What is Above is Within:
William Blake and the Alchemical Paradigm

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Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgåva utforskar William Blake sin firfaldige visjon som ei oppleving av *gnosis*, og ser på korleis ein større alkymistisk tradisjon kan ha påverka utviklinga av Blake sine to profetisk verk *Milton: A Poem in Two Books* og *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*. Oppgåva baserer seg på nyare esoterisk teori, deriblant Wouter J. Hanegraaff sitt alkymistiske paradigme: eit tankesett som fyrst gjorde seg gjeldande i kjølevatnet av Paracelsus. Det alkymistiske paradigme byggjer på ei religiøs forståing av transmutasjon, og opererer ut frå eit syn om at alt byrjar i ein tilstand omslutta av mørke. Vegen til «lyset», eller det transcendentale, avheng av ei dynamisk samhandling mellom motsetjande krefter: ein prosess som vektlegg personleg erfaring heller enn leiing frå religiøse autoritetar. Ein av dei sentrale figurane i det alkymistiske paradigmet er teosofen Jakob Böhme, som Blake let seg inspirere av. Målet med oppgåva er å forstå parallellane mellom Blake og Böhme i lys av ein større esoterisk tradisjon, nemleg det alkymistiske paradigmet. Fokuset er særleg retta mot Blake si framstilling av syndefallet, og den transformative reisa som krevst for å sjå det «Evige» i den falne verkelegheita. Oppgåva samanliknar utfallet av Blake si transformative reise med ei oppleving av *gnosis*: ei form for religiøs innsikt som utartar seg som ei sanseoppfatning av ei djupare verkelegheit. Ettersom opplevinga av *gnosis* òg dannar grunnlaget for Böhme sin teologi, er det naturleg å vurdere korleis nettopp denne forma for *gnosis* kan ha påverka Blake. Gjennom å analysere Blake sine to profetiar utifrå dei tre fargekoda trinna i transmutasjonsprosessen, ser ein tydeleg konturane av ein alkymistisk konfigurasjon i den firfaldige visjonen. Denne fullkomne visjonen er ei oppleving av å sjå det guddommelege i det verdslege liv, noko som gjer det klart for oss at himmelriket er å finne i kvart enkelt menneskje. Oppgåva slår fast at ein kan sjå klare likheitstrekk mellom den firfaldige visjonen, og Böhme si alkymistiske framstilling av *gnosis*.

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A Note on the Text

William Blake's work will be cited using the plate and line numbers given in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1998), edited by David Erdman. References to illustrated plates correspond with the copies found in *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* (2000). Quotations given from the works of Jakob Böhme will reference chapters and numbered paragraphs.

List of Abbreviations

Au	*Aurora*
CW	*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*
Ep	*The Epistles of Jacob Behmen*
FZ	*The Four Zoas*
IJC	*The Incarnation of Jesus Christ*
Jer	*Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*
Mil	*Milton a Poem in Two Books*
MM	*Mysterium Magnum*
MMH	*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
SP	*Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*
SR	*Signatura rerum*
TLM	*The Threefold Life of Man*
TP	*The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*

Introduction

When he was four years old, William Blake (1757-1837) saw God for the first time. He appeared outside of Blake's childhood home in Soho, put his face close to the window, and left the young boy screaming. While this experience was understandably frightening for a young child, visions of angels and otherworldly beings would soon become a common occurrence in Blake's life. On his walks to and from London, the line between the ordinary and extraordinary would quite often blur; at Peckham Rye the trees were brimming with angels, and in the fields, they could be found playing among the haymakers. Sometimes he would even spot the prophet Ezekiel, peeping out from his hiding spot underneath a tree. When he tried sharing these visions with his parents, it was not well received; on one occasion, he narrowly escaped a beating after telling them about his latest angelic encounter. As Blake quickly learned, he had better keep the visions to himself, or risk punishment for lying. Still, despite the discouragement from his parents, the visions would follow him throughout his life, and become an important source of inspiration for his poetic work. [1] To Blake, God appearing outside of his window was more than just the figment of a child's imagination; it was his first experience of *Eternity*.

In the early reception of his work, these accounts of Blake experiencing otherworldly encounters piqued the interest of readers; some interpreted them as mystical visions, while others saw them as a sign of madness. In his own time, Blake's work was relegated to obscurity; the one-time he attempted to mount a public exhibition of his art, he was labelled an "unfortunate lunatic" by the only reviewer who bothered to show up (Bentley, 1969, 216). Accusations of madness have followed him ever since; already in the first biographical work on Blake, Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), we find an entire chapter dedicated to the question of his sanity.[2] Even after Blake's work was "re-discovered" in the twentieth century, this question lingered. Whether intentionally or not, it seems the first wide-scale critical reception of Blake's work attempted to rid him of this image; in part, by downplaying, or explaining away his supposed

[1] The stories mentioned of Blake experiencing otherworldly visions originates from various first-hand accounts, including Catherine Blake. See Bentley Jr. (2002, 36-39).
[2] Chapter XXXV, titled "Mad or not Mad" (Gilchrist, 1880, 362-375).

mystical visions. Yet, there is no denying that Blake himself adamantly insisted on experiencing visions; in his letters, he writes of conversing with "friends in Eternity. See Visions, Dream Dreams . . . unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals" (CW: *Letters*, 728). Exactly what Blake meant by visions is still up for debate; however, in this thesis, I will explicitly be dealing with the Blake who really *did* see God; or the Blake who, at the very least, believed there is more to the world than what can be perceived by the physical eye.

Blake's later work is centred precisely on the idea of "seeing more": a concept that develops into his notion of *expanded vision*. In his prophetic illustrated texts, *Milton: A Poem in Two Books* (c. 1804-1810) and *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (c.1804-1820?), Blake develops four different "worlds" of vision, each corresponding to different states of being. Together, they form the "fourfold" vision: a state of seeing that transcends the borders of our temporal world of matter. The spiritual bliss of seeing the "Eternal" in things becomes the antithesis to the rationality of the Enlightenment worldview. This is the world of "Single vision & Newtons sleep", where divine mystery has been swallowed up by the machinery of rationalization (CW: *Letters*, 722). In order to pierce the veil of time and space, and see beyond our material existence, we must first undergo an inner transformation. Part of this journey involves the annihilation of our "selfish selfhood", a product of pure rationality. To transform ourselves and be redeemed from our fallen condition, we need to embark on our own spiritual journey; it is not enough the simply rely on the authorities of organized religion, or to be a passive follower of the Mosaic Law. The struggle inherent in this transformative process will be the focus of this thesis; however, to understand the implication of this process, I believe it is necessary to examine these ideas within the appropriate context. But as we shall see, this is no easy task.

In a piece for the London Reviewer, Iain Sinclair asserts: "There is no single Blake. Not any longer" (1996). While Sinclair's comment was mainly directed at the conflicting versions of Blake presented by biographies, this also holds true for the world of Blake scholarship; here, an even greater amount of Blakes can be found lurking amongst the pages. Now, it is of course to be expected that readers of Blake will walk away with different interpretations of his writings; however, the question of how we should contextualize Blake's ideas seems to be a never-ending source of confusion. E.P Thompson, for one, describes this as a growing problem within Blake research. In his introduction to *Witness Against the Beast*, Thompson recalls a comment Northrop

Frye made about the mystic Jakob Böhme (1575-1634), who may be considered one of Blake's major influences. Commenting on the enigmatic nature of his work, Frye had remarked that while some have described Böhme's writing as a "picnic" where "the author brings the words and the reader the meaning", this was hardly the "sneer" it was intended as; rather, Frye had argued, "it is an exact description of all works of literary art without exception" (Thompson, 1993, xi). Thompson notes that while this had struck him as a "wise comment", it was also a "partial one" that left him "uneasy" (ibid). The issue with Blake, Thompson continues, is that there are "so many picnics going on today", and they seem to be taking place at widely different locations. Consequently, he argues, it is now more difficult than ever to reach a consensus on what the sum of this research might be (1993, xii).

There is, perhaps, a sense that something is still missing from our picture of Blake. After all, even Thompson does not come prepared without his own picnic basket. This time, however, the party is headed for the intellectual tradition of "antinomianism": a term Thompson uses to denote Blake's radical rejection of the Mosaic law. As Thompson explains, his own reading of Blake is influenced by David V. Erdman's *Prophet Against Empire* (1954), and the "Erdman tradition" of placing Blake within a radical, political context. What Thompson believes to be missing from Erdman's reading is Blake's antinomianism, and the influence of Muggletonians: an obscure religious sect that emerged from the Puritan revolution (1993, xiii). However, Thompson's argument that Blake was raised in a Muggletonian, antinomian tradition has since received significant pushback from other scholars.[3] And although *Witness Against the Beast* is still an important contribution to Blake studies, it did not—as perhaps Thompson had hoped for—put an end to our separate picnic parties.

There appears, however, to be one Blake that some scholars—including Thompson—finds particularly objectionable. This is the Blake whose sphere of influence seems to extend beyond our conventional history, and into what most people will think of as the "occult". Anything associated with occultism has long been a neglected field within academia, and it is only within the last few decades that this situation has begun to improve. This is largely thanks to the newly emerging field of esotericism, which encompasses movements and intellectual currents that were previously associated with the "occult sciences" (e.g. astrology, alchemy, magic etc.) One of its

[3] See Davies (1999).

leading scholars, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, describes esotericism/occultism as a "conceptual waste-basket for 'rejected knowledge'", which has served as the Other for which modern science and philosophy has defined itself against (2012, 221). As he argues, the Enlightenment created its own self-image in part through what it rejected, namely anything that would fall outside of the realm of "rationality" (ibid). Widely different practices and intellectual currents were lumped together into the category of the occult, only to be dismissed as various strains of irrationality. As a result, esoteric figures and movements were relegated to the side-lines of history, and "transformed into non-historical universals of human thinking and behavior" (2012, 150). Indeed, it is possible that the scholarly contempt for the esoteric has left us with a deeply flawed and incomplete understanding of history, art and philosophy. And if so, I suspect that it has also impeded our understanding of Blake, and his poetic universe; however, with the research emerging from esoteric studies our knowledge of this "hidden" history is improving, thus enabling us to better discern underlying esoteric currents and influences in his work.

The intention behind this thesis is to use this research to situate Blake within a larger esoteric tradition. I will do this, in part, by examining the influence of Böhme on Blake: a man he proclaimed to be "divinely inspired" (Robinson, 1869, 27). My own inquiry begins with one simple, yet difficult question: what exactly was it about Böhme that appealed to Blake? The answer I have arrived at brings us to yet another picnic party—and a strange one at that. While it is generally agreed upon that Blake was influenced by Böhme towards the later part of his life, the extent and form of this influence is still an area of debate. And although a considerable amount of Blake scholarship will mention his relationship to Böhme, there are, as of now, only two notable in-depth studies on this connection: Bryan Aubrey's *Watchmen of Eternity* (1986) and Kevin Fischer's *Converse in the Spirit* (2004). What sets this thesis apart from previous work written on the Böhmean influence on Blake, is its engagement with modern, esoteric theory; moreover, it attempts to understand the parallels between Blake and Böhme's theological systems as part of a larger overarching tradition, namely that of *alchemy.*

In short, alchemy is the science of transmuting matter (usually metals) into gold. Unlike Böhmean theosophy, this appears to be a tradition that most people have some familiarity with. Yet, although alchemical imagery, symbolism and concepts seems to saturate our modern media landscape, it is rare to see alchemy talked about as anything more than a curiosity, or an outdated

form of science. During the last few decades, however, more and more scholars are urging us to reconsider the importance of alchemy in Western history, not only as a form of science, but also for its influence on culture and religion.[4] It is of course the latter that we will be dealing with in this thesis; more specifically, the central focus will be on alchemical transmutation, and its religious dimensions. Previously, most of the research written on this aspect of alchemy came from Jungian scholars, but the concept of transmutation has also been incorporated into esotericism as one of its defining features. As will be discussed in greater detail later, Hanegraaff suggests that a new mode of esoteric thinking emerged from a religious interpretation of the alchemical transmutation process. He refers to this new strand of esotericism as the "alchemical paradigm": in short, it involves a "dynamic process" that works its way from "nature to metaphysics", and from "darkness to light" (2012, 193-194). Böhme stands as one of its central figures; his theological works aim to combine an alchemical framework of transmutation with the attainment of *gnosis*: the visionary ascent to a higher level of reality.

The aim of this thesis is to explore Blake as part of this alchemical paradigm; however, in order to do so, it will simultaneously be necessary to rethink how we approach Blake's concept of vision. The focus of my thesis will be on how the transformative potential of Blake's four "worlds" of vision can be understood in relation to the alchemical paradigm, and the experience of *gnosis*. Translated from Greek, the word *gnosis* means *knowledge*; in the context of esoteric religion, this is usually seen as a type of transformative, or salvific knowledge (Magee, 2016, xvi). In recent years, some esoteric scholars have begun to reassess the position of *gnosis* in religious thought; Hanegraaff, for instance, suggests that we ought to look at gnosis as the core of esoteric and mystical traditions rather than an attribute (2016, 392). Likewise, Glenn Alexander Magee posits that both mysticism and esotericism is founded on *gnosis*, either directly through experience, or indirectly through testimonies (2016, xxix). My own approach to Böhme is informed by this development within esoteric scholarship; the thesis will thus treat *gnosis* as a central element when assessing the impact Böhme had on Blake.

The thesis will explore Blake's connection to the alchemical paradigm by analysing Blake's *Milton* and *Jerusalem* (his two most esoteric works) according to the three colour-coded

[4] The scholarship of William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe has been particularly important for the reassessment of alchemy as a scientific discipline, while scholars like Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, among others, have emphasises the importance of alchemy in the development of Western culture and religion.

stages of the alchemical transmutation process: *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*. My thesis claims that the constructed narrative of fall and redemption central to Blake's visionary journey borrows heavily from an alchemical tradition; moreover, it suggests that the outcome of the journey—the fourfold vision—can be understood as a form of esoteric *gnosis*: a concept that Blake likely inherited from Böhme. However, before we can begin to explore these concepts in relation to Blake, I believe it would be helpful to first see how they manifest in Böhme's theosophical system. The beginning of the first chapter will therefore serve as an introduction to Böhme, as well as an explanation of several words and concepts that will be relevant for the subsequent chapters. I will then return to a more in-depth discussion on esoteric scholarship, and how it can be applied to Blake.

Chapter 1:

Blake, Böhme and Esotericism

Our knowledge of what Blake read of Böhme is unfortunately limited. There are no surviving copies of any of Böhme's works that we know belonged to Blake. Some of Blake's possessions were later inherited (and possibly destroyed) by Frederick Tatham (1805-1878), an acquaintance of Catherine Blake, the wife of William Blake. In 1864, Tatham contacted a book dealer, claiming to be in possession of "books well thumbed and dirtied by his [Blake's] graving hands", which included: "a large collection of works of the mystical writers, Jacob Behmen, Swedenborg, and others." (Bentley, 1969, 41). Tatham does not mention any specific titles, but several different English translations of Böhme would have been available at the time. It is likely that Blake owned, or at least was familiar with, some volumes of the so-called William Law edition: a four-volume publication that was put together by friends of Law after his death. The work was, for the most part, a reissue of previously published English translations of Böhme; however, the volumes also included a series of strange figures made by the German theosophist Dionysius Andreas Freher (1649-1728). From the diaries of contemporary journalist and diarist Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867), we know that Blake had likely been in contact with this edition, as he supposedly praised "the figures in the Law translation as being very beautiful", even going as far as saying that "Michael Angelo could not have done better" (1867, 27).

In all of Blake's known writings, Böhme is only mentioned by name twice. The first time is in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790), where he is placed above Swedenborg, but below Dante and Shakespeare: "Any man of mechanical talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's. and from those of Dante or Shakespear, an infinite number." (pl. 22). The second time he is mentioned is alongside Paracelsus, and their appearance seems to be the catalyst for the American Revolution: "Paracelsus & Behmen appeard to me. terrors appeard in the Heavens above / And in Hell beneath & a mighty & awful change threatend the Earth / The American War began All its dark horrors passed before my face" (CW: *Letters*, 707). Blake associating Böhme with the "terrors above" might seem like a reproach, but as we shall see, this was the highest compliment Blake could bestow upon the mystic.

While we do not know exactly what Blake read of Böhme, there is ample textual and visual evidence in his work that reveal a certain degree of familiarity with his writings, and with a larger alchemical tradition; in particular, I would point towards sixteenth- and seventeenth-century alchemical emblem books as a possible source of influence for Blake's visual artwork. The illustrations found in alchemical emblem books are seen as equally, if not more important, than the texts that accompany them; in fact, one of the most well-known alchemical emblem books of the seventeenth century, the *Mutus liber* (1677), or the *Silent Book,* depicts the full process of transmutation entirely without words (hence why it is called the *Silent Book*). It is not hard to imagine that the alchemical tradition of juxtaposing text with images would appeal to Blake, who achieves a similar juxtaposition through his "illuminated printing".

Introduction to Jakob Böhme

In Görlitz around 1600, about 160 years prior to Blake's vision of God, the shoemaker Jakob Böhme had his own mystical experience; while gazing at a bright pewter vessel, he was suddenly enraptured in divine light. The experience brought him to the "innermost Ground or Center of the . . . hidden Nature", where the "most intimate Nature of all the Creatures" revealed itself to him through the "signatures formed upon them" (Franckenberg 1780, 7-8). While this was not his first, or his last divine illumination, it marked a turning point in his life. In a letter addressed to the customs official Caspar Linder, Böhme describes it as follows:

> the Gate was opened unto me, that in one quarter of an houre I saw and knew more, then if I had been many yeares together at an University . . . I knew not how it happened to me . . . For I saw and knew the Beings of all Beings, the Byss [Ground], and Abyss [Unground]; also the birth of the holy Trinity; the decent, and originall of this World, and of all creatures, through the Divine Wisedome (Ep, 2:7-8).

What Böhme seems to be recounting here, is an experience of *gnosis*: a salvific knowledge, involving the pursuit of—or return to—a higher power; allowing for "a direct perception of the ultimate truth of what is" (Magee 2016, xvi). To Linder he explains that the knowledge he gained from the experience was given to him by God, adding: "man must acknowledge, that his knowledge is not his owne, or from himselfe, but Gods, and from God" (Ep, 2:11). In the *Signatura rerum* (The signature of all things), he further states: "the outward Man apprehendeth not in this

life-time the divine Essence Corporally; but only through Imagination, where the inward Body doth Penetrate the outward" (XIV:65).

The "imagination" Böhme is talking about is not imagination as mere fantasy, but as an expansion of perception. It is a concept he likely inherited from Theophrastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541), better known as the alchemist Paracelsus. According to Paracelsus, the entire macrocosm is contained within the human microcosm. Thus, the potentiality for creation (on a cosmic scale) is also contained within the individual. By utilizing the reflective powers of the human microcosm, the imagination acts as a magnetic force that draws in the physical world and transforms it in the internal. Paracelsus provides an example of how this works by explaining its effects on pregnancy; in *Of the Nature of Things*, he states: "the imagination of a breeding woman is so powerful, that in conceiving the seed into her body, she may change her infant divers ways" (1674, 164). This is because: "her inward Stars are so strongly bent upon the Infant, that they beget an impression, and an influence upon it" (1674, 165). While Böhme's own understanding of the imagination does not align completely with Paracelsus, it does maintain the same relationship between the "inward" and the "outward". The effect of the imagination explains why *gnosis* is so powerful to Böhme, because the inner experience manifests itself in the outer world.

The quest for *gnosis* is a defining feature of Böhmean theosophy, and his later followers would come to favour the individual spiritual experience as opposed to the doctrines of organized religion. Depending on how we define *gnosis*, it seems like the Böhmean experience threads the line between the mystical and the esoteric. Magee suggests that we can separate between mystical and esoteric *gnosis* through their perceived relation to reality: the former "has the effect of helping us accept reality as it is", while the latter is "concerned with changing reality: gaining knowledge or powers that might enable us to alter or control objects, situations, and events, either for selfish or selfless purposes" (2016, xxxi-xxxii). While accounts attempting to describe *gnosis* vary, Magee notes that the experience "seems to involve several basic components", including:

> a fundamental alteration in the quality of experience, as things seem to become more vivid or real; the sense that one is seeing into the true nature of things; the intuition that all is really one; the sense that the distinction between self and other has collapsed; and the overwhelming feeling of the rightness of things – that everything, just as it is, is fundamentally right. (2016, xviii)

As one might imagine, an experience of *gnosis* is not easily conveyed with words. After Böhme's illumination, twelve years would pass before he would even make an attempt to express it in writing. When he first tried, he found: "I could very hardly apprehend the same in my externall Man, and expresse it with the Pen" (Ep, 2:10). In the years leading up to the completion of his first work (which would become known as the *Aurora*), he experienced prolonged periods of melancholy during which he was unable to write. In the *Aurora* he explains that: "the first fire was but a Seed, and not a constant lasting Light" (XIX:16). It was only in subsequent moments of illumination—when the "gate" would once again open within him—that he was able to bring forth the internal and capture it in writing. In those moments, he would suddenly be filled with inspiration, which he experienced as a shower of rain that "hitteth whatsoever it lightenth upon" (Ep, 2:11). Böhme describes this light as the source of his knowledge, adding that even when the gates were closed off, the fire "never extinguished" (Au, XIX:16). His project of rendering this divine knowledge accessible through writing resulted in several highly personal accounts of *gnosis*.

However, Böhme is careful to emphasize that transcendental *gnosis* cannot be understood by reason alone. The only way to achieve religious illumination is through an inner process of spiritual transformation and rebirth. Unfortunately, this is more complicated than simply gazing at a pewter vessel; it demands a continuous struggle between opposing principles within ourselves. Böhme depicts the transformation as a series of births, which he divides into three: the outward birth, the astral birth, and a final birth of the soul, which "the outward Man neither knoweth nor comprehendeth" (Au, XX:50). The three births can only be understood in conjunction with what Böhme calls his three guiding "principles". These are summarized in Andrew Weeks' intellectual biography on Böhme as:

I. The darkness in you, which longs for the light, is the first principle.

II. The force of light in you, by means of which you see in your mind without eyes, is the second principle.

III. And the longing force, which issues in the mind and attracts to itself and fills itself, from which the material body grows, is the third principle. (1991, 113-114)

Simplified, the first principle is the *dark world*, and the second the *light world*. The third is *our world*, which is a culmination of the two preceding principles. These principles were originally

contained within the unfallen Adam. But they existed in an uneasy equilibrium, constantly threatening to overtake one another. Since the original Adam ultimately succumbed to the material world, and his own self-centeredness, we must move beyond—not back—to our pre-fall state. In other words, we are not trying to restore what was lost, but work our way towards something new; this is not a return to a non-corporeal state, but a continual renewal that seeks to unite us with the divine.

According to Böhme, the process of rebirth must involve a complete self-surrender to God, thus embracing the experience of something greater than our own will. However, it is important to emphasize that this is, indeed, a *process*—and a complicated one at that. When we open ourselves up to this inner rebirth, we discover that the desire to overcome our selfhood is accompanied by a fear of what we will be without it. This inner conflict brings us to a state of crisis, which Böhme calls the *Schrack*. Magee notes that this is often translated to "flash", adding that Böhme: "writes of it as a fire flash or lightening flash (*Blitz*)" (2016, 188). As Magee further notes, this is the catalyst for our inner transformation, but Böhme "is not entirely clear about what it involves". Magee reasons that it probably amounts to the realization that the only way we can resolve this conflict is by surrendering ourselves to God (ibid).

To further complicate things, Böhme talks as if this process is not only taking place within ourselves, but also within God. In absence of human consciousness, God cannot be realized; he exists only in what Böhme calls the *Unground*, a state of non-being from which the world was formed. In this state, God is defined by two opposing wills: the will to manifest, and the will to remain concealed. As Magee points out, this suggests that there is an inherent "negativity within God"; or rather, an "*absolute negativity*", as God contains the "primal will to close, withdraw, refuse" (2016, 192). This is, however, a necessary aspect of God; the existence of good and evil is "The Essence of this world . . . and the one cannot be without the other" (MM, XI:15). The will to manifest can only arise from opposition; if God did not contain darkness, he would not exist in a way we could comprehend. This is a crucial aspect of Böhme's theosophy, as throughout his writings, the dialectical relationship between good and evil is presented as being the catalyst for the rebirth of ourselves, and of nature. This is because the light and darkness in God are also contained within us, as: "God is the heart or fountain of nature, from him cometh all." (Au, 1:9). Of course, by "nature" Böhme does not only mean the physical nature that surrounds us, but also

our inner nature; elsewhere he tells us: "without Nature God is a Mystery . . . an Abyssal Eye, that standeth or seeth in the Nothing, for it is the Abyss [Unground]; and this same Eye is a Will, understand a longing after manifestation, to find the Nothing" (SR, 3:2). In other words, we are God's nature; and without nature, God cannot come into being. As Magee notes, this suggests "creation 'completes' or perfects God" (2016, 190).

Böhme compares our inner rebirth(s) to the work of the alchemists: "as this is done in Man, so likewise it is in the Transmutation of Metals" (SR, 5:12). In short, this work depends upon the unification of opposing principles: a process that is also central to Böhme's theosophy. We know that Böhme was influenced by alchemists, particularly the writings of Paracelsus. This is not only apparent in Böhme's use of alchemical language and symbolism, but also in his conceptualization of the rebirth process. In *Of the Nature of Things*, Paracelsus writes: "In the Creation of the World, the first separation began from the four Elements, seeing the first matter of the World was one Chaos" (1674, 239). This "chaos" is the *prima materia*: the original, pure matter from which the world, and the four elements, was made. Understood metaphysically, the *prima materia* is the human soul in its original harmony with God. In a laboratory setting, it is the starting point of the alchemical magnum Opus: in order to transmute metal into gold, the substance the alchemist is working with must first be dissolved into its first matter. This is usually depicted as a process involving three stages, where the impure matter must undergo a form of death to be reborn in its pure form. It starts with *nigredo*, the blackening stage; here the matter is killed and putrefied, producing a black colour. It then turns white in the *albedo* stage, during which the impurities of the matter are washed away. To complete the creation of the Philosopher's Stone, the four opposing elements (fire, water, earth, and air) must be reunited; this is sometimes referred to as a return to the *prima materia*. In the *rubedo*, the final phase of the Opus, the Stone is heated by a strong fire. The fire intensifies until the Stone attains a ruby red colour, signifying the end of the Opus, and the creation of the Philosopher's Stone.[5]

It is also common for this process to be illustrated by the "chemical wedding" (sometimes referred to as *hieros gamos*, meaning sacred union or marriage). In the alchemical corpus, elements, substances, and general concepts are often identified as either masculine or feminine.

[5] From the fifteenth century and onwards, the process of transmutation is usually depicted through the colours of black, white and red; however, there can be more than three color-coded stages, most notably the *citrinitas* (yellowing), and the multi-coloured peacock stage. See Abraham (1998, 42).

For instance, fire and air are masculine, while water and earth are feminine. Likewise, the sun (Sol) is masculine, while the moon (Luna) is feminine. This masculine-feminine dichotomy also extends to the element's "qualities"; mercury is the cold, moist feminine principle, while sulphur is the hot, dry masculine principle. These are the "opposites" that the alchemist must unite. The most popular image for this unification is the chemical wedding; here Sol and Luna—often represented by the (red) king and (white) queen—must die and be reborn in their unified form. The end-product of this perfect union is the Philosopher's Stone (sometimes illustrated by a hermaphroditic figure, or the "rebis").[6]

A version of this unification process can be found in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1550), a popular alchemical treatise that was made up of Latin excerpts from other alchemical source-works. From the 1550's and onwards, the *Rosarium* would often include a series of woodcarvings from an old German poem titled *Sol und Luna*. In these carvings, the transmutation process is illustrated by the unification of a king and a queen. At first, the royal couple are shown naked in a sexual embrace (figure 1). Next, their unified bodies are placed in a tomb, signifying the beginning of the putrefaction process (figure 2). Once they are revived, the king and queen become one unified being—a hermaphrodite with two heads and one body (figure 3). In the final figure, Christ is shown rising from the same tomb (figure 4). With this, Christ becomes analogous with the Philosopher's Stone, and a parallel is drawn between his death and crucifixion, and the death and putrefaction of the first matter. In her discussion on "spiritual alchemy", Karen-Claire Voss argues that the final figure of the *Rosarium* indicates that it belongs to a Christian doctrine that celebrates the "glorification and perfection" of the "physical body", rather than a transcendence of the corporal (1998, 168). As she puts it, the resurrection of Christ is here "the embodiment of the hierogamic union between human and divine" (ibid). This is an important point, because it illustrates how alchemy—even when seen as a "spiritual" process—is still firmly anchored in our physical reality.

In Böhme's theosophy, this drama of separation and unification is also happening inside of Adam. It is central to his fallen condition, as Adam's fall from the divine harmony is also a fall from androgyny. As Böhme explains, Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge is the *second* fall—the first fall is what results in her creation. Before the first fall, Adam was "the true Manly Virgin

[6] See Abraham (1994, 98-99)

of God”: both “man and woman”, and yet “neither” at the same time (MM, L:48). His female counterpart was the “Virgin Sophia”—the source of divine wisdom. More than that, she is, as Magee explains, the “mirror in which God beholds himself”; not as an “imitation or copy”, but as “an *imago*, a mature expression of the Being of God” (2016, 193). God’s will to manifest emanates from this mirror image, since Sophia reflects his innate potential for creation. After Adam’s fall, she disappears into the second principle, leaving Adam unable to intuitively perceive the divine presence in this world. Before his separation, Adam “understood the Language of nature” , and could name “all creatures from their essence, forme and property” (MM, XIX:22). However, as Magee posits, Böhme’s Adam was not consciously aware of this knowledge. His original divine form is therefore inadequate, since he cannot grasp—or become part of—the dynamic struggle that defines God. The first fall is thus necessary; it is a “transition from divine – but unconscious – perception of the whole, of the one, to a perception of the multiplicity of things in their separation or division” (2016, 198).

The separation does, of course, come at a price. Since we are descendants of Adam, we are also in a fallen state. Like Adam, we have been separated from God’s harmony, and are now exiled to the mortal (or “outward”) world. It is only through *gnosis* that we can see beyond our corporeal reality and realize the innate divine potentiality within us. For Böhme, the vision brought on by the pewter vessel was, as Magee puts it, “a momentary recovery of the original standpoint of Adam” (2016, 198). It was also, as mentioned, one that he struggled to adequately express once the moment had passed.

Readers familiar with Blake will immediately notice the similarities between Böhme’s Adam and Blake’s Albion—the poet’s fallen primordial man, and symbol for mankind. In *Milton* we find him consumed by his own reasoning selfhood in “the Sea of Time & Space” (15:39). Albion’s fall is explored in greater detailed in *Jerusalem*; here we are told that the separation from the female Jerusalem (his “Emanation”) has caused Albion to enter a “deadly sleep of Six Thousand Years” (96:11). He has suffered the same faith as Böhme’s Adam, whose “pretious and endeared Bride . . . was taken from him in his sleep” (MM, XXV:14). But the separation and unification process also happen to several other characters in Blake’s poems, including to his version of John Milton, and to all four of his “Zoas”. Although the process plays out in different ways, it is always part of the same redemptive struggle. And, significantly, it is put in motion by

the opposing forces within, and around us. Both good and evil are thereby equally necessary, as one cannot exist without the other; as Blake declares in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence." (3:4-5).

Blake and Esotericism

In her work *Glorious Incomprehensible*, Sheila A. Spector argues that "the largest impediment to a study of Blake's mysticism has been cultural bias", adding: "literary critics, following Northrop Frye's lead, have equivocated on the question, basically defining Blake out of the field." (2001, 27). Her remarks on Frye are related to his greatly influential *Fearful Symmetry,* in which mysticism is defined as a "form of spiritual communion with God which is by its nature incommunicable to anyone else" (1947, 7). The definition used by Frye does not only, as Spector points out, "define Blake out of the field", but also creates an artificial dichotomy between the artist and the mystic. As Frye goes on to argue, poets who have been labelled "mystics" should more appropriately be called "visionaries" (1947, 8). According to Frye, a visionary is someone who "creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual world in which the objects of perception in this one have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism", while "most great mystics . . . find the symbolism of visionary experience not only unnecessary but a positive hindrance to the highest mystical contemplation" (ibid). Based on this reasoning, he concludes: "This suggests that mysticism and art are in the long run mutually exclusive, but that the visionary and the artist are allied." (ibid). This reasoning arguably does not hold up under scrutiny; if we look at Böhme, we find that symbolism and images are central to the revelatory mechanism of his theosophy. Still, Frye's terminology has proven to be enduring, perhaps in part because the divide it places between the poet and the mystic allows us to talk about Blake's visions safely within the realm of poetry.

Yet, the cultural bias within Blake scholarship has not been the only impediment; the bigger issue at hand has arguably been the general lack of scholarship on esoteric subjects. For literary critics in the twentieth century, the lack of research in this field undoubtedly made it difficult to navigate the underlying esoteric influences in Blake's work. Even when dealing with relatively

well-known figures, like Swedenborg, Böhme and Paracelsus, the scholarship has been, and to some extent still is, quite limited. Additionally, because of the waning interest in occultism, some esoteric works remain untranslated, or suffer from poor translations. This has posed a challenge for scholars trying to assess the impact of esoteric thought on Blake, and made it nearly impossible to place him, or his ideas, within a larger esoteric context. Additionally, there seems to be a growing consensus among esoteric scholars that we need to reconsider some of the terms and assumptions found in older academic writings on these topics. This is something to keep in mind when revisiting older esoteric scholarship on Blake. While a larger reassessment might be in order, I will only briefly touch upon some of the more problematic terms that are of particular note to this thesis.

I would wager that many people who may know little or nothing about Gnosticism, have at one point or another heard that Blake is a Gnostic. One early inquiry into his supposed Gnosticism can be found in Clark Emery's 1966 introduction to Blake's *The Book of Urizen*; here Blake is described as someone who: "has both the intellectual individualism and the fertile mythological imagination which characterized the Gnostics" (1966, 13). Emery then asks, rhetorically, if Blake echoed any of their "fundamental doctrines" and presents a list of twelve "general beliefs" they supposedly tended to agree on (1966, 14). Some of the points listed, like the return to "an original spiritual unity" and awakening being brought on by "knowledge" (*gnosis*) are undoubtedly characteristic of Gnostic texts, but the list as a whole is not descriptive of a specific Gnostic tradition; rather, he seems to mix up aspects associated with various "Gnostic currents (ibid). The issue with Emery's doctrines are that they treat Gnosticism as one comprehensive belief system, rather than a set of ideas. This is not unusual, and it is not unique to Blake studies; however, there are flaws with this approach. Roelof van den Broek, who has published several books on *gnosis* and Gnostic religion, cautions that "the term Gnosticism . . . if used at all, should only be employed as a neutral term encompassing the various gnostic systems that flourished in the first centuries of our era." (2016, 54). The issue, he explains, is that the term "suggests a coherence and uniformity which did not exist in reality" (2013, 3). Elsewhere, Van den Broek notes that "gnostic ideas have always spontaneously emerged in Western culture, independent of early Christian Gnosticism." (2016, 58).

Van den Broek notes similar issues with the term Hermeticism, which has also endured a usage that creates a false impression of coherence. Since the 1950s, in the wake of the highly acclaimed works published by Frances Yates on Hermeticism, Blake would increasingly be placed within the so-called hermetic tradition. While some scholars, notably Kathleen Raine, have argued that Blake was familiar with Hermetic writings, others have used Hermeticism more as a catch-all term when discussing esoteric aspects of his work. While Hermeticism was initially conceived as a tradition based upon the writings attributed to the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus (the most important being the *The Asclepius* and *Corpus Hermeticum*), the term is also commonly used when talking about alchemy. Additionally, Hermeticism has also come to encompass various esoteric traditions inspired by alchemy, or hermetic writings, such as Astrology, Kabbalah, Theosophy and anything vaguely associated with "magic" or the "occult". Since the thoughts and ideas associated with these currents can vary greatly, Van den Broek suggests it would be "preferable to speak of 'hermetic religion' and 'gnostic religion'" (2013, 3). In *Esotericism and the Academy*, Hanegraaff offers his own theory on the terms popularity; assessing the impact of Yates' *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964), Hanegraaff describes Hermeticism as the "magic word that allowed academics to be taken seriously while exploring the history of occult beliefs and practices", adding that its usage has now largely given away to the term esotericism (2012, 334).

Some might argue that this is now the new "magic word", and perhaps they are right; however, esotericism is not just a change of terminology, it also offers a new methodology. If we start with the assumption that certain occult currents were marginalized by the new Enlightenment rationality, then naturally a field dedicated to studying them must start by answering the basic question of what these thinkers, practices and strands of thought have in common. This is not an easy task, and there is an ongoing debate about how esotericism should be defined. As of now, the prevailing approach is that set forth by Antoine Faivre, one of the pioneering scholars of esotericism. In *Access to Western Esotericism*, he identifies four fundamental features of esotericism: (1) "Correspondence", (2) "Living Nature", (3), "Imagination and Mediation", and (4) "Experience of Transmutation". Faivre also includes two other characteristics, which are not always present, but are often found in conjunction with the other features, namely: (5) "The Praxis of Concordance", and (6) "Transmission" (1994, 10-15). Together, the elements in his list creates a basic set of guiding criteria that can be used to determine whether something is esoteric. Faivre argues that these features are in essence "more or less inseparable", but "methodologically it is

important to distinguish between them (1994, 10). He further maintains that the first four characteristics must be present for something to be considered esoteric, although they “can be positioned quite unequally” (1994, 15). Finally, he notes that these elements are “as identifiable in music, art, and literature as in explicitly esoteric works” (Ibid).

I will return to the rest of this list in the subsequent chapters, but it is of course the fourth point—the experience of transmutation—that is of importance for this thesis. The term “transmutation” is borrowed from alchemy, and is also, as mentioned, the word Böhme uses when he talks of the inner rebirth(s). According to Faivre, transmutation can be understood as a form of “metamorphosis” that results in a disintegration between “knowledge (*gnosis*) and inner experience, or intellectual activity and active imagination” (1994, 13). Faivre prefers this word over “transformation”, since the latter “does not necessarily signify the passage from one plane [of reality] to another” (ibid). While the notion of a “spiritual” alchemy has become a highly contested subject (in part, because of its association with Carl Jung), it can hardly be denied that alchemy contains a religious or spiritual dimension. This can readily be observed in Böhme, who incorporates the alchemical transmutation process into his theosophical system. Faivre argues that, in the wake of Paracelsus, the “figurative presentation” of this process—with its three colour-coded stages—would become an increasingly important aspect of the alchemical corpus (1994, 13). When presented this way, it starts to resemble what Faivre calls the “traditional mystic way”: a threefold process of “purgation, illumination, unification”. As he further notes, this implies that “transmutation can just as well occur in a portion of Nature as in the experimenter himself” (1994, 13). Transmutation of matter thus becomes analogous with an inner rebirth; one that brings together the spiritual and the corporeal.

In *Esotericism and the Academy*, Hanegraaff suggests that the merger of alchemical and religious thought can be understood as part of the emergence of what he calls an “Alchemical paradigm”. He posits this as a departure from the “Platonic paradigm”: a way of thinking “grounded primarily in Platonic frameworks and assumptions”, “dominated by concepts of universal harmony” with an “essentially static ‘great chain of being’”, and further characterized by its “concern with ancient wisdom” (2012, 192-193). The alchemical paradigm, on the other hand, is founded on the concept of transmutation. Hanegraaff further notes that while various aspects of this esoteric tradition have been lumped in with Hermeticism, it should not be confused

as Hermetic. Unlike the Platonic paradigm, which Hanegraaff traces back to the Italian Renaissance, the new alchemical paradigm emerged out of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany, and can be traced back to Paracelsus (2012, 193). Central to the alchemical paradigm is the idea that the world emerged from a state of darkness, which is then followed by a redemptive struggle between opposing fractions. We can see in Böhme's theosophy how this is understood in a religious context; his *prima materia* is the *Unground*, a unification and separation is an inherent part of Adam, and rebirth, or salvation, can only be achieved through a struggle between the conflicting wills within ourselves. As Hanegraaff explains, the religious interpretation of transmutation as a continuous struggle opened for a new way of thinking that was "inherently dynamic, linear, and dialectic" (2012, 193). Moreover, it is less concerned with the supposed wisdom of past authorities, and places greater emphasis on "direct, personal experience" (ibid). In other words, the objective for the thinkers within the alchemical paradigm was not to restore mankind to a former state of divine glory, but rather to elevate the corporeal human to a new, higher level of being.

As Hanegraaff further notes, this new way of thinking was especially appealing to Lutherans, who rejected the church as the ultimate source of religious wisdom. Without the authoritative guidance of religious institutions, it was up to the individual to discover their own path to salvation. It was easy for the alchemical model to be introduced into the process of salvation, since it imagines an upward motion from an original state of darkness (sin), to a state of divine redemption through Christ. (2012, 195). Of course, reaching this state was no easy task; due to the confusing, and sometimes conflicting messages contained within the Bible, some began looking elsewhere for answers. The quest for divine knowledge took many shapes, and the merger of alchemical transmutation and Lutheranism became, according to Hanegraaff, "responsible for the most important forms of creative innovation in what we now see as 'Western Esotericism' after the sixteenth century" (2012, 194). For Böhme, his own spiritual crisis was brought on by the existence of evil, which his "outward man" could find no explanation for. In *The Incarnation*, the problem of evil is explored as a series of questions and answers, where "outward reason" asks: "then God hath by the Dying of his Sonne, redeemed us, and paid a ransom for us, *wherefore* then must we also dye and perish or be consumed?" (I:4). The answer came to Böhme not through study, but through the transformative experience of *gnosis*, where the ultimate truth was revealed to him by a personal encounter with the divine light of God.

It is easy to see how this mode of thinking would appeal to Blake, who himself valued a direct spiritual experience as opposed to the confines of organized religion. Indeed, the emphasis on personal experience was one of the reasons behind Blake's rejection of one of his other major esoteric influences: the scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* Blake declares: "Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth: Now hear another: he has written all the old falshoods" (pl. 22). While both Böhme and Swedenborg wrote about their experience of *gnosis*, they had very different ideas of how to achieve it. In his books on Swedenborg's *The Secrets of Heaven,* Hanegraaff notes that Swedenborg's concept of *gnosis* was presented as something reserved to a small, privileged (or chosen) group of people (2007:9). Böhme, on the other hand, not only maintains that *gnosis* can be achieved by anyone, but makes the individual experience of *gnosis* central to his theosophy. This, in turn, laid the foundation for a movement that deeply encouraged its followers to develop their own unique religious interpretations. In his book on theosophy, Arthur Versluis describes it as "a discipline, an experimental path that each must walk on his or her own" (1999, 26). It was precisely this rejection of the "outer church" in favour of the "inner church" that appealed to Blake, and as we will see in his major prophecies, the idea of experience as a path to the divine is central to his visionary journey.

Commenting on Blake's connection to esoteric and mystical figures, Laura Quinney notes that Blake "linked himself with Boehme and Swedenborg precisely in so far as they too had 'visions'" (2019, 301). "The real issue", Quinney continues, "is what Blake meant by visions" (ibid). And indeed, this is the big problem at hand. Like many Blake scholars before her, Quinney is quick to conclude that they were not mystical in character; rather, they were more like "a work of art" that "arises out of the individual imagination". (2019, 306). It is particularly Blake's insistence on individuality that Quinney believes disqualifies Blake from the label "mystic". And yet, if we start to look at other esoteric movements that emerged out of the alchemical paradigm, especially Böhmean theosophy, we see that that the insistence on an active and individual interpretation of the spiritual experience is one of their defining features. For Böhme and his followers, the personal experience of mystical "visions" was the "Key" to salvation: "One cannot lend the Key to another to [unlock] this [withall] . . . every one must unlock it with his own key, or else he cannot enter therein" (TP, IX:26). While it is indeed difficult to determine what Blake meant by "visions", his own accounts of visionary experiences are eerily similar to the ones

described by Böhme; it may then be possible that we should be examining the role of visions in Blake's belief system, not as an extension of the "poetic imagination", but as an experience of *gnosis*.

Chapter 2:

Nigredo

The beginning of the alchemical Opus is marked by the blackness of the *nigredo*; this is the matter in its impure, divided state. Numerous symbolic expressions can be identified with this stage: usually associated with blackness, devouring, putrefaction, and death. For a description of the *nigredo* we may turn to the *Atalanta fugiens* (1618), a highly celebrated alchemical emblem book from the seventeenth century.[7] Its author, the German alchemist Michael Maier (1568-1622), plainly states: "that which can make a man grow young again is nothing, but death itself, and the beginning of eternal life ensuing" (2020, discourse 9). Continuing, Maier further writes: "when you see your matter black, rejoice, because it is the beginning of the work" (2020, dis. 12). Of course, in the minds of religious thinkers, the blackness of the *nigredo* could convey more than simply the state of metals; for some theologists, it came to symbolise the death of Christ, and sometimes, even the heralding of the apocalypse.

We see this allegorical reading of the *nigredo* in the works of Böhme. In the *Incarnation of Christ*, he proclaims: "when we consider of Death, how we must go through Death into Life, then we find altogether another kind of Life; which cometh out of Death." (IJC II, 1:10). This "death" is seen as being accomplished through burning flames of *fire*, the transmutation agent in alchemy. Continuing, Böhme writes: "our Life consisteth in Fire", later adding: "the Fire killeth or mortifieth and devoureth the substance which the fire it selfe Maketh . . . it consumeth that, and giveth out of the Death, a much Nobler and better (Other), which it cannot Consume." (II, 1:18, 1:22). Böhme likens this rebirth to the creation of the Philosopher's Stone; however, he emphasises the need to examine the inherent darkness—both of ourselves and of the world—in order to attain this mystical object:

> If we will speak of the Noble Stone, and bring it forth into the Light to be known, we must first show the *Darkness* and deformity of the Stone, which hinder that it is not known. For,

[7] The book contains 50 emblems, which where illustrated by Matthäus Merian (1593-1650). Each emblem has a corresponding motto, epigram, fugue, and a larger discourse. See "Interplay" (Nummedal and Bilak, 2020).

> since we know that the Noble Stone lies hidden in this world, and may be had *every where*, and yet is not known, we should therefore seek to know the cause why it is so hidden (TLM, 7:14).

Exactly what Böhme means by the "Noble Stone" will be the topic of a later discussion, but we can already safely conclude that he is not talking about the attainment of elemental gold; rather, it is something of divine origin, which has been obscured in darkness.

The divine in Blake's fallen world is similarly obscured in a veil of darkness; however, this darkness crucially pre-dates the fall of mankind. In accordance with the creation myths we find in the alchemical paradigm, Blake's world is one that emerges from a state of darkness; in fact, in his two major prophecies, every aspect of creation—even the divine—is subject to the same dark becoming. It must be noted that the darkness in Blake's poetry is more complicated than simply a state of original sin; in fact, the concept of sin is more or less absent in Blake. Rather, true darkness, to Blake, is a world of stasis. It is a closing off of possibilities, an absence of movement. Blake conceives of this motionless state as a fallen oneness: an idea which is essential to Blake's creation myth. Like the dark *prima materia,* the world of Blake's poetry comes into being from a shapeless, uniform void. This is simultaneously the beginning of redemption, and the beginning of the fall: it is the moment where the outward perception divorces from the inward; yet, as we shall see, this separation is necessary to attain the divine wholeness of the fourfold vision. It is the contrary forces of light and darkness, expansion and contraction, that creates the foundation of Blake's transmutation: a process that aims to exceed the visionary state of the unfallen being. We may conceptualize this light and darkness as an "opening" and "closing"; hence why, when Blake inserts himself into *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, it is as the poet-prophet whose "great task" is: "To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity" (Jer, 5:18-19).

Emerging from the Abyss

In his two major prophecies, Blake's concept of vision develops into four separate "worlds" of imagination: Ulro, Generation, Beulah and Eden. Each world represents a different way of perceiving the reality that surrounds us. When the four worlds are brought together, they form the "fourfold vision":

Now I a fourfold vision see
And a fourfold vision is given to me
Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And three fold in soft Beulahs night
And twofold Always. May God us keep
From Single vision & Newtons sleep

(CW: *Letters*, 722)

The transmutation begins in Ulro; the imagination of mankind in its fallen state. Ulro is a world of darkness and opacity, an "Abyss of sorrow and torture" (Mil, 19:22, 23:39). It is the "Seat of Satan / . . . the False Tongue beneath Beulah" (Mil, 27:45-46). It is a place of death and destruction, "a vast Polypus / Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing / A self-devouring monstrous human Death Twenty-seven fold" (Mil, 34:24-26). When the eye is limited to "Single vision", it is barred from seeing the "inner" world; only the "outer" is perceived as real. Thus, under the "delusion of Ulro", the earth is nothing but a "Globe rolling thro Voidness", since the mind is unable to grasp anything beyond scientific rationality (Mil, 29:17). But in Ulro, even material existence is a formless void: with everything stripped of a deeper meaning, all that is left is abstractions. Worse yet, Blake's abyss works to perpetuate itself: it is like a "mighty Polypus" ,[8] which grows to obscure the other worlds of the Imagination (Jer, 15:4).

Blake's Ulro calls to mind Max Weber's process of "disenchantment": the rejection of "mysterious incalculable forces" in favour of "technical means and calculations" (Weber, 1958, 117). In 1947, the critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer similarly identified disenchantment as the foundation of the Enlightenment: as articulated in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the "Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world" (2002, 1). Blake, who experienced this process first hand, writes in *Jerusalem*: "I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe / And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire / Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton" (Jer, 15:14-16). Hanegraaff argues that the conceptualization of esotericism can be seen as a "direct outcome" of the process of disenchantment, as the term now encompasses "everything seen as incompatible with the disenchanted worldview" (2012, 254).

[8] Sea creature with tentacles, or a cancerous growth. See Damon (1965, 332-333).

Of course, in response to the process of disenchantment, there has also been established a counter-tradition of "re-enchantment", which seeks to reincorporate these "mysterious forces" back into our understanding of the natural world. As Hanegraaff further notes, the concept of re-enchantment closely matches Faivre's definition of esotericism:

> the notion of "correspondences" is clearly an alternative to instrumental causality, "living nature" stands against a mechanistic worldview, "imagination/mediations" implies a multi-leveled neoplatonic cosmology as opposed to a cosmos reducible to only matter in motion, and "transmutation" implies the theosophical/alchemical process of regeneration by which fallen man and nature are reunited with the divine. (ibid)

The "instrumental causality" and "mechanistic worldview" that Hanegraaff identifies with the disenchanted world, could very well serve as a description of Blake's Ulro; indeed, as Blake declares in *Milton*: "a Natural Cause only seems, it is a Delusion / Of Ulro: & a ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory" (27:45-46). Likewise, Blake's process of attaining fourfold vision could be viewed in terms of re-enchantment, as it seeks to elevate the natural world beyond our observable realities.

Yet while the disenchanted world of Ulro can in many ways be seen as the anthesis to Blake's fourfold vision, it is also presented as integral to the process of creation; in fact, there can be no life without Ulro. In *Jerusalem*, Blake writes: "Such is the nature of the Ulro: that whatever enters: / Becomes Sexual, & is Created, and Vegetated, and Born." (39:21-22). This does become somewhat confusing once Blake's second world, "Generation" is introduced; this is presented as the Imaginary equivalent to our world of time and space. Like Ulro, it is also portrayed as a product of the fallen condition. As S. Foster Damon notes, Blake does not seem to differentiate between these two worlds until *Jerusalem*: in his earlier prophecies, Generation is called the "vegetative world, and treated as part of Ulro (1965, 150). Different explanations have been proposed for why this distinction happens; one possibility is that Blake's Ulro is only the beginning of existence, but it is not existence in and of itself. In his in-depth study of Böhme's influence on Blake, Kevin Fischer suggests that Ulro and Generation can be compared with Böhme's first principle: the former is the "formless spectral existence", while the latter "may be seen as the 'eternal beginning' of the birth of Christ." (2004, 160). If we return to Weeks summarization of the three principles, we may say that Ulro is "the darkness in you", while Generation is the part that is "longing for the

light" (1991, 113-114). In other words, Ulro is the unrealized potentiality of the *Unground* (God in his "unconscious" state), while Generation is the beginning of creation. Viewed this way, Ulro can be understood as the fabric that underlies the Imagination, and gives it the potential to manifest in the temporal world of Generation.

We see the potentiality of Ulro expressed in the character Los: "the "Prophet of Eternity" (Mil, 7:36). The work of the immortal Los is not that dissimilar from the work of the alchemists; he is frequently portrayed as a blacksmith—altering both nature and humans through the fire of his furnace. It is commonly accepted that his name is intended to be the Latin world "Sol" (sun) spelled in reverse. And like the sun, Los gives life to the world that surrounds him. He represents the innate potentiality of the human Imagination, and its effect on the corporeal world. Everything that is visible to the human eye is made so by Los. And everything that Los creates, he creates from his Imagination: he is "Within labouring. beholding Without" (Mil, 3:37). There is, however, a necessary darkness to Los' creation. In *Milton*, Los gives form to Urizen: the embodiment of reason. While the name "Urizen" is usually understood as a derivation of "Your Reason", it has also been suggested that it could derive from the Greek word *ουριζειν* ("to limit"), which forms the root of the English word "horizon" (Damon, 1965, 419). Regardless of whether Blake was aware of the Greek derivation, "to limit" is an appropriate description of the fallen Urizen, as he comes to represent the effect of the disenchantment on the Imagination. When Los finds him, his mind is locked up in "darkness & solitude" (Mil, 3:6). He is described as the "Abstract horror": a creature "Refusing all Definite Form" (Mil, 3:9). In his fallen state, he inhabits the formless void of Ulro: the "indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning" (Mil, 3:8). Throughout the course of seven ages, Los gives form to the abyss that surrounds him—descending into it like the sun, "a red round Globe hot burning" (Mil, 3:11). The formlessness of the abyss implies that Ulro contains the same "oneness" as the *prima materia*; thus, while it contains the potentiality for creation, it is only through separation that it can assume form.

The "becoming" is seen as partly a negative event; as the Abyss separates into definite parts, the fallen condition seems to intensify. In his discussion of the fallen condition of Blake's mythological world, Frye posits "the fall of man and the creation of the physical world were the same event" (1947, 41). This is largely correct, but the creation of Urizen illustrates that there are *two* states of darkness: the Chaos of the unrealized world, and the realized world in separation. In

alchemical terms, we may think of it as the dark *prima materia* before separation, and the impure elements after separation. Unlike the biblical seven days of creation, Blake depicts the journey from nothing into something as *painful*; it is described with words such as "ghastly torment", "trembling & howling & dismay" (Mil, 3:22, 3:26). The fallen condition is reflected in every aspect of creation. Once Urizen assumes form, he begins to resemble the shape of Los; he is created into a human body, and bestowed with the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. But through the act of transforming the fallen Urizen, Los, too, is changed; thus, by the end of the seventh age, a "trembling & weeping" Los must undergo his own separation, and like the Abyss, he is divided into contraries: a male Spectre and a female Emanation (Mil, 3:31).

The separation of Los further amplifies the relationship between perception and the creative Imagination. It is specifically the act of "beholding" that transforms him; as Blake writes, Los—still engulfed in the Abyss—"became what he beheld" (Mil, 3:29). The phrase "became what he/they beheld" is further repeated throughout *Jerusalem*, and it is always related to the act of separation.[9] But in *Milton,* the negative "becoming" must be understood in relation to the Imagination, since that is the source of the creation that Los is beholding. Thus, it implies that an observer has the potential to amplify the darkness of the corporeal world through perception: what the observer sees through their Imagination is projected to the outward world, and then reflected back at them. This is, in effect, similar to the Paracelsian concept of Imagination, which manifests itself as "impressions" upon the physical world. Reflecting on the transformative properties of this "becoming", Blake writes: "Then those in Great Eternity who contemplate on Death / Said thus. What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom / It seems to Be, & is productive of the most dreadful / Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be" (Jer, 32:50-53). Indeed, the "becoming" can reinforce the fallen condition, but the opposite is also true. Above all, the interconnected nature of Perception and Imagination must be conceived as the basis for creation.

The mirror-like qualities of the "becoming" share similarities with Böhme's *Unground*. As noted, the God of Böhme's *Unground* only comes into being from opposition. In his unconscious state, God exists as a non-being—an entity not yet aware of his own existence. In *Signatura rerum*, Böhme writes: "without Nature there is an Eternal Stilness and Rest, viz. the Nothing; and then . . . an eternal Will ariseth in the Nothing, to introduce the Nothing into Something, that the Will

[9] See Jer 30:50, 54, 32:9, 14-15, 19.

might find, feel, and behold it self" (II:8). Fischer suggests that the "nothingness" of the *Unground* may have resonated with Blake precisely because of the potentiality that exists between the borders of "the Something" and "the Nothing" (2004, 86-87). Of course, as Fischer also notes, the "Nothingness" of the *Unground* cannot be understood as "simply nothing"; rather, it is the unrealized potentiality for creation (2004, 87). In *Signatura rerum*, Böhme further states: "God is without Beginning, and hath an Eternal Beginning, and an Eternal End, which he is himself, and the Nature of the inward World is in the like Essence from Eternity" (3:1). Since God is "without Beginning", so is his creation; thus, everything that has the potential to be created, must already exist in the Eternal. We may think of this as a movement from "formlessness" into "form". Now, if we keep in mind that Böhme incorporated the Paracelsian concept of imagination into his theosophy, we can begin to see the true creative potential of the "becoming"—both as a positive and negative event.

It is within this negative becoming of the *Unground* that Böhme finds the answer to the existence of evil. In his *Six Theosophic points*, Böhme's "Reason" asks: "Why has God created a painful, suffering life? Might it not be in a better state without suffering or pain, seeing he is the ground and beginning of all things?" (SP, "Theoscopia", 1:7). As an answer, Böhme writes: "Nothing without contrariety can become manifest to itself; for if it has nothing to resist it, it goes continually of itself outwards, and returns not again into itself." (ibid, 1:8). The contraries of light and darkness are necessary for both earthly, and divine existence. This, according to Böhme, is the truth that Reason is unable to comprehend. As Böhme further explains: "For a thing that in itself is only good, and has no suffering (Qual),[10] desires nothing; for it knows nothing better in itself or for itself after which it could long" (ibid, 1:18). The dialectical relationship between Böhme's opposites—light and darkness, manifest and unmanifest, the two wills of God—underlies every aspect of his theosophy. This is likely one of the reasons why Böhme appealed to Blake. Although Blake of course disregards some of Böhme's contraries—particularly the ones relating to sin—he still maintains the same dialectical relationship between light and darkness; as Blake's Mary cries out: "O Forgiveness & Pity & Compassion! If I were Pure I should never / Have known Thee; If I

[10] Qual is German for pain, or agony; however, Böhme's use of the term also relates to the negative quality (Qualität) in God, and in the corporeal world. See Hegel (1974, 210).

were Unpolluted I should never have / Glorified thy Holiness, or rejoiced in thy great Salvation" (Jer, 61:44-46).

While the fallen condition arises from the creation of the physical world, the contraries of the created world provide a path of access to a higher state of being. In *Milton*, we see that the fall of Los into multiplicity offers a reprieve from the formless void of Ulro. As Blake writes, "Los continual builds the Mundane Shell" around the dreaded "Polypus" of Ulro (Mil, 34:31). The "Mundane Shell" is admittedly one of Blake's stranger concepts. In *Jerusalem* he writes that the "beautiful Mundane Shell" is "The Habitation of the Spectres of the Dead & the Place / Of Redemption & of awaking again into Eternity" (59:7-9). It acts as a projection: "whatever is visible in the Vegetable Earth, the same / Is visible in the Mundane Shell; reversd" (Jer, 72:46-47). Within the Mundane Shell we find the Mundane Egg. The Egg is our world of time and space, while the Shell is the visible sky. Damon explains it as the place where "fallen man incubates until he hatches and re-enters Eternity" (1965, 288).

The egg-shaped world of Los may be compared to the alchemical egg, which is often presented as the "vessel of transmutation" and the birthplace of the Philosopher's Stone (Abraham, 1998, 66). As Lyndy Abraham notes, the transmutation of the Stone is also "frequently compared to a hatching of a chicken from its egg" (ibid). In Blake's mythology, it acts as an intermediary between the temporal and the eternal; it is the cycle of life and death: the place where the mortal being is transmuted. The eighth emblem of Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* provides us with an answer as to why the egg is such an important symbol in alchemy: "In an egg are the seeds of both male and female joined together under one cover or shell" (2020, Discourse). By this, he means that the egg contains the masculine and feminine contraries that the alchemists are trying to reconcile. Maier continues:

> the corruption or death of an egg brings new generation and life to the chicken, so an Embryo being freed from that human vegetable life . . . another more perfect is obtained by coming into the light of this world, as by nativity: yea also we being deprived of this present life, which we lead, another most perfect and eternal is at hand (ibid).

The Philosopher's Stone is like an egg in that it contains the contraries of nature; yet, as the Stone takes on form, the contraries are not simply brought to harmony, but fundamentally altered into

something that transcends matter. The death of the *nigredo* may thus be compared to the hatching of the egg; it marks the shift from an old state of being to a new form of perfection.

The Divided Fourfold

Now that we have an idea of how an original state of darkness is incorporated into Blake's concept of creation, we can begin to examine how the same darkness operates within Blake's process of transmutation. Blake, like Böhme, imagines that the experience of Eternity is available to anyone. The issue, according to Blake, is that we have closed ourselves off from the "inward" world of the Imagination. This does not only affect us spiritually, but also alters the way we perceive the "outward" world. In *Jerusalem*, the relationship between the inward and outward is further expounded upon by Los, who declares: "If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of Perception seem to vary / If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects seem to close also" (30:55-56). This "closed-up" state of perception is the outward eye seeing through the imaginary world of Ulro; here, the true mysteries underlying reality are obscured from our field of vision, leaving us only with what can be perceived by the fallen senses.

The effect of this fallen state on mankind is explored through the divided Albion, Blake's universal man. In the previous discussion of Blake's "becoming" we saw how an initial separation is necessary for the emergence of potentiality. As mentioned, this can be conceptualized as the separation from the original dark unity of the *prima materia*. The four aspects of this unity were once contained within Albion; in their fallen form, they are known as the *Four Zoas*. Each of Blake's Zoas are identified with a fundamental aspect of the human being: the body (Tharmas), reason (Urizen), feelings (Luvah), and imagination (Urthona). Albion is also another name for England; thus, we must keep in mind that the transformation of Blake's primordial man also signifies the hope for a larger societal change.[11]

Through his address "To the Jews" in *Jerusalem*, Blake establishes a connection between Albion and Jewish Kabbalah: "You have a tradition, that Man anciently containd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth" (pl. 27). The "ancient tradition" that Blake is referring to is

[11] For the development of Blake's use of the name Albion, see Damon (1965, 9-16)

generally accepted to be that of *Adam Kadmon*, the Primordial Man in the Kabbalah. In Kabbalistic teachings, Adam Kadmon is conceived of as the first manifestation of God's creative potency. As the First Man, he contained all aspects of the Godhead—both masculine and feminine (Scholem, 1965, 104). In plate 25 of *Jerusalem*, we see an illustration of this sexual divide in Albion; his right thigh is engraved with an image of the masculine sun, while his left thigh belongs to the feminine moon (figure 7). Without going further into the intricate symbolism and teachings of the Kabbalah, we may say, in short, that the fall of the original Adam was brought on by an unbalanced growth between these aspects.[12] A similar separation of the masculine and feminine is inherent to Blake's fallen condition. Thus, after reminding his reader of the "ancient tradition", Blake writes: "But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion" (Jer, pl. 27). The "Starry Heavens" are the four Zoas, which in light of the comparison with Adam Kadmon, can be understood as the divine aspects of man.

Since Blake's fourfold man is an image of God, then God must also be fourfold; this fourfold wholeness of God is in turn mirrored in the four Zoas. Within these reflections we find an intricate set of correspondences. For one, the Zoas are explicitly identified with the four elements: "And the Four Zoa's who are the Four Eternal Senses of Man / Became Four Elements separating from the Limbs of Albion" (Jer, 32: 31-32). In light of this, Albion can either be understood as the *prima materia,* or the base metal which is to be transmuted. Again, it is important to note that all of these aspects are contained within Albion in his fourfold wholeness. The remaining aspects of the Zoas are included in table 1:

TABLE 1 *The Four Zoas*

Zoas	Trinity	Directions	Sense	Metals	Element
Tharmas	Father	West	Taste	Brass	Water
Urizen	Satan	South	Sight	Gold	Air
Luvah	Son	East	Smell	Silver	Fire
Urthona	Holy Ghost	North	Hearing	Iron	Earth

[12] See Scholem (1965, 103-115) for a more detailed explanation.

As the table illustrates, the various aspects of the Zoas reveal an interdependence between physical nature, human nature, and divine nature. In other words, they illustrate the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm: a relationship most famously expressed in Hermes' *Emerald Tablet* as the principle "as above, so below" (Abraham, 1998, 69-70).

When it comes to the Zoas' correspondence to the Trinity, Damon suggests that Urizen can be understood as its fallen aspect, which becomes Satan (1965, 459). Thus, regardless of his fallen state, Urizen must be conceived of as part of the whole that makes up the fourfold human *and* the fourfold God—an idea which seems to bring us closer to a negative "Böhmean" aspect: "For this world rests upon the foundation of the dark world. The dark world gives to this world essence, will and quality" (SP, IX:17). The same dark aspect is shown by Blake to be contained within the human being. In his fallen state, man, like the primordial Albion, is divided into four parts: Humanity, Emanation, Spectre, and Shadow (Jer, 15:6-7). The Spectre—the reasoning power in man—is identified with Satan (Mil, 38:29). In its fallen state, the Spectre devolves into the "Selfish-Selfhood". This is a state characterized by the same rationalized mindset of Ulro, only here the ruthless rationalization is used to justify a total disregard for anything other than what might serve its own self-interest. Like Ulro, the Spectre has a self-perpetuating quality; it is not only a symptom of the fallen condition, but part of the mechanism that keeps it in place:

> The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated
> From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio
> Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames Laws & Moralities
> To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars
>
> (Jer, 72:10-13)

And yet, there is a strange duality at play here; while darkness is a "closing", it is also the means of *expansion*. This expansion is really an "expansion" of vision, but it is often conceptualized by Blake in geographical terms. I already touched upon this in the discussion on Blake's dark "becoming", where we saw how the division of Los resulted in the creation of the material world, i.e. the world of four cardinal directions. As illustrated in *table 1*, each of these four cardinal directions correspond to one of the four Zoas, which in turn corresponds to one of the four "Eternal" aspects of man. It is, as we shall see, the synthesis of these strange correspondences that creates the foundation of Blake's transmutation.

Of course, the idea that the world is operated by an underlying web of correspondences now seems very alien to us, but this was a common feature of the pre-modern worldview. As suggested in the discussion of Blake's Ulro, the disappearance of correspondences can be understood as a product of disenchantment: a process that fundamentally altered our understanding of the natural world. Commenting on Faivre's characteristics of esotericism, Magee notes that the synthesis of his first two criteria—*correspondence* and *living nature*—amounts to a "qualitative approach to nature" (2016, xxiii). As an example of this approach, he mentions the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), who believed the entire universe was permeated by a "*spiritus mundi"* (world spirit). The *spiritus mundi* extended its influence across all spheres of life, and as Magee further explains, it was believed that one could "draw on" it through a system of interdependence; for instance, the influence of a particular planet could be attracted through the use of an associated substance: "precious stones, animals, scents, colors, and so forth" (ibid). A more familiar example may be that of astrology, which similarly asserts a relation between heavenly bodies and human affairs. Of course, modern day astrology is very different from the astrology of ancient or medieval traditions; in Renaissance alchemy for instance, it was considered the "heavenly counterpart" to the earthly science of transmutation (Abraham, 1998, 13). Part of its web of correspondences included the planets, each of which responds to one of the "seven main metals": mercury (Mercury), tin (Jupiter), iron (Mars), copper (Venus), lead (Saturn), silver (Moon), gold (Sun) (ibid). Most of the correspondences we find in alchemy require a level of deciphering, which is part of what makes alchemical symbolism so confusing to a modern audience; indeed, as Faivre declares, the world of correspondences is one where: "Everything is a sign; everything conceals and exudes mystery; every object hides a secret" (1994, 10).

How, then, are we to understand Blake's relation to this world of concealed mystery? He did, after all, insist that his work could be understood and enjoyed by anyone, including children (CW: *Letters*, 703). This is one of Frye's main objections against a mystical (or esoteric) reading of Blake; in *Fearful Symmetry* he argues: "Whatever Blake's prophecies may be, they can hardly be code messages", having previously asserted that "any attempt to explain them in terms of something that is not poetry is bound to fail" (1947, 6-7). Yet, there is of course the slight problem that no one can seem to agree on exactly how we are to understand Blake. And with good reason;

few other poets need a 460-page dictionary to make sense of their work.[13] Frye does, however, have a point: we cannot approach Blake's prophecies as some kind of code that is meant to be deciphered by a select group of people; this would run counter to the idea that the experience of Eternity is available to everyone —a point that is emphasised repeatedly.

Yet, there is undeniably an element of concealment in Blake's poetry. In a letter to his loyal patron Thomas Butts, Blake declares: "Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (CW: *Letters*, 730). One may read this and think that Blake is asserting that his art is not meant to be understood by everyone; however, what Blake is really saying is that the greatest works of poetry are those that transcend the outward reason. The concealment does not come from a desire to keep his work obscure; rather, the perceived concealment is the effect of the limits of the corporeal understanding. Crucially, these corporeal limits can be surpassed—even *within* the corporeal life. Blake makes it his mission to "open the Eternal Worlds" for us, so that we, like the fallen Albion, can also overcome our fallen state, and see the "concealed mysteries" of this world.

Eternal Death

Blake's visionary journey begins with the death of the reasoning self; to be able to experience the divine vision, we must do away with our old idea of perception. Of course, one of the fundamentals of alchemy, whether as laboratory practice or a "spiritual" pursuit, is that creation requires destruction. We see this principle expressed in the *nigredo*: before the four opposing elements can be united, the gross matter must first be dissolved into its first form. In the *Atalanta fugiens*, the death of the matter is initiated by Saturn, who "appear[es] with a scythe, a serpent . . . morosity, and distorted feet". He is, as Maier explains, the God who "devoured and vomited up his sons". (2020, dis. 12). When adding a religious or spiritual dimension to the Opus, *nigredo* becomes the moment of realization; it is the acknowledgement of error, and the beginning of purgation. As Maier puts it, Saturn is "the discoverer of truth", as "truth is discovered in darkness" (ibid).

[13] *A Blake Dictionary* (Damon, 1965).

To understand how the human being is to emerge from its state of darkness, we may look at how this darkness operates in the transmutation of Blake's "reborn" John Milton (1608-1674). First, it must be noted that the deceased poet was a major influence on Blake's creative work, especially in his early years. In a letter, Blake once wrote: "Milton lovd me in childhood & shewd me his face" (CW: *Letters*, 707). But while Blake greatly admired Milton for his mythic narratives, he was deeply troubled by his repressive, puritan belief system. It was particularly Milton's demonization of Energy (Evil) that Blake considered to be his great theological error. In part, because it promotes a passive acceptance of injustice, but also for how it elevates reason above the Imagination. In *The Marriage,* Blake states: "Good is the passive that obeys Reason [.] Evil is the active springing from Energy" (pl. 3). Of course, in the same poem, Blake also famously declares Milton to be: "a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it" (pl. 6). Though unwittingly, Blake believed Milton had demonstrated the transformative energy of "Evil" through his portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667). That is not to say that Blake necessarily considered Milton's Satan to be the "hero" of *Paradise Lost*; rather, it was the potentiality of Milton's Satan that Blake admired. Part of the motivation to make Milton the protagonist of his prophetic work was indeed to emphasize the transformative potentiality that was inherent to—but supressed—in Milton's own creative vision.

The beginning of Milton's transmutation starts with the acknowledgement of error. The poem opens with the question: "Say first! what mov'd Milton, who walkd about in Eternity / . . . To go into the deep her to redeem & himself perish?" (Mil, 2:16, 20). Milton's spirit is in Eternity, and yet, for the past 100 years, he has been "pondring the intricate mazes of Providence / Unhappy tho in heav'n" (Mil, 2:17-18). Of course, as Milton himself writes in *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (2000, I:254-255). This, as we shall see in a moment, hints at a larger theme, but for now, it suffices to say that Blake's Milton has indeed proven himself right: his own mind has turned Heaven into Hell. The state of Milton's Heaven is brought on by the separation from the feminine aspect of his being. Blake refers to this as his "Sixfold Emanation": most likely, as Damon reasons, because of Milton's "three wives and three daughters" (1965, 277). Divided from the Emanation, Milton's Spectre has impaired his vision. Thus, the Heaven Milton envisioned is devoid of any creative-imaginative impulse; it is sterile and static, bearing closer resemblance to Ulro than Eden. It is the ultimate manifestation of his own errors, both theological and personal. It is partly seeing the product of his

own flawed theology that leads Milton to realize the need to be redeemed from his own separated state. Thus, acknowledging his errors, Blake's Milton proclaims: "I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!" (Mil, 14:30).

Yet, Milton is not the only one in need of redemption; in fact, the process of transmutation spans across our three-dimensional universe, and is simultaneously taking place within Blake himself. While experiencing the failure of his own heavenly vision is what causes Milton to begin to realize the extent of his errors, the answer, we are told, to what finally "moved him" to act was "A Bards prophetic Song!" (Mil, 2:22). The Bard is Blake, but not the Blake of corporality; he is an idealized version of himself: the fully realized poet-prophet, communicating with Milton in Eternity. With his song resounding beyond the borders of the temporal world, Blake repeatedly warns: "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation" (Mil, 2:25). Heeding his warning, Milton descends to the mortal plane; in his downward trajectory, he takes on the form of a falling star: "startled the shades / Of Hell beheld him in a trail of light as of a comet / That travels into Chaos" (Mil, 15:18-20). Thus, in his fall from Eternity, Milton becomes an image of his own Satan from *Paradise Lost*, who: "Fell with his flaming legions through the deep / Into his place" (2000, VII:134-135). When Milton finally reaches the mortal world, his fallen form strikes Blake's left foot, causing a "black cloud" to "spread over Europe" (Mil, 15:50). With this, Milton's spirit is "reborn" in Blake, thus uniting the two poets.

What follows is several radical shifts in perspective, and a narrative where past, present and future all constitutes different, overlapping layers of reality. As Frye correctly points out, the Bard's Song does not "relate to a sequence of events"; rather, it expands on Blake's mythology through a "series of lifting backdrops" (1947, 332). And yet, although the Song takes up most of the first book, its duration is only a glimpse of a moment; in fact, this is the case for the entire poem. At the conclusion of his journey, Blake writes: "Terror struck in the Vale I stood at that immortal sounds / . . . A moment, & my Soul returned to its mortal state" (Mil, 42:24, 26). But of course, this moment is not the same as a moment in our temporal world; the history of mankind is "less than a pulsation of the artery", while the atemporal moment "Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years" (Mil, 28:62-63). It is in the space between the temporal and the Eternal that "the Poets Work is Done", and where "all the Great / Events of Time start forth & are concievd" (Mil, 29:1-2). In other words, there exists another "dimension" outside of our perception

of time and space—and it is this "hidden" layer of reality that has been obscured from Milton's vision.

In the first book of *Milton* we see how the acknowledgement of error is accompanied by the same symbolic expression of death that we find in the *nigredo*. In his moment of realization, Milton declares:

> Tarry no longer; for my soul lies at the gates of death.
> I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.
> I will go down to the sepulcher to see if morning breaks!
> I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death
>
> (14:19-22)

Similar to the imagery we find in the Chemical Wedding, Milton's own transmutation begins in the grave. The decision to return to the mortal world is marked by Milton declaring: "I go to Eternal Death!" (Mil, 14:14). This is, however, no "ordinary" death; Blake's Milton has, after all, been dead for over a hundred years. Rather, the "Eternal Death" is the return to mortal life, and the beginning of redemption. Of course, it is not unusual to see death as a symbol for renewal; however, it is possible to see the traces of alchemical influence here. For one, Milton's death emerges from a preceding state of darkness; in fact, the death is not so much its own state of darkness, as it is a way to intensify, or confront, the already existing dark aspect. Indeed, even in Eternity, Milton bears "the shades of Death & Ulro" (Mil, 14:12). Moreover, the darkness that cloaks Milton is explicitly identified with a separation from his feminine aspect—a point we will return to in the coming chapter. Finally, as we will see, it is precisely through embracing the transformative potentiality of this darkness that Milton moves from "Eternal death" to the fourfold wholeness of "Eternal life".

This upward momentum is achieved through what Blake refers to as "self-annihilation" — a concept that we may recognize from Böhme. As the name implies, the self-annihilation is a destruction of the Selfhood. But as Damon notes, this is "not easy"; in fact, the Selfhood serves as the final obstacle that severs man from the experience of Eternity (1965, 363). It is very possible that Blake's concept of self-annihilation was inspired by Böhme, who similarly saw the selfhood as a hindrance towards a unity with God:

> The divided word of mans property which had turned it selfe away from the universall perfection, viz. from the ONE into a self-hood, must enter againe into the ALL, and be tryed purged and purified through the fire of God; and live, and move in the One; viz. in the fathers onely will. (MM, XXXIX:25)

But unlike Böhme, who argued for a passive self-surrender to God, Blake does not seem to conceptualize the return to "wholeness" as an integration into the will of God. Or if he does, it is a very *different* kind of self-surrender. When Milton made his decision to go to "self-annihilation", he first "took off the robe of the promise, & ungirded himself from the oath of God" (Mil, 14:13). In other words, Milton is breaking away from God. Or more specifically, he is breaking away from the promise granted to those who adhere to the Biblical Law. This is part of what Blake sees as a false moral framework. This framework is in turn identified with the Selfhood because it instils a false sense of righteousness that helps uphold its self-centeredness. It additionally provides a sense of security, as it outlines a clear path to salvation. Without this framework, we are forced to not only reconsider our approach to morality, but also our concept of God, and salvation.

This is, in a way, a self-surrender; by freeing himself from the "oath of God", Milton is essentially giving himself over to a God that is completely *unknown*, or a God who, at the very least, does not have his laws carved in stone. There is indeed an underlying Böhmean aspect to all of this; for one, the decision to "go to self-annihilation" is not easy; it is "direful pain" (Mil, 14:39). Like the Böhmean self-surrender, the process of self-annihilation is accompanied by the fear of what we will be without the "self".

The Dark Vortex

The reversal of Milton's perception is conceived of as a descent into a vortex: a symbol that features prominently in both the textual and visual depiction of the visionary journey. In an article on Blake's use of the vortex symbolism, Marsha Newman identifies the whirlpool as a "two way image": there is both "the whirlpool of fallen vision, a vision of creation disconnected from its divine origin", and the whirlpool that reconnects us with "the eternal vortex, the whirlwind of creation" (2004, 92). Blake's vortex already appears on the frontispiece of *Milton* (figure 8), which shows a male figure about to enter its whirling mass. The figure is either Milton, or the combined

form of Blake-Milton; most likely the latter, as the figure is about to step forward with his left foot.[14] Through the spiralling text surrounding him, we can gather that the vortex is moving in a clockwise motion. The placement of the text has an effect on us as readers, as we are forced to not only read it horizontally, but also vertically; it is not only Milton who must alter his perception, but the reader as well.

Milton's journey into this spiralling mass is depicted on plate 32; beginning from the outer edge of the "chaotic universe", Milton travels past the realm of Urizen, and into the Mundane Egg (figure 9). The illustration is unlike anything else Blake has ever made, which immediately makes it stand out from the rest of his illuminated work. As observed by Newman (2004) among others, the plate bears a striking resemblance to a series of illustrations we find in the third volume of the William Law edition of Böhme. The illustrations in question were originally made by Freher, and then later reprinted in the appendix of the third volume of the Law edition as *An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen* (1764). Freher's enigmatic illustrations are made up of geometric shapes, symbols and letters; of particular note are the various circles, which are prominent in all of his illustrations. Even at a cursory glance, it is easy to see how these figures might have influenced plate 32 of *Milton* through their geometric patterns. The likeness is especially apparent in the first figure: a beautifully made illustration pertaining to show "the true principle of all things" (figure 10). It depicts the Böhmean contraries—the "Byss and Abyss", "Nothing and All", "Time and Eternity"—and their position in the cosmic creation. And like Blake's Zoas, these are all illustrated as circles—a shape that, as we will see later, holds particular significance to Böhme.

A full, detailed explanation of the remaining illustrations would require a thesis of its own; however, a brief overview might be beneficial for the coming discussions. Freher's thirteen-part illustrations are meant to visualize the inner workings of Böhme's three principles; in short, they show the beginning of creation (i.e. God's movement from *Unground* to "Ground"), the division of the original Adam (identified with the letter A and the fiery upward △ triangle), and the reunification with Sophia (identified with the letter S and the watery downward ▽ triangle). The first figure shows the unformed world of the *Unground* (figure 11). From its triangular centre, the spiralling text forms its own vortex. The beginning of the text reads: "This Abyssal Nothing will

[14] When Milton descends to the corporeal world, his falling form enters Blake's left foot (Mil, 15:48-49).

introduce itself into Something" (Law, 1764, Appendix). Figure II shows the darkness of the First Principle (figure 12), while figure III shows an unseparated world containing both a dark and a light aspect (figure 13). In figure IIII, we see a six-pointed star (the unification of the upward and downward triangle) surrounded by three circles, each representing one of Böhme's principles (figure 14). The outlines of a larger circle surround the star; this dotted outline breaks off, and creates another vortex, from which a text spirals into the centre: "-ing this Life along with it from Nature into Liberty" (ibid). In other words, what we are seeing from figure I to IIII is the beginning of creation, i.e. manifestation. Figure IV to XII, which will not be discussed in more detail, depicts the fall of Adam, and the process of redemption through Sophia.

Although Freher's illustrations were likely the major influence behind Blake's visual depictions of the vortex, it appears that he also borrowed from the written works of Böhme when developing the meaning attached to his vortex symbology. According to Weeks, Böhme's frequently used the words "*Turba* and *turbiren*"[15] to "signify a kind of vortex of thought at the outer limits of the knowable" (1991, 29). Newman, who agrees that Weeks' description corresponds with the Blakean meaning of the term, notes that the image of the whirlpool also evokes the "whirlpool of desire"[16] of Böhme's first principle (2004, 76). This is the dark principle: the part that "longs for the light" (Weeks, 1991, 113). For corporeal man, this is the aspect confined to the "outward" vision. It is also the first ground of creation, or the material realm of being: an idea that seems central to Blake's conception of the vortex.

Above all, the vortex in *Milton* is an image of self-annihilation; it is by confronting the alienation of the dark element—the fallen vision—that one begins the process of redemption, or visual expansion:

> The nature of infinity is this: That every thing has its
> Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity.
> Has passd that Vortex, he percieves it roll backward behind
> His path, into a globe itself infolding; like a sun:
> Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty
>
> (Mil, 15:21-25)

[15] Defined by the Oxford Latin Dictionary as "Disorder, confusion, commotion, turmoil" (2012, 2193).
[16] Depicted in the second figure of Freher's thirteen-part illustration (Law, 1764, Appendix).

As Milton travels through the vortex, the oneness of his fallen vision separates into multiplicity: "the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing / Its vortex; and the north & south, with all their starry host" (Mil, 15:28-29). Echoing the *Emerald Tablet*, Blake further writes: "what was underneath soon seemd above" (Mil, 15:42). Newman notes how Blake's depiction of this radical change in perspective mirrors Freher's illustrations of the fall and redemption of Adam (2004, 85). The parallels are most noticeable in figure X, where Adam (A) is shown chained to the lower triangle of the corporeal world (figure 15). The upper triangle is touching the sphere of Christ (C); together, these two triangles form the shape of an hourglass. Surrounding Christ and Adam is a larger circle; the lines of the circle flow inward, creating a whirlpool into the glowing centre connecting the two triangles. Freher's illustration can be said to provide a blueprint for Milton's visionary expansion; his journey into the vortex begins at the outer edges of fallen perception, but through the act of self-annihilation, his perception is reversed, thus reuniting him with the divine Imagination, which belongs to the realm of Christ.

Chapter 3:

Albedo

The motto of the 45th emblem of the *Atalanta fugiens* reads: "The work is perfected by Sol and his shade" (Maier, 2020). As Maier's emblem hints at, the symbols that are introduced in the *albedo* must be understood in relation to the process of *unification*: i.e. the reconciliation of opposites. The "shade" is of course the moon (Luna), the feminine portion of the perfected stone. In the *albedo* stage, the moon is one of the central symbols; it represents "receptivity", a state in which the matter is awaiting form (Abraham, 1998, 5). Other symbols we find in the *albedo* are similarly associated with whiteness and purity; some common ones include: the virgin, doves, swans, silver, white flowers, and the general conceptualization of paradise (ibid). The whitening that occurs during this stage is a form of purification: a process that may be observed in both the transmutation of metals, and in transmutation as a "spiritual" pursuit. This purification is associated with the feminine element water, and it is common to see the *albedo* as a "washing away" of impurities. However, the purification of the *albedo* does not simply return the matter to its original state; rather, it prepares it to take on a new form. At this stage, the stone is commonly referred to as the "white foliated earth"; as Abraham notes, this is seen as the stage of the Opus where the now separated and putrefied matter "awaits re-animation" (1998, 216). For later adherers to the alchemical mode of thought, nature itself was imagined as a "spiritual body" that, through a dynamic process of reconciliation, could be purified and transmuted into a greater state of divine being (Hanegraaff, 2012, 202).

As we further examine the movement from darkness to light in Blake's major prophecies, we will see that a continuous struggle between the masculine and feminine contraries are imbedded in Blake's conception of nature, both as a material manifestation, and as an eternal divine aspect of the fourfold human being. The potentiality that we see arise from the separation of the formless Ulro now begins to approach the realm of actuality: the twofold sexual dimension of time and space. But in the movement from death to life, the duality of Blake's "becoming" takes on a new form through the feminine aspect. It is particularly the contrary modes of perception (i.e. "inward" and "outward") that is explored through the female aspect's relation to nature; while the feminine is identified with the Imagination, it appears to be in a fallen state because of its association to

material nature. The process of reconciliation thus requires a deeper reflection on the state of corporeal existence, and the connection between the inward and the outward, and the material and the immaterial.

The Divine Imagination

The key to visionary expansion lies in the *Divine Imagination*. As we might expect, Blake's concept of Imagination alludes to something more than fantasy; it is both a faculty, and an eternal aspect of the divine human:

> Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more. (Jer, pl. 17)

It is through the Imagination that we are able to experience the world that lies beyond the temporal moment; yet, in the fallen condition, the Imagination itself has been restrained. How, then, are we to understand the Imagination as both a product of transmutation, as well as the mechanism that sets the transmutation in motion?

We may first start by examining the active Imagination as an esoteric concept. In his four-part criteria of esotericism, Faivre describes the imagination as a "tool for knowledge of self, world, Myth" (1994, 13). Faivre links this concept of imagination with the notion of mediation: a revelatory mechanism that denotes relations between the material world and the divine world through the use of intermediaries (1994, 12). As Faivre further suggests, it is perhaps their notion of mediation that is the biggest difference between the "mystic" and the "esoteric"[17]: while the classic mystic sees intermediaries, like symbols and images, as a hinderance towards a union with the divine, the esoterist sees them in terms of revelation and imagination (ibid). The intermediaries that we discover through the imagination lend a new importance to the concept of correspondence: it is the imagination that puts the "theory of correspondences into active practice", thus enabling us to gain insight into the interdependence between human nature, and divine nature (ibid).

[17] Faivre is here careful to note that mysticism and esotericism can overlap, and that this definition is merely for practical purposes.

In Böhmean theosophy, the concept of active imagination is identified with Sophia: the great mirror of God. In his discussion of Böhme's concept of "divine nature", Versluis notes that Böhme utilizes "symbols as intermediaries" as a way to make the transcendental realities comprehensible to us (1999, 131). As Versluis further notes, Sophia is similarly an intermediary: "she is the matrix through which God 'objectifies' himself in creation, through which his activity takes place." (1999, 133). In other words, Sophia functions as a way for God to gain knowledge of himself through creation, which in turn is a reflection of God's own imagination. Böhme's Sophia arguably serves a similar function as the *albedo* stage in the Opus: through the purifying light of the second principle, she brings out the aspects of God that was constrained in his state of contraction. This is essentially a way to transform the potentiality of the *Unground*. Thus, while God contains all the potential for creation, it is through Sophia that God first becomes aware of this latent potential.

God's divinity is in turn reflected in his creation (i.e. nature), which becomes a mode of revelation. As Faivre notes, Böhme's theosophy conceptualizes the divine not in terms of abstract manifestations, but as "visible forms". (1994, 27). These forms can reveal themselves to us through *gnosis*, which alters our perception of the world that surrounds us. The imagination thus becomes crucial, as it is through the intermediaries of images and symbolisms that we begin to understand the parts of nature that remain concealed to us.

Blake similarly incorporates several different layers of intermediaries into his fourfold vision, ranging from abstract concepts into specific symbolic expression. Generally speaking, these intermediaries exist to elucidate the relationship between God and humanity, and the temporal and eternal. Before we consider some specific examples, we may return again to Blake's concept of correspondence. As noted, the correspondences associated with the four Zoas reveal the interdependence between the various aspects of nature: physical, human and divine. The existence of these aspects alludes to another layer of reality that remains concealed by the fallen vision. Yet, while we may not be aware of this dimension, it nonetheless exists within us:

> What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:
> The Circumference is Within: Without, is formed the Selfish Center
> And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.
>
> (Jer, 71:6-8)

This again harkens back to the doctrine of "as above, so below": the "above", i.e. the divine, is contained *within* the human microcosm. The purpose of Blake's intermediaries is to make us aware of this hidden dimension by expanding our inner eye into the world of Imagination. And indeed, one of these intermediaries is Blake himself, the poet-prophet whose great task is to "open the Eternal Worlds" for us (Jer, 5:18). It is through this "opening", or "expansion", that the hidden fourfold web of correspondences is revealed to us, thus allowing us to see the true reality of being. This process of revelation operates in a similar manner to what is described by Faivre; the intermediaries help bridge the gap between the material and the eternal, and become a tool that helps us understand ourselves, and the world that surrounds us.

The Imagination is crucial to this process; however, in his later prophecies, Blake's idea of the human Imagination expands to encompass both an idea of *seeing*, and of *being*. In his brief discussion of Blake in *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, Faivre notes how Blake seems to attach several different meanings to the word Imagination, including: "faculty of vision" (as in "clairvoyance"), "spirit of prophecy", "spiritual existence" or "spiritual body" (2000, 112). To clarify the final meaning, Faivre (ibid) points towards a passage from *Jerusalem*, where Blake writes: "Imagination! the Divine Body" (74:13). The same notion is also put forth in *Milton*: "the Human Imagination / Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus" (3:3-4). From this, Faivre concludes: "The imagination is thus the spiritual part of Man, the part that, having come for God himself, possesses the vision of all things" (2000, 113). Indeed, Blake's Imagination cannot be confused with fantasy; it is an eternal aspect, and a divine faculty: "in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven / And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow" (Jer, 71:17-19). Thus, the visions that spring forth from the Imagination are, in essence, more real than the visions that we perceive by our physical human eyes; after all, as Blake writes in *Jerusalem*: "All Things Exist in the Human Imagination" (Jer, 65:25).

As we will soon discover, there is something very Böhmean to this process. According to Böhme's *Six Theosophic Points*: "Whatever the imagination has seized, that it introduces into the mind" (IV:4). In his discussion of Böhme and transmutation, Versluis describes the Imagination as "the site of our spiritual battles": a realm that encompasses "the field intermediate between the realm of pure luminosity and the physical realm, the 'plastic' or 'subtle' realm of shifting images,

the astral realm." (1999, 164). In Blake's mythology, we may recognize the "physical realm" as Generation, and the "realm of pure luminosity" as Eternity. To Böhme, the intermediary realm is identified with Sophia, the feminine element of the divided Adam. Blake similarly associates the Imagination with the missing feminine element; however, it is not the feminine alone that is responsible for Imagination, but rather the contraction and expansion that arises from the contraries of the masculine and feminine. This is again an idea that Blake may have picked up from Böhme, or from the larger alchemical tradition; after all, the process of transmutation is imagined as being a process of reconciliation between masculine and feminine principles.

The Feminine Becoming

Similar to what we see in alchemy, the masculine/feminine dichotomy permeates almost every aspect of Blake's two major prophecies. Like the idea of darkness and separation, this divide is present on both an individual level, and on the scale of creation. In the previous chapter, we saw how the physical world of Blake's mythology emerges through an act of separation. This movement from oneness into multiplicity becomes part of Blake's complex gender symbolism, which in turn shapes his concept of contraction and expansion. Most notable is perhaps his idea of masculine Spectres and feminine Emanations, both of which are identified as features of the fallen condition. Yet, this divide runs much deeper: the masculine and feminine are presented as integral to the creation of the physical, and the imaginary world.

While there is of course a larger discussion to be had about Blake's portrayal of the sexes, we must be careful to note that Blake's sexual binaries are also meant to be understood in a more abstract way as the contraries of contraction and expansion, closing and opening. It is this relationship between the masculine and feminine that produces motion and leads to an expansion of vision. There is, however, a duality to the feminine: while it is identified with inspiration and redemption, it is also guilty of upholding the separation between the sexes. It is particularly in the moment of external perception that the negative aspect of the feminine is manifested; this is when the feminine becomes a separate part of nature, and is thus divided from the Eternal aspect that is known as the Imagination. Yet, this movement from inward to outward perception seems to be a necessary process; similar to what we see in Böhme, this may be understood as what Magee

describes as a “transition from divine – but unconscious – perception of the whole . . . to a perception of the multiplicity of things in their separation and division” (2016, 198). This transition is achieved through the opposing forces of unreconciled contraries, which are conceptualized in various ways as masculine and feminine elements.

To start with, the masculine and feminine are intertwined with the very fabric of our concept of reality: time and space. This is central to Blake’s creation myth, and to his concept of fourfold vision. In the Bard’s song, we learn that “Los is by mortals nam'd Time”, while “Enitharmon”, the Emanation of Los, “is nam'd Space” (Mil, 24:68). It is this union of time and space that we perceive as the physical world; however, as Damon notes, these dimensions have “no absolute existence”: they are “twin aspects of Eternity”, as experienced through our fallen senses (1965, 404). They are only a *part* of reality, not reality as a whole; indeed, it is as mentioned in the “Sea of Time & Space” that we first encounter the fallen Albion (Mil, 15:39). In this fallen state we, like the sleeping Albion, are only able to grasp the faint outlines of the full visionary experience: “The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions, / Are become weak Visions of Time & Space” (Jer, 49:21-22). Thus, perhaps the best way to think of time and space are not as actual, existing dimensions, but rather as a projection of Eternity.

The spaces of Enitharmon are identified with Beulah, Blake’s third world of Imagination. It is usually placed above Ulro and Generation, but below Eden. In Blake’s two major prophecies, Beulah primarily functions as a source of inspiration, as well as a retreat from the material world. While our world is twofold, Beulah is threefold; this threefold nature acts as an intermediary between Generation and Eternity. The inspiration that we derive from Beulah reflects the true essence of Eternity. The first book of *Milton* opens by evoking the “Daughters of Beulah!”, the “Muses who inspire the Poets Song” (2:1). The “Daughters of Beulah” are contrasted with the “Daughters of Memory”: the former signifying inspiration, while the latter represents the act of copying, rather than creating (Mil, pl. 1). It is the inspiration from Beulah that enables Blake (i.e. “the poet”) to break through the temporal moment and communicate with Milton in the Bard’s song. Moreover, it is within this spatial realm that the potentiality of Ulro begins to transform into something that goes beyond the purely material.

Unlike Ulro, which urges separation, Beulah begins to address the need for unification. In this feminine space, we encounter some of the same imagery and symbolic expressions that we

see in the *albedo* stage of the alchemical Opus: Beulah is “feminine lovely / Pure mild & Gentle” (FZ, 1:30-31), with “moony shades & hills” (Mil, 30:5). The word Beulah is the biblical name given to Palestine, and translates from Hebrew as “married” (Damon, 1965, 42). It is described as a “land of rest” (Mil, 20:2), which provides a refuge from the divided nature inherent to the world of Generation:

> There is a place where Contrarieties are equally True
> This place is called Beulah, It is a pleasant lovely Shadow
> Where no dispute can come. Because of those who Sleep.
> (Mil, 30:1-5)

Yet, while contraries are able to coexist in Beulah, they are not unified; it is still a place where the feminine and masculine are seen as opposing principles.

In her book on Blake and the Miltonic influences on his view of women, Eugenie R. Freed suggest that Los and Enitharmon’s relationship is similar to that of Sol and Luna of alchemy (1994, 23). This seems like a fairly obvious, and perhaps intentional parallel. Los is identified with Sol both in name and character, while Enitharmon is identified with Luna through the use of Blake’s lunar imagery. Together, they form the basis that makes transmutation possible. A similar alchemical relationship can also be found in Böhme’s theosophy. And as Freed further notes, there seems to be parallels between Enitharmon and Böhme’s own version of Luna (ibid). In *Signatura rerum,* Böhme writes:

> “[Luna] is as a Wife of all the other Forms; for the other Forms do all cast their Desire through Sol into Luna; for in Sol they are spiritual, and in Luna Corporeal . . . whatsoever the Sun is, and maketh in the Spirit-life in it self, the same Luna is and maketh Corporeal in it self.” (SR, IX:26)

Of course, Böhme’s Luna is not so different from the Luna of alchemy; however, Böhme’s Luna is placed within a system of seven other properties. These properties, or spirits, are depicted as wheels, each corresponding to a specific planet.[18] The seventh property is Luna; as the final property, she contains the essence of the remaining six properties. Through Luna, the six properties attain corporality; in unity, they form the Eternal Nature of God.[19] As Fischer explains, Luna is portrayed as the passive element of Wisdom, while Sol is the active, “imaginative center” (2004,

[18] We see these wheels visualized by Freher in figure X (Law, 1764 appendix)
[19] See chapter X, XII, XXXII of Aurora (Böhme, 1656).

141). Thus, the relationship of Böhme's Sol and Luna is in part characterized by the transformation of potentiality; similar to the receptive moon of the *albedo*, Böhme's Luna receives the Imaginative impulse from Sol, which, when reflected back, is transmuted into a new form.

Comparisons have also been made between Blake's Beulah and Böhme's second principle. In his discussion of Böhme's principles, Fischer notes the similarities between Beulah and "the mercy of the 'pleasant, 'sweet yielding' and 'heavenly Essence' of the second principle'" (2004, 164). In Böhme's theosophy, the second principle is what transforms, or enables the manifestation of God's innate potentiality for creation. As mentioned, this potentiality arises from the dark principle of the *Unground*; it is within this first principle that we find the foundation that enables creation. But the potentiality of the first principle cannot become manifest without the second principle. These two principles constitute the "dark world" and the "light world", i.e. the two wills of God (concealment and manifestation). In his discussion of Böhme's principles, Magee notes that he describes them in terms of "contraction" and "expansion", adding that the "contraction" within God seems to describe the "psychology of radical selfishness" (2016, 191). As we have seen, these same terms are used by Blake, arguably much to the same effect; they can be applied to the process of seeing, as well as to the conception of creation.

As the feminine realm of space, Beulah is, in part, responsible for the movement into material existence; or rather, it marks a shift in perspective from inward to outward nature. In Frye's reading, it is identified as the place where the fall begins, primarily through its association with the feminine as Mother Nature. As Frye reasons, the fall is characterized by "Albion's relapse from active creative energy to passivity", a decline that "takes the form of wonder or awe at the world he has created, which in eternity he sees as a woman" (1947, 126). The woman is the material aspect of nature, which Albion now perceives as separate from his own Eternal being.

There is undoubtedly a negative aspect to Blake's Beulah: while Beulah is a source for inspiration, it is also called an elusive "land of shades" (Jer, 4:21). In *Jerusalem*, it is ascribed the same shadowy qualities as Ulro, namely the incorporeal, formless nature. For one, Beulah is named the land of "lovely delusions" (Jer, 17:27). Its inhabitants—the dreamers of Beulah—are sometimes called "the dead", who "wail night & day" (Jer, 48:52). Beulah is thus not always a pleasant dreamscape; in *Jerusalem*, it also doubles as a graveyard, with "Urns", and "Graves & Funeral Arks" (11:2, 89:60). Indeed, for the separated human being: "the Flowers of Beulah weave

to be their Funeral Mantles" (Jer, 90:7). It seems the negative aspects of Beulah receives more attention in *Jerusalem*: for the fallen Albion, it is no longer enough for Beulah to be a resting place; like Frye reasons, it seems that this feminine space must also, in one way or another, be responsible for the fallen condition.

The Female Will

Due to Blake's treatment of the "becoming" as a negative event, it is not uncommon to see his works interpreted as a rejection of material or bodily existence. For esoteric-oriented scholars, this has been one of the key arguments for placing Blake within the so-called "Gnostic" tradition. As posited by Emery in his list of Gnostic doctrines, the Gnostics saw the universe as "a vast prison", in which man "is enslaved both by the physical law of nature and by such psychic laws as the Mosaic Code" (14, 1966). Emery argues that Blake's view on corporeal existence bears a close resemblance to that of the Gnostics; this influence is traced back to Böhme, who Emery also places within the same tradition (1966, 14-15). Of course, this reading of Blake is not exclusive to scholars identifying him as a Gnostic; however, the issue of how we are to interpret Blake's view of material existence becomes highly relevant in the context of esotericism—particularly in how we are to understand the outcome of Blake's visionary journey.

To get a better idea of Blake's view of material existence, we must further explore the duality of Blake's separated female element. As we saw with Beulah, the feminine is identified as the beginning of material, or external, nature. This is framed as the fall, which implies that the redemption of mankind cannot be achieved within the corporeal world. Yet if we believe, as I have reasoned before, that the fall was a necessary event, then it would seem that bodily existence must be part of the fourfold whole. As we will see in the coming discussion, the feminine encompasses both the material aspects of nature, and the concealed, Eternal aspect. In the process of unification, the feminine is the purifying element; yet, its manifested form emerges from its own state of darkness, similar to what we observed in the *nigredo*. The duality of the feminine is made apparent in its relation to nature: the negative aspect is manifested as an external perception of nature, while the purifying aspect is the inward perception of man as part of a cosmic correspondence.

We see an example of the purifying aspect in Ololon, the spiritual form of Milton's Sixfold Emanation. In Eden, Ololon is "a sweet River, of milk & liquid pearl" (Mil, 21:15). It has been suggested that the composition of her river implies "lactation and seminal fluid" (Paley, 2009, 106). Considering the unified sexual dimension of Eden, this may very well be what Blake had in mind; however, the whiteness of the river can also be interpreted in a more general sense as a purifying element. If we consider the white liquid in light of alchemical symbolism, it is possible to see the parallels to the *albification.* To give an example of this process, we may again return to Maier; the motto of the third emblem of the *Atalanta fugiens* reads: "Go to the woman washing clothes, and do you after the same manner" (2020). This is intended as a message to the alchemists, suggesting that they should imitate this washing in their transmutation of matter. The accompanying epigram further reads:

> Do you not see, how women wash and boil
> Their clothes in waters hot, if they get soil?
> Pursue their steps, you cannot go astray,
> For water washeth any filth away.
>
> (ibid)

The water washes away the impurities of the blackened matter, and transforms it into a pure white. As we see in the emblem, this entire process is identified with the feminine. Likewise, in *Milton*, it is the feminine Ololon who prepares Milton for the "real" Eternal life; in part, through an act of self-sacrifice.

The journey of Ololon mirrors that of Milton; when she learns of Milton's descent, she assumes responsibility for his fallen condition. In her own act of self-annihilation, she declares: "let us give / Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors" (Mil, 21:45-46). This journey takes her to the "Couches of the Dead", where the dying form of humanity lay at rest. Two of the death couches belong to Los and Enitharmon, the manifestations of time and space. Ololon's descent down to their sleeping forms awakens the sleeping humanity, which opens a "wide rode" to "Eternity" (Mil, 35:35). The final couch belongs to Milton, who has gone to Eternal Death (Mil, 35:29). Yet, the death couch of Milton does not only represent the state of Milton as an individual, but also the state of humanity, and of the universe as a whole.

Through Ololon's journey, we see the effect the fallen condition has on the human body, and our experience of the four senses. From Ulro, she travels to Or-Ulro: one of the "Four States of Humanity in its Repose" (Mil, 34:8). Or-Ulro is the final, and lowest of the four states; it is identified with the "Stomach & Intestines", and described as "terrible, deadly, unutterable" (Mil, 34:15-16). The three preceding states are: (1) Beulah, the head, (2) Alla, the heart, and (3) Al-Ulro, the loins (Mil, 34:8-15). Together, these four states constitute the four senses: sight, smell, taste, and hearing. And as Freed notes, they seem to mimic the bodily correspondence we find in Böhme's work (1994, 98). In the second chapter of the *Aurora,* several paragraphs are dedicated to the relationship between the macrocosmic universe, and the human body: the lungs and arteries signify the "Deep betwinxt the Stars and Earth", while the entrails mirror the "operation of the stars" (II:37, 39). As Böhme explains, this is because: "The whole body with all its parts, signifieth Heaven and Earth" (II:33). In Blake's work, it is through these bodily senses that we can access the Imagination: "he whose Gates are opend in those Regions of his Body / Can from those Gates view all these wondrous Imaginations" (Mil, 34:17-18). Yet, in our fallen state, these gates remain concealed, as we fail to realize the image of divinity that is reflected in our own bodies.

Seeing the state of humanity in Ulro forces Ololon to contemplate the consequences of the divided Spectres and Emanations. Before her final reunion with Milton, she must also confront her own role in upholding this sexual divide. The climax of this confrontation takes place in Blake's garden at Felpham, where Ololon is manifested as a "Virgin of twelve years" (Mil, 36:17). In this physically manifested form, the virginal Ololon suggests a state of newfound purity, and receptivity, while Blake's garden—which is located within the temporal world—becomes the realm of actuality. She asks Blake of Milton's whereabouts; Milton, who is now part of Blake, hears Ololon's voice, "more distinct than any earthly", and follows her down into the garden (Mil, 37:5). A shadowy form of Milton then separates from Blake, as an: "outline of Identity, in the Selfhood deadly" (Mil, 37:10). This is a manifested form of Milton's Spectre, which has grown into the Satanic Selfhood. The real Milton then appears, as a "Human Wonder of God" (Mil, 37:13). He confronts his Satanic Selfhood, declaring: "Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually / Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee" (Mil, 38:35-36). Having overcome his selfhood, Ololon now appears before him, praising the act of self-annihilation as "giving thy life to thy enemies" (Mil, 40:8). After witnessing the true horrors of the Selfhood, she

questions the role of the feminine Emanation in creating “this Newtonian Phantasm / This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon & Bolingbroke / This Natural Religion!” (Mil, 40:11-13).

Ololon’s confrontation with her own feminine aspect instigates the final redemption of Milton. As she cries out “Is Ololon the cause of this?”, her own shadowy aspect is manifested before her. Ololon’s negative counterpart is Rahab Babylon, “A Female hidden in a Male . . . [the] cruel two-fold Monster” (Mil, 40:20-21). She is the “false body”: an “Incrustation over” the “Immortal Spirit” (40:35-36). As the “false body”, the feminine Rahab is emblematic of an understanding of nature as purely material; this is, as we saw, the same worldview that is associated with the disenchanted Ulro. The hermaphroditic imagery represents a false union between the sexes; rather than being united in harmony, they remain unreconciled opposites. As Damon notes, the opposite for Blake is androgyny, which unites the inherent masculine and feminine aspects of the primordial Albion (1965, 185). Since Rahab is the negative counterpart of Ololon, she must also be understood in relation to Milton’s Sixfold Emanation. She is a manifestation of Milton’s own false perception, which was locked up in a false oneness. Thus, she is not really the negative counterpart of Ololon, but rather an image imposed upon her by Milton’s Spectre. Spurred on by this realization, Milton declares: “All that can be annihilated must be annihilated” (Mil, 40:30). Before his reunion with Ololon, Milton vows:

> To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human . . .
> To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour . . .
> To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
> To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
> To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration
>
> (Mil, 41:1-7)

Through his self-annihilation, Milton is washing away the errors of rationalization, and rejecting the externalized perception of nature, thus preparing him to take on a new form in his final union with Ololon.

In *Jerusalem*, Blake further develops the negative feminine aspect to become a false perception of nature. This aspect becomes known as the “Female Will”, which is the feminine counterpart to the “Selfish Selfhood”. The term first appears in *Jerusalem*, where it is used to explore the division of nature. Responding to the Female Will, Los cries out:

> What may Man be? who can tell! but what may Woman be?
> To have power over Man from Cradle to corruptible Grave.
> There is a Throne in every Man, it is the Throne of God
> This Woman has claimd as her own & Man is no more!
>
> (30:25-28)

The Female Will is guilty of upholding the same fallen reality as the Selfish Selfhood; however, unlike the Selfish Selfhood, the Female Will is explicitly identified with the material reality of nature. In Blake's major prophecies, nature is represented by Vala, the Emanation of Luvah, Zoa of passion, or emotion. Vala's fallen form is known as the Shadowy Female, which signifies that she is only a reflection of a greater form of nature. In *Jerusalem*, she proclaims: "I alone am Beauty / The Imaginative Human Form is but a breathing of Vala [Nature]" (29:48-49). Before the separation, there was no divide between inner and outer nature: "Man anciently containd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth" (Jer, pl. 27). This was the "Throne of God", i.e. the eternal divine aspect. This aspect is not lost, but it remains obscured to the fallen vision. Vala, the Mother of nature, conceals the spiritual Eternity with her great veil of materiality. This state of vision is identified with the formless void of Ulro, which leads its inhabitants into a spectral existence. In their separated state, both the masculine Spectre, and the Shadowy Female Will are identified with this concealment.

Yet, the concealment is not the product of the feminine, but rather a result of Albion's fall. In *Jerusalem*, it is Albion who is deemed responsible for the division of nature: "O Albion why wilt thou Create a Female Will?" (30:31). The fall is in part brought on by Albion's love for Vala, who represents the material aspects of nature. Her existence is the product of the Reasoning Spectre: "Man is adjoind to Man by his Emanative portion: / Who is Jerusalem in every individual Man: and her / Shadow is Vala, builded by the Reasoning power in Man" (Jer, 39:38-40). By loving Vala, Albion is perceiving nature as something that is separate from himself, rather than an Eternal aspect of his being. It is this error of vision that causes the fourfold Albion to descend into separation.

Yet, it again becomes apparent that there is a necessity to this separation, as it is through Vala that Jesus can appear in our material world: "O my Lord & Saviour? / Shall Vala bring thee forth!" (Jer, 62:5-6). Likewise, in *Milton*, it is Ololon that is responsible for the appearance of Christ: "Uniting in One with Ololon & the appearance of One Man / Jesus the Saviour appeard

coming in the Clouds of Ololon!" (Mil, 21:59-60). Blake's Christ must here be understood as not only the Son of God, but the Eternal aspect of the Divine Imagination. In his earthly incarnation, he becomes the link that joins the spiritual and the corporeal, or the human and the divine.

It is precisely this union between the earthly and the spiritual that is celebrated in alchemical depictions of the reborn Christ. Voss, who examines this union in her essay on "Spiritual Alchemy", argues that the portrayal of the resurrected Christ in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (figure 4) "indicates a profound change in the subject/object relation, since the divine is ordinarily viewed as wholly other than human" (1998, 168). If, as Voss reasons, the union in the *Rosarium* demanded a "transcendence of the body", we would expect to find the putrefying remains of the royal couple in their tomb; instead, we find an empty grave, from which the risen Christ appears (ibid, figure 4). In Blake's prophetic work, the risen Christ similarly becomes an allegory for the recovery of divine vision. For the fallen Albion, this means a recovery of the visionary state that was lost through his love for Vala; through this change of perspective, the Eternal aspect is reunited with the material, or earthly aspect of the fallen man.

While Voss describes this transmutation as "spiritual alchemy", other esoteric scholars have questioned the use of this term. Commenting on the influence of alchemy on Böhme, Hanegraaff is careful to note that "references to alchemical transmutation were *not* just metaphors for purely 'spiritual' processes", rather, Böhme's perspective on transmutation is firmly "rooted in organic concepts (not just metaphors) of birth and generation" (2012, 201). As Hanegraaff further notes, the alchemical narrative of Böhme presumes that nature—both corporeal, and divine—is in some kind of fallen state, thus "the universal process of 'reintegration' involves the salvation not just of human individuals, but of Nature itself: the fallen body of God should be restored by being transmuted into its original perfection as an eternal world of light" (2012, 202). This is not a purely spiritual process: much like what we see in laboratory alchemy, the object of transmutation is nature itself. Based on the parallels between man and nature in the process of transmutation, Hanegraaff concludes that the religious dimensions of alchemy can "be called spiritual only with reservation" (ibid).

As an aside, it should be mentioned that for many practicing alchemists, it seems alchemical transmutation was inseparable from religion; indeed, in the wake of Paracelsus, it was

commonly argued that alchemical experimentation was a way to gain knowledge of God.[20] And more than that, the experimenter could elevate God's creation to perfection; for the sixteenth-century theologian Thomas Tymme (d. 1620), it was precisely this redemptive quality that was the allure of alchemy: "For whatsoever God hath created may be brought to a Christalline cleerenes, and the Elements gathered together into a simple fixed substance" (Janacek, 2011, 29). Additionally, as Hanegraaff argues, such a conceptualization of nature as a "spiritual body" that could be transmuted into divinity also made it highly appealing to eighteenth-century thinkers who rejected the Enlightenment's disenchanted view of nature as "mere matter in motion" (2012, 202).

As we see in the alchemical tradition, a conception of nature as being in a fallen state does not necessarily equate to a rejection of earthly existence; similarly, I believe we can say that the duality in Blake's approach to nature does not amount to a disdain of bodily or material life. On the one hand, our perception of external nature is inadequate; perhaps, in part, because of our bodily senses. Yet, on the other hand, the natural world contains observable traces of the Eternal world; this includes the human body, which reflects the fourfold wholeness of God. The movement from darkness into light thus requires the attainment of manifested form, as it is through our experience of the material world that we gain knowledge of the Eternal world. The duality of Blake's feminine aspect captures the continuous struggle that is needed to unite the inward and outward perspective of nature; rather than return the divided being into the state that preceded the fall, this struggle prepares the subject to attain a new, and elevated form: one that, as in the chemical wedding, signifies the union between human and the divine.

[20] Alchemical studies were seen as being preoccupied with the Book of Nature, which commonly acted as a complimentary to the Book of God (the Bible). See Janacek (2011, 24-32).

Chapter 4:

Rubedo

The final stage of the Opus is achieved through the reconciliation of opposites; as the masculine and feminine is brought to harmony, the four elements is transmuted into a fifth element. This is the fabled *Philosopher's Stone*: an object said to bestow the alchemist with the mythical power to bring perfection to all things. The Stone is usually cloaked in secrecy and referred to in riddles, with a multitude of names; sometimes it is known as the "elixir", "tincture", or "quintessence", while other common names, like the "red king" or "red lion", derive from the ruby red colour attained at the end of the Opus (Abraham, 1998, 147). The birth of the Stone is the subject of the 34th emblem of the *Atalanta fugiens*; in the lower right corner, the nude figures of Sol and Luna are depicted embracing each other, while the upper left corner shows a nude female figure giving birth to a child (the stone) from her abode in the skies (figure 16). The motto of Maier's emblem reads: "He is conceived in baths, and born in the air, and being made red walks upon the waters." (2020). The last line of the motto evokes strong associations with Christ, who demonstrated his command of nature by walking across the stormy sea. In the accompanying epigram, Maier further writes: "This gift of God is a Stone, and yet not so",[21] which implies that the perfection of the Philosopher's Stone goes beyond the transmutation of metals. Indeed, as we have seen previously, it was common for the process of transmutation to be likened to the death and resurrection of Christ. Following this analogy, the unified stone of the *rubedo* holds the possibility for the redemption of mankind, and possibly, for nature as a whole.

What, then, does the Philosopher's Stone have to do with Blake, and the expansion of vision? Blake was of course not a laboratory alchemist, but, as I have argued, he did integrate alchemical notions, symbolism, and imagery into his conception of the fourfold vision. This becomes increasingly apparent in the final trek of his visionary journey, which ultimately culminates in an alchemical configuration of unified opposites, producing the wholeness of the fourfold vision. And in a way, the fourfold vision *is* the Philosopher's Stone. If this sounds dubious, we need look no further than to Böhme; in the *Threefold Life of Man*, he writes: "The Noble Stone

[21] The paradoxical statement "It is a stone and not a stone" is a common refrain in alchemical writings. See Abraham (1998, 145).

lies in the Eternity" (7:16). Böhme also tells us that: "He who has it [the Stone], and knows it, if he seeks, he may find all things whatsoever are in Heaven and in Earth" (TLM, 6:103). The "Noble Stone" of theosophy is a form of *gnosis*: it is the realization that we, even in our corporeal form, contain the whole of divinity. This is, however, a revelation that we must arrive at on our own; it is through experience, and not organized religion, that we are reborn into this knowledge. Similarly, Blake writes:

> I give you the end of a golden string,
> Only wind it into a ball:
> It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
> Built in Jerusalems wall.
> (Jer, pl. 77: *To the Christians*)

Blake, as the poet-prophet, aims to stir the reader to begin their own visionary journey; however, he can only give us "the *end* of a golden string". The string may guide us, but it is up to us to follow its many tangles if we are to arrive at "Heaven's gate".

The Unified Fourfold

The climax of both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is reached when the divided fourfold is brought back into a unified harmony. This unification does not only reconcile the opposites of the masculine and feminine, but illuminates, and brings together, the underlying correspondences of nature. Blake's depiction of this process contains both visual and textual evidence that suggest some degree of familiarity with alchemical source works.

As observed by Freed, the unification of Milton and Ololon calls to mind the figure of Sol and Luna in the *Rosarium philosophorum,* both in their visual depiction, and in their symbolic representation (1994, 81-82). In the moment of unification, the Sixfold Emanation within Ololon divides, and flees: "into the depths / Of Miltons Shadow as a Dove upon the stormy Sea." (Mil, 42:5-6). When she returns to the divided Milton, it is in the form of a "Moony Ark" (Mil, 42:7). This moon-ark is another one of Blake's many multifaceted symbols; for one, it is symbolic of the "moony spaces" of Beulah, which, as discussed, is identified with inspiration. It is also symbolically linked to Noah's ark; in part, through the image of the dove, which appears in the

biblical account of the flood. This connection is further cemented in the visual depiction on plate 24 of *Jerusalem*, where a crescent moon is shown floating on top of a stormy sea (figure 18). In an article discussing the symbolic meaning of Blake's moony ark, Nicholas O. Warner suggests that, because of its connection to the biblical flood of Noah, it may serve as an image of rebirth, thus making the moon-ark both a symbol of hope, and a "vehicle of spiritual transition" (1980, 48-49). There may, however, be yet another layer to Blake's moon-ark; as Freed observes, a descending dove also appears alongside Sol and Luna in the *Rosarium* (figure 5, 6), which seems to act as a catalyst for the unification of the royal bodies (1994, 81). According to Abraham, the white dove is also associated with peace in the alchemical tradition; it is seen as a symbol for the reconciliation of opposites, with its white colour identifying it with the *albedo* (1998, 59). The parallels to the *Rosarium* continue in the next passage: appearing as the moony-ark, Ololon descends "Into the Fires of Intellect" (Mil, 42:9). We again see the alchemical configuration of opposites: Ololon, the feminine element of water, descends into Milton, the masculine element of fire; together, their unified form completes the Opus, which becomes: "One Man Jesus the Saviour" (Mil, 41:9-11).

Visual similarities to the alchemical emblem tradition can also be observed in Blake's depiction of the unified human form at the end of *Jerusalem*. An illustration of Blake's *hieros gamos* is depicted on plate 99 of *Jerusalem*; here, a nude female figure is being embraced by a bright, clothed male (figure 17). In a short article on the influence of the *Atalanta fugiens* in Blake's engravings, Paul Miner (2012, 336) notes the similarities between this plate, and the lower right half of the 34th emblem of the *Atalanta fugiens* (figure 16). Maier's emblem, which we briefly discussed in the introduction to the chapter, shows the nude figures of Sol and Luna in an erotic embrace. Generally speaking, solar and lunar imagery are quite prominent in the visual illustrations of Blake's major prophecies; especially in *Jerusalem*, where the sun and moon are shown to be the male and female aspect of Albion. On plate 99, Blake's female creates the shape of a crescent moon, while the male, surrounded by his round, fiery halo, appears to be the sun. As Miner observes, their position is reminiscent of Maier's emblem, with the male figure extending his hands to the female's behind (ibid). Both couples are indicative of a greater final union; one which will produce a form of perfection that goes beyond the sexual divide of the warring contraries.

We see the alchemical configurations of this union in Albion, who is restored to his fourfold wholeness at the end of *Jerusalem*. His great awakening begins in the furnace; as Albion initiates his self-annihilation, the "Furnaces [of affliction] became / Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine" (Jer, 96:35). The purifying force of the "Living Waters" are the four senses:

> According to the Human Nerves of Sensation, the Four Rivers of the Water of Life
> South stood the Nerves of the Eye. East in Rivers of bliss the Nerves of the
> Expansive Nostrils West, flowd the Parent Sense the Tongue. North stood
> The labyrinthine Ear.
>
> (Jer, 98:15-18)

This passage further demonstrates how Blake's spiritual awakening does not necessitate a rejection of the body, but rather an elevation of the corporeal experience; indeed, in every aspect of the human being, we can find a reflection of the divine. These aspects are the four Zoas, who are now arising "into Albions Bosom" (Jer, 96:41-42). As we saw in the preceding chapters, the Zoas are part of an intricate web of correspondences—one that explicitly involves several of the key components we find in alchemy, most notably elements and metals. In Albion's awakened state, the Zoas return to their fourfold wholeness, thus revealing the microcosmic parallels between material nature, and divine nature.

Having called forth his Emanation, the awakened Albion grabs his bow from the great "Infinitude":

> thro the Four Elements on all sides
> Surrounding his awful Members. Thou seest the Sun in heavy clouds
> Struggling to rise above the Mountains. in his burning hand
> He takes his Bow, then chooses out his arrows of flaming gold
>
> (Jer, 95:10-13)

In response, each of the four Zoas reaches for a bow of their own; this moment is described as creating a "Fourfold Vision" (Jer, 96:6-7). Urizen, now "bright beaming" as the sun, reaches towards the south, and grabs "a breathing Bow of carved Gold", while Luvah, the Zoa of passion, turns eastwards for "a Silver Bow bright shining" (Jer, 96:7-9). The union of Urizen and Luvah—passion and reason—also mirrors that of Sol and Luna, who are known as gold and silver in alchemy. The fourfold similarly encompasses Tharmas and Urthona, the Zoas of body, and

inspiration. In the East, Tharmas retrieves “a Bow of Brass pure flaming richly wrought” (Jer, 96:10). The final Zoa, Urthona, grabs from the north “a Bow of Iron terrible thundering” (Jer, 96:11). It is of course no coincidence that it is the Zoa of inspiration that completes the vision; the “furnace of affliction” belongs to Los, Urthona’s fallen form. And it is through the fire of Los’ furnace that Albion’s selfhood is destroyed. The product of Albion’s reawakened vision is the fourfold bow, a creation that:

> . . . is a Male & Female & the Quiver of the Arrows of Love,
> Are the Children of this Bow: a Bow of Mercy & Loving-kindness: laying
> Open the hidden Heart in Wars of mutual Benevolence Wars of Love
> And the Hand of Man grasps firm between the Male & Female Loves
>
> (Jer, 97:12-15)

Wielded by Albion, the bow represents the perfect harmony between the opposing principles; it does not only reconcile them, but redeems, or elevates, each individual aspect to a new form.

As we might expect, this redemption has to do with the change of perspective; it introduces a new mode of seeing that fundamentally alters our understanding of ourselves, and the world(s) we inhabit. This change is first made apparent through Blake’s description of the four Zoas, and their cardinal directions. In the Bard’s song of *Milton*, we are told that the fall of Albion was followed by Luvah’s descent into “the World of Urizen”, which is located “to the South” (19:19). The same myth is later repeated in *Jerusalem*, which demonstrates its importance in Blake’s fall narrative. As we saw earlier, the separation of Luvah was the consequence of Albion’s faulty vision, which instigated a divide between material and divine nature. Through Albion’s movement from inward to outward perspective, the realm of Luvah becomes the “World of Opakeness” (Jer, 73, 22-23). This world is meant to signify a state in which the divine vision remains inaccessible; or something that is both unseeable, and unknowable. In Albion’s fourfold form, Luvah is returned to his original position in the east, and instructed to operate the “Loom”—a task usually reserved for female figures in Blake’s prophecies (Jer, 95:17). Urizen, once the dark “limiter”, becomes an image of illumination; in his new form, he is directed back to his “Furrow” (Jer, 95:16). Reunited with Albion, Urizen channels the negative potentiality of the Ulro into the act of transformation; in this visionary state, the plowman Urizen becomes the harbinger of a new age.

At the ending of *Milton*, the renewal of mankind is named the "Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations" (Mil, 43:1). Blake's harvest calls to mind Christ's parable of the grain of wheat: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John 12:24, KJV). The same parable is mentioned by Stanton J. Linden as an example of a biblical verse that was ripe for alchemical allegorizing; as Liden explains, the death and resurrection of Christ worked as an analogy for the colour-coded process of transmutation: the death of the "grain" being the *nigredo*, and the "fruit" symbolizing the Philosopher's Stone (2003, 16). The harvest is therefore a common motif in alchemical emblem books. A particularly striking example can be found in the illustration to *The Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine*: a popular late 16th century German work on alchemy. The work was later translated into Latin and reprinted with twelve accompanying engravings in Maier's *Tripus aureus* (1618). In the illustration to the eighth key (figure 19), a skeleton is shown laying in a field, with its head resting on a sheaf of grain (Maier, 1618, 47). To the left, a farmer is scattering seeds, while a flock of crows (another symbol of the *nigredo*) surrounds his feet. To the right, we see an angel blowing into a horn, signifying the volatility of the matter. Behind the corpse, a woman is praying in the dug-out grave, while two archers are sitting to her left and right. The target they are aiming at forms a circle within a square: the circle ⨀ is another symbol for gold, while the four-sided square represents the four elements of the Opus.[22] The engraving holds the promise for the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone, but shows that it can only be achieved through the process of death and resurrection. Whether or not Blake encountered any versions of *The Twelve Keys*, it is not hard to imagine that the alchemical allegorizing of the harvest could have influenced his conception of visionary expansion, particularly in its hope of renewal through a fourfold configuration brought on by death.

The ending of *Milton* is commonly described as an apocalyptic vision. Before returning to his temporal body at Felpham, Blake has one final vision:

> And I beheld the Twenty-four Cities of Albion . . .
> And the Immortal Four in whom the Twenty-four appear Four-fold
> Arose around Albions body: Jesus wept & walked forth
> From Felphams Vale clothed in Clouds of blood, to enter into

[22] The image of a square and a circle acts as a symbol for the Opus, while the transformation of a square into a circle ("squaring the circle") symbolizes the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone. See Abraham (1998, 189).

> Albions Bosom, the bosom of death & the Four surrounded him
> In the Column of Fire in Felphams Vale . . .
>
> (Mil, 42:16-22)

Echoing the "negative becoming", the appearance of Christ is heralded by "clouds of blood, "streams of gore, and "dreadful thunderings" (Mil, 42:8). The depiction of this event calls to mind Blake's vision of Paracelsus and Böhme, whose appearance marks the beginning of the American Revolution (CW: *Letters*, 707-708). This is similarly described as bringing on "terrors" and "dark horrors"—evoking the feeling that we are about to witness the beginning of an apocalyptic re-imagining of society. We see the same vivid language at the beginning of Blake's visionary journey, suggesting that the inner rebirth may simultaneously necessitate, or beget, the transmutation of the outer world. Exactly what this transmutation entails is left unanswered, as *Milton* ends on what Harold Bloom describes as a "prelude to apocalypse" (1963, 360).

The Four is One

When Blake attempts to describe the vision that appears from Albion's fourfold bow, we are told that it is "Glorious incomprehsible by Mortal Man" (Jer, 98:11). And what follows may indeed be described as *incomprehensible*: "innumerable Chariots of the Almighty" appears from the blood red sky, and "every Man stood Fourfold, each Four Faces had" (Jer, 98:8-12). It seems to be an experience that almost defies words, which reflects the strange, paradoxical nature of Blake's expanded vision. The word "fourfold" implies a multiplicity; yet the vision Blake is describing is both *one* and *four* at the same time. This is a paradox that is often encountered when dealing with the divine; in Böhme, for instance, the three principles of God are explained as follows: "they are in one another as one, and they are but *one* thing but according to the Creation they are *Three*" (TLM, 6:48). In an article exploring Blake's fourfold vision, Edward J. Rose describes it as "a fallen description of infinite perfection, of unfallen Oneness", while the "Oneness" of "Single Vision" describes the fallen unity of Ulro (1964, 173-174). Rose posits that the unfallen Oneness is the vision of the prophet-poet, who is now able to experience the object of perception from all sides (1964, 174). As he further explains, this implies that the poet-prophet has broken through the barriers of time and space, and has now become "the circumference" (ibid).

Rose points towards Blake's use of the squared circle as a graphic illustration of his fourfold vision (ibid). This is a design we are familiar with from the alchemical tradition; it illustrates the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone (the circle) from the four elements (the square). Rose notes several instances where the squared circle is prominent in Blake's illustrations. A particularly striking example can be found on plate 43 of *Milton*, in which a crouching Blake is shown with his head between the thighs of another nude male figure, likely either Los or Milton (figure 20). The standing figure is emerging from a yellow orb, with raging fire surrounding the outside. Although no description is given by Blake, it is reasonable to surmise that the plate alludes to the attainment of vision, with the erotic pose perhaps suggesting a unification between the perceptive fields of the circle and the square. In Blake's expanded vision, the four sides of the square are, as Rose posits, "all sides of the object of Perception" (1964, 175). Each side is one of the four Zoas, and their corresponding world of Imagination. Within the centre we find the "circumference", which is visually enclosed within the four lines of the circle. In an illustration for the article, Ross depicts the attainment of the fourfold vision as a squared circle within another circle; as Ross explains, this is because "The eyes expand to an infinite circumference so that all is contained in one man." (1964, 176). Blake describes this expansion in *Jerusalem*:

> What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:
> The Circumference is Within: Without, is formed the Selfish Center
> And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.
> And the Center has Eternal States!
>
> (71:6-9)

To attain the fourfold vision, the outer must become part of the inner. Ross's illustration of this process is very helpful, because it shows that the fourfold vision is, in a way, greater than its parts; rather than remove the perception of the material, it expands outwards towards the divine.

This process can also be visualized with the help of Blake's fourfold wheel. First, it must be noted that several kinds of wheels appear in Blake's major prophecies, and there is a pervading duality in their symbolic meaning. The wheels of Eden evoke harmony: "Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace", while the wheels of this world are "wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic / Moving by compulsion each other" (Jer, 15:17-20). We see here how the wheel in the material world becomes imbued with the imagery of industry and machinery. This change in imagery again brings to mind the process of disenchantment, which replaces "living

nature" with a "mechanistic worldview" (Hanegraaff, 2012, 254). The fourfold wheel, on the other hand, is not just an image of harmony, but of living nature. We see this living wheel at the end of *Jerusalem*, when the four Zoas becomes the "four Living Creatures" of the chariot, who then expands into the four-cardinal direction (98:24).

The idea of the Zoas as wheels goes back to *Milton*; on plate 32, we see them depicted as four spheres (figure 9). Blake's illustration creates the basic design of the squared circle; only here the circle is separated into the four different spheres. The plate shows that the mundane egg (i.e. our world of time and space) is the centre, and the object unifying the four spheres. Ross argues that the shape of the egg, which, as he notes, forms an imperfect, ovular circle, could be emblematic of the fallen vision (1964, 175). Yet, its position in the centre demonstrates that it has the potential to transform, or unify, the other spheres of vision.

Blake's description of the "four Living Creatures" derives from Ezekiel's vision of the throne of God (the *Merkavah*):

> And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub. . . they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. . . . their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had (KJV, 1:10:9-12).

The vision described in the first chapter of Ezekiel has been the source of fascination and contemplation for centuries of esoteric and mystical thinkers, especially within the Jewish mystical tradition. In his ground-breaking work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), Gershom Scholem coined the term *Merkavah Mysticism* to define early Jewish texts centred on the details of Ezekiel's throne. In a later work, Scholem asserts that "the main purpose of the ascent to the Merkabah is the vision of the One Who sits on the Throne" (1987, 16). By reading Ezekiel, we can surmise that this is a vision of God: "upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." (KJV, 1:26). In other words, the aim of the ascent for the *Merkavah* mystic was to experience the image of God; crucially, not in the afterlife, but within the mortal world. Of course, the remarkable description of the visible God in Ezekiel has not only been of interest to *Merkavah* mystics; indeed, the vision has been the source of endless speculation, and theologists have pondered over its meaning for centuries.

Among these theologists we find Böhme, to whom the vision of the chariot also holds the possibility of seeing something that transcends corporeal reason. References to Ezekiel's chariot can be found throughout Böhme's writings, often with the central focus being on the appearance of the wheels within wheels. For one, the image of the four living wheels is used by Böhme to illustrate how the different aspects of God (i.e, trinity, principles, etc.) are all part of God's oneness:

> the spirit shewth that all the powers in the Father are one in another, as one power. . . . A Resemblance Image or Figure whereof, we have in the Prophet Ezekiel the I. Chap. Who seeth the Lord in the Spirit and resemblance, like a wheele, having Four other wheels one in another, the Four being like one another (Au, 3:19-20).

While it is not uncommon for Ezekiel's vision to be interpreted as an image of God's omnipresence, Böhme's primary interest seems to be in the depiction of God's manifested form, and our ability to experience it visually in the natural world. In the *Threefold Life of Man* he tells us that the oneness of Ezekiel's vision is a synthesis between inward (eternal) and outward (temporal) perception:

> But the spirit of the soul, if it be turned about, so that it looketh with its own eyes into the innermost, and with the Eyes of this world the outermost, understandeth it: for this is the Vision in Ezekiel, of the Spirit with the inward and outward Eyes (10:24).

The vision of the four-wheeled chariot is interpreted by Böhme as being an experience of the inner realm; however, the incomprehensible description given by Ezekiel suggests that this is an experience that goes beyond words. It is, in a way, comparable to an experience of *gnosis*; as we recall, Böhme, after his moment of illumination, claimed to have seen the "the Beings of all Beings" (EP, 2:7), yet, as he tried to write it down he found he "could very hardly apprehend the same" in the outward world, or express it in writing (EP, 2:10). In the *Aurora*, he describes the experience as follows:

> my spirit suddenly saw through all, and *in and by* all the Creatures even in Herbs and Grasse it knew God, Who he is, and How he is, and What his will is: and suddenly in that light my will was set on by a mightily impulse, to describe the Being of God (XIX:13)

It is possible that, in the eyes of Böhme, the content of Ezekiel's vision does not so much attempt to describe the actual image of God as the *experience of* the image of God.

The wheel itself is a pertinent image of this experience, because it captures the essence of motion necessary to arrive at this vision. Böhme seems especially captivated by this aspect of Ezekiel's wheel, hence why we find several different iterations of it in his writings.[23] The absolute importance of the wheel in Böhme's work should be made clear by revisiting Freher's illustrations, all of which centre on their various forms. One example of Böhme's many wheels can be found in his conception of the seven source spirits, who are seen as being a part of God: "The seven wheels are the seven Spirits of God . . . [they] are like, a turning about of a wheel, which hath seven wheels *within one another*" (Au, XIII:90). As the passage makes clear, each spirit is seen as being contained within the others; they are not just separate entities but intrinsic to the whole of being. Commenting on Böhme's figuration of the seven wheels, Magee reasons that it is an attempt to express what the *One* really is like, and how the *One* is "experienced by the mystic *all at once"* (2016, 196). To be able to experience the *One*, it appears that the subject must attain some kind of understanding of themselves as part of this wholeness. Böhme's conception of this process is firmly rooted in the alchemical mode of thought. We begin in a state of darkness, in which we perceive ourselves as being individuals separate from the *One*. This perception is brought on by our selfhood, which leads us to believe that there is nothing greater than ourselves. Through (visionary) experience, we begin to attain a renewed understanding of ourselves, and our relation to the *One*. The results of this process are not measured in the abstract knowledge of our divine origin, but in our actual experience of the divine itself.

Böhme's treatment of the four-wheeled chariot would likely have resonated with Blake, and it is possible that it directly influenced his own adaptation of Ezekiel's vision. To start with, it links the concept of transformation (becoming part of the *One*) with the visionary experience (seeing the *One*). We find the same notion of perceiving a divine wholeness expressed in Blake's process of contraction and expansion:

> We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
> We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one,
> As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
> We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him
>
> (Jer, 34:17-20)

[23] For a brief overview of the development of Böhme's many wheels, see Weeks (1991, 58, 74)

Crucially, this visionary expansion is achieved through experience; we begin in a state of contraction, but through the destruction of the selfhood, we attain the vision of the unfallen *oneness*. This notion of *oneness* forms the basis for Blake's fourfold vision, and we find this need for unity reflected in every step of Blake's visionary journey. To various degrees, this process of unification contains elements of alchemical symbolism and configurations. This alchemical unification is also evident in Blake's adaptation of the four-wheeled chariot: through the four Zoas, Ezekiel's vision of the living creatures becomes the four alchemical elements, who then becomes one in the fourfold Albion. Within Blake's notion of the unfallen oneness lies the possibility of something beyond the ordinary; however, as implied by the visions of Ezekiel, the divine is something we must experience for ourselves.

Seeing the Eternal

At the end of *Jerusalem*, Los gives an explanation for how one can attain the expanded vision: "he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole / Must see it in its Minute Particulars" (91:20-21). The same sentiment is beautifully expressed in the famous opening lines to Blake's "Auguries of Innocence":

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour
>
> (1-4)

Blake describes a vision that seemingly transcends the spatial and temporal boundaries of the created world. And yet, he simultaneously shows us that the Eternal awaits us in the material realm; in fact, it is available everywhere, in every aspect, or "minute particulars" of nature.

Seeing the Eternal does not only alter our understanding of ourselves and the material world, but also our perception of God, and his moral law. Realizing that the material world is a reflection of the divine, brings about the conclusion that "every Minute Particular is Holy" (Jer, 69:42). And this, of course, extends to the human being, and the corporeal body: "But General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every / Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the

Divine Jesus." (Jer, 91:29-31). Blake equates the worship of God with the practice of using our Imagination, which, as noted earlier, is seen as an Eternal aspect, and a divine faculty:

> the Worship of God, is honouring his gifts
> In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according
> To his Genius: which is the Holy Ghost in Man; there is no other
> God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity
>
> (Jer, 91:7-10)

Self-knowledge is thus knowledge of God, since we are created in his image. In her essay on Böhme and the English Romantics, Elisabeth Engell Jessen asserts that Blake's theology is built on the same underlying premise that we find in Böhme, namely that "the way of the human subject back to God proceeds via the continual seeking of God within" (2014, 183). It is this continual inner seeking that brings us to an experience of the divine, and knowledge of its being.

In her work *Blake and Tradition*, Raine calls this the "opening of the centre", which describes the moment where the Eternal breaks through the perceived boundaries of time and space (1968, 154). To my knowledge, Raine is also the first to suggest that Blake might have inherited this idea from Böhme (1968, 157). We find a passage very reminiscent of Blake's expansion in *The Threefold Life of Man*, where Böhme similarly asserts that the divine can be observed in the smallest aspects of nature: "The Eternal Center, and the Birth of Life, and the Substantiality, are every where. If you make a small Circle, as small as a little Grain (or kernel of Seed) there is the whole Birth of the Eternal Nature" (6:43). In a later passage, he adds: "whatever thou seest in this Great Circumference, the same is also in the *smallest* Circle" (6:62). To Böhme, God is himself comparable to a circle; he is something without a beginning or an end: "if a Man would liken the Father to any thing, he should liken him to the Round Globe of Heaven" (Au, 3:17). The assertion that the entirety of creation is contained within the smallest of circle must be understood as a parallel between the microcosm and macrocosm: "as you find Man to be, just so is the Eternity . . . *All is in man*, both Heaven and Earth, Stars, and Elements" (TLM, 6:47). And it is this "perfect whole" that we see reflected in nature through our expanding eye.

What is peculiar about Böhmean theosophy is the relation between nature and the visualized image. As mentioned, Böhme considers nature to be a mode of revelation; in conjunction with the imagination, it reveals to us the inner working of the divine. Nature is in itself

a concrete manifestation of the divine; however, our experience of nature depends upon our own spiritual state. Böhme insists that we must experience the world with "our own Eyes"; those who are blind to the "light of this world" are considered to be "asleep and dreameth" (TLM, 6:36). When Böhme speaks of the "eye" or "seeing", he really does mean it in a very literal sense. The visionary experience is not just another way to speak of revelation, or spiritual knowledge; divinity cannot be experienced through some abstract knowledge, but through actual images. As Faivre explains, the way theosophers arrive at their insight is "by scrutinizing both the Divine and observed Nature often in its most infinitesimal details" (1994, 29). It is through the process of examining the material nature that the theosophers are able to experience the divine nature; in other words, one must start with the immediate observable reality—which still derives from God—in order to ascend to a higher level of seeing. As Faivre notes, Böhmean thought aligns with the general trend in Western esotericism of maintaining a principle of divine origin: the sphere of the divine is thereby "identical to that of the reflections and projections of those in the more concrete world that surrounds us" (1994, 26). God, as the creator of this reflection, desires to be known; yet, because God is, as Faivre notes, "immutable", we can only know the divine through "living images of its manifestation" (1994, 27). The image that our Imagination derives from the natural world is thereby more than just an elevation of the outward vision: it is a manifestation of the divine.

The way Böhme arrives at an image of the divine is through the experience of *gnosis;* however, as Faivre notes, theosophical *gnosis* must also be "accompanied by an inner transformation of ourselves" (1994, 27). It is this experience of *gnosis* that brings us to the *innermost ground of nature*: "when the mind thus enkindles itself in a form, it enkindles the whole spirit and body, and forthwith carries its imagination into the inmost fire of the soul, and awakens the inmost *centrum naturae*" (SP, 3, IV:5). The transformation that occurs through *gnosis* is described by Hanegraaff as a "radical end to alienation from one's own divine essence", since the experience leads us to realize that the divine realm is identical to our own "essential nature" (2016, 383). As Hanegraaff further explains, this idea of "self knowledge as knowledge of God" is often illustrated through the image of a "divine spark" that has fallen into the world of matter; however, Hanegraaff is careful to note that not all accounts of *gnosis* present the corporeal realm as something that we need to be liberated from (ibid). *Gnosis* can also be conceptualized as a visionary experience. As an example, Hanegraaff points us towards an image from the hermetic

Poimandres, where the visionary is transformed by staring into the eyes of the divine Poimandres until he realizes the he is really beholding himself (ibid). Böhme's conceptualization of *gnosis* can be understood to operate in a similar manner, except it is specifically through the process of attaining images that we arrive at the great realization. Faivre suggest that theosophy can be understood as a "theology of the image", as the image is the means by which we realize our total and complete being (1994, 29). This process may very well be described as an expansion of vision; the images we find through our Imagination transforms us, and through this transformation, we arrive at even more divine—more *real*—images.

This, I believe, is also the key to Blake's fourfold vision, and the process of expansion. In Blake's prophecies, the *seeing* and *being* of the Imagination are closely related; as we recall from the discussion on the negative "becoming", the act of "beholding" is associated with transformation: what we see, we become. In a letter to his patron John Trusler, Blake explains:

> to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination & I feel Flatterd when I am told So (CW: *Letters*, 702).

Yet, the visions that we experience through the Imagination are not only a reflection of the Eternal aspect, but a way for us to reincorporate this concealed aspect back into our being. The "Eternal death" of Blake's *nigredo* prepares us for this moment: stripped of our selfhood, we become like the "white foliated earth", awaiting the opportunity to take on a new form. But again, this is not an easy process; while the Imagination can be transformative, we do not transform ourselves simply by conjuring up images. The way the transformation occurs is through a gradual back-and-forth process; the act of seeing transforms us, but what we see is limited by our current state of being. To expand our vision (i.e. to "see more") we must also transform ourselves.

It is, however, through Böhme's idea of *gnosis* that Blake seems to find his own version of the Philosopher's Stone; that is, the transcendental experience of *Eternity*. Through the visionary journey, we arrive at the realization that the temporal world is a reflection of the Eternal. And what is more, we as humans carry the whole of this reflection within our being: "What is Above is Within" (Jer, 71:6). Everything that God has created exists for us to discover within our Imagination: "For All Things Exist in the Human Imagination" (Jer, 69:25). Thus, the experience

of the Eternal does not lie beyond our temporal world but can be accessed within this corporeal realm. This is what Böhme means when he tells us that he who has the Stone "may find all things whatsoever are in Heaven and in Earth" (TLM, 6:103). Blake, like Böhme, views this process as a visionary journey; the divine cannot be reduced to abstractions, it must be experienced through our senses. In the *Aurora*, Böhme tells us that "the *true Heavens* is every where, even in that Place where thou standeth and goeth", further adding, "If Mans Eyes were but *opened*, he should see God every where in his Heaven; for Heaven standeth in the innermost Birth or Geniture every where" (XIX:26, 54). Likewise, Blake writes:

> Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?
> It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell,
> Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos'd,
> I hope thine are not: hence it clothes itself in rich array;
> Hence thou art cloth'd with human beauty O thou mortal man.
> Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies
>
> (Mil, 20:27-32)

The microscopic fly embodies the divinity found in the "minute particulars" of nature; not ruled by human reason, its gate is open to the infinite. Blake asks if we can *see* the fly, because the Eternal is experienced precisely through the act of "seeing"; thus, the Eternal does not lie "beyond the skies" but exists within us in the *here and now*.

Conclusion

By examining the fourfold vision through an esoteric framework, it becomes clear that *Milton* and *Jerusalem* reveal the influence of a larger alchemical tradition upon Blake. More research is needed to determine the extent of this influence, but to me it appears that it had a substantial effect on Blake's later work; this is not only observable in his writings, but also in the illustrations to his poetry. While Böhme is, in all likelihood, the most important source for the development of Blake's alchemical framework, it is quite possible that he also had some familiarity with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century alchemical emblem books. Of course, I cannot confidently say whether Blake was directly influenced by alchemical texts, or if his main exposure to alchemical terms and ideas was through the framework of Böhme; however, I believe his two major prophecies reveal that the concept of alchemical transmutation was central to the development of the fourfold vision.

As we have seen throughout the thesis, Blake's transformation contains the key components of Hanegraaff's alchemical paradigm. The transformation starts with the fall; yet, while the fall is treated as a source of our closed-up vision, it is heavily implied that there is a source of darkness that precedes the fall. We see this darkness in Urizen, who exists as an "abstract horror" in his unformed shape (Mil, 3:9). The fallen "oneness" of non-being is comparable to the dark *prima materia*: the starting points for the alchemical Opus. Like the *prima materia* of alchemy, Blake's oneness requires separation; this is the fall into material existence, a state that enables us to experience the fourfold multiplicity of being. The fall narrative is, however, not constructed to be an account lamenting bodily existence, or the darkness of material creation; rather, the focus is always on our spiritual state, and the possibility of renewal through the Imagination. It captures the essence of the "upward notion of birth", a term used by Hanegraaff to describe the movement from darkness to light; in the alchemical paradigm, this original state of darkness was believed to "be the matrix of superior and even divine realities" (2012, 193). Hanegraaff notes that these realities are attained through a "bottom-up approach"; the alchemical mode of thought begins with the material world, for then to work its way up to the divine (ibid). This is arguably what we see in Blake's visionary journey; the Eternal can be found in the "minute particulars" of nature. Yet, because of our own rationalized approach to nature, we have lost our ability to intuitively experience ourselves as part of the Eternal. To return to a fourfold wholeness,

and experience ourselves through the Eternal, we must expand our vision: a process that is conceptualized through an alchemical configuration of opposites.

The contraries we encounter in Blake's major prophecies functions similarly to the dialectical opposites in Böhme's alchemical framework: the "Light and Darkness", "*Ground* and *Unground*", "Something and Nothing". Like Böhme, Blake treats the fall as a transition from oneness to separation. The effects of this separation are explored through the divided Albion, whose fall is brought on by perceiving himself as divorced from (God's) nature. This separation is necessary, as it is through these opposite forces that we transform ourselves and expand our vision towards the Eternal; this time, with a renewed understanding of our own being. Blake's contraries are part of his complex gender symbolism, which grows to include even the fabrics of time and space; these are not treated as abstract concepts, but as actual characters in his poetic universe. Sexually divided opposites are central to alchemy, and the concept of transmutation; every symbol, figure and quality, including the four elements, can be divided into categories of male and female. Böhme similarly incorporates a sexual divide into his concept of creation; everything, in its unified form, has a masculine and feminine element—even God, who is manifested through the feminine Sophia. In Blake's prophecies, the sexual divide represents the contrary forces of contraction and expansion; however, in their divided state, both the masculine and feminine contain a duality of light and darkness, or inward and outward.

The aim of Blake's fourfold vision is to unite the inward and outward perspective. This process relies on personal experience; there are no religious authorities, or codes of law that will guide us. Of course, a reliance on "direct, personal experience" is another key component of the alchemical paradigm, and we even find this idea of experience embedded in the alchemical conceptualization of creation; as Hanegraaff explains, the alchemical mode of thought envisioned the process of creation as "inherently dynamic, linear, and dialectic, starting with the simple unity of primal matter and working its way up from there, by means of dramatic and painful processes of growth and development full of violent conflicts between opposed forces or principles" (2012, 193). The similarities with Blake's visionary expansion are apparent: we begin with a separation from a false oneness, then, through our experience of the contraries of nature, we arrive at the divine fourfold wholeness. This visionary journey takes us from the mundane to the otherworldly; it thus arguably goes beyond *transformation*, and into the realm of esoteric *transmutation*.

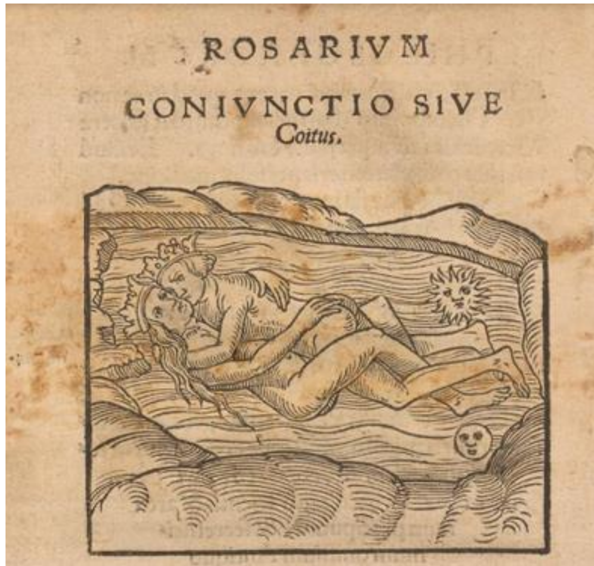
The product of this transmutation—the *oneness* of the fourfold vision—appears to align with an experience of esoteric *gnosis*. If we return to Magee's definition of *gnosis*, we see that the "glorious incomprehensible" of Blake's realized vision contains the basic components that we find in accounts of *gnosis*, including: an "alteration in the experience", "the sense that one is seeing into the true nature of things", and "the sense that the distinction between self and other has collapsed" (2016, xviii). Blake's fourfold vision amounts to an experience that fundamentally transcends our spatial and temporal understanding of reality; everything is both one and four at the same time, and all of infinity is contained in the blink of an eye. It describes an experience that is intensely personal, thoroughly esoteric, and "gloriously incomprehensible".

Considering how this experience is conceptualized as a transformation through "seeing", it is possible that the fourfold vision was influenced by the Böhmean form of *gnosis*. To Böhme, the attainment of images is crucial for our understanding of the divine, as it is through our investigation of the external nature that we arrive at the true image of the inward nature (the "signatures"). And this is, indeed, an image, or perhaps rather the *experience* of the image; similar to what we find in mystical and esoteric interpretation of Ezekiel's vision, it appears that Böhme's form of *gnosis* strives to arrive at an experience of the visual image of God. It is, however, only through the Imagination that we are able to experience the divine in our corporeal form: "the outward Man apprehendeth not in this life-time the divine Essence Corporally; but only through Imagination, where the inward Body doth Penetrate the outward" (SR, XIV:65). Blake similarly writes: "in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven / And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow" (Jer, 71:17-19). By seeing through the eye of the Imagination, we expand our perception into the realm of the divine; this process of expansion is accompanied by an inner rebirth, which strives to attain an experience of fourfold wholeness that is immanent in the material world, and in our own being.

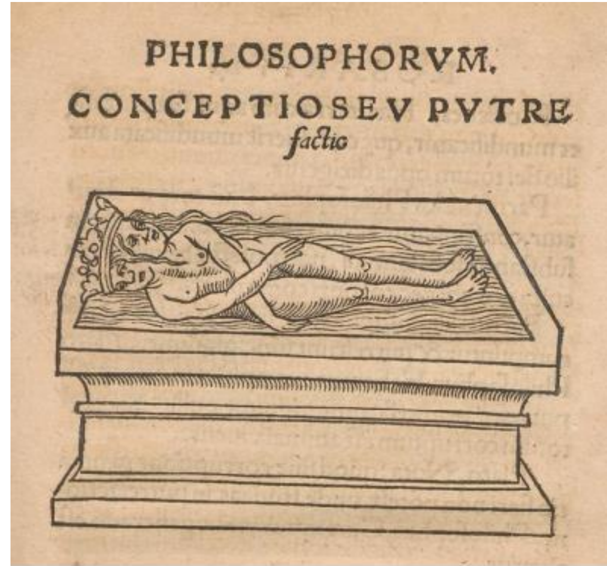
Blake's major prophecies are strange and demanding; and perhaps intentionally so. The convoluted narratives and complex structures are only part of the difficulty; arguably, the biggest challenge is in how they incorporate concepts and ideas that now seem very alien to us. If we are to take Blake at his word, then we are dealing with works of poetry that were intentionally created to transcend "corporeal understanding" (CW: *Letters*, 730). Perhaps, then, we ought to look outside of the realm of "rationality" in our approach to Blake; in fact, we may even have to venture into

the perceived wasteland of Western esotericism, where figures like Böhme have been banished to obscurity. It is undeniable that Blake had an interest in some of these esoteric thinkers, including, of course, Swedenborg, Böhme, Paracelsus, and possibly also figures like Maier, and Merian. Even so, the level of influence remains unclear, and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which esoteric works Blake may have borrowed from. I do, however, believe that Hanegraaff's alchemical paradigm, paired with the concept of *gnosis*, provides a useful framework for our approach to Blake. While the focus of this thesis has been limited to the concepts attached to the fourfold vision, it is possible to use this approach in a larger study on the development of Blake's thought; not only the esoteric elements, but the political as well. Now that we are beginning to rediscover the rich history of Western esotericism, I think it is time that we reconsider its position within Blake research; after all, we cannot hope to understand Blake's visionary works, if we are not willing to approach them through our Imagination.

Figures



1. *Rosarium philosophorum.*



2. *Rosarium philosophorum.*

3. *Rosarium philosophorum*.

4. *Rosarium philosophorum*.

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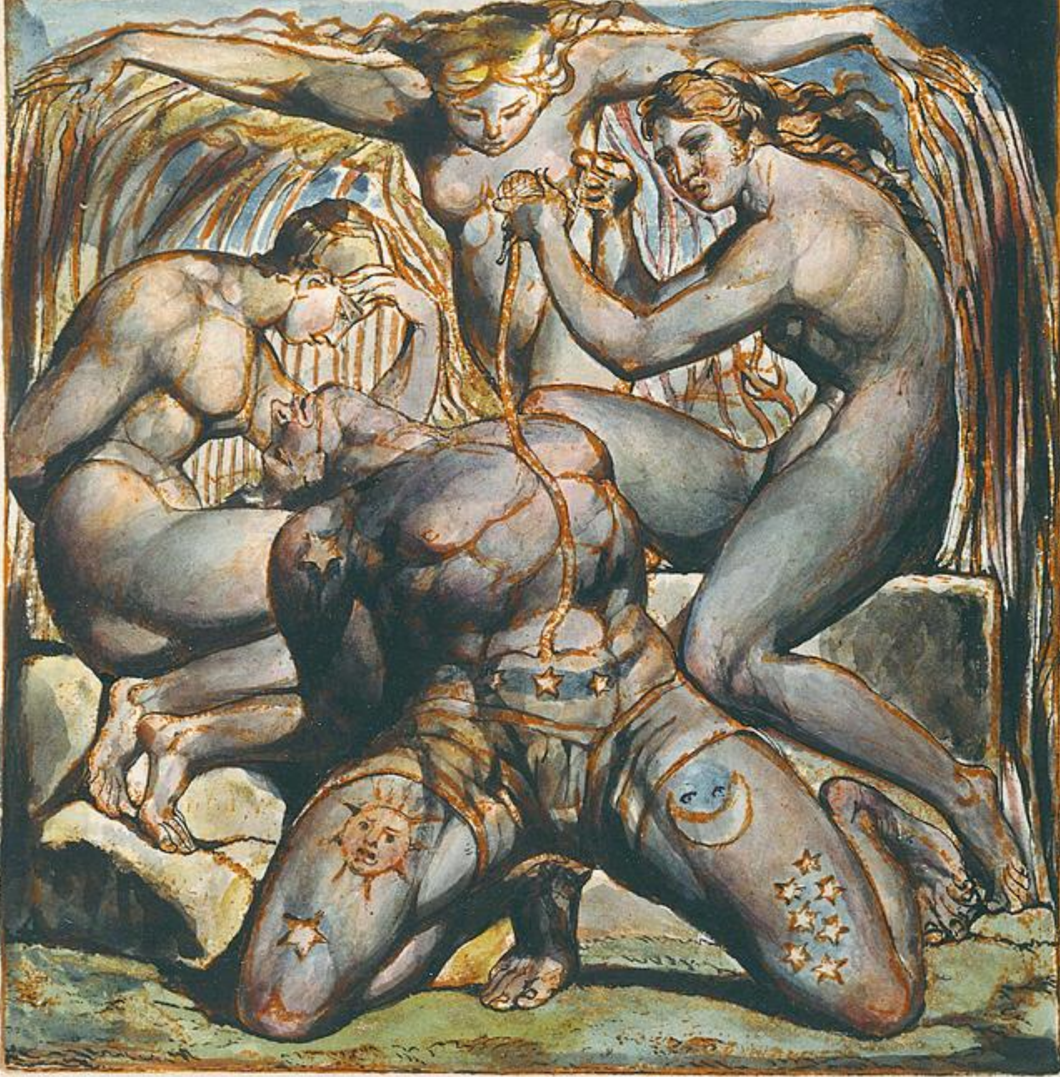
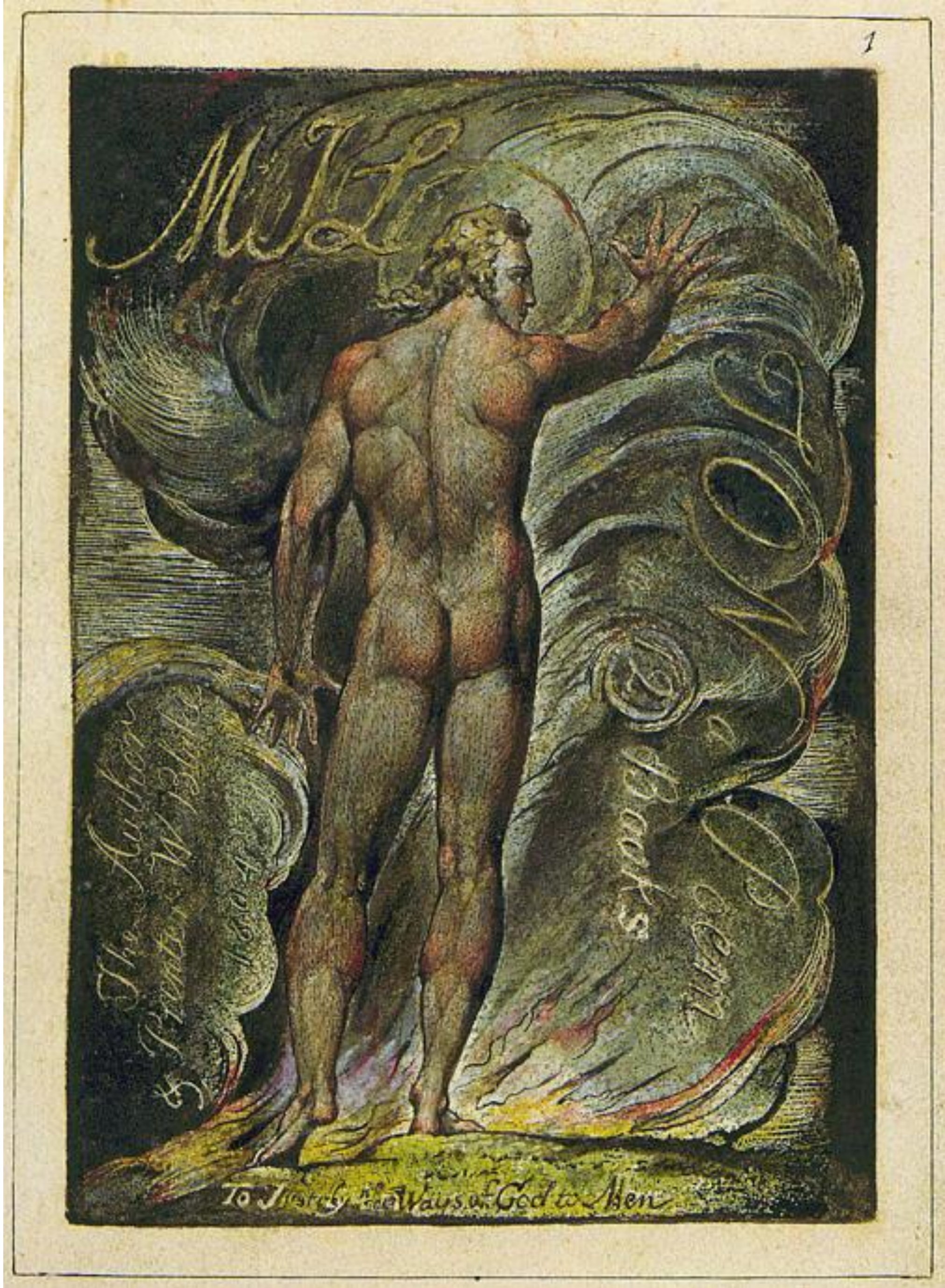
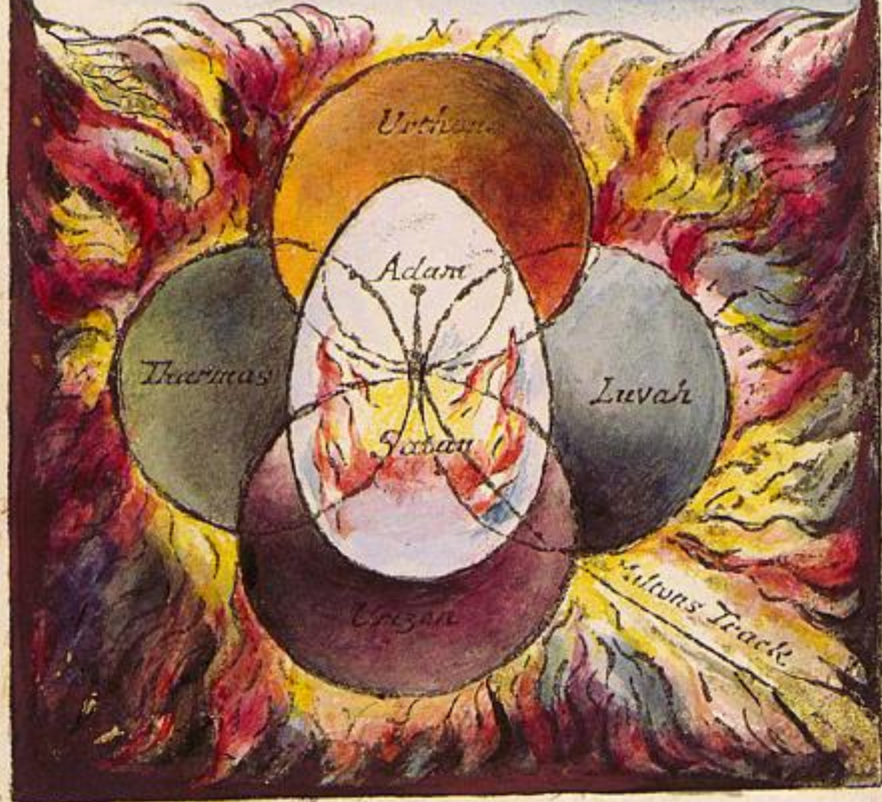
6. *Rosarium philosophorum.*



7. *Jerusalem*, plate 25.



8. *Milton*, *frontispiece.*



9. *Milton, plate 32*.

10. *The true principle of all things*.

11. *Freher, figure I.*

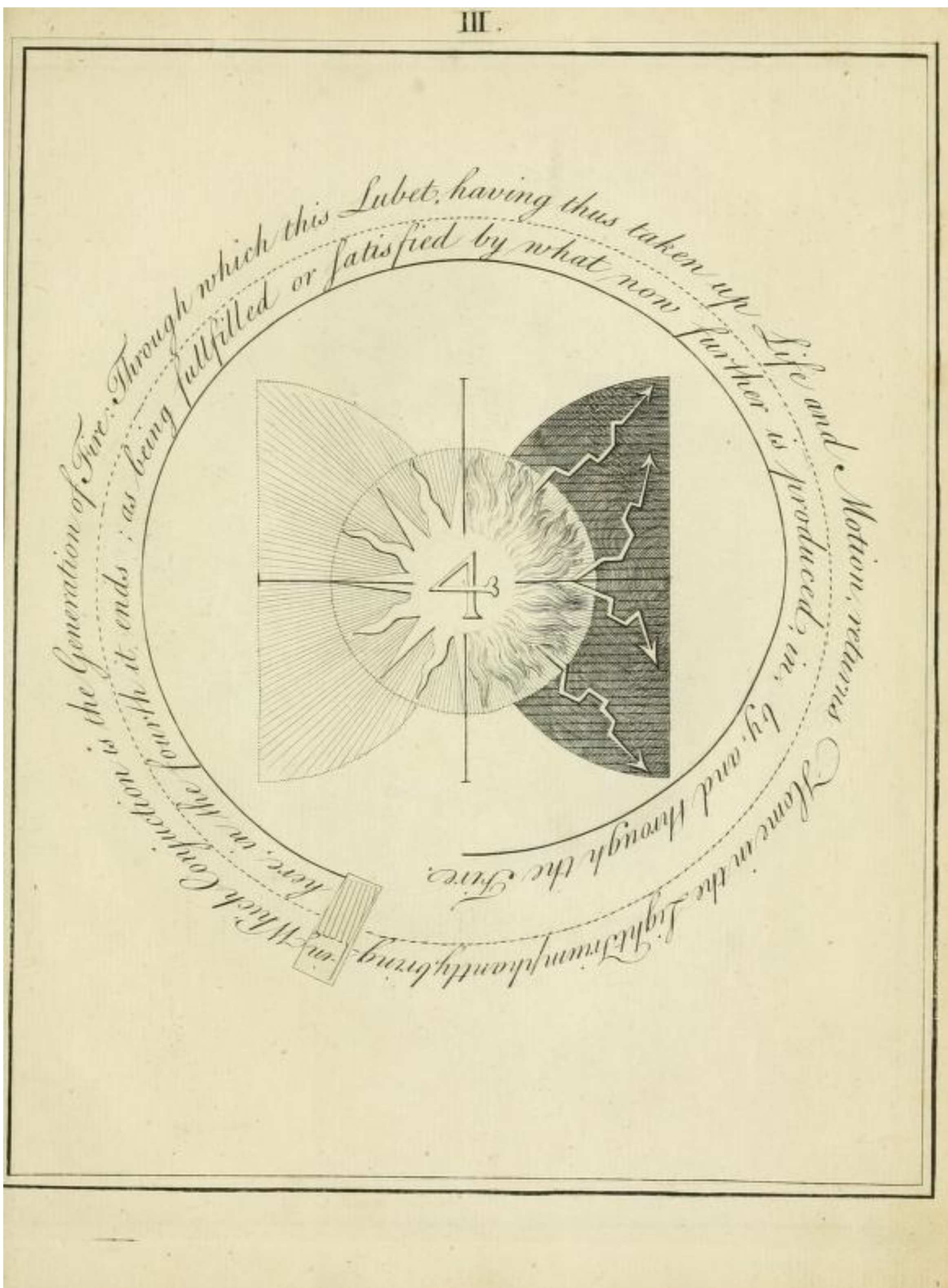
II.

Bitterness. Stinging Motion.

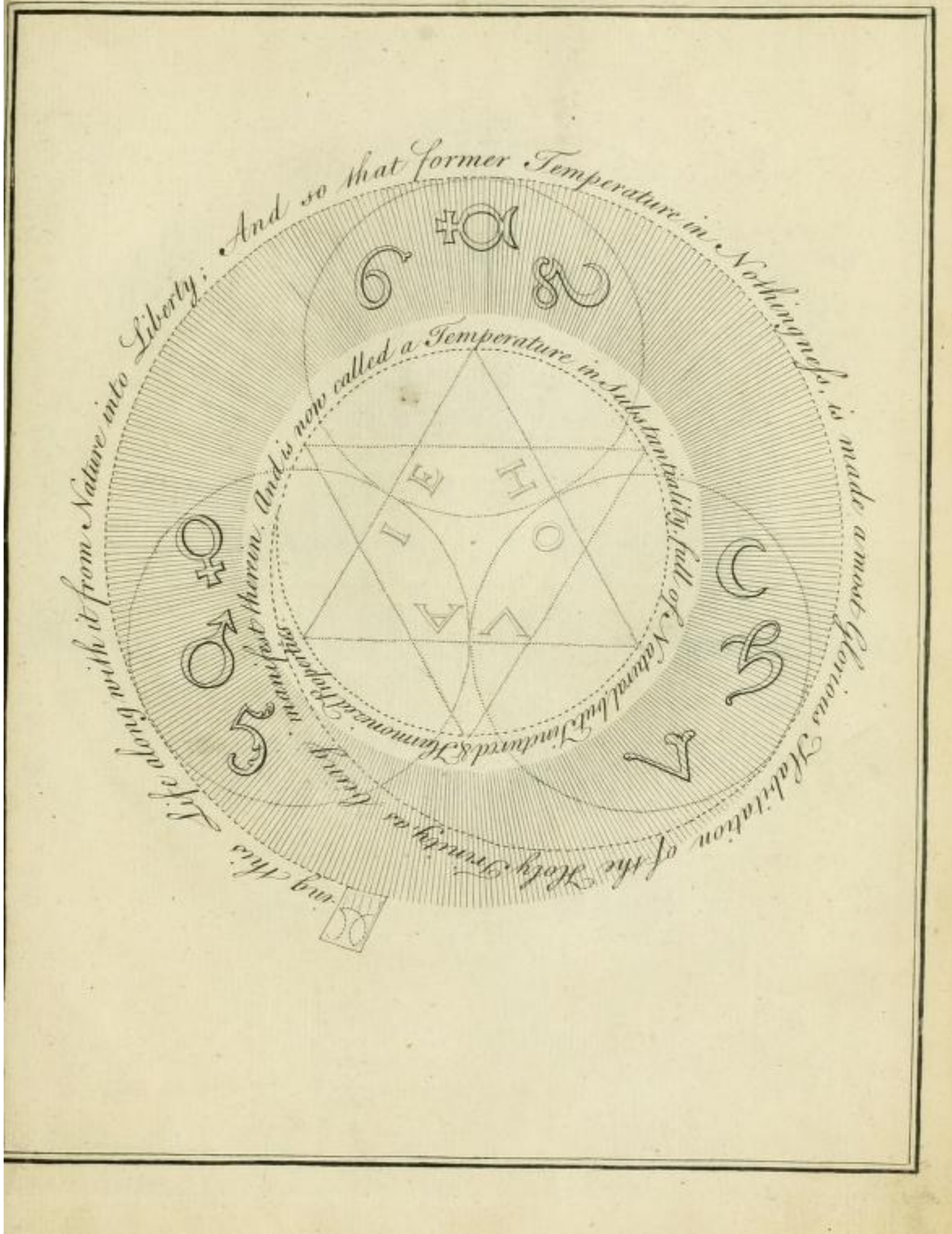
Harshness. Magnetical. Attraction.

Anguish. Whirling Wheel.

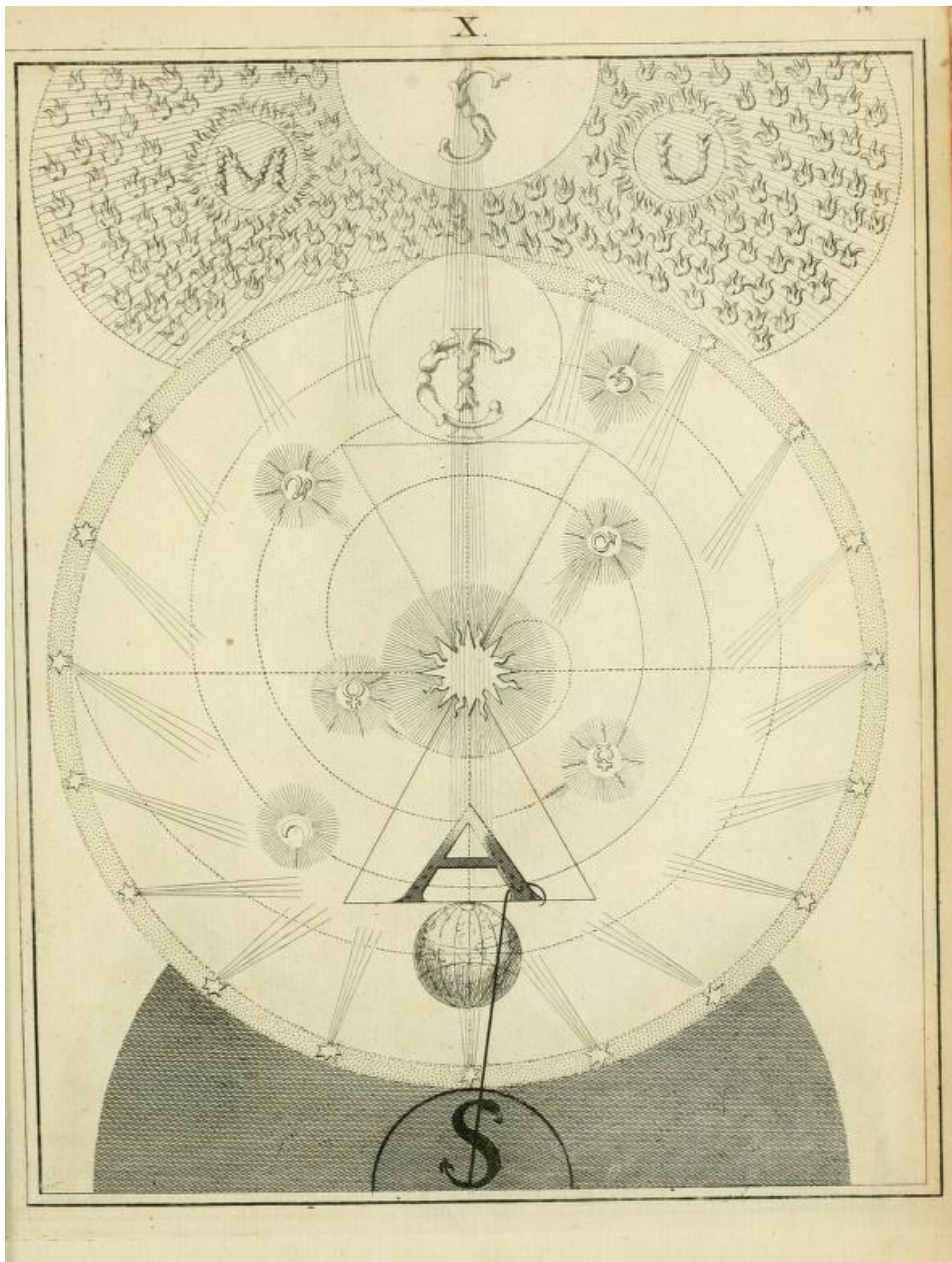
12. *Freher, figure II.*



13. *Freher, figure III.*



14. *Freher, figure IIII.*

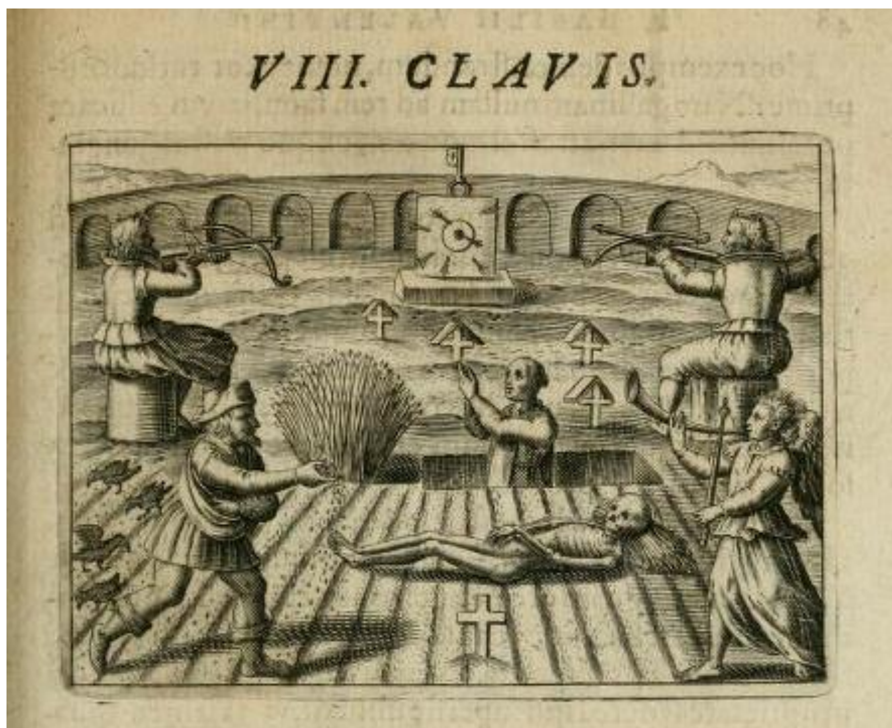


15. *Freher, figure X.*

16. *Atalanta Fugiens, emblem XXXIV.*

17. *Jerusalem, plate 99.*

18. *Jerusalem, plate 24.*



19. *The eighth key of Basil Valentine.*

20. Milton, plate 43.

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