

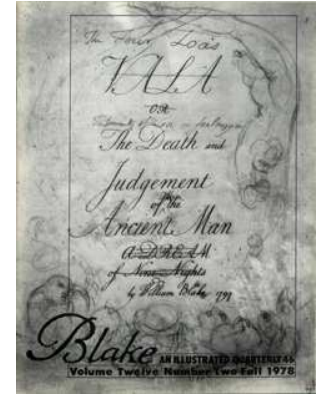
# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

A R T I C L E

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 12, Issue 2, Fall 1978, pp. 87-90



# THE FOUR ZOAS AND "THE PHILOSOPHICK CABBALA"

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The relation of Blake's poetry to Platonic and Neoplatonic thought has attracted discussion for many years.<sup>1</sup> Blake apparently read works by Thomas Taylor, the Platonist,<sup>2</sup> and by Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist.<sup>3</sup> James King has shown that Blake personally knew Thomas Taylor,<sup>4</sup> who read and wrote about Henry More.<sup>5</sup> In the course of their documentation of some analogues to Blake, S. Foster Damon, Desirée Hirst, and Morton D. Paley briefly indicate some resemblances between Henry More and Blake;<sup>6</sup> and "The Philosophick Cabbala," from *Conjectura Cabbalistica* by More,<sup>7</sup> in fact furnishes several specific parallels to *The Four Zoas* which these scholars have not discussed. "The Philosophick Cabbala," part of More's retelling of the fall of man as narrated in the Book of Genesis, bears close resemblance in many points to Blake's retelling of the fall of man in *The Four Zoas*. The fact that *The Four Zoas* is a long poem and "The Philosophick Cabbala" is a shorter work in prose entails, of course, some distinctions in style and formal intention; but some philosophic assumptions and even specific thoughts and specific passages correspond so closely as to suggest comparison: these works have similar casts of symbolic characters, similar accounts of the cause of the fall, and similar accounts of certain consequences of the fall, and some of these similarities are sufficiently close and sufficiently unusual to suggest indirect if not direct relation of the two books.

Specifically, More's concept of the "Soul's Vehicle" (II, 20) resembles Blake's concept of emanation. Each is a feminine portion of an original, masculine character; each is the faculty of joy; and each is the faculty of connecting man with the material world. More describes the creation of this "Feminine part" (III, 1) or "Soul's Vehicle": after the creation of the original man, Adam, "God indued the Soul of Man with a Faculty of being united with vital joy and complacency to

the Matter" of the universe (II, 20). Blake similarly describes the creation of the feminine portion of an original man:

The manhood was divided for the gentle passions  
making way  
Thro the infinite labyrinths of the heart . . .  
. . . stood before the Eyes of Man  
A female bright.

(84:13-16<sup>8</sup>)

More defines this feminine portion as the source of "vital joy" and writes that she represents "joyous and chearful life" (II, 24); similarly, Blake's representation of the feminine portion, in the person of Enitharmon, says: "I wake sweet joy" and "wake the bubbling springs of life" (34:85,87). Both writers also clearly characterize the feminine portion of the original man as the faculty of connecting him with the material world. More writes that the original "masculine Adam . . . consists in pure subtile Intellectual Knowledge" (II, 18), whereas the "Feminine part" (III, 1) with which he is subsequently indued "is that Vital principle that joins the Soul to the Matter of the Universe" (II, 20). The feminine portion of the man is the faculty of sensation of matter in Blake's description, too, and he thus catalogues the bodily senses as attributes of the union of masculine character with his new feminine portion:

They eat the fleshly bread, they drank the  
nervous wine  
They listend to the Elemental Harps & Sphery  
Song  
They view'd the dancing Hours, quick sporting  
thro' the sky  
With winged radiance scattering joys thro the  
ever changing light

(12:44-13:3)



Again,

. . . Los & Enitharmon walkd forth on the dewy  
Earth  
Contracting or expanding their all flexible  
senses  
At will to murmur in the flowers small as the  
honey bee  
At will to stretch across the heavens & step  
from star to star  
Or standing on the Earth erect, or on the  
stormy waves  
Driving the storms before them or delighting  
in sunny beams  
While round their heads the Elemental Gods kept  
harmony

(34:9-15)

In both More's account and Blake's, the activation of this feminine portion, with her functions of joy and connection with matter, is explicitly described as a profound sleep of the man. This profound sleep has, of course, its original in Genesis 2:21-22, where God is said to have caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, during which God creates Eve from Adam's rib. Both More and Blake retell the events of Genesis; but both More and Blake also interpret those events and attach special significance to such symbols as the sleep. The significance of the sleep, in which More and Blake largely agree, does not derive directly from the narrative of Genesis, but seems to be peculiar to the interpreters, and consequently to constitute a parallel that cannot be accounted for by reference to their common source in Genesis. In both writers, the feminine portion of the man is characterized as a state of intellectual sleep and material excitement.

. . . God, to gratify Adam, made him not  
indefatigable in his aspirings towards  
Intellectual things; Lassitude of Contemplation,  
and of Affectation of Immateriality . . .  
brought upon him remisness and drowsiness to  
such like exercises, till, by degrees, he fell  
into a more profound sleep. At what time . . .  
that lower Vivificative principle of his Soul  
did grow so strong, and did so vigorously,  
and with such exultant sympathy and joy,  
actuate his *Vehicle*, that, in virtue of his  
Integrity, which he yet retain'd, this became  
more dear to him, and of greater contentment  
than any thing he yet had experience of.

(II, 21)

In Blake's account, too, the feminine portion of the man is characterized as a gratifying sleep and a repose from the tiring intellectual activities of the man. The emanation of Los is characterized thus: "Lovely delight of Men Enitharmon shadv refuge from furious war / Thy bosom translucent is a soft repose" (90:5-6). Just as in More's account the "Feminine part" was "highly invigorated in Adam, by the remission of exercise in his more subtle and immaterial Faculties" (III, 1), so too in Blake's account the feminine emanation represents a drowsy slackening of exercise. Enitharmon, for example, was "Once born for the sport & amusement of Man"

(10:25), just as the "Feminine part" in More was born "to gratify Adam" (II, 21); then Enitharmon is said to "drink up all his Powers" (10:25), just as in More the "Feminine part" is associated with a remission of Adam's powers. Ahania, another emanation in *The Four Zoas*, is said by her masculine portion to reflect "all my indolence my weakness" (43:18), just as in "The Philosophick Cabbala" the "Feminine part" is said to result from a "not indefatigable" male and is associated with his "drowsiness" (II, 21). This explicit and repeated characterization of the feminine portion as a "Vivificative" state of material consciousness and a "profound sleep" of intellectual consciousness (II, 21) is another instance in which More and Blake are parallel.

Blake writes that in *The Four Zoas* he will sing of a "fall into Division" (4:4), and in this very long and very complex poem, he divides his symbolic characters in more ways than one. Like More, he divides masculine from feminine, as described above; but he also divides an original man--Albion--into "Four Mighty Ones" (3:4), the four zoas themselves. These zoas are said to live "in the Brain of Man," and their "bright world . . . is in the Human Brain" (11:15-16). In *The Four Zoas*, the division of these mental faculties and a contention that arises between two of them are specifically said to precipitate the fall from grace; in "The Philosophick Cabbala" also, two very similar mental faculties are considered separately and a similar contention between them is said, equally specifically, to precipitate the fall from grace.

In "The philosophick Cabbala," a faculty of strong feeling, which More calls "the *Concupiscible*," usurps the function of "Reason" (III, 6), and this usurpation is given as the cause of the fall from grace. Similarly, in *The Four Zoas*, Luvah, the zoa of passion and lust, usurps the function of Urizen, the zoa of reason, and this usurpation is given as the cause of the fall. The faculty symbolized by Luvah corresponds closely to "the *Concupiscible*" faculty: Luvah is called "Love" and his "place the place of seed" (126:7-8). Urizen closely corresponds to the faculty of Reason, as his place is the brain (23:12), and he receives the command from the "holy voice" (64:21) to "Go forth & guide my Son" (64:24), which is symbolized by his command of the "horses of Light" (119:27). The contention between them causes the fall in both writers' explanations. More explains the cause: "the *Concupiscible* . . . snatch'd away with it Adam's Will and Reason" (III, 6). Blake explains with equal concision: "Urizen gave the horses of Light into the hands of Luvah" (119:27), and, again, "Luvah siez'd the Horses of Light" (10:13). This is the repeated description of the cause of the fall in both writers. More writes that while Adam's Reason was asleep, "Adam was wholly set upon doing things . . . as the various toyings and titillations of the lascivient *Life of the Vehicle* [that is, the *Concupiscible* faculty] suggested to him" (III, 6), and "Adam again excused himself within himself, that it was the vigour and impetuosity of that *Life of the Vehicle* . . . whereby he miscarried" (III, 12). In Blake's words, while "Urizen sleeps in the porch / Luvah and Vala woke & flew up from the Human Heart /



Into the Brain" (10:10-12). Vala is the emanation of Luvah, and is consequently a function of passion, which is here again said to usurp the place of the sleeping reason.

I do not argue that "The Philosophick Cabbala" is the only source in which Blake could have found such a model: in *Energy and the Imagination* Morton D. Paley, who does not mention "The Philosophick Cabbala" in this connection, cites several other writers who explain that "Passion subverts the place of Reason."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the parallel of Urizen's [reason's] displacement by Luvah [passion] with the Intellectual faculty's displacement by "the *Concupiscible*" furnishes another in a series of parallels between More's account of the fall and Blake's.

The foregoing passages illustrate the parallels of the Urizen/Luvah pair with the Concupiscible/Reason pair; but "the *Concupiscible*" or "the Soul's Vehicle" also corresponds to the concept of emanation in Blake. Clearly, however, we can expect Blake's long and complex poem to contain a more complicated system of symbols than More's short prose chapters. The fact that the Vehicle seems to be like the emanation in many ways and also to be like Luvah in many ways need not suggest a failure of correspondence between Blake and More; Blake's longer and more complicated work contains a longer and more complicated system of concepts. The sleep of Urizen and uprising of Luvah parallels the sleep of Reason and uprising of the "lascivient *Life of the Vehicle*" in More; but, at the same time, the "drowsiness" of Adam and "vital joy" of his Vehicle also parallels the "indolence" and "weakness" and "soft repose" of Blake's males and the concomitant vitality of their feminine portions. Thus, the dichotomy of masculine zoa and feminine emanation seems to correspond closely; but when describing the usurpation of Reason's function by a "lascivient" faculty, Blake uses the symbols of Urizen and Luvah. The Vehicle in More therefore parallels the emanation in Blake, and it also parallels Luvah; whereas More's shorter and simpler account uses one dichotomy only, Blake's longer and more complicated account of the same story uses more than one. Both pairs in Blake behave very much like More's pair: a similar opposition of similar mental faculties causes the fall from grace in both accounts.

After interpreting its cause, both Blake and More describe a consequence of the fall from grace which constitutes a particularly striking parallel, because it has no apparent source or suggestion in their common source, the Book of Genesis: both writers treat the incarnation of humans in the material world as a result rather than an antecedent of the fall, and they similarly describe the process by which this occurs. More writes that "the Eternal Lord God decreed, that he [Adam] should descend down to be an Inhabitant of the Earth" (III, 16), and Adam does so: "At last the *Plastick power* being fully awakened, *Adam's Soul* descended into the prepared Matter of the Earth, and, in due process of time, *Adam* appeared cloth'd in the skins of beasts; that is, he became a down-right *Terrestrial Animal*, and a mortal creature upon Earth" (III, 21). According to More, this is the process by which all creatures are incarnated in mortal forms: ". . . God, by his *Inward Word* and *Power*, prepared

the Matter in the waters, and near the waters, with several *Vital congruities*, so that it drew in sundry Souls from *the World of Life*" (I, 20). According to More, this does not occur to humanity until after the eating of the forbidden fruit; it occurs as a consequence of the fall from grace. In Blake's account, after the eating of the forbidden fruit, Los exercises a "*Plastick power*," saying: "Stern desire / I feel to fabricate embodied semblances" (90:8-9). Enitharmon, his emanation, responds, urging him to "fabricate forms" (90:22), which the two of them proceed to do. In Blake's account, as in More's, a "spectrous" multitude begins "Assimilating to those forms" (90:41-42): "Enitharmon erected Looms" and "in these Looms She wove the Spectres / Bodies of Vegetation" (100:2-4). Again,

Enitharmon wove in tears Singing Songs of  
Lamentations  
And pitying comfort as she sighd forth on the  
wind the spectres  
And wove them bodies . . .

(103:32-34)

while

. . . Los employed the Sons  
In Golgonoozas Furnaces among the Anvils of  
time & space  
Thus forming a Vast family . . .

(103:35-37)

Although in *The Four Zoas* it is Los and his emanation, and not God himself, who form the bodies into which souls descend, Los is enabled to do this because "the Divine hand was upon him" (100:6). Blake's version, then, of mortal incarnation follows "The Philosophick Cabbala" rather than Genesis by making human incarnation in bodily form a result of the fall rather than a development that occurred before it. Furthermore, both Blake and More depict the process of bodily incarnation with a vision of divinely prepared matter into which previously bodiless spirits descend.

Although the focus of this study is on the relation of *The Four Zoas* to "The Philosophick Cabbala," I would by no means suggest that *The Four Zoas* alone among Blake's poems bears comparison with More's work; Blake's *Milton*, for example, repeats echoes from "The Philosophick Cabbala." Morton D. Paley has pointed out to me that the speech of Leutha, from 11:35 through 13:6 in *Milton*, which is generally recognized to recall *Paradise Lost*, II:747-814, also clearly recalls More's *Conjectura Cabbalistica*. Leutha says that

. . . entering the doors of Satans brain night  
after night  
Like sweet perfumes I stupified the masculine  
perceptions  
And kept only the feminine awake.

(12:4-6)

This passage has obvious affinities with More's passage in which the "masculine Adam" suffers



"remisness and drowsiness" as the feminine portion or "Vivificative principle of his Soul did grow so strong" (II, 18,21). Further, just as More writes

. . . Adam again excused himself within himself,  
that it was the vigour and impetuosity of that  
*Life in the Vehicle*, which God himself implanted  
in it, whereby he miscarried: the woman that  
God had given him,

(III, 12)

Leutha, the counterpart of this feminine Vehicle in  
*Milton*, says: "I am the Author of this Sin!" (11:35)  
and

. . . my fault, when at noon of day  
The Horses of Palamabron call'd for rest and  
pleasant death:  
I sprang out of the breast of Satan, over the  
Harrow beaming  
In all my beauty! that I might unloose the  
flaming steeds

(12:8-11)

Here, as in *The Four Zoas*, Blake repeats the emergence of a feminine portion from a masculine character, recalling the pattern in More's work; and here, too, he repeats yet another pattern found in "The Philosophick Cabbala": a crisis following an intrapsychic division and a usurpation by one mental faculty of another. Just as in "The Philosophick Cabbala" "the *Concupiscible* . . . snatch'd away with it *Adam's Will and Reason*" (III, 6), and in *The Four Zoas*, "Luvah siez'd the Horses of Light" (10:13), in *Milton* the pattern is repeated: Leutha's attempt to "unloose the flaming steeds / As Elynittria use'd to do" (12:11-12) precipitates a crisis; "they brake the traces" (12:13) and thereby bring about "A Hell of our own making. see, its flames still gird me round" (12:23). In the pattern of the feminine portion's emergence, then, and in the pattern of intrapsychic usurpation precipitating a crisis, *Milton*, like *The Four Zoas*, bears comparison with "The Philosophick Cabbala." Thus, neither Blake's tendency to recall More's work nor the specific ideas and configurations that he adopts are strictly limited to *The Four Zoas*.

Clearly, at any rate, "The Philosophick Cabbala" furnishes a long series of parallels to *The Four Zoas*: there are similarities between More's "Feminine part" and Blake's emanation; between the two writers' explanations that conflicts among mental faculties caused the fall from grace; and between their descriptions of the descent of spirits into bodily form as a consequence of the fall. So many parallels may suggest a relation between Blake's work and More's. The probable availability of More's work to Blake may even suggest a possible direct relation; but the internal evidence alone of so many similarities constitutes at least, I believe, some indirect relation that may--or may not--be coincidental.

<sup>1</sup> For book-length studies of this relation, see especially George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), and Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927). My citation is from the reprint of the revised edition (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969), p. 52; Harper, pp. 43-44; and Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination, A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> S. Foster Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), p. 167, and Wilson, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> James King, "The Meredith Family, Thomas Taylor, and William Blake," *Studies in Romanticism*, 2 (1972), pp. 153-57.

<sup>5</sup> Harper, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> e.g., Damon, pp. 167, 328, 341, 367, 384, 467; Desirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), pp. 158-59; and Paley, pp. 216-17.

<sup>7</sup> Henry More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica. or, A Conjectural Essay of Interpreting the Minde of Moses, according to a Threefold Cabbala: viz., Literal, Philosophical, Mystical, or, Divinely Moral* (London: J. Flesher, 1653); also printed in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Dr. Henry More . . . 4th ed.* (London: J. Downing, 1712), from which I quote.

<sup>8</sup> I use the text of *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1965), pp. 296-392. Citations include Blake's manuscript page number and line number as indicated by Erdman.

<sup>9</sup> Paley, 91 ff. Paley cites Plato's *Phaedrus*, Ovid's story of Phaeton, Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, 11. 740-42, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, IX:1125-31.