sup>38</sup> Frank Sayers, 'Moina: A Tragedy in Five Acts,' in *Dramatic Sketches*, London: printed for J. Johnson. MDCCXC. [1790], 33.

array'd' under Yggdrasil.<sup>39</sup> The spread of disease culminates in *Jerusalem* with the fleeing stars and withering world:

The Stars flee remote: the heaven is iron, the earth is sulphur,  
And all the mountains & hills shrink up like a withering gourd,  
As the Senses of Men shrink together under the Knife of flint,  
In the hands of Albions Daughters, among the Druid Temples.

(E219. 66:81–84)

The geographical transformation is apocalyptic and it merges with general sacrificial imagery where 'the Senses of Men shrink.' Alongside the vision of the heavens turning to iron and earth to sulphur, the appearance of 'Druid Temples' amplifies the ominous tone of the scene. It is, however, the Daughters in their priestly role who promote this changing environment. The movement of the stars echoes Jerningham's interpretation of Ragnarök: 'Say stars shall drop like glitt'ring gems of rain:/Say Fenris, bursting from his time-worn chains,/[...] Doom'd while the course of havoc he shall run.'<sup>40</sup> The falling stars motif in Blake, while also finding a precedent in the Bible, can also be situated comfortably alongside the Ragnarök narrative.<sup>41</sup>

Erin and Scotland voice their concerns when disease forces radical change in Albion's body. The agency given to the British nations delineates cultural and national difference, especially when Erin and Scotland do not celebrate a universal 'Britishness.' Instead, they bemoan the corruption caused by Albion's oppressive systems:

The Lungs, the Heart, the Liver, shrunk away far distant from Man  
And left a little slimy substance floating upon the tides.  
In one night the Atlantic Continent was caught up with the Moon,  
And became an Opaque Globe far distant clad with moony beams.

(E198. 49:17–20)

Erin describes her downfall that occurs due to her unfortunate association with Albion's dying body politic. It results in her own physical transformation: 'By Laws of Chastity and

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<sup>39</sup> Jerningham, *The Rise and Progress*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Jerningham, *The Rise and Progress*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> See: Isa. 34:4; Rev. 6:13; Mark 3:25; Joel 2:10.

Abhorrence I am witherd up' (E198. 49:26). Later, she describes the impact of Selfhood on the nation as 'Creeping in reptile flesh upon the bosom of the ground!' (E198. 49:33).

In a structure that emulates the Seven Corporeal Ages, Erin then lists the physical repercussions using almost epithetic variations of phrases found in earlier illuminated books:

The Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, closd up & dark,  
[...]  
The Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out  
True Harmonies, & comprehending great, as very small:  
The Nostrils, bent down to the earth & clos'd with senseless flesh.  
That odours cannot them expand, nor joy on them exult:  
The Tongue, a little moisture fills, a little food it cloyes,  
A little sound it utters, & its cries are faintly heard.

(E198. 49:34–41)

This list breaks the body into its disparate parts, and as a result, Albion's internal components are shown to collapse existing structures, only to re-form with new rules. This betrays a similar irony to Los who declares, 'I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans/I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create' (E153. 10:20–21). Los' desire to avoid one system by forming another relays a naivety, a belief that freedom exists outside of Albion's body only to become further trapped through his own designs.

Luvah—or Orc—is another example of a solution inadvertently damaging the body. As Albion's Spectre, Luvah's urge for radical reformation further harms the body politic. When the Universal Man falls ill, the Zoas and others succumb to a system that proliferates infection and disease. Luvah then propagates 'bloody veins in torments over Europe & Asia;/Not yet formed but a wretched torment unformed & abyssal/In flaming fire; [...]' (E210. 60:3–5), a scene that emulates Tirzah's torturous machinations when she 'ties the knot of bloody veins, into a red hot heart!' (E113. 19[21]:56). In other illuminated books, veins are closely connected to the disabling of a body with adverse effects, for example, in *America*:

Albion is sick. America faints! Enrag'd the Zenith grew.  
As human blood shooting its veins all round the orb'd heaven  
Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood



(E53. 4:4–6)

In *Europe*, veins form part of the imagery when describing the conflict between Urizen the guardian of oppressive laws, and Orc, the spirit of change:

The Guardian of the secret codes forsook his ancient mansion,  
Driven out by the flames of Orc; his furr'd robes and false locks  
Adhered and grew one with his flesh, and nerves & veins shot thro' them  
With dismal torment sick hanging upon the wind:

(E64. 12:15–18)

Otto suggests that in earlier poems, 'a too hasty appeal to a redemptive faculty power is likely to produce the disease it hopes to cure,' and this is arguably also the case in *Jerusalem* when Albion's cardiovascular system is subjected to rapid infection and inflammation.<sup>42</sup> Orc's prior attempts at dismantling Urizen's systems are countered in *Jerusalem* where Luvah—as part of Albion's fragmented body politic—exacerbates the problem.

Luvah's veins and the 'flaming fire' could refer to the fires of revolution and inspiration associated with Orc who is described in *America* as the 'fiery joy' (E54. 8:3) that destroys Urizen's laws. The imagery in *Jerusalem*, though, does not indicate radical change as it does not dismantle the systems in place. It is, in fact, an infection. Visualising the body as a network of parts, Mee maps cardiovascular systems onto Blake's poetry to show how 'deviations from the legitimate routes of circulation opened up either the prospect of corrupting infections or simply too much pressure destroying the system.'<sup>43</sup> In Albion, these deviations persist and destroy the existing body before reimagining it as a different sort of 'body.' Mee suggests that Urizen's desire to reify laws by encoding them into Nets establishes stability, but this inadvertently causes death and destruction because 'the natural order of circulation, is a product of framing.'<sup>44</sup> When reading Albion as an extension of Urizen's laws and world, this is most certainly the case.

Disease, while affecting the body's interior, also maintains a level of exteriority.

*America* provides many examples of this with 'Leprosy Londons Spirit' (E57. 15:3) and 'the

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<sup>42</sup> Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Mee, 'Bloody Blake: Nation and Circulation,' 64.

<sup>44</sup> Mee, 'Bloody Blake: Nation and Circulation,' 78–79.

Bard of Albion' who 'felt the enormous plagues./And a cowl of flesh grew o'er his head & scales on his back & ribs' (E57. 15:16–17). Occasionally, disease or leprosy is described in textile terms like in Leviticus 13, where fabrics and skins are treated in a similar fashion: 'This is the law for a case of leprous disease in a garment of wool or linen, either in the warp or the woof, or in any article made of skin.'<sup>45</sup> There is a clear parallel between the two descriptions, which in turn confirms Wright's observation that disease is not fully embodied. This is further developed in *Jerusalem*, where:

I saw the limbs form'd for exercise, condemn'd: & the beauty of  
Eternity, look'd upon as deformity & loveliness as a dry tree:  
I saw disease forming a Body of Death around the Lamb  
Of God, to destroy Jerusalem & to devour the body of Albion  
By war [...]

(E152. 9:7–11)

Los wants to establish a relationship with the husbandman, a figure representative of the masses, but the means of accomplishing this only aggravates the problem. With the recurrent shroud or covering imagery, sickness moulds itself 'around the Lamb/of God' in the form of Death. Thus, instead of a productive outcome, this body is cultivated by war, a codified establishment associated with the emanations in *Milton* and, more explicitly, Odin.

Albion does not initially recognise that it is his own sickness that grips the nation because his sense of self is removed from the body politic, of which he also belongs.

Nevertheless, this paradox allows for the other components of the body to intervene:

Thus Albion sat, studious of others in his pale disease:  
Brooding on evil: but when Los open'd the Furnaces before him:  
He saw that the accursed things were his own affections,  
And his own beloveds: then he turn'd sick! his soul died within him

(E189. 42:1–4)

The rapid repetition of personal pronouns—'him,' 'he,' 'his'—emulates Albion's panic once realising that he is not only part of the diseased system, but may be its origin. His reaction is

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<sup>45</sup> Lev. 13:59.

identical to Urizen's who, after attempting to create life, 'sicken'd to see/His eternal creations appear' (E81. 23:8–9). In fact, Albion continues to mirror Urizen who 'view'd his race' and:

[...] he curs'd  
Both sons & daughters; for he saw  
That no flesh nor spirit could keep  
His iron laws one moment.

(E81. 23:23–26)

The conflicted emotions and division of sons and daughters reveal a universe that is no longer unified under one body. Their failure is their literal inability to embody Urizen's solitary laws. Similarly, Albion 'turn'd sick' after recognising his role in his demise and his failure in resurrecting a unified nation body is explored in greater detail through his Sons and Daughters.

### ***The Sons of Albion: Vegetating Bodies & Fratricide***

When Albion recognises 'the accursed things' as a part of himself, he is not just a man or nation in this moment, but a patriarchal figure. As part of her discussion of tyrannical fathers in Gothic and Jacobin novels, Frances Chiu briefly notes that Blake was also interested in 'conflating political and religious despotism with paternal despotism.'<sup>46</sup> The idea that the father is 'an embodiment of a male patriarchy' and socio-political tyranny is not surprising, but Chiu recognises another pattern in Blake, where a jealous father—personifying anachronistic and antiquated laws—victimises a son.<sup>47</sup> As Paley suggests, 'the "death" of Albion is abetted by the activities of his Spectre Sons and terrible Daughters [...] emerging from him in order to attack and destroy him.'<sup>48</sup> Thus, while the relationship between Albion and his children is not so definitively hostile as that found in other Blake poems, there is a filial animosity that antagonises and further dismembering the body politic.

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<sup>46</sup> Frances Chiu, 'From Nobodaddies to Noble Daddies: Writing Political and Paternal Authority in English Fiction of the 1780s and 1790s,' *Eighteenth Century Life* 26, no. 2 (2002): 9.

<sup>47</sup> Chiu, 'From Nobodaddies to Noble Daddies,' 9–10.

<sup>48</sup> Paley, *The Continuing City*, 211.

Much like the Emanations, the Sons and Daughters of Albion have limited agency over whether or not to propagate actively oppressive institutions. They also participate in the now familiar recurring trope, where figures become creators of the systems that enslave them. As part of Albion's body, their internal conflict impacts the nation's body politic, especially when they become vehicles for Religion and War. When Albion exiles his children, they become like Fuzon, and are victimised by the very systems they uphold:

The Children must be sacrific'd! [...]  
 [...] unless a Refuge can be found  
 To hide them from the wrath of Albions Law that freezes sore  
 Upon his Sons & Daughters, self-exiled from his bosom  
 (E197. 48:58–61)

Albion's law negatively impacts their bodies when it 'freezes sore,' and the children are further 'self-exiled' despite being needed for sacrifice. All the while, 'Envy stood the enormous Form at variance with Itself/In all its members: in eternal torment of love & jealousy' (E223. 69:6–7). Connolly believes that the relationship between the 'enormous Form' and 'its Members' is Blake's way of revealing 'the dynamics of divisions and comminglings in sibling relationships, as well as the pain and antagonism which comes with reproduction.'<sup>49</sup> This sibling dynamic is particularly worth examining in greater detail, especially in light Ragnarök where family feuds and a struggle between the Æsir and giants both initiates and advances the Nordic Apocalypse.

In *Völuspá*, the völva foretells:

[...] I see further ahead to the mighty Doom of the Gods, of the victory-gods.  
 Brother will fight brother and be his slayer,  
 sister's sons will violate the kinship-bond;  
 hard it is in the world, whoredom abounds,  
 [...] before the world plunges headlong; no man will spare another.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*, 130.

<sup>50</sup> Trans. Larrington, 'The Seeress's Prophecy,' 9;  
*[Völuspá]*,  
 'fram sé ek lengra  
 um ragna røk  
 röm stigtíva.

A scene also found in Snorri's *Edda*, this passage reveals how Ragnarök is initiated by cycles of fratricide, an internal warring that begins prior to these verses when the blind god Höðr accidentally kills his half-brother Baldr. I propose that *Jerusalem* contains a similar fratricidal struggle between the Sons that destroys Albion.

In *Jerusalem*, the eradication of establishments only cultivates more oppression. It is worth nothing that Stukeley's view of British druidism as an early version of Christianity seems to be clearly visible in *Jerusalem*, where:

“All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore.” Your  
Ancestors derived their origin from Abraham, Heber, Shem, and Noah, who  
were Druids: [...] Albion was the Parent of the Druids

(E171. 27: ‘To the Jews’)

Druidism, as discussed earlier, was a loaded term that referred to a broad English history, rooting it in a complex blend of priesthood, the ancient cultures of the British Isles, and a strain of Scandinavian liberty. Here, the suggestion of a primal druidic form that encompasses all the nations and people of the world names Britain as the potential centre for the reunion of nations, ‘Was Britain the Primitive Seat of the Patriarchal Religion? [...] Ye are united O ye Inhabitants of Earth in One Religion’ (E171. 27: ‘To the Jews’). The druidic overtones to this declaration bring to the fore Blake's imagining of a fallen and unfallen version of the nation; here, Britain carries the potential for a religion that could be redeemed but also become a State Religion.

Wright suggests that Blake critiques a ‘political iconography that supported a particular brand of British nationalism – militarist, dutiful, self-sacrificing, imperial, and hungry for

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Bræðr munu berjask  
ok at bǫnum verðask,  
munu systrungar  
sifjum spill  
hart er í heimi,  
hórdómr mikill,  
[...]  
áðr veröld steypiskæ  
mun engi maðr  
qðrum þyrma.’; 302.]

glory.<sup>51</sup> The sustained druidic imagery in *Jerusalem* becomes an important tool to examine this 'brand of British nationalism.' The short poem found in 'To the Jews' explores the relationship between nation and sacrifice:

Where Albion slept beneath the Fatal Tree  
And the Druids golden Knife,  
Rioted in human gore,  
In Offerings of Human Life

(E172. 27:29–32)

The Fatal Tree's reappearance not only recalls hangings at Tyburn, but it also echoes Gray's Fatal Sisters, especially the druid's knife rioting 'in human gore.' The initial enjambment along with the grisly description expressed through a simple ABCB rhyme—'knife,' 'gore,' and 'life'—threads the sequence of events back to a sleeping Albion. Sleep as a common metaphor for death obscures his status, because if he is simply asleep, this scene becomes one of passive ignorance that makes him complicit in the ensuing sacrifice. If Albion is in fact dead, then he is presented as a victim of his own failures and trapped within a nightmarish dream, thus reinforcing the theme of a self-sabotaging body politic. It is this sort of ambiguity that is present throughout the poem.

The Children of Albion draw attention to the self-destructive cycle that surrounds the nation's body. For example, when Albion sleeps, Britain groans and shakes the Atlantic Mountains:

Cold snows drifted around him: ice coverd his loins around  
He sat by Tyburns brook, and underneath his heel, shot up!  
A deadly Tree, he nam'd it Moral Virtue, and the Law  
Of God who dwells in Chaos hidden from the human sight.

The Tree spread over him its cold shadows, (Albion groand)  
They bent down, they felt the earth and again enrooting  
Shot into many a Tree! an endless labyrinth of woe!

(E174. 28:13–19)

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*, 134.

The description of Albion here replays the fate of Urizen in *The Book of Ahania*. Urizen is also driven to tend his wounds under a Tree that turns into another ‘endless labyrinth of woe!’ (E87. 4:4). The parallels between Albion and Urizen are further consolidated when Urizen’s injury provokes the Tree to grow:

[...] under his heel:  
 [...]
   
Till the horrid plant bending its boughs
   
Grew to roots when it felt the earth
   
(E86–87. 3:62–66)

The similarity between these two scenes is unsurprising, but if *The Book of Ahania* examines the inauguration of Urizen’s laws, *Jerusalem* focuses on their dissemination.

The propagation of a Tree and its ‘Moral Virtue’ parallels the spreading of Albion’s children who militate positively against a unified body politic. The ‘enrooting’ envisioned throughout *Jerusalem* exposes this contradiction at the heart of Albion’s body, as proliferation becomes an agent of a unified body politic that tries to efface the Sons. Despite its single source, the Tree in both *Jerusalem* and *The Book of Ahania* springs into multiple offshoots—a grove—which then contests Urizen’s isolated system. In *Jerusalem* this further develops into a ‘labyrinth,’ implying that the role of ‘enrooting’ is to trap rather than aid those inside the body politic. Although the Daughters embody the more bellicose, violent druidism, the Sons are the ones who actively disseminate these laws to become the system of entrapment.

When the Tree of Moral Virtue grows around Albion, the Sons ‘become the first Victims, being the first transgressors’ (E174. 28:24), a victimisation prompted by their father who desires a ‘willing sacrifice of Self, to sacrifice of (miscall’d) Enemies/For Atonement’ (E174. 29:20–21). The Sons go on to embody the consequences of sacrifice, but they also manipulate the body in the process. In the ‘Song of the Lamb,’ Jerusalem is bound by the Divine Voice ‘upon the Stems of Vegetation’ (E210. 60:11). Hand, Scofield, and the counties:

They spread forth like a lovely root into the Garden of God:  
 They were as Adam before me: united into One Man,  
 They stood in innocence & their skiey tent reachd over Asia

(E210. 60:15–17)

The repetition of ‘they’ reinforces their collection of forms despite the fact that they are ‘united into One Man.’ Spreading like a ‘lovely root,’ the Sons do not promote freedom, but rather they advance the fall of humanity.

Albion’s Sons are associated with the Polypus, a vegetative, independent form constructed from a miscellany of bodies:

[...] the Twelve Sons of Albion

Enrooted into ever Nation: a mighty Polypus growing

From Albion over the whole Earth: such is my awful Vision.

(E159. 15:3–5)

Again, the nation enroots to develop a constricting network through the Polypus that is ‘nam’d Albions Tree’ (E219. 65:48). Fallon suggests that through the Polypus, ‘Albion’s warrior Sons become a formless parody of the Divine Humanity,’ and unlike an organic model, it is a ‘chaotic compound of living death, its male members continuously at war.’<sup>52</sup> They dissect a victim ‘with/Their cruel fingers for his heart’ (E218. 66:27–28), consequently transforming themselves, ‘their nostrils & tongues shrunk up/Their ear bent outwards’ (E218. 66:37–38); and eventually, ‘The human form began to be alterd by the Daughters of Albion’ (E219. 66:46), thus the Polypus becomes part of the body’s disintegration.

In response, the Sun and Heavens shrink ‘Away into the far remote: and the Trees & Mountains witherd/Into indefinite cloudy shadows in darkness & separation’ (E219. 66:51–52). This prelude to impending war is evocative of the Fatal Sisters, especially when the Daughters and stars:

Shout in the night of battle & their spears grow to their hands

With blood, weaving the deaths of the Mighty into a Tabernacle

For Rahab & Tirzah; till the Great Polypus of Generation covered the Earth

(E220. 67:32–34)

The Daughters might encourage the growth of the Polypus, but it is the Sons who unite in shadowy form to manifest disease within the Female body; they ‘Became a ravening eating

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<sup>52</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 261.



Cancer growing in the Female/A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death' (E223. 69:2–3). The destructive powers of a plant is also present in both the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri's *Edda* where Höðr kills Baldr with a shoot of mistletoe. This particular plant is mentioned twice in Blake's poetry, once in *Jerusalem* and a second in his drama *The Ghost of Abel* (printed 1822) which is an exploration of revenge, Atonement, and an 'intellectual attack on religion as retributive justice.'<sup>53</sup> In dialogue with Jehovah, Abel declares, 'Thou Human O Jehovah./By the Rock & Oak of the Druid creeping Mistletoe & Thorn/Cains City built with Human Blood [...]' (E272. 2:15–17). The biblical narrative merges here with Northern antiquities to augment the image of sacrifice and murder.

When Albion's Sons proliferate as a single root, this motif also implements aspects of Norse myth, specifically the role of Baldr's death in the instigation of Ragnarök. In Snorri's *Edda*, Baldr dreams of his death, prompting the Æsir to gather promises from nature to protect him, but they unfortunately overlook the mistletoe plant. Loki turns the mistletoe into a weapon, killing Baldr and initiating the fall of the Æsir. In *Völuspá*, the events unfold as follows:

From the stem which seemed so slender  
there came a dangerous grief-dart: Hod started to shoot;  
Baldr's brother was born quickly;  
Odin's son started killing at one night old.<sup>54</sup>

Váli is sired to avenge Baldr's death, which is considered in the *Poetic Edda* as Höðr's doing, emphasised by the alliteration in the original, 'harmflaug hættlig' (dangerous grief-dart). However, as Baldr's brother and therefore Höðr's half-brother, Váli propagates the fratricide that characterises Ragnarök.

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<sup>53</sup> Whittaker, *Divine Images*, 318.

<sup>54</sup> Trans. Larrington, 'The Seeress's Prophecy,' 8;

[*Völuspá*,  
'varð af þeim meiði  
er mæz sýndisk  
harmflaug hættlig,  
Höðr nam skjótae  
Baldrs bróðir var  
of borinn snemma,  
sá nam Óðins sonr  
einnætrr vega.']; 299.]

The act of vengeance is presented differently between the two sources: the *Poetic Edda* places more blame on Höðr while Snorri's *Edda* focuses on Loki's role.<sup>55</sup> Snorri recounts the events as found in the poem *Lokasenna* where Loki is the more active participant:

Then said Loki: "Follow other people's example and do Baldr honour like other people. I will direct you to where he is standing. Shoot at him this stick."

Hod took the mistletoe and shot at Baldr at Loki's direction. The missile flew through him and he fell dead to the ground, and this was the unluckiest deed every done among gods and men.<sup>56</sup>

Regardless of these differences, family discord—specifically fratricide—lies at the heart of Ragnarök, something further emphasised still when Loki is revealed to be Odin's blood brother: 'Do you remember, Odin, when in bygone days/we blended our blood together?'<sup>57</sup> Ragnarök becomes an event fabricated from cycles of punishment, continuing until the eventual eradication of the Æsir and reinstating of a new world.

When the Sons of Albion enroot and participate in sacrifice, the narrative exposes a constant re-formulation and breakdown of the body. As humanity attempts to regain control of their physical form, they fall into the same trap as Los when he attempted to create a body for Urizen. The humans 'labour to divide into Days/And Nights, the uncertain Periods: and into Weeks & Months' (E219. 66:68–69). 'Uncertain' is a pause that becomes a literal gap between 'Days/And Nights' and 'Weeks & Months.' This doubt foreshadows failure when 'They return not: but generate in rocky places desolate' (E219. 66:72). Earlier, the Sons and Daughters:

[...] seem remote and separate

<sup>55</sup> The nuance between sources can be attributed to different religious agendas, with Snorri's *Edda* being written after the Christianisation of Iceland. Höðr's position as a blind god also impacts the way vengeance is portrayed in both sources. See: Sharon Choe, "Hann var blindr": The Function of Disability in the Aftermath of Ragnarök, *Mirator* 20, no. 2 (2021): 5–20.

<sup>56</sup> Trans. Faulkes, 'Gylfaginning,' 48–49; ['Þá mælir Loki: "Gerðu þó í líking annarra manna ok veit Baldri sömð sem aðrir menn. Ek mun vísa þér til hvar hann stendr. Skjót at honum vendi þessum." Höðr tók mistiltein ok skaut at aldri at tilvísun Loka. Flaug skotit í gögnum hann ok fell hann dauðr til jarðar, ok hefir þat mest óhapp verit unnit með goðum ok mönnum.']; 46.].

<sup>57</sup> 'Loki's Quarrel,' in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 82; [*Lokasenna*, *Eddukvæði: Volume I Goðakvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 410; '„Mantu þat, Óðinn, er vit í árdaga/blendum blóði saman?"]

From each other; and yet are a Mighty Polypus in the Deep!  
 As the Mistletoe grows on the Oak, so Albions Tree on Eternity: Lo!  
 He who will not comingle in Love, must be adjoind by Hate  
 (E219. 66:53–56)

Pliny claimed that in Gaul, the mistletoe was gathered by the Druids and that 'their most sacred tree was the oak, and their most sacred plant or shrub the mistletoe found growing on an oak tree.'<sup>58</sup> Other than its association with the Druids, the mistletoe is also a parasitical plant that extracts nutrients from its host plant, and so here in *Milton*, this relationship of co-dependence and reaffirmation is recast in negative terms. The simile exemplifies the vegetative nature of interacting bodies within the 'Polypus in the Deep'; the privileging of 'Hate' rather than 'Love.'

Once again drawing on the ever-present disease motif, the internal conflict between the Sons manifests in physical damage, especially when:

In the terrible Family feuds of Albions cities & villages  
 To devour the Body of Albion, hungring & thirsting & ravning  
 [...]
   
 And every Human Vegetated Form in its inwards recesses  
 Is a house of ple[as]antness & a garden of delight [...]
   
 (E229. 73:47–51)

The capitalisation of 'Family' could refer to the Divine Family, but the sentence structure itself also obscures such a direct interpretation. I suggest that these 'Family feuds' could also refer to Albion's warring 'cities & villages.' Like Ragnarök, discord begins with family before developing into a self-devouring form and resulting in a breakdown of society.

As well as being physically compromised, Albion's mental state deteriorates near the end of Chapter Two when he becomes 'posess'd by the War of Blood! The Sacrifice/Of envy Albion is become' (E199. 50:8–9). The scene that follows shows Los weeping when 'the roots of Albions Tree enterd the Soul of Los' (E202. 53:4). This moment develops into a greater exposition on the entrapment of the 'Children of Los time after time' (E202. 53:7). The

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<sup>58</sup> Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 14.

offspring emulate Urizen's children who mutate: 'Their Giant Forms condensing into Nations & Peoples & Tongues' (E202. 53:8). This 'condensing' into disparate body parts and nations is no longer surprising as it seems that children are only able to emulate their parents.

Children are also moulded by their environment. In *Northern Antiquities*, Percy claims that ancient Norse culture prepared its children for war: 'Their eyes, from the moment they were first opened, saw nothing but military spectacles, arms, effusion of blood, and combats either real or in sport: thus as they grew up from their infancy, their souls were early disposed to imbibe the cruel prejudices of their fathers.'<sup>59</sup> The influence of an environment on a child's worldview explicitly noted here is also visible in the corporeal changes of the Children in Blake's poetry. This is especially the case when, for example, the Children of Los transform into microcosms; they are 'Seven-fold each within other: incomprehensible/To the Vegetated Mortal's Eye's perverted & single vision' (E202. 53:10–11).

The enrooting Sons embody the invasive nature of Albion's institutions. They also symbolise the decay that consumes the world like sacrificial fire:

The Gigantic roots & twigs of the vegetating Sons of Albion  
 Filld with the little-ones are consumed in the Fires of their Altars  
 The vegetating Cities are burned & consumed from the Earth:  
 And the Bodies in which all Animals & Vegetations, the Earth & Heaven  
 Were containd in the All Glorious Imagination are witherd & darkend;  
 (E198. 49:10–14)

Their vegetating bodies become encoded with a system that contributes to their demise and consequently the nation. The shrinking, withering, and darkening stresses the disintegration of Albion's Giants, that is mankind, and the diminishing of 'Glorious Imagination.' The burning cities echo the Apocalypse, but the additional 'Animals & Vegetations,' also transforms this scene into a sacrifice. The networks of internal strife, then, accelerate the degeneration of the world.

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<sup>59</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.1, 198.

The body politic decomposes when ‘The Lungs, the Heart, the Liver, shrunk away far distant from Man’ (E198. 49:17). When vegetation forms a false body, the landscape decays:

A threefold region, a false brain: a false heart:  
And false bowels: altogether composing the False Tongue,  
Beneath Beulah: as a watry flame revolving every way  
And as dark roots and stems: a Forest of affliction, growing  
In seas of sorrow. [...]

(E158. 14:5–9)

The body, transformed into ‘dark roots and stems,’ becomes a ‘Forest of Affliction.’ To vegetate means either to grow—usually in relation to plans—or to be figuratively inactive and stagnant.<sup>60</sup> The term is paradoxical and the body here does both to expand its deathly reach.

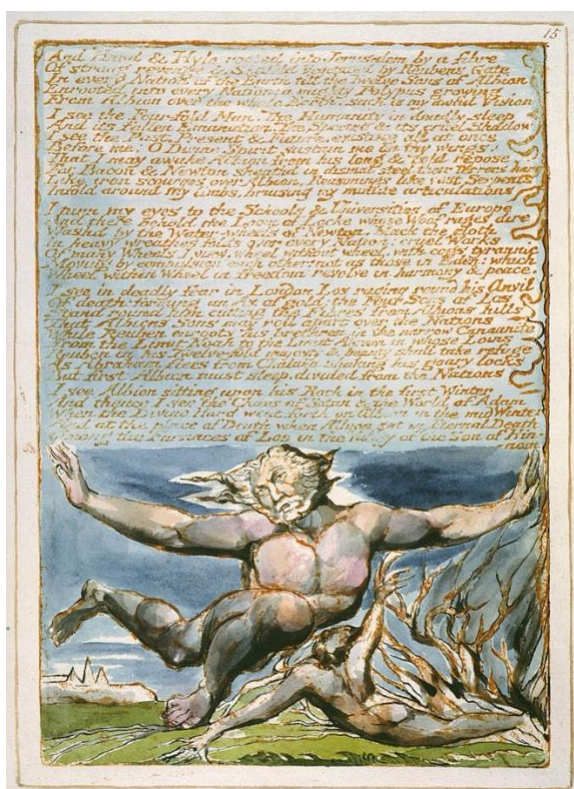
The design of Plate 15 is an example of the relationship between body, enrooting, and State Religion (fig.18). The larger figure, presumably Albion, takes up much of the plate. The figure underneath turns away as its body twists into fibres. It is visibly ‘enrooting,’ demonstrated by the left hand that grapples the earth with fingers that turn into roots. Branches seem to emerge from its body to travel up the margin and connect the figure to the lines: ‘And Hand & Hyle rooted into Jerusalem by a fibre/Of strong revenge’ (E158. 15:1–2). The background reveals buildings that are largely undefined but are framed by Albion’s feet. Even though spectral in presence, the church spire is visible, thus implying that this corporeal transformation is caused by State Religion.

There is another version of this enrooting in relation to the emanations on Plate 57 (fig.19). The women dominate the design with tendril-like fingers and limbs; the space feel almost claustrophobic. The design emulates a medieval *mappa mundi*, with a globe in the background which locates ‘London’ and ‘Jerusalem’ at each pole. This frames a textbox which questions ‘What is a Church?[...] Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion/O Demonstrations of Reason Dividing Families on Cruelty & Pride!’ (E207. 57:8–11). These two plates, then, reveal the Sons and Daughters as victims of their dissemination of

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Vegetate, v.1 and 6a,’ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

Albion's oppressive institutions. The Sons, especially, embody the movement of State Religion to reveal a contradiction within a body politic that purports to unite under one body but remains a dissonant network of independent components. Their self-destructive tendencies best embody the problems of institutionalised religion, and the Daughters then further expose the need for violence to achieve a version of a body politic that can function under these conditions.



**Figure 18:** William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Copy E (c.1821), Plate 15. Relief and white-line etching with hand colouring.

Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.



**Figure 19:** William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Copy E (c.1821), Plate 57. Relief and white-line etching with hand colouring.

Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

## ***The Daughters of Albion: Combustible Bodies & Venerating War***

The Book of Revelation does not explicitly mention war in relation to Apocalypse, with Armageddon only mentioned once in the whole Bible as a city.<sup>61</sup> Blake, on the other hand, presents a rather different relationship that is more in line with the *Edda* which describes:

<sup>61</sup> Rev. 16:16; a reference to the Apocalypse in Isa. 2:4 states, 'he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears are pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' This is reiterated in Joel 3:10; Mic. 4:3.

Three [Winters] shall follow, during which War and Discord will spread through the whole globe. Brothers out of hatred shall kill each other; no one shall spare either his parent, or his child, or his relations. See how it is described in the VÖLUSPÁ [...]<sup>62</sup>

In his notes, Percy definitively states that war and decay are a crucial part of Ragnarök: 'I have before observed that "the philosophers of the north" considered nature as in a state of perpetual labour and warfare [...] At last, a confusion of the seasons, with a long and preternatural winter, were to be the final marks of her decay.'<sup>63</sup> In *Jerusalem*, the institution of War is cultivated by the Daughters of Albion who maintain the fatalistic cycles initiated in *Milton*.

The Daughters become associated with 'the powerful, the coercive, and the violent,' something June Sturrock argues has 'a close contemporary parallel in the representations of French revolutionary violence that emerge from both revilers and supporters of the Revolution.'<sup>64</sup> Sturrock's specific focus on mythical female monsters pushes her to suggest that the re-casting of female power and chastity as oppression was part of Blake's 'rejection not just of an ancient and repressive moral code but of a new and revitalized manifestation of this code, which threatens to perpetuate in a new form a divisive and oppressive social structure.'<sup>65</sup> Whittaker develops this view in relation to druidic sacrifice, suggesting that as the Daughters gain power, they reinforce and are reinforced by religion, thus turning Stonehenge into 'the site of subordination of the male to the female.'<sup>66</sup> In view of Blake's Northern antiquarianism, the association between the Daughters and religion can move beyond a critique of chastity and sexual subordination, especially when they come to embody an ancient, specifically Norse, code of war.

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<sup>62</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 159–60; ['En áðr ganga svá aðrir þrír vetr at þá er um alla veröld orrostur miklar. Þá drepask bræðr fyrir ágirni sakar ok engi þýrmir fýður eða syni í manndrápum eða sífjasliti. Svá segir í Völuspá [...]' 49.]

<sup>63</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 168.

<sup>64</sup> June Sturrock, 'Maenads, Young Ladies, and the Lovely Daughters of Albion,' in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, Christopher Hobson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 339.

<sup>65</sup> Sturrock, 'Maenads, Young Ladies, and the Lovely Daughters of Albion,' 340.

<sup>66</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, 165.



The best depiction of the Daughters and their violent relationship with Albion is Plate 25 (fig.20). In this striking image, Albion kneels with his head twisting to the side as he leans in the lap of one of the Daughters who disembowel him. Similar to the women on Plate 57, the central Daughter's arms extend with what could either be veins, fibres, or tendrils; they sweep from her fingers in a veil or wing-like formation. The Daughter to the right cries while sitting on a block of stone, perhaps a sacrificial altar. She winds Albion's entrails into something that resembles a ball of wool, continuing the typical association between the emanations and weaving. This vivid scene is surprisingly bloodless, and yet it captures a grotesqueness within Albion's manipulated body. The violence is captured through Albion's position of subjugation, and it is the clearest vision of the destruction of the nation's body.



**Figure 20:** William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Copy E (c.1821), Plate 25. Relief and white-line etching with hand colouring.  
Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.



The association between the Daughters and the bellicose Fatal Sisters is furthered with the introduction of the Wicker Man. This particular motif in *Jerusalem* is an extension of the sacrifice and Druid motif. It only appears three times in Blake's work, the first being when Milton's Shadow 'appeared the Wicker Man of Scandinavia in whom/Jeruselems children consume in flames among the stars' (E137. 37[41]:11–12). In his essay on ancient Celtic language and culture, *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary* (1768), John Cleland discusses the collective burning of criminals in 'wicker Pageants.'<sup>67</sup> He tries to reassure his readers that these were the equivalent of public executions rather than barbaric sacrifices:

The last circumstance might give rise to that imputation on the Gauls, by Cæsar, of a barbarity, which, after all, was more likely to be of a judiciary than of a superstitious nature. The burning Innocents, in default of guilty, enough in number to furnish a solemn execution, is not very credible; especially as Cæsar is notoriously, in that very place, mistaken in his attribution of the Deities of the Romans to the Druidical sistem.<sup>68</sup>

When examining universal etymology, Rowland Jones also addresses the Wicker Man. *The Circles of Gomer* (1771) is a dictionary-style essay, and under the entry 'BRIAREUS, a Titan so called by the gods but amongst men Ægeon,' Jones examines the perceived misidentified etymology of 'Brittain, Beritan, Bretan, Bredan or Byrdan' by antiquarians and etymologists.<sup>69</sup> While refuting William Camden's etymology, Jones lists what he views as 'Roman forgeries' of Celtic customs, including the notion that 'the Britons, instead of animal compensations, sacrificed in their wicker basket, innocent men and not beasts, or delinquents against the Druid religion.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> John Cleland, *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary, or, Essay, by means of the Analitic method, to retrieve the ancient Celtic, etc.*, Printed for L. Davis and C. Reymers, printers to the Royal Society. MDCCLXVIII. [1768], 88.

<sup>68</sup> Cleland, *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary*, 89.

<sup>69</sup> Rowland Jones, *The Circles of Gomer or, an essay towards an investigation and introduction of the English, as an universal language, etc.*, Sold by S. Crowder, in Pater-noster Row, et.al. MDCCLXXI. [1771], 30–31.

<sup>70</sup> Jones, *The Circles of Gomer*, 32.

Jones continues to list countries with similar cultural rituals to the Britons, drawing together all nations into an imagined shared history. In a similar fashion, *Jerusalem* also relates Scandinavia and Europe to Albion, though it is not something to be desired:

Luvah tore forth from Albions Loins, in fibrous veins, in rivers  
Of blood over Europe: a Vegetating Root in grinding pain.  
Animating the Dragon Temples, soon to become that Holy Fiend  
The Wicker Man of Scandinavia in which cruelly consumed  
The Captives reard to heaven howl in flames among the stars  
Loud the cries of War on the Rhine & Danube [...]  
With cymbal, trumpet, clarion; & the scythed chariots of Britain.

(E196. 47:4–11)

Whittaker suggests that, in light of the sexual nature of sacrifice, the Wicker Man's role 'is to repress sexuality, which returns, however, in perverse form, revolting against the father – Albion – of whose form the self is a spectrous reflection even as the ego-ideal is that spectre haunting the self.'<sup>71</sup> When the Wicker Man emerges from 'Dragon Temples,' it echoes Stukeley's work on Stonehenge and Abury, but also as a product 'of Scandinavia,' there is a further explicit connection to Northern antiquities. Perhaps 'Scandinavia' here is a general denomination for the Gothic nations, or maybe it is a passage that consolidates Northern Europe as a land encoded with oppressive structures. Regardless, the ambiguity of the Captives who could be either innocent or guilty suggests the latter, especially when the alliteration—'cruelly consumed' and 'heaven howl'—connects the Wicker Man to War which, as we know, is associated with Odin.

Cleland's discussions on the Wicker Man are part of a broader argument that 'the *Celtic*, at least so far as I can discover of it, and at the point from which I take my departure, was universally the elementary or mother-tongue. [...] In this title of *universal*, it is plain that the *Celtic* is included.'<sup>72</sup> He offers an explanation for the relationship between ancient religions and law:

<sup>71</sup> Whittaker, *William Blake, and the Myths of Britain*, 166.

<sup>72</sup> Cleland, *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary*, iii.

The words *Ecclesiastical*, *Diocese*, *Dean*, *Cardinal*, *Bishop*, *Priest*, and even *Religion* itself, do not originally mean any thing purely spiritual: being, in fact, in their origin, all terms of judiciary import, in those times when the law was absolutely blended with divinity, from which the law was proud of receiving its support, the law of the country was also its religion.<sup>73</sup>

Druid temples become ‘courts of judicature’ that support Christianity hierarchies of power. The real origin of barbaric despotism, according to Cleland lay with the warriors who subjugated the Druids—or magi—to their code of war.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast, Blake imagines a fallen and unfallen version of the Druid, where it can either be liberated—in the tradition of Iolo Morganwg—or retain a memory of sacrifice and conflict. As a warrior, though, the Druid gains a militant outlook that more firmly situates it within the institutions of subjugation. The Wicker Man becomes an emblem for these structures as envisioned by Los:

[...] instead of heavenly Chapels, built  
By our dear Lord: I see Worlds crusted with snows & ice;  
I see a Wicker Idol woven round Jerusalems children. [...]  
(E186. 38[43]:63–65)

Although situated within a snowy Urizenic landscape, unlike the other Wicker Men, this one does not burn. Instead it remains an ‘Idol,’ a static prison that is a prelude to sacrifice and war.

The Daughters are already established in *Milton* as violent instigators of sacrifice and fate, and in *Jerusalem* their role also includes the veneration of war. Despite being paired with a Son of Albion, the Daughters torment and brutalise their counterparts. For example, Gwendolen dismantles Hyle’s body, hiding the sun between his ribs:

[...] she roll’d his kidneys round  
Into two irregular forms: and looking on Albions dread Tree,  
She wove two vessels of seed, beautiful as Skiddaws snow;  
(E237. 80:72–74)

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<sup>73</sup> Cleland, *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary*, vii.

<sup>74</sup> Cleland, *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary*, viii, 80, 84.

Gwendolen eviscerates Hyle, reshaping his kidneys into seeds, possibly for further propagation. She imbues within them ‘bends of self interest & selfish natural virtue:’ (E237. 80:75) before reinstalling them into his loins. In a speech to the other Daughters, Gwendolen suggests, ‘Let us lead the stems of this Tree let us plant it before Jerusalem/To judge the Friend of Sinners to death without the Veil’ (E239. 82:32–33). This scene is a version of the Crucifixion first found in *The Book of Ahania*, but now with the addition of judgement. The Daughters are like druidic judiciaries but their verdict is predetermined—‘death.’

Despite their conflict, the Sons and Daughters unite in the sacrifice of Luvah and their relationship is described as one of mutual dependence:

For a Spectre has no Emanation but what he imbibes from deceiving  
A Victim! Then he becomes her Priest & she his Tabernacle.  
And his Oak Grove, till the Victim rend the woven Veil.

(E217. 65:59–61)

The Spectre retains a priestly role, while the Emanation transforms into the religious institution itself. She is both Tabernacle and Oak Grove, and will continue to uphold these two roles until the veil of the tabernacle tears in two. Biblically, this moment signals the time of Jesus’ death, and theologically speaking it is when Christ’s body becomes the tabernacle:

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater  
and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this  
building [...] but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place,  
having obtained eternal redemption for us.<sup>75</sup>

This is an apocalyptic moment, in that it is the point where sins are forgiven and reunion with the Divine body politic becomes possible. By defining the emanation as tabernacle, the woman-body becomes a point of entrance that seems to promise transcendence. However, she in fact embodies a code of violence that is also promoted by Vala: ‘For in our battles we the Slain men view with pity and love:/We soon revive them in the secret of our tabernacles’ (E236. 80:25–26).

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<sup>75</sup> Heb. 9:11–12.

The influence of the Fatal Sisters is amplified when the Daughters become more Valkyrie-like in the face of war. When Gwendolen declares, ‘the fury of Man exhaust in War! Woman permanent remain’ (E239. 82:35), women are defined as survivors; they transcend a futile mortality only to exist in a perpetual state of violence. In an earlier speech, Los describes a battle scene: ‘the Soldier strikes, & a dead corse falls at his feet/Nor Daughter Nor Sister nor Mother come forth to embosom the Slain!’ (E185. 38[43]:43–44). The traditional mourning woman trope is lacking in this scene. There is no outpouring of emotion or even empathy. Instead, the expected mourning is replaced with something more antagonistic which becomes more apparent in hindsight, because a few lines earlier, ‘The Armies of Balaam weep—no women come to the field/Dead corpses lay before them, & not as in Wars of old’ (E185. 38[43]:39–40). It is the army that weeps, not the women who are textually distanced from any emotional reaction with a hyphen. Instead, the enjambment connects them more intimately with the ‘Dead corpses’ strewn across the field. Thus, the lack of compassion associates them with death rather than life, violence rather than mourning.

Gwendolen describes the relationship between the Daughters and the law as revolving around war or death. This, she believes, will lead to perfection:

I have mockd those who refused cruelty & I have admired  
The cruel Warrior. [...]  
[...] I am become perfect in beauty over my Warrior  
For Men are caught by Love: Woman is caught by Pride  
That Love may only be obtained in the passages of Death.  
(E238. 81:1–7)

Her admiration for cruelty leads to an unsettling alliance between beauty and war which then leads to a tension between deformity and perfection when Los throws Cambel into the bellows: ‘she minded not/The raging flames, [...]/instead of beauty/Defo[r]mity: she gave her beauty to another.’ (E240. 82:66–69).

The Daughters are paradoxically described as ‘beauty & perfection & be Vegetated beneath/Their Looms, in a Generation of death & resurrection’ (E161. 17:8–9). Los’ protests against this code of perfection-in-death associated with Odin’s code of war remains unheard:

[...] they rejo[i]ce among their warriors  
 Woden and Thor and Friga wholly consume my Saxons:  
 On their enormous Altars built in the terrible north:  
 From Irelands rocks to Scandinavia Persia and Tartary:  
 (E241. 83:18–21)

This is the only time that Blake uses the Saxon version of Odin’s name, Woden, and is the only time he appears in *Jerusalem*. In fact, this is the first and final time in *Jerusalem* we meet all three main Norse gods. The alliteration and enjambment doubly emphasises the association between ‘warriors/Woden,’ with the additional adverb ‘wholly’ capturing the absoluteness of the devastation. As such, the Daughters refine previous ideas of perfection in war to keep violence and sacrifice within Albion.

### ***The Final Image: The Deformed Body Politic***

As the poem moves closer towards reviving Albion and restoring his health through this vale of destruction, the Norse associations remain tangible. Los begins to see ‘The Briton Saxon Roman Norman amalgamating/In my Furnaces into One Nation the English: & taking refuge/In the Loins of Albion’ (E252. 92:1–3). Britannia realises:

In Dreams of Chastity & Moral Law I have Murdered Albion! Ah!  
 In Stone-henge & on London Stone & in the Oak Groves of Malden  
 I have Slain him in my Sleep with the Knife of the Druid O England  
 (E254. 94:23–25)

Davis Michael proposes that although Blake does not restore the city’s body in his work, renewal is still present as Blake ‘recuperates the infectious, gluttonous, monstrous body of the city through his unusual view of nature as a part of humanity that is constructed as an “other”

through fallen perception.’<sup>76</sup> Frosch also argues that ‘renovation’ in *Jerusalem* ‘takes the form of a conflict of two forces, accusation and forgiveness.’<sup>77</sup> The final plates do seem to envision a healing and re-formation of the body politic, where oppressive institutions are put aside in favour of imagination and liberty. This vision of wholeness promotes an expansion and reunion of the senses, but without any transcendence of the contingent relations of its parts, they remain open to the future.

Albion—as envisioned by the end of *Jerusalem*—is not restored to an earlier or has progressed to a perfected body. Instead, he is regenerated into a new form that is freed of certain restraints but is incomplete; there is no perfected end point. Instead, the different figures who live inside Albion:

[...] conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright  
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions  
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect  
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine  
Of Human Imagination, [...]

(E257–58. 98:28–32)

The body politic seems to have come together with Man acknowledging the emergence of a new world. Excitement manifests through the repetition and continuous enjambment that pushes the momentum towards the ‘all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens/Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific’ (E257. 98:33–34). There is a similarly conversable vision in the *Edda* where, after Ragnarök, ‘Baldr and Hod will arrive from Hel. Then they will all sit down together and talk and discuss the mysteries and speak of the things that had happened in former times, of the Midgard serpent and Fenriswolf.’<sup>78</sup>

Although the poem itself ends on Plate 99, Blake reintroduces a vision of Los holding a compass and hammer, standing against the backdrop of a druid temple on a final Plate 100

<sup>76</sup> Davis Michael, ‘The Corporeal City,’ 109.

<sup>77</sup> Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion*, 88.

<sup>78</sup> Trans. Faulkes, ‘Gylfaginning,’ 56; [‘Því næst koma þar Bladr ok Höðr frá Heljar. Setjask þá allir samt ok talask við ok minnask á rúnar sínar ok ræða of tíðindi þau er fyrrum höfðu verit, of Miðgarðsorm ok um Fenrisúlfr.’; 53–54.]

(fig.21). This additional scene re-opens *Jerusalem's* ending to further examination, suggesting that Albion's renewal does not equal the Christian notion of a restored, complete body that is reunited with the Father God. Looking once again at Ragnarök, the Norse analogues clarify some of the finer details of Plate 100. In *Völuspá*, a serpent reappears after Höðr and Baldr talk:

There comes the shadow-dark dragon flying,  
the gleaming serpent, up from Dark-of-moon Hills;  
Nidhogg flies over the plain, in his pinons  
he carries corpses [...]<sup>79</sup>

This ominous vision does not reveal transcendence after Ragnarök. There are corpses, a dragon-serpent, and more movement. In *Gylfaginning*, the narrative about Ragnarök ends abruptly, suggesting a similar open-endedness. While continuing to ask questions about the Æsir, Gylfi—or Gangler—is thrown out of Asgard by the fictional triad, Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði, figures who are all presumed to be Odin. Nidhögg is also mentioned, but the true ending in the *Edda* is expulsion from the celestial realm:

Now, continues Har, If you have any new questions to ask me, I know not who can resolve you; because I have never heard of any one who can relate what will happen in the other ages of the world: I advise you therefore to remain satisfied with my relation, and to preserve it in your memory.— Upon this, Gangler heard a terrible noise all around him; he looked every way, but could discern nothing, except a vast extended plain.<sup>80</sup>

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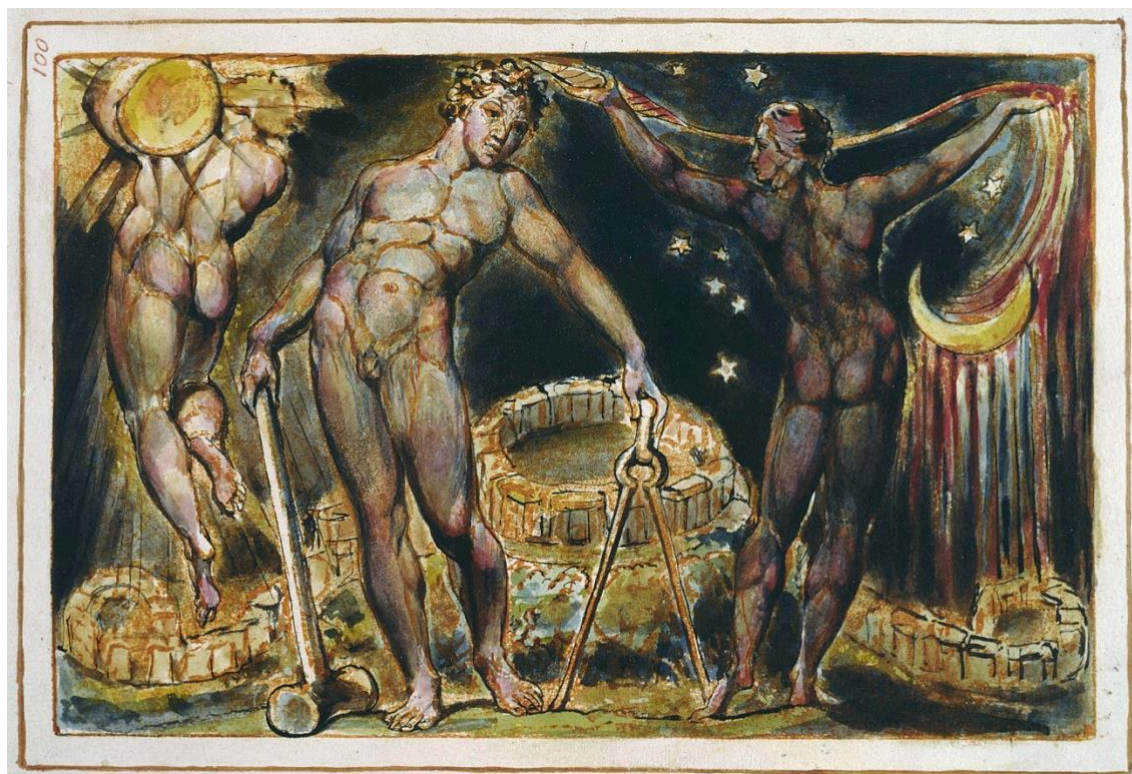
<sup>79</sup> Trans. Larrington, 'The Seeress's Prophecy,' 12.

[*Völuspá*,  
'Þar kómr inn dimmi  
dreki fljúgandi,  
naðr fránn, neðan  
frá Niðarfjöllum;  
berr sér í fjöðrum  
– flýgr völl yfir –  
Níðhoggr nái.  
Nú munj hon sökkvask.'; 307.]

<sup>80</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 167; ['En nú þú kant lengra fram at spyrja þá veit ek eigi hvaðan þér kemr þat, fyrir því at øngan mann heyrða ek lengra segja fram aldarfarit. Ok njóttu nú sem þú namt.' Því næst heyrði Gangleri dyni mikla hvern veg frá sér, ok leit út á hlið sér.'; 54.]



Gylfi then relates that his newfound knowledge of the Æsir that ‘hath been handed down among the people by Oral Tradition.’<sup>81</sup> The account of Ragnarök ends, only to be followed by this brusque shift in narrative and tone which even Gylfi struggles to comprehend.



**Figure 21:** William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Copy E (c.1821), Plate 100. Relief and white-line etching with hand colouring.  
Yale Center for British Art. © The William Blake Archive.

Similarly, the final *Jerusalem* plate initiates more questions and doubts, provoking the reader to wonder whether the body—and by implication, the nation—has truly achieved finality. I propose that while there is a kind of renewal, there is no completion. The two side figures carry the sun and dress the sky, but they face away from the reader. There are also further signs that this scene is indicative of further movement, perhaps even another cycle. The left figure moves backwards as he carries the sun on his shoulders. Although the sun is positioned higher than the moon, this passiveness creates a juxtaposition between a possible rising dawn or the removal of the sun which is, as discussed, an established apocalyptic trope.

<sup>81</sup> Percy, *NA*, Vol.2, 167; [‘Ok eptir honum sagði hverr maðr öðrum þessar sögur.’; 54]

The moon seems to be falling with the stars, repeating the established Biblical motif.<sup>82</sup>

The figure on the right hand side could be disassembling the fabric of the destructive events woven by the Daughters—or perhaps even the work of the Spectre who ‘builded stupendous Works, taking the Starry Heavens/Like to a curtain & folding them according to his will’ (E251. 91:32–33)—but the colouration evokes the prophetic Book of Joel which notes that at the end of days, ‘the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great terrible day of the Lord come.’<sup>83</sup> The moon is coloured with what seems like blood which then stretch down to the temples in the fibres that have been related to enrooting, weaving, and a dark fatalism. Instead of falling, it could also be suspended. Its position halfway down the scene is ambiguous, and the figure holding the night is, once again, facing away from the reader. Their profile reveals no expression of rapture or peace. It is ambivalent and inscrutable; the arrangement of this plate suggests that even if this is a moment of renewal, it is not the end for Albion.

The image is bloodless, in that the temples are merely present rather than portraying active sacrifice. However, their existence is a reminder that throughout the illuminated books, Blake proposed that priesthood was formed after ‘choosing forms of worship from poetic tales’ (E38. PL.11). In light of *Jerusalem* and this final plate, the temple gestures towards the potential for religion to be improved upon as well as redeemed, but as it stands, it also creates a disconnect within the idea of completeness or transcendence. It contradicts biblical traditions to keep the future of Albion open-ended. In this way, Blake disputes the realisation of an able-body or a ‘healed’ whole that is celebrated at the end Revelation. He resists the Christian notion of finality where the end is a reunion within the Pauline Body of Christ. Reading these final plates through Ragnarök provides an alternative framework where, despite an apocalyptic renewal, the incompleteness of Albion’s body is still apparent. Similar to the *Edda*’s structure

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<sup>82</sup> Mark 13:25; Rev. 6:13.

<sup>83</sup> Joel 2:31.

where Gylfi's narrative continues beyond the tales of Ragnarök, the presence of Plate 100 questions this idea of achieving finality. The body politic remains incomplete.

# Coda

## Blake's Visionary Forms

Such Form the aggregate of the Twelve Sons of Albion took; & such  
Their appearance when combind; but often by birth-pangs & loud groans  
They divide to Twelve: the key-bones & the chest dividing in pain  
Disclose a hideous orifice; thence issuing the Giant brood  
[...]  
In the Oak Groves of Albion which overspread all the Earth.  
(E224. 70:10–16)

Although the ending of *Jerusalem* offers a renewal of sorts, this is not a conclusion for the Blakean body which remains, at its core, an assemblage that is part of an ongoing process. The passage used as an epigraph to this conclusion is an example of the aggregation of beings that is constantly revisited and reinvented throughout the illuminated books. Despite uniting as a whole here, they remain short of being a totality; there remains ‘a hideous orifice,’ an example of the type of flexible, permeable border that is part of the Blakean body, and therefore Albion. The body is a subject that Nancy believes can be ‘folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, [...] orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched.’<sup>1</sup> As examined throughout this thesis, the human body in Blake consists of varying interactions between multiple forms, and it is this movement that defines and redefines the external body politic. Through the independent workings of the Sons and Daughters of Albion, the Spectres, Eternals, and Emanations, it is clear that the able-body politic is a construct that is not consistent with Blake’s vision of Albion. This traditional body politic metaphor relies on a fixed hierarchy or system, for example the Body of Christ as described by St. Paul. Albion, it seems, aligns more comfortably with a deformity that ‘refuses

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy, ‘Corpus,’ 15.

to recognize the representation of the healthy body [...] as the sole determination of the aesthetic.’<sup>2</sup>

The openness of the human form allows for an expansion of the senses as found at the end of *Jerusalem*, while also suggesting that the Blakean body remains in a state of constant flux beyond the end of the poem. Its incompleteness speaks to the broader idea that, for Blake, a British body politic is not a static, governing organization based on a hierarchy of power. It is inconsistent, in part due to the heterogenous mix of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Celtic cultures within Britain at the turn of the century. My examination of the body politic focuses on Northern antiquarianism due to the general, widespread engagement with ancient Scandinavia across the British nations during the eighteenth century. Blake’s own Northern antiquarianism participates in this broader narrative, and he consciously engages with certain Norse tropes that were part of ongoing debates concerning Britishness and identity. His interest, however, is not a scholarly pursuit of Old Norse like that of Gray, and has greater similarities to the imaginative adaptations of Sayers.

The Scandinavian and Gothic inflections within Celtic, Welsh, and English antiquity—for example the Bards and Druids—play a key part in Blake’s examination of codes, laws, and the impact of such institutions on the freedoms of the people. In the illuminated books, it is clear that for Blake, any strains Gothic liberty that could transform Britain becomes entangled with an oppression that lies at the heart of the nation. His work addresses the idea of liberty through ‘an antagonism between the inspired bard and repressive druid of northern antiquity which maps on to a parallel biblical opposition between prophet and priest.’<sup>3</sup> There are the similarities between Blake’s Druid and Iolo Morganwg’s Welsh Druid tradition, but after a closer examination, Sayers’ version is more in line with Blake’s mediation of this figure. Unlike Iolo, Sayers looks beyond Britain towards Scandinavia, thus suggesting a more Norse-centred vision, where the

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<sup>2</sup> Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 76.

Druid and Bard are complicit in the actions of a corrupted ancient government. For Sayers and Blake, Scandinavia provided a language and culture that complicated British antiquity.

In the illuminated books discussed in this thesis, Blake takes this hybrid Scandi-British antiquity to examine the tensions within the emergence of a British body politic. In Urizen's formless and dark deformity that is comparable to the Norse giant Ymir, he critiques the Pauline Body of Christ and organised religion through hierarchy. When Los creates a body for Urizen, it remains fragmented and unfinished, thus revealing Blake's aversion to society's fixation on institutionalisation. Through Fuzon's brutalised corpse, Blake combines the motif of druidic sacrifice with the popular tradition of a tree embodying a type of British liberty. By drawing parallels between Christ's Crucifixion and Odinic sacrifice, when Fuzon's suffering body hangs from the Tree of Mystery, Blake subverts the doctrine of Atonement. As a consequence, Fuzon propagates the law-making systems established earlier by his father Urizen. He then further embodies an institutionalised State Religion that lies at the heart of the Blakean body politic. In both *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake's critique of the body politic metaphor is expanded on a larger, national scale. Building on the foundations of Urizen and Fuzon, the bodies presented in these later illuminated books are also indefinite and deformed. The openness of form is further aggravated and supported in equal measure by a dark fatalism that both produces and is a product of the system at work. In *Milton*, this is captured by the cyclic and violent Emanations who, as women-bodies, codify the institution of War in and of themselves. Taking inspiration from Gray's Valkyries and the Norse Norns depicted in eighteenth-century adaptations of *Völuspá*, Blake transforms the Emanations into vindictive forms who sabotage the body by weaving webs of fate.

The overwhelming vision of the North and Scandinavia in the illuminated books is rooted in a Norse Code of War that sustains the underlying oppression initiated by Urizen. This is then eventually propagated by the Sons and Daughters of Albion. The violence that is woven—literally and figuratively—into the fabric of the British body politic is thoroughly examined in *Jerusalem*. The body of Albion reveals a network of institutions, exemplified by

diminutive beings, that conflict and confront each other. The result is a realisation that at the heart of the nation lies a heterogeneity that contests its claims to unity. Instead, Albion becomes a victim of a self-inflicted deformity when the disparate parts of his body politic reveal its own ‘incompleteness, its precariousness.’<sup>4</sup>

By the end of *Jerusalem* religion, it seems, remains material, and as a consequence, the body is still in the process of moving to an end that is beyond our view. This is the openness of the Blakean body and the materiality of embodiment which has been developed throughout the illuminated books. Even though he has a more optimistic view of Blake’s body politic as reaching a utopian vision, Fallon also notes the unlimited form at the end of *Jerusalem*, one that continues to progress.<sup>5</sup> Frosch too suggests that the poem’s final scene shows how ‘the myth of Albion awaking to the changes of perpetual renovation is itself subject to the same process.’<sup>6</sup> Taking into consideration the Christian elements, resurrection is a possible solution. However, in terms of the Norse analogues, Albion’s body remains unfinished. What happens next, is up for further interpretation, but I argue that there are signs of a reconciliation with the openness of the nation’s body. There is an epistemological shift where a ‘norm’ or traditional standard is broken, ‘and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result.’<sup>7</sup>

Blake’s Northern antiquarianism goes beyond a simple appropriation of Norse motifs. From the linguistic similarities between Urizen and Ymir, to Fuzon’s status as a Baldr-like sun god; from an Yggdrasil-inspired Tree of Mystery to the Valkyrie-type Emanations, Old Norse is integral to the understanding of how the Blakean body is conceived and enacted within the illuminated books. However, it is clear that, while the body does not transcend difference or process at the end of *Jerusalem* as envisioned in the Bible, Blake also seems to want to move beyond the Norse Code of War. The Norse elements in the illuminated books transform the body into a site of both belligerent conflict and potential liberty, but neither are offered as the

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<sup>4</sup> Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment*, 261, 277.

<sup>6</sup> Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion*, 182–83.

<sup>7</sup> Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3.

final image. Instead, the motifs in play push readers to understand that these are just two side of the same coin: the body will create itself and also be its own undoing. Davis Michael suggests that ‘the construction of a community to resemble a human body, even to function as a human body, suggests that human beings themselves are to some extent self-created.’<sup>8</sup> Unlike the poem’s Christian symbolism, the Norse tropes draw attention to this sort of enterprise in Blake’s body politic, be that through deformed bodies, sacrifice, woven cycles of fate, or even disease.

Although there has not been a lot of attention of Blake’s Northern antiquarianism in Blake scholarship, in Norse reception studies there is already a wide array of scholarship available on the topic. That being said, in both of these fields, there remains a lack of any substantial examination on Blake’s specific use of Norse motifs, and how this speaks to eighteenth-century debates concerning nation, Britishness, and the body politic. Moving beyond this, then, there is still work to be done to further consolidate Blake’s place within the general timeline of eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism. What this thesis has shown is that by considering Blake’s use of Old Norse myth and culture, we can better address his alternative body politic model in the illuminated books, one that allows the body of Albion to remain open to its ever-moving internal relations.

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<sup>8</sup> Davis Michael, ‘The Corporeal City,’ 105–106.



## *Abbreviations*

<i>Analytical</i>	<i>Analytical Review</i>
<i>Apology</i>	Blake's <i>Annotations to An Apology for the Bible</i>
<i>America</i>	<i>America: A Prophecy</i> (1793)
<i>Descriptive Catalogue</i>	<i>A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures</i> (1809)
<i>Dramatic Sketches</i>	<i>Dramatic Sketches of the Ancient Northern Mythology</i> (1790)
<i>Europe</i>	<i>Europe: A Prophecy</i> (1794)
<i>Five Pieces</i>	<i>Five Pieces of Runic Poetry</i> (1763)
'Gwin'	'Gwin, King of Norway' (1783)
<i>Illustrations</i>	Blake's <i>Illustrations to Gray's 'Poems'</i> (1797–98)
<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion</i> (composed 1804–c.1820)
<i>L'histoire de Dannemarc</i>	<i>Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc</i> (1755)
<i>Marriage</i>	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i> (composed 1790)
<i>Milton</i>	<i>Milton: a Poem</i> (c.1804–11)
<i>NA</i>	<i>Northern Antiquities</i> (1770)
<i>Ossian</i>	The Poems of Ossian: <i>Fragments of Ancient Poetry</i> (1760), <i>Fingal</i> (1762), and <i>Temora</i> (1763)
<i>Reliques</i>	<i>Reliques of Ancient English Poetry</i> (1765)
<i>TW</i>	<i>The Watchman</i>
<i>Urizen poems</i>	<i>The Book of Urizen</i> , <i>The Book of Ahania</i> , <i>The Book of Los</i>

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