Freemasonry, secret societies, and the continuity of the occult traditions in English literature
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Chapter IX: William Blake and the "Illuminized" Prophets--Richard Brothers, Joanna Southcott, and their Followers

As noted several times, the visit of Count Grabianka to the London Swedenborg Society in 1786 stimulated great curiosity about Animal Magnetism and its mode of practice among the Avignon Illuminés. Two young artisans, John Wright and William Bryan, heard about Grabianka and his Masonic society from other Swedenborgians, and set off on a fantastic, seven hundred mile, barefoot trip from London to Avignon in order to be initiated into Grabianka's "Grand Mystery." In his account of the trip and of his later adherance to Richard Brother, Wright gave a valuable explanation about how his interest in Swedenborgianism led him into Masonic "Illuminism."[1] Robert Southey's discussion of Wright's pamphlet reveals the source of much scholarly difficulty in documenting these elements of popular culture:

> It is one of those innumerable pamphlets, which, being published by inferior booksellers, and circulating among sectarians and fanatics, never rise into the hands of those who are called the public; and escape the notice of all the literary journals. They who peruse them do it with a zeal which truly can be called consuming; they are worn out like a schoolboy's grammar; the form in which they are sent abroad, without covers to protect them, hastens their destruction, and in a few years they disappear forever. (Letters from England, III, 198)

Wright described how he became fascinated with Swedenborgianism after he heard the open-air preaching of Ralph Mather and Joseph Salmon, both of whom had been led to Swedenborg through their interest in Boehme, William Law, and the Quaker doctrine of the "inner light."

[1] John Wright, A Revealed Knowledge of Some Things that will be speedily fulfilled in the World, "Communicated to a Number of Christians, brought together at Avignon, by the power of the Spirit of God, from all nations. . ." (London, 1794).

In April 1788, the Holy Spirit told Wright he must go to London and seek out the New Jerusalem Church. Wright was a poor man, with a family to support, but by July 1788, he managed to move them to London. He first found work as a carpenter, and then a co-worker, Bicknell, told him about the New Jerusalem Church at Great Eastcheap. Wright had known James Hindmarsh earlier but was disappointed at the Swedenborg Society:

> I saw nothing but the old forms of worship established by man's will, and not according to the will of God, although called by that blessed name of the New Jerusalem, in which these old forms have neither part nor lot. (p.4)

The Holy Spirit, though, soon led him to speak to a converted Jew named Samuel, who spoke warmly of this New Jerusalem Church and discussed "his own people returning to their land." After discussing the imminence of the Day of Judgment, the Jew told Wright of a man who thought the same way, and sent him on to William Bryan, who informed him about the Avignon Illuminés.

Bryan, whose complex relation to several figures in this study will raise many new questions about Blake's milieu, was a skilled copper-plate printer. He noted in his own account of the Avignon trip that his abilities as a printer "had been approved by the best engravers" and that he "had been entrusted with the best work to do" in the period before his Masonic pilgrimage.[2] There is a strong possibility that Blake was acquainted with Bryan, through their engraving work

[2] William Bryan, A Testimony of the Spirit of Truth Concerning Richard Brothers (London: sold at J.Wright's, 1795), p.29.

or Swedenborgian connections. Hindmarsh's claim that Bryan and Wright "were not members of our Society" referred to formal membership, for both men were associated with the Swedenborgians for years--perhaps more through Swedenborgian Freemasonry (Hindmarsh, p. 47). Boswick, a Masonic historian, says that Bryan was definitely a Swedenborgian (p. 163). Bryan's connection with the Avignon Illuminés was stimulated by the visit to London of an English-speaking Russian, Major Tieman, in 1786 or 1787, who apparently initiated Bryan into the lower degrees of Freemasonry, in anticipation of further advancement at Avignon (Bryan, p. 27). Tieman was working with Grabianka, helping the Polish Illuminé in his proselytizing efforts among the Swedenborgians. Viatte's description of Major Tieman gives an insight into the complex network of occultist Swedenborgian Freemasonry in France and England:

> Tieman, un de ces commis voyageurs en illuminisme, dans le genre de Gleichen et du Comte de Vivonne, un de ces hommes qui se mêlent à toute les sectes, que l'on trouve en relations avec Lavater et les swedenborgiens d'Avignon, Tieman, hôte et confident de la duchesse de Wurtemberg, éprouve des visions que Willermoz commente avec attention, "a beaucoup d'analogies avec lui, et se persuade, à son example, de la possibilité des communications des esprits." (Viatte, I, 144)

Interestingly, the last quoted words are from a letter by Savalette de Langes in 1782, at a time when he was in contact with General Rainsford, William Bousie, Chastanier, and other Swedenborgian Freemasons in London. Tieman also attended the various Masonic Conventions in the 1770's and 1780's (Viatte, I, 150).

Tieman, who was called "le chevalier errant de la théosophie" (Faivre, p. 274), was also a friend of Lavater, at the period of Blake's great interest in the Swiss physiognomist, and corresponded with him from 1781 to 1796

about the wonders of Animal Magnetism:

> Tieman prouve ainsi l'immortalité de l'âme, et l'existence d' "organs-racines": il assure avoir vu les yeux fermés; et nous savons que Lavater vénère "cette force. . . comme un analogue de ce don prophétique, infiniment plus parfait, des hommes de la Bible." (Tieman to Lavater, 14 January 1791. Viatte, I, 224)

"Cette force" was Puységur's ecstatic somnambulism.

Bryan noted that as a young man, before he met Tieman, he explored the different sects of Dissenters in London and attended Quaker meetings for four years. He eventually objected to the "church-craft"--i.e., outward forms of worship--of even the Quakers (the sect disowned him after his Avignon trip in 1789). Wright explained that "some of the New Jerusalem people . . . asked Brother Bryan and his wife, and a person that lived in the house whose name was Noble, to go and drink tea with them" in late 1788 (Wright, Revealed, 6). Noble may have been related to George or Samuel Noble (1779-1853), engravers and Swedenborgians, though whether their father or someone else is unclear. Bryan intrigued Wright with descriptions of the Avignon Society, "who were favored with divine communications," and after a traverse of magnetic sympathy in January 1789, which commended them simultaneously to go to Avignon, they made plans for their amazing journey on foot. Several friends helped them with money and advice, and apparently agents of the Avignon Society in London wrote ahead, without the two artisans' knowledge, to make arrangements for their reception in Paris and Avignon. William Spence noted the heavy correspondence between the London Swedenborg Society and Avignon at the time, but gave no names (Essays, p. 61).

When the two travellers reached Paris, they went by pre-arrangement to the house of William Bousie, who accompanied

them to Avignon. That Bousie was a Masonic collaborator with General Rainsford, Chastanier, and Grabianka, as well as the official Swedenborgian "négociant" between England and the Continent, certainly suggests a larger Masonic element in the London Swedenborgian group during Blake's membership than Hindmarsh and the official historians have given credit to. Hindmarsh himself noted Bousie's role with Bryan and Wright, and later sought him out in Paris in 1802 (Hindmarsh, p. 48, 181). At Avignon the artisans were welcomed by Major Tieman, who worked with Bousie to prepare them for initiation into the higher degrees (Bryan, p. 28).

As Wright noted, "After we were admitted into the Society, many extraordinary things were communicated unto us." These included the violent shaking of all the furniture in the séance room, "that announced the presence of angels," as well as vivid prophecies of world revolution for the spiritual and political regeneration of mankind (Wright, p. 19). The articulator of the prophecies was the "Sainte Parole," an oracular medium who brought messages from the angelic world. Hindmarsh, who was horrified at accounts of the whole affair, described the ceremonies, which he was sure were part of a Jesuit plot:

> After a certain process of examination, probation, and injunction of secresy, they were finally initiated into the mysteries of their order. Of what nature these mysteries were, may be collected from the following particulars, which transpired soon after the return of the travellers. It was given out, that the members of this Society had immediate communication with heaven; that at certain seasons they assembled at the top of a mountain, where an angel met and conversed with them; that this angel once presented each of them with a glass phial (cork and all) filled with a red liquid, which he told them was the dew of heaven, and which, if carried in their bosoms, would be a continual protection to them against enemies, and would moreover enable them at all times to perform miracles, provided they had sufficient faith in its virtues. On one occasion our travelers were

> most solemnly introduced to that which was called the actual and personal presence of the Lord; which, it appears, was effected by the agency of a comely and majestic young man, arrayed in purple garments, seated on a kind of throne or chair of state, in an inner apartment decorated with heavenly emblems, who thus dared to personate the Lord, and was waiting to receive from these newly-initiated devotees that homage or worship, which is alone due from a creature to his adorable Creator. (p. 48)

Wright stressed the strict injunctions for secrecy about the order. Given the political situation in France in early 1789, the prophecies which the initiates heard would surely have meant arrest. The "Sainte Parole" revealed that "before the end of this year," the "perfidious enemies of the Name of God" (a Cabalistic expression) "will begin to show their fierceness, and you will hear of extraordinary things and memorable feats":

> You will hear that the world is filled with trouble and dissension. Father, son, relations, friends, all will be in motion; and it is in that year all will have its beginning.
>
> Remember that the face of the world will be changed, and you shall see it restored to its first state. The thrones shall be overturned, the earth shall be furrowed, and change its aspect . . .
>
> In a proper time you will see erected to the true God and his relations, a magnificent TEMPLE, at the price of many efforts, great trouble, and much sweating . . .
>
> The PALESTINE will become again the most fortunate country on the earth; it shall be the centre of that faith, of which it was the cradle . . . The enlightened Jews will embrace the Catholic faith. All people will acknowledge one God . . .
>
> All the nations will be enlightened to see their previous errors. (Wright, pp. 25 ff)

Bryan and Wright remained in Avignon for nearly seven months, participating in the occult and magnetic rituals, and reading and making extracts from the journals of the Society (Bryan, p. 28). Among Wright's extracts were notes about

Brumore, a Swedenborgian Freemason from Berlin, and significantly, about Duché, the London Swedenborgian. The interpreter, probably Bousie, who posed questions to the Oracle for Bryan and Wright, asked on 8 July 1789:

> 1,4,7 [Wright's code name] Prays to know if it is the will of Heaven that he should cause his wife to come with Duché to be consecrated.
>
> Answer: Heaven sees thy motive, my Son, and approves thy zeal, but in order that it may take place ** ----> 13x do not think of it, thy hope is vain. (Wright, p. 61)

The reference to Duché is provocative, for Jacob Duché hosted Grabianka of the Avignon Society during his nine-month stay in London. As noted earlier, Duché's home was the gathering place for many Swedenborgians, theosophers, and foreign Freemasons, including Blake's friends, Flaxman and Sharp, and Wright's allusion to Duché implies his own acquaintance with him. As discussed earlier, Blake's subscription to Duché's essays in 1779 indicates a possible early acquaintance, and Erdman notes that Blake's move to Lambeth in early 1791 may have been stimulated by the close proximity of his house to Duché's home at the Lambeth Orphan Asylum, where the theosophical gatherings took place from 1779 until 1792, when Duché returned to America (Prophet, p. 290).

The Swedenborgian historian Charles Higham glossed over Wright's cryptic reference to Duché, claiming that "the wild assertions of such an enthusiast do not deserve . . . serious consideration."[3] But Higham does speculate that perhaps Thomas Spence Duché, Jacob's artistic son, may have visited the Avignon Society, "in the course of one of

[3] Charles Higham, "The Reverend Jacob Duché," New Church Review, 22 (1915), part II, p. 415.

those unsuccessful journeys in quest of renewed health" which his father had written about. Thomas Duché was a musician who composed songs for the Asylum organist and a painter who studied under Benjamin West; significantly, he gave his engraving to William Sharp (Erdman, "Blake's Swedenborgianism," p. 257). One account of Thomas' last days says he died in the south of France in 1790, which implies that he could be the Duché who visited the Avignon Society (Higham, p. 415). But whether it was the father or son, the continued connection of the Duché family with the French Masonic group after Grabianka's visit with them is highly significant for Blake studies.

Before Bryan and Wright left Avignon, they were "well supplied with money," which made their return to England in September 1789 a much easier trip. Back in London, however, Bryan complained that he could get little work, despite his previous good reputation among the engravers, because they said he had once been mad and left his business. Finally, "having studied medicine" at Avignon, he opened an apothecary shop, where he dispensed patent medicines and practised magnetic cures (Spence, _Essays_, p. 62). His main method was to break through the patient's "self-love" or Swedenborgian _proprium_ in order to establish magnetic _rapport_ with him:

> By his Holy Spirit I have at times been favoured to feel so much of that love as to enter into a sympathy of feeling with my patient, so that I could describe every symptom of their disease from feeling it in my own body . . . it has instantly been communicated to my mind what to give. (Bryan, p. 30)

Bryan's sense of his magnetic gifts was recorded by Hindmarsh, after conversing with Bryan about the Avignon trip. Bryan spoke of "some extraordinary powers to which he pretended, beyond those of his fellow mortals." He claimed he possessed a faith sufficient to demolish and remove everything that

opposed any obstacle to his wishes:

> "For example," said he, "were I now disposed to exert my faith, and the power inseperable from it, I could, with a single blast of wind from my mouth, overthrow the buildings on either side of the street, and scatter them in all directions." (Hindmarsh, p. 47)

Bryan moved to Bristol in 1794 to work in a temporary hospital there, "in order that I should be a little acquainted with the sufferings of my fellow men, under the ruling system of the present day" (Bryan, p. 35). This radical note was continued in his protests against the cruel forced enlistment of Irish sailors (a protest Lord Gordon had also made). He concluded his autobiography with a call for defiance of the oppressive church and state, and a prophetic warning that the revolution "is about to be fulfilled in this day" (Bryan, pp. 31, 38).

In the meantime, John Wright carried on his carpentry work and proselytized for the Avignon Society. One of his anecdotes would have delighted Blake, whose campaign against the "single-vision" of John Locke was in full swing. Wright noticed a man reading a book while walking down the street; the Holy Spirit prompted him to speak his message of Masonic illumination:

> . . . which I soon felt the man received, and who afterward told me that he at that time was reading a supposed famous writer, whose name was Locke, and that what I said was exactly in opposition to what he was then reading, and that it was so clear that his ideas and understanding were changed to things of greater importance. I communicated to him our journey to Avignon. (p.22)

Wright also noted that he converted John Barrow, a jeweller, to Illuminism, who then travelled to Ireland to spread the doctrine.

Robert Southey, who knew and admired Bryan and "heard the whole system from his mouth," gave an important account of the London Swedenborgians and the Avignon Society, and his

interpretation of Bryan's and Wright's role is suggestive.[4] Southey thought the two artisans were the "unsuspecting tools of the Society," and he pointed to the "designed fulfillment" of many of the prophecies in the political developments in France:

> What became of the Avignon Society, Heaven knows. The honest dupes whom they had sent abroad, fully prepared to welcome any novelty as the commencement of the Millenium, were left to their own direction. . . . Wright and Bryan had now for some years been looking for the Kingdom of Christ, and teaching all within their circle of influence to expect the same promised day. Of what had been announced to them, much had been too truly accomplished. (Letters from England, III, 222, 225)

Southey also implied that the "circle of influence," centred on Bryan and Wright, was mainly composed of people interested in the Avignon and Swedenborgian versions of Animal Magnetism —especially those who were influenced by Mainaduc. He claimed that Mainaduc, the predominant Mesmerist in the 1780's in England, might have gone on triumphantly and even made himself the head of a sect or a new religion, "had the times been favourable. But Politics interfered, and took off the attention of all the wilder and busier spirits (Letters from England, II, 339). Given the scarcity of dates on Mainaduc, this may provide a valuable clue that he was still working in England around 1789, and provides a possibility that Bryan and Wright were involved with a "school" or "society" of Animal Magnetism during the almost undocumented years from 1789 to 1794, when the new prophet Richard Brothers appeared, who rallied the Avignon Illuminés and many London Swedenborgians to his cause.

[4] Kenneth Curry, ed. New Letters of Robert Southey (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), p. 468.

After Mainaduc's death (date unknown), a woman headed his school, but it eventually broke up:

> Happily, for some of the disciples, who could not exist without a constant supply of new miracles to feed their credulity, Richard Brothers appeared, who laid higher claims than Mainaduc, and promised more wonderful things. (Southey, Letters from England, II, 339)

Southey, who did not know of Brothers' own connections with Avignon, also noted that "the Society at Avignon had unintentionally trained up apostles" for the "King of the Hebrews," as Brothers called himself, and that Bryan and Wright were among his first disciples. Also among his first followers was William Sharp, Blake's friend. The "prophecy of some old heretic was raked up," according to Southey, "which fixed the downfall of the Church as destined now to be accomplished," and the number of the Beast was explained as Louis XVI (Southey, Letters from England, III, 225, 231). Wright's journal explained that this "prophecy of Christopher Love" was asserted in 1788 by "the Brethren at Avignon" who said "such a person therein described would most certainly arise in England" (p. 23).

The importance of Richard Brothers (1757-1824) to late eighteenth-century literary and political history is beginning to receive more scholarly attention, especially from E.P. Thompson and Morton Paley, but his French Masonic connections have not been analyzed, nor his possible connection with Lord George Gordon's highly similar career. Born in Newfoundland but schooled in England, Brothers entered the British Navy in 1771 and was discharged as a Lieutenant with half-pay in 1783. It is possible that he knew of Gordon's widespread reputation as "the Sailor's Friend," since their naval experience overlapped by several years. Like Gordon, Brothers remained interested in the abuses of justice within the Royal Navy; he later saw in a vision that "he would shake the English Admiralty, as a man would

bread in a basket" (London Times, 4 March 1795). Between 1783 and 1787, Brothers travelled in Spain, Italy and France, before settling in London.

At some time after 1783, Brothers came under the influence of Count Grabianka, probably while the former was in France. Brothers studied at Avignon,[5] which meant he had to be an initiate of high degree Freemasonry. As noted before, Grabianka in the 1760's had been told by a fortune-teller that he would become King of Poland, conquer the Turkish Empire, win control over Asia, and would transfer his capital to Jerusalem, where monarchs of the earth would "learn supreme wisdom from him as from a second Solomon" (Danilewicz, p. 50). Grabianka took the prophecy seriously, and was still preaching it when Brothers was initiated at Avignon. According to Balleine, Grabianka's political activities were aimed at gathering a Masonic following which would enable him to realize his dream. But, first, as the old Israel was apostate, he must gather a new Israel, whom he grouped artificially into Twelve Tribes with the old Biblical names. Brothers agreed with Grabianka that the Bible taught that a King would rule the world from Jerusalem, but his Protestantism recoiled from the Avignon daily Mass, and his patriotism from the thought of England being ruled by a Pole. Brothers continued to study Swedenborgianism, Cabalistic angel-magic, and Animal Magnetism with the Illuminés, but returned home troubled and perplexed in 1787.

For several years Brothers shut himself up with his Bible and studied the visionary writings of Jane Lead, John Lacy, and other early eighteenth-century Behmenistic-Cabalistic seers (Balleine, p. 29). He also worked on

[5] G.R.Balleine, Past Finding Out: the Tragic Story of Joanna Southcott and her Successors (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 27-28.

Cabalistic numerical interpretations of Scripture, trying to compute the date of the coming millenium. That he practiced "somnambulistic" trances and other magical rituals is indicated by his increasingly vivid visions, spirit-communications, and his later admission that he experimented in private at turning rods into serpents, etc. (Southey, Letters from England, III, 231). In Brothers' own account, he said, "The spirit of God began first to visit me" in 1790, though "I had always had a presentiment of being some time or other very great."[6] The visit of the Spirit apparently referred to the increasing intensity of his visions. In 1791 he was "carried in a vision" to Sweden and foresaw the coming death of the Swedish King. He did not warn the King though, for if the Swedish ruler had lived, he would have commanded the German army against the French (Brothers, pp. 83-85). According to the London Times, 4 March 1795, Brothers was psychically transported to Stockholm again in 1792, where "he had several conferences with the ghost of the famous Swedenborg, the Chief of the Somnambulists"--a highly significant contemporary linking of Swedenborg and the French groups. The Times also noted that "his daily and nightly apparitions amount to about six hundred," and that at the height of the French Revolution in 1792, his "mind being revolutionarily exalted," he wrote voluminous warnings to George III and Pitt,

> . . . with a view of dissuading them from a war against France, because this war would be carried on against a righteous people, chosen to execute the plan which God had revealed to him.

Brothers also wrote Pitt, predicting the death of Louis XVI, and the ultimate folly of English entry into the French war--

[6] Richard Brothers, A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times 2nd.ed(1794, Philadelphia: Robert Campbell, 1795), p. 71.

both of which came true and received wide public attention (Brothers, I, 18). When his predictions were ignored by the government, however, he predicted the beginning of universal destruction.

In August 1791, Brothers' landlady requested that the Guardians of the Poorhouse take in the impoverished Naval officer. At the hearing Brothers revealed that in 1789 he had severed all connections with the military, as repugnant to true Christianity, and had not drawn his half-pay because of his refusal to swear an oath. This scruple arose from his Quaker associations, shared by Gordon, who stimulated him to denounce oaths in general but particularly the hypocrisy of the "voluntary" aspect of the oath to the Royal Navy. The Guardians got his pay back for him, but only temporarily. One of the Guardians, Joseph Moser, later wrote an antagonistic account of Brothers, which noted his attempts in 1791-92 to heal and restore the blind to sight.[7] That Bryan, a fellow Avignon Illuminé, was also practising magnetic healing then is significant. By 1792, Brothers was imprisoned for debt again, and the miserable conditions of Newgate appalled him.[8] Lord Gordon was in Newgate at the same time, but there is no available record of whether they met. However, the same London Corresponding Society radicals who visited Gordon in 1792 came to visit Brothers when he was confined again in 1795. Thompson notes that the L.C.S. may even have "prompted" Brothers (p. 18), and one of his first disciples was William Sharp, Secretary of the L.C.S.

While in Newgate for eight weeks in fall 1792, Brothers' visions intensified, and the similarity of many of his descriptions to Blake's prophetic visions is striking. In

[7] Joseph Moser, Anecdotes of Richard Brothers in Years 1791 and 1792 (London: J.Owen, 1795), p. 29.

[8] Ronald Matthews, English Messiahs (London: Methuen, 1936), p. 93.

1792, Brothers saw that "the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit . . . his throne was like the fiery throne, and his wheels as burning fire" (Brothers, II, 43).

Though the "Ancient of Days" is a Biblical phrase available to anyone, Brothers undoubtedly used it in its occultist Masonic sense. Significantly, Blake's great engraving of the "Ancient of Days" was probably made in 1794 (Bentley, Records, p. 614), when Brothers' usage of the phrase gave it a particular "Illuminated" connotation. Brothers revealed that at another time,

> I was in a vision, having the angel of God near me, and saw Satan walking leisurely into London; his face had a smile, but under it his looks were sly, crafty, and deceitful . . . after this, I was in a vision, and saw a river run through London coloured with human blood. (I, 54)

He also pondered over Grabianka's prophecy. He agreed with the Illuminé leader that the time had come for the Jews to regain Palestine, and for God's Vice-regent to govern the world from Jerusalem, a belief shared by the poorer Jews around Lord Gordon in Newgate at the same time. But he was sure Grabianka was not the hoped-for prophet, especially because Grabianka substituted "make-believe" tribes for God's chosen people. To Brothers, the Twelve Tribes presented a perplexing problem:

> The Jews scattered throughout Europe represented only Two. But Twelve were to return. Where were the missing Ten? Various answers had been suggested, the Gypsies, the Afghans, and the Tartars. But Brothers announced that the Ten were merged in the population of Great Britain. Thousands of British families, who had forgotten their Hebrew origin, would discover, when the moment came, that they were children of Israel. (Balleine, p. 31)

Surely, Brothers could not have failed to know of Lord Gordon's widely publicized conversion to Judaism, nor of his related

involvement with French revolutionaries and illuminated Freemasons in France and England, during their simultaneous stay in Newgate. Provocatively, it was apparently after Gordon's death in 1793 that Brothers felt the full force of his own prophetic mission. In 1793 he began calling himself "the Nephew of the Almighty," and by 1794 he published his claim, "I am the prophet that will be revealed to the Jews, to order their departure from all nations, to go to the land of Israel" (Brothers, I, 65).

Brothers also knew, by revelation, that Christopher Love of the 1788 Avignon prophecy had the divine spirit of the Living God: "He testified of me at that time under different names, though all of them meant one and the same person . . . a Lantern to the Jews" (Brothers, II, 106). Blake's Los, dressed in Hasidic garb and carrying a Lantern, thus may be related to Brothers as well as to Gordon. As noted earlier, John Wright said the Avignon Brethren had told Bryan and himself in 1789 that the prophecy of Christopher Love was true, and that its fulfiller "would most certainly arise in England" (Wright, Revealed, p. 23). Brothers' continued involvement with Avignon was also substantiated by the testimony in 1795 of Sarah Flaxmer, a former landlady, who claimed that the Avignon Society was "Satan's Synagogue," and that through it, John Wright had got Brothers under Satan's power (Matthews, p. 108).

In 1794, Brothers published A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times, through George Riebau, who called himself "Bookseller to the Prince of the Hebrews," and who subsequently published fourteen of Brothers' books and pamphlets. But Brothers had first tried to get Robert Hindmarsh of the Swedenborg Society to print his prophecies, through the mediation of Captain Hanchett, a follower of Brothers since his Newgate days (Brothers, II, 67). Hindmarsh

said he at first accepted Hanchett's request "to print the pamphlet containing his [Brothers'] prophecies and pretended revelations," for Hanchett offered to "pay double or treble its value." But after examining the manuscript, and "finding that it distinctly prophesied the death of the King, which I considered to be unlawful and highly injurious to the welfare of society," Hindmarsh refused the job. This connection of Brothers with the Swedenborg Society is significant, for despite Hindmarsh's pious rejections of all Illuminatist influence on the London Society (many had been jailed, including Brothers, when Hindmarsh later wrote his memoirs), there is evidence in his own works of the Swedenborgian interest in Brothers. For example, the Rev. Francis Leicester, a Swedenborgian "who was disposed to examine every new pretension to supernatural communications," took Hindmarsh to visit Brothers, who received them hospitably and entertained them with the "particulars of his history," which must have included his relations to Grabianka and the Avignon Society since Hindmarsh was familiar with both. On request, Brothers also showed them his magic rod, and revealed his visions and mission to them (Hindmarsh, pp. 122-123).

Brothers' most famous pamphlet, A Revealed Knowledge, used Cabalistic mathematical interpretations of the Scriptures to prove that the restoration of the Hebrews to Palestine, including the "Invisible Jews" of England, and the millenial rebuilding of Jerusalem, would occur in 1798. In passionate denunciations of the English war against the French revolutionary forces, Brothers called it a "war against God himself." The statement against the King which frightened off Hindmarsh was Brothers' warning to George III that "immediately on my being revealed to the Hebrews as their Prince, and to all Nations as their governer, your power and authority may cease" (Balleine, p. 32). On 16 July 1794,

Brothers wrote John Wright to request that he publish the "revealed knowledge communicated to the Society at Avignon, of which you and William Bryan . . . were members" (Wright, p. 24). Wright complied and published in 1794 his account of their experiences at Avignon as well as the extracts he had copied from the Society's journals. Wright claimed that he first met Brothers on 14 July 1794, just two days before Brothers' request, and that he was led to Brothers by the son of a foreman of the shop where he worked. On meeting Brothers, Wright was immediately convinced that the "Nephew of the Almighty" fulfilled the Avignon prophecies (Wright, pp. 22-23).

In January 1795, Bryan also published a testimonial to Brothers and his own account of the journey to Avignon. The full title makes quite clear that he wrote as a Masonic Illuminatus:"A Testimony of the Spirit of Truth Concerning Richard Brothers . . . in an address to the people of Israel and to the Gentiles called Christians, and all other Gentiles . . . William Bryan, one of the Brothers of the Avignon Society, and by Revelation from God declared to be a Jew of the Tribe of Judah." Bryan said he at first was against Brothers and was sorry that Wright was so fascinated. But the Spirit sent him to Brothers in December 1794 and he was converted. Bryan also claimed to have thought of the "British Israelite" theory in 1785 or 1786 (when Grabianka espoused his version), and he agreed with Brothers' development of it.

Brothers placed great faith in his two disciples and publicly confirmed their roles:

> The Lord God commands me to inform you, John Wright, that you are of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Levi . . . The Lord God commands me to say to you, William Bryan, that you are of the Hebrews of the tribe of Judah, and that you, with John Wright, are appointed . . . to testify publicly to the world who I now am, and what my future destination is. (Brothers, II, 107, 113)

Brothers went on to predict that many would "see visions and dream dreams" during the era of "spiritual circumcision" (Southey, Letters from England, III, 248), as they discovered their Hebraic origin and began to rebuild Jerusalem. That "spiritual circumcision" was connected with the capacity to see visions is shown in Brothers' 1795 pamphlet, "Wonderful Prophecies," in which he discussed "the existence, nature, and extent of the prophetic powers in the human mind." Interestingly, Blake used the symbol of circumcision throughout his prophetic writings in connection with the exalted imagination and sacramental sexuality:

> . . . Circumscribing and Circumcising the excrementitious
> Husk and Covering, into Vacuum evaporating, revealing the
> lineaments of Man, . . .
> Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah, rejoicing in Unity
> In the Four Senses, in the Outline, the Circumference and Form.
> (Blake, CW, p. 745)

At other points in Jerusalem, Blake proclaimed that "Uncircumcised pretences to Chastity must be cut in sunder," and that "The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity . . . On Circumcision, not on Virginity, O Reasoners of Albion!" (pp. 627, 687). Brothers, however, did not demand as much of Jewish ritual as Gordon did, who underwent a painful adult circumcision and then displayed his trophy (Hibbert, p. 167).

Another of Brothers' early adherants was Peter Woulfe (1727-1803), the distinguished chemist and Royal Society member, who was also a practising alchemist, Avignon Illuminé, and Swedenborgian. Joseph Priestley mentioned his acquaintance with Woulfe in 1786, and Sir Humphrey Davy described the written prayers and inscriptions which were part of Woulfe's alchemical processes (DNB). Woulfe searched long and hard for the elixir and attributed his repeated failure to "his want of due preparation by pious and charitable

acts."[9] Woulfe kept a secret alchemical lab in Barnard's Inn and only those who knew the secret signal could gain admittance.

As mentioned earlier, Woulfe was a long-time friend of General Rainsford and corresponded in the 1770's with him and with German Freemasons over alchemical secrets. Woulfe was possibly in Algiers with Rainsford when he was initiated into a Rosicrucian Society there in 1782. In 1789 Woulfe, who spent half of each year in France, carried messages and books from William Bousie to Rainsford, who had hoped to gain Woulfe as a member of his elite Masonic "Universal Society." But another letter to Rainsford in 1789 mentions Woulfe's failure to carry out some political errand--"Woulfe has not written to one yet, as he promised, and indeed I do not expect much political information from him" (Hills, "Masonic Personalities," p. 108). Rainsford replied to the unnamed complainant that Woulfe "is you know a little eccentric, as all philosophers are, and you must excuse him and catch him when you can."

Woulfe was an early disciple of Richard Brothers and on 17 July 1794, the alchemist wrote Rainsford in Gibralter:

> I left with your worthy Lady two books of Prophecies by one Brothers; they contain very wonderful things, and I fear we shall find all he says to be true . . . You cannot now doubt, but there was good foundation for what I wrote you about Bryant (sic) last September . . . had you attended to it, the wicked designs of our republican Societies would have been known then. (Hills, "Masonic Personalities," p. 109)

The allusion to Bryan's subversive political aims is significant, and may corroborate the charge of Clifford and Southey that the more sincere and naive occult students of the Illuminés

[9] John Timbs, A Century of Anecdote, 1760-1780 (London: Frederick Warne, n.d.), p. 567.

were manipulated by the political revolutionaries. This question about Bryan will arise again, in connection with William Sharp, and will be dealt with later. That Woulfe, and probably Rainsford, were not involved in radical politics seems further indicated by Brothers' pronouncement of 1795:

> . . . And you, Peter Woulfe, one of the Avignon Society, whom the Lord . . . commands me to mention here by hame, as a testimony of his great regard, your property, confiscated in France, will be restored with interest and much kindness shewn to you by the members of its government. (Brothers, II, 80)

Since the confiscating government would have been the victorious revolutionary one, Woulfe must not have been on their side. Rainsford kept up with Woulfe until 1802, when the last letter concerning him is dated; Woulfe died in 1803.

Other early adherents of Richard Brothers were P.J. de Loutherbourg, the Swedenborgian disciple of Cagliostro's Egyption Freemasonry, and, as already pointed out, the Swedenborgian engraver, William Sharp. Because of Sharp's long acquaintance with William Blake, in both Swedenborgian groups and engraving work, the question of his possible Masonic involvement is important. Before supporting Brothers, Sharp (1749-1824) had been an early Mesmerist and Swedenborgian; a member of the 1783 Theosophical Society, which was dominated by foreign Freemasons; a close friend of the Duché family when they were involved with Grabianka and the Avignon Illuminés from 1786 to 1790; a student of Animal Magnetism with the Swedenborgian Freemasons Cosway and Loutherbourg; and a prominent member of the London Corresponding Society which backed both Lord Gordon and Richard Brothers.

Sharp was also a collaborator of Thomas Paine, whom Blake is said to have helped escape to France in 1792 (Erdman, Prophet, p. 154). Paine's long essay on Freemasonry,

which has already been quoted, indicates his probable membership, and he was accused of working for the Illuminati in 1798 (Stauffer, p. 234). In 1805, Paine definitely worked with the "Columbian Illuminati" in New York, a Masonic society which represented "Jacobinism and French ideas generally."[10] Sharp's engraved portrait of Paine became famous and had a wide circulation. Interestingly, when Paine was accused in London of Illuminatist activities in 1798, Blake wrote a defense of him in his annotations to Bishop Watson's attack on Paine in Apology for the Bible. But Blake added, "I have been commanded from Hell not to print this, as it is what our Enemies wish" (Blake, CW, p.383).

During the treason trial of the London Corresponding Society leaders in 1794, Sharp was also cross-examined by the Court, but eventually acquitted as a harmless "enthusiast." During the trial, John Flaxman, a Swedenborgian, probable Freemason, and mutual friend of Sharp and Blake, wrote from Italy expressing his concern about the accused men. Richard Brothers followed the trial closely and issued warnings about the innocence of the L.C.S. members and the dire consequences to the government if they were found guilty.

> The English government, both what is called civil and ecclesiastical, in its present form, will . . . be removed, annihilated . . . before the expiration of ten months from this day. (Brothers, II, 79-80)

In April 1795, Sharp responded to Brothers' support during the trial with a fine engraved portrait, entitled "Richard Brothers, Prince of the Hebrews," and included the pledge, "Fully believing this to be the Man whom God has appointed, I engrave his likeness," signed William Sharp. But James Gillray,

[10] M.C. Conway, The Life of Thomas Paine (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1892), p. 303.

who ridiculed Cagliostro and Gordon in his satiric "Masonic Anecdote" in 1786, issued a striking caricature of Brothers, leading the Jews to the Promised Land. Gillray portrayed Brothers as a sans culotte and French agent, with assignats bulging from his pockets, while he carried the Whig opposition on his back to the New Jerusalem. Churches and monuments fall, while the sun wears the red cap of liberty and drips blood (Paley, p. 263).

Most importantly, for demonstrating the contemporary view of Brothers as an agent of the French Illuminés is the long article on him in the London Times, on 4 March 1795, the day before his arrest under an archaic law which forbade the printing of false prophecies which cause dissension. Other sections of the article, dealing with his visions have already been quoted, but it is worth a long quotation to reveal the public awareness in London of the complex Masonic, occultist network:

> "The Great Prophet of Paddington Street: Nephew of God":
>
> Great Political convulsions have always been either preceded or accompanied by great moral revolutions . . . Thus, the French Revolution was preceded by a number of sects more or less absurd, but all equally extravagant, which prepared the public mind for all sorts of changes. Such were the Constitutionalists, who played off their tricks with great adroitness; the Martinists, who pretended to penetrate into the most hidden mysteries of the divinity; the Mesmerists, who invited all France to their banquets; the Somnambulists, etc., etc. When the French Revolution began, the prophetess Don Gerle . . . made her appearance; and under Robespierre, there sprung up at Paris a number of other visionary dreamers. It seems that there are men in this country, who propose to employ the same means to attain their end. As a man of the name of Brothers, appears to be selected to act a prominent part in these scenes, we have been induced to communicate . . . his printed prophecies, and the public conferences held at his house . . .
>
> ....
>
> Brothers is daily visited by Ladies and Gentlemen, who want to have their fortunes told; by indigent

> French emigrants, to whom he promises his protection through his interest with God; and by different descriptions of people, who delight in hearing, even from the mouth of a madman, invectives against the present administration.

The article also noted Brothers' predictions of the assassinations of the King of Sweden and the Empress of Russia, and sneered that the latter prophecy would afford much pleasure "to the conductor of one of our Jacobin prints, who lately assured the public, that the death of that Princess would be a most fortunate event for humanity."

The next day, 5 March 1795, Brothers was arrested, not without resistance, and the Times concluded:

> The sketch of the visions of this prophet . . . must clearly evince the necessity of confining him in a place, where the necessary remedies may be administered to cure his troubled imagination. His arrest seems the more urgent, as from the nature and object of his visions, there is reason to believe he was become the tool of a faction, employed to seduce the people, and to spread fear and alarm.

During the long, strange trial, Brothers' gentle and dignified deportment could not be shaken, and the Ministers were captivated by his singular personality. The Lord Chancellor pronounced his words "sensible and proper" and acquitted him. But King George III, himself mad, had Brothers examined by his own doctors and declared insane (Matthews, p. 109).

When Brothers was confined to an asylum, a torrent of pamphlets in his defense poured from the British press. In one of them, "every mystic or eccentric from Jacob Boehme downwards" was cited as pointing to his mission. His followers, who numbered in the thousands after his arrest, were from the "dangerous class of merchants, small tradesmen, and superior artisans that had been the backbone of the Revolution in France" (Matthews, pp. 109, 112). The

distinguished Oriental scholar, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, an erudite Member of Parliament, moved in the Commons "that the books written by Richard Brothers be laid before the House." He made an eloquent three hour speech in his defense, but no one dared second his motion. A month later, Halhed moved "that a copy of the information on which Brothers was arrested be laid before the House," but again could find no seconder (Balleine, p. 35). Brothers remained in confinement for the next eleven years, until Erskine, the great Whig lawyer, became Lord Chancellor in 1806 and granted his release (Paley, p. 265). Interestingly, Erskine was Lord Gordon's cousin and brilliant defense lawyer in Gordon's trial of 1781.

After Abbé Barruel's sensational exposé of a grand Illuminati conspiracy "against the governments, religion, and morality of Christendom,"[11] was published in England in 1797, Robert Southey felt compelled to defend politically the very theosophers and Illuminés he had ridiculed intellectually. He said that there was about as much truth in Barruel's version as in Madame Scudery's romances, but that the characters introduced were indeed real persons, "to whom false motives were imputed":

> A little of what was ascribed to them had really occurred, but the whole plot, colouring, and costuming of the book [Barruel's] were fictitious. It was a work written to serve the purposes of a party, with the same spirit and the same intent as those which in old times led to such absurd and monstrous calumnies against the Jews; and, had its intent succeeded, there would have been a Saint Bartholomew's Day in England. True it was that a Society had existed, whose object was to change or influence the governments of Europe; it was well organized and widely extended, but enthusiasm, not infidelity was the means which they employed. (Southey, Letters from England, III, 196)

[11] Augustin de Barruel, Memoires pour Servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme, vols. I-IV (A Londres. De l'Imprimerie Françoise chez Ph. le Boussonier, 1797).

To disprove Barruel's charges, Southey then gave his account of Bryan and Wright's experiences at Avignon. In 1808 Southey wrote a friend about the study which went into his accounts of the "underground" theosophical sects of the late eighteenth century, noting that "there is more research in them than you would imagine." He added that all the material on Brothers and Bryan was written from personal knowledge, including long discussions with Bryan about "the whole System." The main value of his book, Letters from England, he concluded, was "its thorough veracity. To the best of my knowledge, I have good authority for every single thing it asserts" (Curry, Southey, I, 468-469).

As the English government began to fear both a home-grown revolution and a possible French invasion, the governmental repression of suspected Jacobins grew severe. Gordon, the instigator of revolutionary fervour from 1780 on, died in jail in 1793; the London Corresponding Society leaders, including Sharp, were arraigned or imprisoned before their acquittals in 1794; Brothers, "the most discussed writer in the kingdom," was an obvious political prisoner in 1795. And at Lambeth, William Blake, after publishing his radical, occultist political prophecies in the early 1790's, which echoed the themes of Brothers and the Illuminati, veiled his utterance in increasingly obscure, mythological terms. In 1798, Blake complained, "To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life. The Beast and the Whore rule without control" (Blake, CW, p. 383).

Though the danger of being caught as a member of an "illuminated" secret society increased after the exposés of Barruel, Robison, and Clifford, the London Swedenborgian groups still received a visit from a famous French Illuminé, Saint Martin, in the 1790's, who judged "que cette voie ne mène pas loin," but assimilated their ideas on the plurality

of worlds and the "spiritual societies" (Viatte, I, 271; Faivre, pp. 98-99). In 1796, Grabianka himself established contacts with Saint Martin and then probably visited London again in 1799, as he received financial help from English sympathizers to his movement. During the Terror, Grabianka saved many lives and was imprisoned. In 1805, he was in Russia, where he cured hysterical women with miracle-working seeds, and continued to reveal the dogma of the "Great Four" only to the Elect (Danilewicz, pp. 69-73). Whether Grabianka visited Brothers or his underground Illuminatist followers in London is unknown.

As Thompson points out, the rise of Napoleon and the domestic persecution of the late 1790's tore the last Jacobin intellectuals apart from the artisans and labourers (p. 175). Wordsworth, shortly before a partisan of the French Revolution, said of the period, "In Britain ruled a panic dread of change," which led the disenchanted revolutionary once more to "retire into myself." Southey and Coleridge, both interested in the theosophy as well as the radical politics of French and English "Illuminism," began to quarrel over the meaning of the word.[12] Southey wrote Coleridge on 16 June 1800 to accuse him of "illuminizing" in his political attitudes. Southey said, "Siéyes and the Corsican have trod upon my Jacobin corns--and I am a thorough English Republican." On 28 June 1800, Coleridge replied to his charge:

> You say I illuminize--I think that Property will some time or other be modified by the predominance of intellect . . . but first those more particular modes of Property itself must be done away, as injurious to Property itself --these are, Priesthood and too great Patronage of Government. Therefore if to act on the belief that all things are process and that all inapplicable Truths are moral Falsehoods, be to illuminize, why, then I illuminize! (Curry, Southey, p. 215)

[12] On Coleridge's interest in Animal Magnetism, Swedenborg, Boehme, and the Cabala, see J.B.Beer, Coleridge the Visionary (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959) and Lane Cooper "The Power of the Eye in Coleridge," in Studies Presented to J.M.Hart (New York, 1901), pp. 78-121.

Curiously, the Oxford English Dictionary quotes Coleridge's letter as the only illustration of "illuminize," and notes that the word is derived from the secret society of Illuminati "which held deistic and republican views."

Meanwhile, Richard Brothers continued to write his pamphlets, which were smuggled out of the asylum by his devoted disciple, John Finlayson. As the year of the millenium, 1798, came and went, with Brothers still confined, many of his disciples drifted away. But in 1799, William Sharp still proselytized for Brothers, and offered John Flaxman, Blake's good friend, the job of Architect in the re-building of the Temple. During the same period, Thomas Holcroft recorded a conversation with Sharp:

> I mentioned Brothers, of whom he talked in his usual style. The wisdom of the Creator had occasioned all our miseries; but the tongue of wisdom was now subdued, meaning Egypt, which was not only a slip of land resembling a tongue, but the place in which the learning of the world originated. Thus, by the help of a pun and a metaphor, he had double proof, which he accepts as indubitable. Syria, Palestine, and all these countries are soon to be revolutionized; and those who do not take up arms against their fellow men, are to meet at the Grand Millenium.[13]

Sharp was grateful that Holcroft didn't call Brothers a "rascally imposter."

At some point after that, though, Sharp quarreled with Brothers' disciple William Bryan and "came to discredit him as a deceiver" (DNB, "Brothers"). Interestingly, Bryan continued his Masonic affiliation, for Danilewicz points out his address to a London Lodge in 1804 (Danilewicz, p. 64). Halhed too lost some of the vigor of his faith, but continued to correspond with John Wright until 1804 (DNB "Halhed").

[13] Thomas Holcroft, The Life of Thomas Holcroft, ed. Eldridge Colby (London: Constable, 1925), pp. 245-46.

Brothers, however, continued to write of his visions, including complicated plans for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, published in 1800 as A Description of Jerusalem with the Garden of Eden in the Center, and in 1805 as A Letter to the Subscribers for Engraving the Plans of Jerusalem. Paley's recent article points out the many similarities of Brothers' plans to those of Blake's epic poem Jerusalem, which he was working on from as early as 1802 until 1820 (p. 275). One of the engravings in Brothers' 1800 work is signed "Lowry Sc," who was probably Wilson Lowry, whose portrait Blake engraved nearly twenty years later. Brothers also attacked Sir Isaac Newton and the Greeks, as lacking spiritual vision, a view stubbornly maintained by Blake also. Brothers' call that the New Jerusalem "shall be the land of true liberty!" was possibly echoed by Blake's "Jerusalem is named Liberty Among the Sons of Albion" (Paley, p. 276; Blake, CW, p.649). Blake's description in Jerusalem of Golgonooza, the visionary city, also parallels the basic Masonic premise (which Brothers obviously accepted) of the rebuilding of the Temple as symbolic of the spiritual and psychic regeneration of man:

> The stones are pity, the bricks, well wrought affections
> Enamel'd with love and kindness and the tiles engraven gold,
> Labour of merciful hands: the beams and rafters are forgiveness
> The mortar and cement of the work, tears of honesty . . .
> Prepare the furniture, O Lambeth, in thy pitying looms . . .
> . . . there the secret furniture of Jerusalem's Chamber is wrought.
> (Blake, CW, p. 684)

More importantly, Brothers' work on the invasion of England by the Saxons demonstrated that the British were the Ten Lost Tribes, a theory which Blake accepted and used in Jerusalem, though with some changes of interpretation. Brothers worked on his theory from his Avignon days until 1822, when he published A Correct Account of the Invasion and Conquest of this Island by the Saxons, "so interesting and so necessary to be known to the English Nation, the Descendants of the Greater Part of the Ten Tribes of Israel" (Damon, pp. 452-453).

Blake's first biographer, Frederick Tatham, who knew Blake personally from the 1820's on and took in his widow in 1828, felt compelled to deny a connection of Blake with Brothers that apparently was often made:

> These visions of Blake are more like peopled imaginations, and personified thoughts, they only horrified where they represented any scene in which horrors were depicted as a picture or a Poem. Richard Brothers has been classed as one possessing this power, but he was really a decided madman, he asserted that he was nephew of God the Father, and in a mad House he died as well indeed he might. Brothers is only classed with Swedenborg in order to ridicule Swedenborg, and bring him into contempt. Blake and Brothers therefore must not be placed together. (Bentley, Records, p. 520)

Brothers' dying words were strikingly similar to Blake's concept of Los, who labors at the furnace to rebuild the Jerusalem of the spirit. In 1823 Brothers firmly grasped Finlayson's hand and asked him if his sword and hammer were ready to defend and build the New Jerusalem. On hearing his disciple accept his prophetic mission, Brothers seemed to will his own death on the spot (Matthews, p. 122).

The apparently continued interest of Blake in Brothers after 1800 is intriguing, for their mutual friend William Sharp soon found a new prophet, Joanna Southcott. As Southey noted, some of Joanna's foremost adherents were "veterans in credulity":

> They had been initiated in the mysteries of animal magnetism, had received spiritual circumcision from Brothers, and were thus doubly qualified for the part they were to play in this new drama of delusion. To accomodate them, Joanna confirmed the authenticity of this last fanatic's [Brothers'] mission, and acknowledged him as King of the Hebrews,--but she dropt his whole mythology. (Letters from England, III, 247-248)

At age fifty-one, Joanna published The Strange Effects of Faith (Exeter, 1801), which Sharp read; he immediately became

fascinated with the new apocalyptic prophetess. He and another follower of Brothers, George Turner of Leeds, went to Exeter in December 1801 to hail her, brought back to London "the great Box of Sealed Writings," and prepared a triumphal entry for her. When Joanna came to London in 1803, she viewed Brothers as a rival, but since many of her followers also were loyal to him, she granted him a "Jonah-role" and backed the pleas for his release. But soon she denounced his answers to his visions, though not the visions themselves, and had her most loyal followers deface one thousand of Sharp's fine engravings of the "Prince of the Hebrews" (Matthews, pp. 56-62).

Sharp tried to convert Blake, who was possibly a "Brothers-ite" at the time, to Joanna, but according to Flaxman, "such men as Blake are not fond of playing the second fiddle--Hence Blake himself a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams would not do homage to a rival claimant of the privilege of prophecy" (Bentley, Records, p. 235). Paley notes that Flaxman's comment may have been malicious and misleading, and points out that Blake's rejection of Joanna probably grew more from "his lifelong opposition to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, with its concomitant elevation of celibacy and denial of the erotic" (p.285). Like Blake, Brothers always opposed celibacy. When Joanna announced her miraculous Virgin Conception of Shiloh, the new Messiah, in 1814, Sharp was filled with enthusiasm and helped buy the layette. But Blake, in his Notebook, took a more skeptical though sympathetic view:

"On the Virginity of the Virgin Mary and Joanna Southcott"

> Whate'er is done to her she cannot know,
> And if you'll ask her she'll swear it so
> Whether 'tis good or evil none's to blame
> No one can take the pride, no one the shame.
> (Blake, CW, p. 418)

N.B. Halhed, Brothers' most prominent backer, helped

Joanna too; he signed the legal opinion that she needed a mortal marriage contract so that Shiloh could be a legal heir (Matthews, p. 72). At her genuinely tragic death-bed, William Sharp kept up his vigil, and then kept hot water-bottles on her dead body for four days while waiting for a miracle. At the dissection, Dr.Reece noted that Sharp was the only one who had not given way to despair--"Life was wrapped in mystery," said he. Sharp became the first guardian of the "Box" and passed it on at his death (Matthews, pp. 75, 83).

Southey pointed out that Blake was intimate with another of Joanna's backers, William Owen "Pughe," the Welsh antiquary. Owen's father was a skilled singer with the harp, a motif often used by Blake. Owen was a member of the Society of Antiquaries from 1793 on, and was an erudite and influential Welsh scholar (DNB). Southey visited Blake's exhibition of 1810, and later noted that the painting of "The Ancient Britons" was influenced by Owen:

> It begins with a translation from the Welsh, supplied to him by that good, simple-hearted Welsh-headed man, William Owen, whose memory is the great storehouse of all Cymric tradition and lore of every kind. (Bentley, Records, p. 226)

Southey, who thought Blake was insane at that time, noted the mutual influence of Blake and Owen, who was one of Joanna's four-and-twenty elders:

> Poor Owen found everything that he wished in the Bardic system, and there he found Blake's notions, and thus Blake and his wife were persuaded that his dreams were old patriarchal truths, long forgotten, and now revealed. They told me this, and I, who well knew the muddy nature of Owen's head, knew what his opinion upon such a subject was worth. (Bentley, Records, p. 399)

The Southcottians eventually adopted Brother's Anglo-Israelite theories, but whether Owen, who knew Blake before 1809, represented Brothers' teachings as well as Joanna's is unknown.

In 1811, Southey visited with Blake and admired both his designs and his poetic talents, though he was disturbed at Blake's mental imbalance. Blake showed Southey "a perfectly mad poem called Jerusalem--Oxford Street is in Jerusalem" (Bentley, Records, p. 229). Though critics have uniformly belittled Southey's comments on Blake, his unique familiarity with and research into the complex theosophical and political milieu in which Blake lived from the 1780's through 1811 make his remarks highly valuable. Rather than defensively writing off Southey's judgment of Blake at that time, however, critics should remember that Southey had a genuine scale of comparison for judging the difference between the visionary and the deranged. He had carefully studied them for over twenty years and was usually sympathetic to the spiritual and psychic needs of the Swedenborgians, Animal Magnetisers and Illuminati, but not to quackery and political manipulation. His concluding thoughts on his conversation with Blake were that "you perceived that nothing but madness had prevented him from being the sublimest painter in this or any other country," and "I came away with so sad a feeling that I never repeated it," surely not a malicious remark (Bentley, Records, p. 399).

Chapter X: The Visionary Years, 1790-1803: Blake's Work at Lambeth and Felpham

The placing of Blake within an Anglo-French Masonic context from the 1770's through 1811 has so far been based largely on circumstantial evidence. By investigating the activities, preoccupations, and relationships of many figures around Blake, we can get a sense of the historical context within which he developed. But that there is much more evidence in the scanty, surviving documents and letters written by and to Blake, as well as in his own works, both as engraver to other artists and as original creator, will be demonstrated in this chapter.

As we have seen from studying the Swedenborgian milieu in the 1780's, Blake's spiritual conversations with his dead brother Robert which began in 1787 (Blake, CW, p. 797), would have found a sympathetic audience among the eager devotees of Animal Magnetism and Cabalistic angel-magic. In fact, the Swedenborgian magazines from 1790 on were replete with accounts of conversations with the dead. Hindmarsh, who was the editor and printer of several, disapproved of these practices, which led to continuing journalistic debates. For example, The New Magazine of Knowledge, printed by Hindmarsh in 1790, included an article, "Remarks on Animal Magnetism and the Danger of Conversing with Spirits," which commented on the widespread practice of Mesmerism and "habit of conversing with spirits" among Swedenborgians. The writer believed in the phenomenon but thought it was bad, because man gave up his free will to do it.[1] Another article, "Observations on Animal Magnetism," praised the process as used by some Swedenborgians; the editors replied

[1] The New Magazine of Knowledge, (London: Hindmarsh, 1790), I, 123.

to this with negatives, claiming the author of the article ("which was taken from his 'Abrege des Ouvrages d'Emanuel Swedenborg'"), had since renounced Swedenborgianism and "is now joined in spirit to a certain society in France . . . of mystic-cabalistico-magnetical practitioners" (New Magazine, I, 404). Since the Avignon Society referred to was a Swedenborgian Masonic lodge, the writer obviously had not renounced Swedenborgianism but rather Hindmarsh's version of it.

The editor of the New Magazine of Knowledge also worried in the 1790's about those Swedenborgian magnetisers who tried to cure, one of whom had an indirect effect on Blake. This was George Adams, a Swedenborgian and "Mathematical Instrument Maker to the King," whose ideas of electrical and magnetic cures were practised on Mrs.Blake by Dr.John Birch. Birch was a good friend of the Blakes before 1800 (Bentley, Records, p. 73), and continued as their art patron and physician for several more years. In Birch's Essay on the Medical Application of Electricity, published by Blake's radical friend Joseph Johnson in 1802, Birch acknowledged his debt to George Adams' works and noted that Dr. John Hunter, a friend of both Birch and Blake, witnessed Adams' experiments in the 1790's. Birch was an anti-materialist and was interested in magnetism as well as electricity, though he rejected the more sweeping claims for both as the "universal Panacea." In his Essay, Birch revised and reprinted Adams' cases of the 1790's.[2] Before dealing with Blake's relation to Birch, it will be instructive to look at George Adams, the Swedenborgian who influenced Blake's favorite physician, and possibly knew Blake himself.

[2] John Birch, An Essay on the Medical Application of Electricity (London: Joseph Johnson, 1802), pp. iii-iv.

George Adams (1750-1795) had been a Swedenborgian from as early as 1784, when he was a member of the Theosophical Society (Hindmarsh, p. 23), at the time of heavy Masonic influence. Adams' simultaneous interest in magnetism was shown in his Essay on Electricity, "to which is added an Essay on Magnetism," published in 1784. When the Avignon Illuminé Grabianka, visited the theosophists in 1786 and spent much time at Jacob Duché's home in Lambeth, he also became a close friend of George Adams (Danilewicz, p. 61). As Hindmarsh antagonistically made clear, an interest in Grabianka meant an interest in Animal Magnetism, Cabalistic angel-magic, and "illuminated" Freemasonry. Adams' application of Swedenborgian tenets to physiology and medicine was demonstrated in An Essay on Vision, "briefly explaining the Fabric of the Eye," in 1789. Hindmarsh, who printed it, noted the "New Church principles" utilized in the essay by Adams, "a prominent member of the New Church in London" (Adams, Preface). Adams' Swedenborgian theories of vision may have influenced Blake, who later explained at great length how to "see through not with the eye" (Blake, CW, p. 433).

Among Adams' many publications the most significant for Dr. Birch, and possibly for Blake, was his Lectures on Natural and Experimental Philosophy, printed by Hindmarsh in 1794. The list of subscribers is important, for it included several of Blake's known friends, such as George Cumberland, Jacob Duché, John Hunter, Joseph Johnson, "--Baldwin," as well as several possible acquaintances, such as Sir William Jones, Joseph Priestley, William Spence, and Count de Brühl. In the Preface, Adams noted that he was in France and Switzerland "about twenty-five years ago," and became alarmed at the anti-religious attacks of the philosophers (Adams, Lectures, I, 14). He searched for "a confutation of

materialism," which led him to the Hermetic philosophers, the neo-Platonists, Van Helmont, Berkeley, and eventually Swedenborg (II, 65). In Volume IV, he discussed magnetism at length, both in its mineral and animal sense (IV, 435 ff).

Since Dr.Birch based his treatment of Mrs.Blake's ailments on Adams' theories, it is interesting to note Blake's enthusiasm for the treatment. On 23 October 1804, Blake wrote his patron William Hayley that "Electricity is the wonderful cause" of his wife's surprising recovery from rheumatism, and on 18 December 1804, he added his praise of "Mr.Birch's Electrical Magic" (Blake, CW, pp. 851, 854). Blake, who was an old friend of Birch, possibly knew him in a Swedenborgian context, for in 1801 he sent greetings to Birch through their mutual Swedenborgian friend Thomas Butts (Blake, CW, p. 810).

Among the subscribers to Adams' Lectures (1794) was the Count de Brühl, whose definite identification is difficult to track down, but who may have been connected with Blake's patrons and friends, the Count and Countess of Egremont. Because the connection may also involve the European Illuminés, it is worth throwing out some provocative but still unresolved leads. The Earl of Egremont and his wife became serious patrons of Blake's work, and he produced "A Vision of the Last Judgment" for her, a complex, highly detailed painting, with voluminous commentary. Announcing that the Last Judgment "is one of these Stupendous Visions, I have represented it as I saw it," Blake went on to include many references to Masonic and occultist concepts--i.e., "Spiritual Mystery and Real Visions" and the two pillars, Jachin and Boaz (both current Masonic terminology); the Hermetic version of Apuleius' Golden Ass as descended "from real Vision in more ancient Writings"; the Merkabah-Cabalistic sense of Elijah's "Fiery Chariot of . . . Contemplative Thought" and "the two Cherubim bowed over the Arc," etc. (CW, pp. 605-613). The tentative connection with Count de Brühl

for this kind of eclectic, "illuminist" terminology stems from the earlier marriage of Alicia Maria, Countess of Egremont (d. 1794) with Hans Moritz, Count de Brühl (1736-1809). The Brühl family in Europe were active Illuminés and occultists (see Viatte, passim), and the Count who married into the Egremont family apparently carried on their Masonic activities and interests (see Casanova, IX, 172, 388). Since the older Count de Brühl was still alive when his in-laws the Egremonts commissioned the strangely mannered painting from Blake in 1808, the possible connections of the principles, which were maintained between the Egremonts and Blake for many years, needs examination in Masonic archives as well as in the Egremont family papers.

Though Blake's major sources of knowledge about Animal Magnetism and Cabalism probably are to be found in his association with the London Swedenborgian group, his simultaneous interest in the works and theories of the Swiss physiognomist and student of occultism, Johann Caspar Lavater, provided parallel concepts and information. Blake wrote that in 1787, "when Flaxman was taken to Italy, Fuseli was given to me for a season" (Blake, CW, p. 799). Johann Friedrich Fuseli (1741-1825) was greatly admired by Blake, who said he was the only man he ever knew "who did not make me almost spew" (Blake, CW, p. 551); Fuseli was also the closest, lifelong friend of Lavater. In 1788, Fuseli translated Lavater's Aphorisms on Man from the original manuscript, which was dedicated to him, and worked closely with Blake, who engraved Fuseli's design for the frontispiece. The edition was published by Joseph Johnson in 1789, who was probably introduced to Blake by Fuseli. While translating the Aphorisms, Fuseli edited and controlled the illustrations to Lavater's long work, Essays on Physiognomy, translated by Henry Hunter, with several engravings by Blake, which began

appearing in 1789 and ran until 1794.[3] Blake also engraved a portrait of Lavater in 1800 and remained interested in physiognomy until the end of his life.

Lavater's Aphorisms was one of Blake's favorite, well-worn books; on the title page, below the name Lavater, is inscribed "Will Blake," with a heart around the two names. Blake's heavily annotated copy reveals his recognition of Lavater's occult interests, as he noted that "substance gives tincture to the accident, and makes it physiognomic" (Boehmenist, alchemical terms), that "Man is the ark of God; the mercy seat is above, upon the ark; cherubims guard it on either side, and in the midst is the holy law" (Cabalistic terms), and then concluded that "this Book is written by consultation with Good Spirits, because it is Good, and that the name Lavater is the amulet of those who purify the heart of man" (Blake, CW, pp. 81, 82, 88). Several scholars, including Gilchrist and Erdman, have pointed out the important and parallel influence of Lavater and Swedenborg on Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-93), but there has been no thorough examination of what Lavater's influence may have consisted of. To do this, we must examine Lavater--and Fuseli--in the context of their associations with Animal Magnetism and secret occult societies.

Lavater and Fuseli were university students together in Zurich, but had to leave town after their joint publication in 1762 of a pamphlet attacking a corrupt local magistrate.[4]

[3] Marcia Allentuck, "Fuseli and Lavater: Physiognomic Theory and the Enlightenment," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, ed. Theodore Besterman, 55 (Geneva: Institute et Musee Voltaire, 1967), p. 100.

[4] Peter Tomory, The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 10.

In 1763 they moved to Berlin, where Fuseli met many German literati, who sent him to London in 1764 as a liaison between German and English men of letters (Tomory, p. 13). Fuseli worked as a reader and translator for the radical publisher Joseph Johnson, but by 1765 his contacts with Johnson's circle turned him against the political indifference of German literature, in which he largely lost interest. Lavater, meanwhile, returned to Switzerland and commenced a voluminous, lifelong correspondence with Fuseli; unfortunately, none of Lavater's letters to Fuseli survive, and only a portion of Fuseli's to Lavater remain.[5] The serious loss this brings to Blake scholarship will be apparent after briefly examining Lavater's complex occult experiences and contacts, which his other correspondence bears witness to, but which he poured out to Fuseli more than to any other friend (see Faivre, "Lavater," passim).

From 1776 until the end of his life, Fuseli was involved with Lavater's physiognomic work, which appeared in German in 1775-78. Initially he was an illustrator, at Lavater's request, but he would not be bound by Lavater's instructions. Goethe, who was friendly with Lavater for years, collaborated with the physiognomist in a few sections of the work (Allentuck, pp. 93-96). Lavater defined physiognomy as the "Science of discovering the relation between the exterior and the interior--between the visible surface and the invisible spirit which it covers--between the animated, perceptible matter, and the imperceptible principle which impressed this character of life upon it (Allentuck, p. 108). His lifelong search for "the invisible spirit," which could be traced in its earthly manifestations, led Lavater to investigate nearly all the occultist groups in Europe.

[5] Eudo C. Mason, The Mind of Henry Fuseli (London: Routledge, 1951), p. 21.

Lavater early read the Quietists, Fenelon, and Madame Guyon,[6] and corresponded with Swedenborg in 1768 and 1769. As noted earlier, Lavater thought Swedenborg was a member of a secret society, and sent a "cipher writing" as a sign of recognition (New Jerusalem Magazine, p.245). In answer to Lavater's inquiries, Swedenborg disclaimed reading Jacob Boehme or William Law. Though Lavater's close friends, Goethe, Kirchberger, Sarasin, and his brother Diethelm, were all initiates of occultist, high-degree Freemasonry, Lavater refused for many years to join any of the lodges he visited. Diethelm Lavater (1743-1826), a physician who was close to his brother, became a Freemason in 1772 and was "the acknowledged leader of the Craft in Switzerland for upwards of half a century (Gould, "Medical Profession," p.161). Though Johann Caspar Lavater refused any restraint on his inquiry, his denial of fixed membership in the many theosophical groups he visited also reveals the wide extent and quantity of them:

> On doit être sûr, autant qu'on peut l'être de quelque chose au monde, que je ne suis ni serai jamais d'aucune secte, d'aucun parti, d'aucun espèce de société secrète. Ni les herrnhutes, ni les ménonites, ni les collégiants, ni les inspirés, ni les francs-maçons, ni les Roses-Croix, ni les spirites, ni les théosophes, ni les concordiants, ni les illuminés, ni les adeptes, ni les mages, ni quelque autre confrérie de cette espèce que ce soit, ne me compteront jamais comme adhérent. (Viatte, I, 156)

Though he concluded in 1787 that he was "l'homme le plus isolé, le plus éclectique," Lavater later became a Rosicrucian Freemason himself (Gould, "Medical Profession," p.161).

[6] F. Baldensperger, "Les théories de Lavater dans la littérature Française" (Paris: Librairie Hatchette, 1910), p. 62.

Lavater followed Mesmer's career closely but skeptically from 1778 on. He became fascinated by magnetic trance-conditions and was later a convert to Animal Magnetism--"par le magnétisme, il croit avoir enfine obtenu la relation directe avec Dieu qu'il souhaite si ardemment." In 1779, Lavater read Saint-Martin's Des Erreurs et de la Verité, and began a lifelong friendship with the distinguished Masonic disciple of Boehme, the Cabala, and Swedenborg (Viatte, I, 169, 166). Lavater sought out Cagliostro at Sarasin's house in Basle in January 1781, and became intrigued with Cabalistic angel-magic, as well as with the Grand Cophta himself. In March 1781, Lavater wrote Goethe about this first meeting:

> Cagliostro est un homme trés original, puissant, peu élevé, et, sous certain rapport, inexprimablement commun; un astrologue à la maniére de Paracelsus; un philosophe hermétique, un arceniste, un antiphilosophe . . . Les sept esprits de Dieu sont à son service, dit-il, il les peut voir, entendre, toucher comme moi . . . Il n'a pas répondu à mes questions et paraît les avoir mal comprises. (Viatte, I, 163)

In fact, Cagliostro had treated Lavater coldly, when he sensed that the physiognomist was patronizing him. When Lavater asked him whence the source of his knowledge derived, Cagliostro replied, in lapidary style,"In verbis, herbis et lapidibus" (Schnur, p. 272).

When Lavater met Cagliostro again at Sarasin's in 1782, the banker hoped Lavater would join Cagliostro's new Egyptian Rite (recently established in London), but he refused. However, Lavater then went to Strasbourg, where he was greatly impressed with the Amis Réunis Masonic lodge: "Parmi les franc-maçons, j'ai rencontré quelque hommes ardents, non point entièrement purs d'exaltation, peut-être, mais d'ailleurs de noble caractère" (Viatte, I, 144). Cagliostro was among the Masons at Strasbourg, and he and Lavater got along well on this visit (Faivre, p. 79).

Mirabeau wrote of Lavater's ambivalent fascination with Cagliostro in 1786:

> Good Lavater said, "Cagliostro, a man; and a man such as few are; in whom however, I am not a believer. O that he were simple of heart and humble, like a child; that he had a feeling for the simplicity of the Gospel, and the majesty of the Lord! Who were so great as he? Cagliostro often tells what is not true and promises what he does not perform. Yet I do nowise hold his operations as deception, though they are not what he calls them." (Carlyle, "Cagliostro," p. 515)

In 1787, after the apparent failure of his proselytizing efforts among the London Swedenborgians and Freemasons, Cagliostro returned to Basle; there Lavater picked up the friendship--much to Goethe's dismay, who had just investigated Cagliostro's background in Sicily. As Lavater wrote of all his experiences to Fuseli, there is certainly a possibility that William Blake, who was fascinated by Lavater, could have heard of these experiences in 1787-88, while he worked with Fuseli on Lavater's Aphorisms and Essays on Physiognomy. The London painter and Swedenborgian Loutherbourg was also at Sarasin's in 1787-88, with Cagliostro and Lavater, and on his return to London in 1789 Loutherbourg may have passed on information to Blake, who was definitely attending Swedenborgian meetings at that time.

By late 1787, Lavater had learned Puységur's technique of "somnambulistic lucidity," and enthusiastically passed it on to several German physicians in Bremen, who became important in Mesmerist history (Colquhoun, p. 71). He noted in 1788 that "par une discipline et un perfectionnnment journaliers, et qui, par la vertu et l'esprit religieux,se rapproche des anges et ses saints . . . lorsqu'à ce moment paraît une vision pure, lumineuse, céleste" (Viatte, I, 164). In 1790 Lavater visited with Major Tieman, who had initiated

Bryan and Wright into the Avignon Illuminés in late 1788. Tieman had corresponded with Lavater about Animal Magnetism for years. In 1790 he brought to Lavater a new book by Saint-Martin, L'Homme de Désir, which Saint-Martin had written in London and had sent personally to Lavater via Tieman. Lavater was increasingly influenced by Saint-Martin's eloquent mixture of Christian Cabalism and Boehmenism, and became even more convinced that a grand illumination was at hand.

Finally in 1794, Lavater received his great vision in Denmark. Prince Charles of Hesse-Cassel had been a patron of Saint Germain in the 1770's, and an initiate since 1782 of a Jewish-Rosicrucian schism within Freemasonry called the "Frères Initiés de l'Asie." This may have been the Rosicrucian rite of Freemasonry that General Rainsford joined in 1782 also. Prince Charles developed an elite theurgic, Cabalistic, Rosicrucian society in Copenhagen, and in 1793 he invited Lavater to visit. Lavater spent nearly a year with them, during which their Cabalistic trance-techniques helped him achieve extraordinary visions. In a secret appendix to his Journal de Voyage, Lavater described his vision of blazing light, "d'aspect phosphorique, d'un blanc éclatant, sembable à la lumière des etoiles. Il y a aussi un nuage, doux au toucher." The vision became increasingly more humanized and answered questions. While the Rosicrucian group studied the Gospel of Saint John, they convinced Lavater that Saint John lived again and that he could get in touch with him, in the flesh as well as in vision. Lavater cherished his Copenhagen visions until the end of his life; he wrote,

> Le point le plus important chez les amis du Nord, c'est Jean. Ils le connaissent, ils le fréquentent souvent, et point sous forme d'apparition. Il vut sur terre sous une forme humaine ordinaire et leur rent souvent visite. (Faivre, p. 83)

Firmly believing in Saint John's presence on earth, Lavater was sure the return of Christ was imminent.

Meanwhile in London, Fuseli continued his work on Lavater's mammoth Essays in Physiognomy, which eventually included over four hundred engraved plates, several by Blake. In 1789, Lavater's gifted son, John Henry, came to London and spent much time with Fuseli, who wrote a poem extolling the youth's talents in 1790 (Tomory, p. 38). John Henry was later initiated into Masonry in Germany, and joined the Pilgrim Lodge on his return to London, the same lodge that Rainsford worked with.[7] Fuseli, who was undoubtedly reading of Lavater's magnetic and Cabalistic experiments in his effusive letters, defended Lavater, but not Animal Magnetism, in the Analytical Review (February 1790). The book Fuseli reviewed, W. Coxe's Travels in Switzerland, criticized Lavater for "extending to religion the same enthusiasm which he has employed in his researches on physiognomy, etc." Fuseli answered that "if Mr.Lavater be weak enough to tamper with animal magnetism, he is certainly too wise to mix it with his religious tenets," and then chided the Reverend Coxe's implied lack of belief in miracles by faith (Mason, p. 140). But as Fuseli's latest and most thorough biographer has noted, "Fuseli himself was not immune" to occultism and visionary experiments: "how much he really believed is impossible to say. One can hardly maintain, confronted by his works, that he was totally uninvolved" (Tomory, p. 105).

[7] Gould, "Medical Profession," p. 161. Gould notes that John Henry Lavater (d. 1819) read a series of papers on his experiences in foreign lodges--including the London one--to his Masonic associates in Zurich. These papers may provide a new source of information on Blake and Fuseli.

Significantly, while in close contact with Blake and Sharp, Fuseli was a contributor to the Conjuror's Magazine, "or Magical and Physiognomical Mirror," which began publication in 1791. Through it ran serially Lavater's Physiognomy, with drawings by Fuseli. William Sharp also worked with Blake and Fuseli on the Lavater engravings (Erdman, Prophet, p. 104). Before discussing the use of occult symbols by Fuseli and Blake during the Conjuror's Magazine period, we need to examine the secret society that the magazine represented. According to Piloo Nanavutty,[8] the anonymous editor of the magazine was Francis Barrett, who later became well-known among occultists for his publication of The Magus in 1801 and Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers in 1815. The Conjurer's Magazine of May 1792 contained a curious prospectus, announcing proposals for the instruction of pupils in Spiritual Knowledge, which included a plan for "commencing Societies of Colleges for receiving Instruction."[9] The word "College" is significant here, for according to the Royal Masonic Cyclopedia, "the regular assembly of a body of Rosicrucians is called a College, at which they celebrate their mysteries and perform the ordinary acts, incidental to the admission and advancement of aspirants. A College is also the second section of the Antient and Primitive Rite of Freemasonry" (Mackenzie, p. 125). The Masonic rite referred to was an "illuminated" high degree within French Freemasonry.

That Barrett's College was indeed a Rosicrucian order is borne out by his signature, "F.R.C." (Fratres Rosae Crucis), on the title-page of The Magus, and the identification of him as "a fellow of the Rosicrucian fraternity" in a contemporary

8 Piloo Nanvutty, unpublished essay, "Some Eastern Influences on William Blake's Prophetic Books"; quoted in Raine, Blake and Tradition, I, 388.

9 Mark E.Perugini, "Blake's Prophetic Books," Times Literary Supplement, 29 July 1926, p. 512.

biographical dictionary.[10] A modern "official" Rosicrucian history says that Barrett lived from 1765-1825, and was trained in the methods of Saint Germain and Cagliostro, especially in the use of Magic Mirrors, Skrying, Cabalistic magic, and Animal Magnetism. Under Barrett as "Supreme Grand Master of the revivified Supreme Grand Dome of England," the Rosicrucian brethren in London became active again.[11] The May 1792 prospectus also noted that Mr.William Gilbert would teach "astrology and Spirit, with the nature and use of talismans" (Perugini, p. 512). Ellic Howe thinks Gilbert meant necromancy by "Spirit," and that his talismanic magic was studied mainly by the astrologers who patronized the magazine.[12] In the August 1792 issue, the title-page was "embellished with engravings, all accurately copied from Lavater by Barlow." Erdman has pointed out the mutual influence of Joel Barlow and Blake during this period (Prophet, p. 154), thus making Barlow's simultaneous association with Lavater's work and with Barrett's magazine suggestive. The August magazine included articles on astrology, palmistry, alchemy, magic, occult philosophy, somnanbulism, dream-symbolism, and the power of imagination. There were long extracts from Lavater and, significantly, from Swedenborg. In the April 1793 issue, an astrologer (Ebenezer Sibley?) gave Swedenborg's Nativity and praised his tenets, "which are gaining ground everyday" (Conjuror's Magazine, II, 339). There were many correspondents, but only

[10] A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland (London: Henry Colburn, 1816), pp. 15, 412.

[11] R.Swinburne Clymer, The Book of Rosicruciae (Quakertown, Pennsylvania: Philosophical Publishing Co., 1946), III, xv,40-44.

[12] Ellic Howe, Astrology: a Recent History (New York: Walker, 1967), p. 25.

initials were given--including, intriguingly, "W. B." (Conjuror's Magazine, II, 354).

The reference to the spread of Swedenborg's doctrines within a Rosicrucian context recalls General Rainsford, a Swedenborgian and Rosicrucian, and his efforts to establish an elite, high degree Masonic society from 1784 through the 1790's. Since the Rose-Croix degree was one of the highest and most prestigious within Freemasonry, it seems that Rainsford probably was involved in Barrett's Rosicrucian group, whose Masonic origin will be discussed later. In 1792, Lord St. Vincent wrote Rainsford that Lord Shelburne "bids me say he is sure you hold intelligence with your Brother Illuminé, the King of Prussia, and that you know all about his views but will not communicate to us mortals" (Hills, "Masonic Personalities," p. 114). The King referred to was Frederick William II, nephew of Frederick the Great and ruler of Prussia from 1786 to 1797. His Rosicrucian and Illuminati involvement has already been discussed, and Rainsford's possible connection with him is significant. In 1794 Rainsford recorded his membership in a Rosicrucian Society at Paris and included a few pages of German notes on alchemy, which he signed Spherae fondus in Salis. Waite points out that "the mystic name" refers to a high grade of a German Rosicrucian rite. Waite also says that Rainsford was admitted into a Rosicrucian group in London, as well as the Paris group of the 1780's (Waite, Brotherhood, pp. 561-62). In 1801, Frances Barrett said that his Rosicrucian College was "select, permanent, and desirable" (Magus, II, 140), which is exactly what Rainsford had hoped for.

That other Swedenborgians had Rosicrucian contacts is verified by Hindmarsh's scornful account of a Rosicrucian visitor to the Swedenborg Society around 1790, when Blake was definitely a participant:

> A foreign gentleman, who held the absurd tenets of the old sect of the Rosicrucians, and who of course, though he believed Swedenborg to have been a great philosopher, by no means embraced his theological sentiments, became acquainted with some of the admirers of Swedenborg's writings, in London. Having been invited one day to dine with a warm friend of those writings, the foreigner after dinner affirmed that such a philosopher as Swedenborg must have discovered the secret which the Rosicrucian adepts pretended to possess, by virtue of which he could protract his existence as long as he pleased. He therefore contended that Swedenborg had not died, but being desirous to put off the infirmities of age, had renewed his existence by means of a precious elixir, and had withdrawn to some other part of the world, causing a sham funeral to be performed to avoid discovery. (Hindmarsh, p. 400)

Hindmarsh piously assured his readers that the Swedenborgians opposed this wild suggestion, but the "pseudo-philosopher" urged his claim so powerfully that "in the warmth of the dispute" they all went to Swedenborg's tomb and opened his coffin. Hindmarsh claimed that the Rosicrucian was "confounded by the direct view of Swedenborg's mortal remains," but he never seems to have caught the parallel of the incident with the legend of opening Christian Rosenkreutz' tomb. The disinterment set off a wave of interest among the Swedenborgians about the state of Swedenborg's remains, and the coffin was opened a second time a few days later by another group of disciples, including Hindmarsh himself:

> We all stood . . . to observe the physiognomy of that material frame . . . which had once been the organ of so much intellect, so much virtue, and such extraordinary powers of mind, as together with the peculiar privilege he enjoyed of holding undoubted and long-continued consort with angels and happy spirits, distinguished him from all other men, and place him high above the rest of his kind. (Hindmarsh, p. 401)

During his Swedenborgian days, Blake may have taken the names, "Mne Seraphim," which he used in Thel (1789), and "Tiriel," in the poem of that name (circa 1789), from Barrett's chart of the Celestial Intelligences, which later

appeared in the Conjuror's Magazine in 1791. That Barrett's spelling "Bne Seraphim" became "Bne Seraphim" in Blake's work may indicate an oral transmission, for both words sound alike when spoken. Though Blake may have had access to the names in Agrippa's works, Barrett's complaint in 1801 about the expense of Agrippa's works should be considered, especially given Blake's poverty: "they are now become so scarce, as very rarely to be met with, and are sold at a very high price by the booksellers" (Barrett, Magus, II, 179). However, the rich painter and collector of occult works, Richard Cosway, may have owned such rarities and made them available to Blake.

Around 1795, Barrett was living at 99 Norton Street, Marylebone, an area much favored by artists.[13] At this address, he maintained a secret Rosicrucian school, which he described in 1801 in The Magus. After noting his previous years spent in occult research, he announced to his readers that he gave private instructions and lectures upon "Natural and Occult Philosophy, Chemistry, Astrology, etc.":

> Those who become Students will be initiated into the choicest operations of Natural Philosophy, Natural Magic, the Cabala, Chemistry, the Talismanic Art, Hermetic Philosophy, Astrology, Physiognomy, etc. Likewise, they will acquire the knowledge of the Rites, Mysteries, Ceremonies, and Principles of the Ancient Philosophers, Magi, Cabalists, Adepts, etc. --The purpose of this school (which will consist of no greater number than Twelve Students) being to investigate the hidden treasures of Nature; to bring the Mind to a Contemplation of Eternal Wisdom.

Another probably member of Barrett's Rosicrucian school after 1795 was Dr. Sigismund Bacstrom, whose initiation into a Rosicrucian Society in Mauritius in 1795 was documented

[13] Frances Barrett, The Magus, with a new introd. by d'Arch Smith (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1967), p. iii.

in the occult manuscript collection of Frederick Hockley in the 1850's (Waite, Rosicrucians, p. 409). Significantly, Hockley was an original member of the Rosicrucian Society that Yeats later joined, and Yeats had access to Hockley's papers. This must be remembered when we deal with Yeats' claims about Blake's Rosicrucian membership during the 1790's. After his Rosicrucian initiation, Dr.Bacstrom lived in London and was a practising alchemist, whose Rosicrucian "father" was Comte Louis de Chazal. There is also evidence of Bacstrom's continued Rosicrucian activity and correspondence in London in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Waite, Brotherhood, p. 560), and his papers on alchemy were preserved by his fellow English initiates. Interestingly, Madam Blavatsky, Yeats' theosophic mentor, began publishing Bacstrom's translations of alchemical texts in Lucifer (February 1891), but her death stopped the project.[14] Yeats read Lucifer and contributed an article to it.

In the archives of Yeats' Rosicrucian Society in the 1880's was a letter from T.F.Ravenshaw,who described the relations between German Rosicrucians and the London group in the late eighteenth century:

> The German fraternity had an established regulation which permitted distinguished members to confer Rosicrucian grades in due order on suitable persons. That a certain Venetian ambassador to England in the eighteenth century had conferred grades and knowledge on students in England; these in their turn had handed on the rule and tradition to others, of whom one of the last was White, Grand Secretary of English Freemasonry from 1810-1857.[15]

The connection of General Rainsford with German Rosicrucian groups in the 1790's is also relevant to this information.

[14] For more information on the Bacstrom papers, see Ambix, 8 (October 1960).

[15] Wynn Westcott, Supreme Magus, History of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (London: private printing, 1900), p. 7.

An odd volume, preserved in the archives of the London Swedenborgian Society today, provides further evidence of an "Illuminati" group at work in London, associated with the Swedenborgians in the late 1790's. This is Dr. William Belcher's Intellectual Electricity Novum Organum of Vision and Grand Mystic System, . . . "by a Rational Mystic" (London, 1798). The title-page grandly proclaimed "the connection between the material and spiritual world elucidated; the medium of thought rendered visible; instinct seems advancing to Intuition; politics assume a form of Magical Intimation." The last line is a perfect description of Blake's technique of prophetic political utterance, and Belcher noted the good reception his papers had received at the New Jerusalem Temple. He found himself a "partial New Jerusalemite" through their similarities of ideas. Belcher knew the Cabala and called his theories "Mosaic Spinozism," and the parallels with some of Blake's most fervently held theories are striking. In a section which interprets sexual love and passion in electro-magnetic terms, Belcher made an amusing plea for greater liberty in love "in favor of the species in general" (see Belcher, pp. 64, 79, 118, 180). He concluded the uninhibited discussion by asserting:

> As well almost might Paracelsus make a man, without female aid, as can be acquired mystic knowledge without woman, the center of magnetic attraction. As woman forfeited paradise by premature curiosity, so, according to the contrast of nature it must be regained by her means. (p. 109)

To his plea for freedom of sexual love, he added a plea for female emancipation. Belcher concluded, though, that the "Illuminati are the only ones cultivating his field of science" (p. 27). It is interesting to speculate whether the French "Illuminatus," advocate of free love and equality, and master of the magnetic "ecstasy," Count Grabianka, met with Belcher and the sympathetic Swedenborgians when the Count visited London again in 1799.

Given the context of documented Rosicrucian, Illuminist activities among the London Swedenborgians in the 1790's and Lavater's Rosicrucian membership from 1794 on, Yeats's hypothesis about Blake's Rosicrucian membership is not the absurdity that critics have called it. Yeats wrote of Blake:

> There is reason to believe that he acquired at this time [1790-1793] some knowledge of the Cabala, and that he was not unacquainted with certain doctrines of the Rosicrucians. It is possible that he received initiation into an order of Christian Cabalists then established in London, and known as "The Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn." Of course this conjecture is not susceptible to proof. He would have said nothing about such initiation even if he had received it. (Ellis and Yeats, I, 24)

Yeats also referred to Cosway's special room for magical ceremonies, and in 1905 he added a significant name to Blake's conjectured Rosicrucian society: "He may also have met mystics and even students of magic, for there was an important secret body working in London under three brothers named Falk."[16]

Yeats's source for this information about Falk was undoubtedly in Masonic annals. In 1877, Kenneth Mackenzie, a Rosicrucian Freemason, published a confused but intriguing account of Falk in the Royal Masonic Cyclopedia (p. 212). Mackenzie said Falk came to England in 1780 (he actually came in 1742), and related the old Rosicrucian lamp and Goldsmid stories. Mackenzie later described a "Cain Chenul Falk or Dr.Falcon" who was the "eminent Rosicrucian" mentioned by Archenholz, and who had a son, Johann Friedrich Falk. The son was born at Hamburg and was a skilled Cabalist: "his

[16] J.A.Wittreich, Nineteenth-century Accounts of William Blake (Univ. of Wisconsin: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970), p. 269.

writings, hitherto unprinted, are preserved with great respect by all those who knew him." He was reported to have died around 1820, and was head of a Cabalistic College in London. He was a jeweller and appraiser of diamonds, but his "chief delight was in doing good, and his reward was in the affectionate regard bestowed upon him by a large circle of friends, whose minds he enlarged by his instructions, while his ample funds were always at their disposal" (Mackenzie, Masonic Cyclopedia, p. 627). Mackenzie did not know if he was related to "Rabbi de Falk," but assumed he probably was. Though other scholars on Dr.Falk have not mentioned a son, we have already seen from Elias Ashmole's role as a Rosicrucian "son" that Falk would have appointed a successor to maintain his Rosicrucian, Cabalistic tradition.

In 1900 Yeats' friend Wynn Westcott also discussed Dr.Falk and his Rosicrucian College in London in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

> This college certainly existed for many years, and a famous city Jewish medical man called Falk, or Dr.Falcon, was for a long period its head, but I have no evidence that the members of this college were Freemasons. This College also related to some mystic teachers in Germany who used mottoes instead of proper names and wrote R.C. after their names, and were as such Rosicrucians, and had descended for some generations from the 1614 Frateres Rosae-Crucis. (Westcott, p. 4)

In The Magus, Frances Barrett demonstrated his fervent Christian Cabalism, and it seems likely that he received his Cabalistic and Rosicrucian training from Dr.Falk or his Rosicrucian "son." Barrett noted his own skill in "the particular composition of talismanic rings," a talent Dr.Falk was famous for (Magus, I, 64). That Falk's supposed son, Johann Friedrich Falk, was a jeweller by profession may be significant here. In the section on "the Cabala or Ceremonial Magic," Barrett emphasized the rarity and secrecy of the highest Cabalistic training. He passed over "those

few secrets in the Cabala, which are amongst a few wise men, and communicated by word of mouth only":

> We are not permitted to divulge some certain things . . . all we solicit is, that those who perceive those secrets should keep them together as secrets, and not expose or babble them to the unworthy; but reveal them only to faithful, discreet, and chosen friends . . . therefore, if thou would be a magician, and gain fruit from this art, to be secret and to manifest to none, either thy work, or place, nor time, nor thy desire or will, except it be to a master or partner, who should likewise be faithful . . . and dignified by nature and education. (Magus, II, 33-34)

Barrett's heavy Christian emphasis from 1801 on will be discussed later, but the German Rosicrucian group which influenced the London order in the 1790's (called the Asian Brothers, and already discussed in connection with Lavater) was nonsectarian, drawing its symbolism from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Mackenzie, Masonic Cyclopedia, p. 56). Given Fuseli's and Lavater's connections with the German type of Rosicrucianism in the 1790's, perhaps Blake's remark in his Notebook about Fuseli referred to that early association:

> The only Man that e'er I knew
> Who did not make me almost spew
> Was Fuseli: he was both Turk and Jew--
> And so, dear Christian friends, how do you do?
> (Blake, CW, p. 551)

Before going on with the complex story of Frances Barrett and his occultist associates from 1801, it will be useful to trace the evidence of Rosicrucian and occult interest in the collaborative art works of Fuseli and Blake at the time of the Conjuror's Magazine publications from 1791 to 1793.[17] The two artists worked closely together from 1787 to 1792 on

[17] The magazine was taken over by a group of astrologers in August 1793, who changed the title to The Astrologer's Magazine, which ceased publication in Jan. 1794. See Ellic Howe, Astrology: a Recent History (New York: Walker, 1967), p. 24.

Lavater's Physiognomy and on Erasmus Darwin's Botanic Garden (published 1791-95). Significantly, Darwin was an enthusiastic Freemason,[18] and his collaborative work with Blake and Fuseli involved his occultist Masonic interpretations of various mythological and scientific traditions.

Darwin's work utilized complex Rosicrucian machinery, for which he cited Sir Francis Bacon's authority. As Darwin explained:

> The Rosicrucian doctrine of Gnomes, Sylphs, Nymphs and Salamanders was thought to afford a proper machinery for a Botanic poem; as it is probable that they were originally the names of hieroglyphical figures of the Elements or of Genii presiding over their operations. The Fairies of more modern days seem to have been derived from them, and to have inherited their powers.[19]

Darwin took a serious view of the Rosicrucian spirits as vital symbols of physiological and chemical processes (Tomory, p. 166). In the "Apology" to The Botanic Garden, Darwin added to his Rosicrucian comments:

> The Egyptians were possessed of many discoveries in philosophy and chemistry, before the invention of letters; these were then expressed in hieroglyphic paintings of men and animals; which after the discovery of the alphabet were described and animated by the poets, and became first the deities of Egypt, and afterwards of Greece and Rome.

Blake's use of the Nymph in Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793) and of the Fairy in Europe (1794) may have been influenced by Darwin's Rosicrucian theory, and certainly by 1804, Blake's repeated references to Rosicrucian gnomes, sylphs, genii, and

[18] Albert Gallatin Mackey, Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, rev. ed. by Robert I. Clegg (1845; Chicago: Masonic History Co., 1956), III, 1199.

[19] Erasmus Darwin, The Botanic Garden (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1807), p. 7.

salamanders in Jerusalem points to his continued interest in Rosicrucian "machinery."

While engraving for The Botanic Garden, Blake was also writing The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-93), in which Plate 11 seems to echo Darwin's "Egyptian" theory on the ancient gods, with a Rosicrucian or Cabalistic conclusion in the last line:

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged and numerous senses could perceive.
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city and country, placing it under its mental deity;
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, and enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
> And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (Blake, CW, p. 153)

On the next plate, 12, Blake opposed to Egyptian and Greek religion "the philosophy of the east," meaning Jewish philosophy, which "taught the first principles of perception." Ezekiel claimed that "we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all others are merely derivative" (Blake, CW, 153). Blake's reference is to the Cabalistic interpretation of the divinely creative imagination.

Darwin referred to the Cosways, who were repositories of much occultist lore, and his works abound with references to alchemy, "the Hermetic Art," and magical practices (Darwin, p. 29). A brief account of Blake's and Fuseli's contributions to The Botanic Garden will show their own eclectic and occultist orientation. Fuseli designed the frontispiece for the poem, entitled "Flora attired by the Elements," in which a Rosicrucian gnome thrusts up his arms to hold out jewels for

the earth. Fuseli repeated the motif of partially buried, uplifted arms in several pictures, as the symbol of a powerful primitive earth or water force, which is consistent with the Rosicrucian interpretation. Canto III deals with phenomena of water and is represented by the Rosicrucian Nymphs. To illustrate "The Fertilization of Egypt" by the Nile, Blake engraved a striking plate after Fuseli's sketch. Darwin's note explained that the rising of the dog-star, Sirius, and the flood-waters of the Nile coincided, so that the Egyptian priests hung the figure of the dog-headed god, Anubis, on the temple. The version of Blake and Fuseli made Anubis a powerful conjuration figure, and Blake himself added a sistrum, a musical instrument or rattle used in the worship of Isis. The importance of Sirius and Anubis to occultist and Egyptian rites of Freemasonry is discussed in many Masonic encyclopedias (see especially Waite and Mackenzie).

Keynes has proved that Blake engraved the four plates of the Portland Vase,[20] which Darwin interpreted as representing the Eleusinian mysteries. Darwin's discussion of the bonds of secrecy of the mysteries is interesting, as they provided a model for Masonic secrecy:

> Secrecy was the foundation on which all mysteries rested . . . This figure of secrecy [on the vase] seems to be here placed, with great ingenuity, as a caution to the initiated, who might understand the meaning of the emblems round the vase, not to divulge it. (Darwin, p. 58)

Raine has pointed out that Blake's "Funeral Urns of Beulah" in _The Four Zoas_ were probably similar to the Portland Vase (_Blake and Tradition_, I, 127). In _The Temple of Nature_ (published 1803), Darwin used the Eleusinian mysteries as the machinery of the poem, noting that in the mysteries the philosophy of nature and of the origin and progress of

20 Geoffrey Keynes, _Blake Studies_, 2nd ed. (1949; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 68-69.

society were taught "by allegoric scenery, explained by the hierophant to the initiated."[21] He also asked, "Might not such a dignified pantomime be contrived even in this age?" (Temple, I, 16), a significant question often discussed in Masonic groups which included the re-enactment of the Elusinian Mysteries in their initiation rites.

Interestingly, the Oriental scholar and Freemason, Thomas Maurice, whose publications in Asiatic Researches in the 1790's were read by Blake (Todd, pp. 31-37), and whom General Rainsford sought out for membership in his elite, Masonic group in 1797, published a long poem on the Eleusinian Mysteries in 1799, called "Grove Hill" (Hills, "Masonic Personalities," p. 148). Darwin's interpretation of Genesis in The Botanic Garden also accorded with the Masonic, Hermetic one, for he thought the story of "Eve from Adam's rib" originated with the Egyptian magi, who educated Moses and was "an hieroglyphic design of the Egyptian philosophers, showing that mankind was originally of both sexes united, and was afterwards divided into males and females" (I, 176).

Another of Fuseli's designs for The Botanic Garden (II, 71) became his most famous painting "The Nightmare," and it reveals Darwin's and Fuseli's interest in a theosophically interpreted "electric or nervous fluid," very similar to the "magnetic fluid" of Animal Magnetism. In "The Nightmare," as in so many of Fuseli's pictures, what he called "the moment of terror" is portrayed, as the oracular Pythoness Laura writhes under the pressure of a leering incubus, and a spectral horse partially emerges from the darkness. Fuseli's friend, John Aiken, discussed the "principle of terror" behind such supernatural scenes:

21 Erasmus Darwin, The Temple of Nature (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1807), Preface.

> A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind and keeps it on the stretch: and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced . . . of "forms unseen mightier far than we," our imagination darting forth explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy cooperating elevate the soul to its highest pitch, and the pain of terror is lost in amazement. (Tomory, p. 75)

In his verses to Fuseli's "Nightmare," Darwin described the potent images that disturb Laura's unconscious mind, which eventually erupt in her "automatic" oracular outbursts. His footnote described cases of sleep-walking and the activity of the subconscious when the will is suspended in sleep (II, 71-72). Another "scientific" note to the section discusses various plants involved in witchcraft, including Enchanter's Nightshade, Druid mistletoe, Mandrakes, as well as the recent craze for Divining Rods; significantly, Darwin concluded:

> And in this very year, there were many in France, and some in England, who underwent an enchantment without any divining rod at all, and believed themselves to be affected by an invisible agent, which the Enchanter called Animal Magnetism! (II, 69)

That Fuseli and Darwin related their picture and verse description of the "moment of terror," when the "agency of invisible beings is introduced," to the claimed phenomena of Animal Magnetism is important, for their own concept of a vitalistic fluid was almost the same. In his Poetical Works (re-issued by Joseph Johnson in 1800, with several plates re-engraved by Blake), Darwin suggested that if a paralytic limb could be made to move by electric shock, this might indicate "some analogy between the electric fluid and the nervous fluid, which is separated from the blood by the brain, and thence diffused along the nerves for the purpose of motion and sensation" (Tomory, p. 125). Darwin's concept was influenced by Joseph Priestley, a friend of himself and Fuseli. Blake was

probably also acquainted with Priestley's theories, for Priestley often visited the Birmingham Swedenborgian Society in 1791, and then carried on a correspondence with Hindmarsh about Swedenborgian versus Unitarian tenets. The occultist interpretation of Priestley's concept of "phlogiston" by the Mesmerists in France has already been noted. Priestley suggested that "all the operations of electricity depend upon one fluid _sui generis_, extremely subtile and elastic, dispersed through the pores of all bodies" (Tomory, p.125). The disruption of the equilibrium of the positive and negative forces of the electric fluid resulted in a flash of light or fluidic energy. As Tomory notes, Fuseli's "moment of terror" thus becomes a violent electrical discharge, but based on an electrical fluid that is supernatural, psychical, and physiological, as well as "scientific."

Fuseli extended the concept of a universal electrical fluid to his artistic treatment of fairies, in which the notion of "mimic dreams" swimming in "fluid air" created his highly evocative "spacescapes," in which dim, gradually appearing supra-natural figures emerge (Tomory, pp. 99, 107). Curiously, an 1827 engraving of Fuseli's "Nightmare" included a strange group of tiny fairies on Laura's dressing table (Tomory, plate 222). Fuseli's portrayals of the moment of terror, when the mind is "kept on the stretch" until a break-through of supernatural vision is achieved, are perhaps the clearest pictorial representations we have of a state equivalent to the "magnetic ecstasy," in which both the condition of the visionary and the vision are eerily evoked. If Fuseli, a trained entomologist who worried about Lavater's sweeping, unscientific generalizations, would have preferred the term "electrical ecstasy" instead, the phenomena are still strikingly similar.

Fuseli's interest in Rosicrucian theories is further demonstrated in his painting "The Rosicrucian Cavern,"

completed in 1803, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1804, and engraved by William Sharp for the 1805 edition of The Spectator. The "moment of terror" here was captured as the Rosicrucian brother who opened Christian Rosencreuz' tomb was attacked by a miraculous brass statue who shattered the perpetual lamp. Tomory makes out an interesting case that Fuseli's picture probably inspired Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), for she was interested in Darwin's Rosicrucian machinery and strange experiments, and admired Fuseli's Rosicrucian painting (Tomory, pp. 204-205).

From 1800 until 1803, at the urging of his concerned friends Flaxman and Fuseli, Blake moved to Felpham, where despite his friends' admonitions he continued to deliberately induce the visionary states which became the substance of his giant prophecies, Vala. or the Four Zoas (1795-1804), Milton (1804), and Jerusalem (1804-1820). That Blake's mental condition before going to Felpham worried himself as well as his friends is evidenced by his note to George Cumberland on 2 July 1800: "I began to Emerge from a Deep Pit of Melancholy, Melancholy without any real reason for it, a Disease which God keep from you and all good men"; he then regretted the "few friends I have dared to visit in my stupid melancholy" (Blake, CW, p. 798). Whether Blake's almost manic depressions were linked to his practice of visionary trance techniques needs new investigation, for certainly during the period when his friends worried, he was holding daily converse with angels and spirits of the dead. Writing to William Hayley to express appreciation for his invitation to Felpham, Blake noted:

> My Angels have told me that seeing such visions I could not subsist on the Earth,
> But by my conjunction with Flaxman, who knows how to forgive Nervous Fear. (Blake, CW, p. 799)

Flaxman's long familiarity with Animal Magnetism has already been noted, especially through his lifelong Swedenborgian

participation. A valuable clue to the nature of Blake's visions is his note to Hayley (16 September 1800), from Lambeth, that "My fingers emit sparks of fire with expectation of my future labours" (Blake, CW, p. 801). W.C. Dendy, who was interested in Blake and Animal Magnetism in 1843, noted the many descriptions by magnetised patients of a blue fluid streaming from the fingers of the magnetiser. Others called it a blue flame and described sparks of light. The famous magnetiser Dupotet claimed to feel a sensation at the point of his fingers resembling the "aura from diffused electricity" (Dendy, pp. 406-423). Significantly, Coleridge, who was also fascinated by and practised Animal Magnetism, wrote of a similar phenomenon occurring in himself circa 1801:

> I have myself once seen (i.e. appeared to see) my own body under the bed cloaths flashing silver light from whatever part I prest it--and the same proceed from the tips of my fingers. I have thus written, as it were, my name, Greek words, cyphers, etc. on my thigh: and instantly seen them, together with the thigh in brilliant letters of silver light. (Bentley, Records, p. 73)

Blake's letters during the Felpham period provide a fascinating glimpse of his visions and of the "automatic" nature of his epic poems. He wrote Flaxman that at Felpham the "voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen." To another Swedenborgian, Thomas Butts, he described "My first Vision of Light" when every grain of sand fused into a giant Man, who folded Blake into his bosom. The similarity of Blake's description to Abulafia's discussion of trance-techniques which stimulate the vision of one's Master and to Swedenborg's vision of the giant figure who swept him up is significant here. Another letter to Butts described Blake's visions of his dead father and brothers "in a black cloud . . . Though dead, they appear on my path" (see Blake, CW, pp. 802, 804, 817).

That Blake's states of visionary exaltation, which are echoed in nearly all accounts of "magnetic ecstasy" and "somnambulistic lucidity," also gave him much trouble, he confided to Butts:

> I labour incessantly and accomplish not one half of what I intend, because my abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over Mountains and Valleys, which are not Real, in a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander. This I endeavour to prevent with my whole might . . . Who shall deliver me from this Spirit of Abstraction and Improvidence? (CW, p. 809)

To Butts, he also noted his "Spiritual Enemies of such formidable magnitude," and the great perils of his travels through the Spirit World (pp. 811, 815). Blake explained to Butts that he could not do his pictures over again, "because they were done in the heat of My Spirits." He admitted to some fears about the commands of the Spirits, but finally concluded that it would be worse to ignore them. He then described his difficult "spiritual state":

> If we fear to do the dictates of our Angels and tremble at the Tasks set before us; if we refuse to do Spiritual Acts because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!--I too well remember the Threats I heard!--If you, who are organized by Divine Providence for Spiritual Communion, Refuse, and bury your Talent in the Earth, . . . Every-one in Eternity will leave you . . . Such words would make any stout man tremble, and how then could I be at ease? But I am now no longer in That State. (p.823)

The next spring, Blake wrote Butts about his immense poem, descriptive of his "Spiritual Acts" from 1800 to 1803. He said the Persons and Machinery are "entirely new to the Inhabitants of Earth (some of the Persons excepted)," and affirmed the automatic nature of the script:

> I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation and even against my Will . . . an immense Poem exists which seems to be Labour of a long Life, all produc'd without Labour or Study. (p. 832)

He again wrote Butts that he might praise his Grand Poem, "since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary; the Authors are in Eternity" (p.825). As noted earlier, Richard Brothers, who studied trance-techniques under Count Grabianka at Avignon, described his visions and automatic script in the same way. The Manchester Swedenborgian John Clowes, who often visited Jacob Duché and the London Society, also saw visions and wrote by spirit-dictation. That Blake was associated sometime between 1804 and 1811 with another group of magnetisers, one of whom also wrote of spirit-dictated poetry produced in a magnetic trance, will be discussed later.

But there is also much evidence in Blake's Felpham poetry of his experience of magnetic trance-conditions. As described earlier, one of the phenomena of the magnetic ecstasy was the vision of one's own inner physiological structure, a sense of the inner self being enlarged and externalized. Magnetic "diagnoses" were often effected by the entranced person's also viewing the insides of a diseased person in magnetic rapport with him. In The Four Zoas, which Blake worked on from 1795 to 1804, he described just such a phenomenon: "Their eyes, ears, nostrils, tongues roll outward, they behold /What is within now seen without" (p. 281). Blake noted in Milton that "man cannot know/What passes in his members till periods of Space and Time/Reveal the secrets of Eternity" (p. 503). What the vision into one's "members" reveals are "the Four States of Humanity in its Repose":

> The First State is in the Head, the Second is in the Heart,
> The Third in the Loins and Seminal Vessels, and the Fourth
> In the Stomach and Intestines terrible, deadly, unutterable.
> And he whose Gates are opened in those Regions of his Body
> Can from those Gates view all these wondrous Imaginations.
> (p. 524)

Similarly, in Jerusalem, when Los opens his visionary furnaces (within the stomach of the Grand Man), the Spectre "saw now from the outside what before he saw and felt within" (p. 627).

Another of the magnetiser's techniques was borrowed from Swedenborg, who learned it from Cabalistic and Yogic practices. This was the controlled breathing which slowed down the heartbeat and thus limited the supply of oxygen to the brain, stimulating psychic visions of light and spirits. This phenomenon is possibly described by Blake's beautiful lines in Milton:

> . . . Every Moment has a Couch of gold for soft repose,
> (A Moment equals a pulsation of the artery),
> And between every two Moments stands a Daughter of Beulah . . .
>
> Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
> Is Equal in its period and value to Six Thousand Years,
> For in this period the Poet's Work is Done; and all the Great
> Events of Time start forth and are conceiv'd in such a Period,
> Within a Moment, a Pulsation of the Artery. (p. 516)

As Blake continued to describe the visionary potency of the space between the pulsations of the artery, he mentioned another phenomenon of the magnetisers--the potency of the epigastric region:

> . . . every Space smaller than a Globule of Man's blood opens
> Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow.
> The red Globule is the universal Sun by Los created
> To measure Time and Space to mortal Men every morning.
> Bowlahoola and Allamanda are placed on each side
> Of that Pulsation and that Globule, terrible their power.
> (pp. 516-17)

The importance of the abdominal "equator" or epigastric region to the magnetisers has already been discussed. The stimulation of the "ganglion of nerves" centered there, which produced an ecstatic condition simultaneously with psychic visions, is perhaps the source of Blake's concept of Bowlahoola and Allamanda, two of the regions of vision within his giant, macrocosmic figure of Albion:

> In Bowlahoola Los' Anvils stand and his Furnaces rage;
> Thundering and hammers beat and bellows blow loud,
>
> . . . .

> Bowlahoola through all its porches feels, tho' too fast
> founded
> Its pillars and porticoes to tremble at the force
> Of mortal or immortal arm: and softly lilting flutes,
> Accordant with the horrid labours, make sweet melody.
> The Bellows are the Animal Lungs: the Hammers the
> Animal Heart:
> The Furnaces the Stomach for digestion: terrible their fury.
> . . . .
> Bowlahoola is the Stomach in every individual man.
> (p. 509)

That Los, Blake's spirit of prophetic vision, works through the lungs, heart, and stomach, is consistent with the roles of these organs within Animal Magnetism.

The third visionary region, on the other side of "That pulsation and that globule," is Allamanda, which Blake explained as "the sense of Touch" (p. 514). Allamanda is thus probably the third state of Humanity, "in the Loins and Seminal Vessels," and contributes its own kind of ecstasy to the visionary moment. As Blake noted, "Were it not for Bowlahoola and Allamanda/No Human Form but only a Fibrous Vegetation;/A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision" (p. 509). But with both sensitive areas stimulated,

> . . . Every Generated Body in its inward form
> is a garden of delight and a building of magnificence
> Built by the Sons of Los in Bowlahoola and Allamanda
> . . . .
> But not by Natural, but by Spiritual power alone. (p. 512)

The primary seat of vision, however, is the four-fold city of Golgonooza, the city within the skull (<u>golgos</u>), which subsumes those of heart, abdomen, and loins into the highest visionary bliss.

Blake's description in <u>Jerusalem</u> of his own state while "in the visions" is suggestive of the famed <u>crisis</u> or convulsion of the magnetisers, when the entranced person saw visions and was relieved of his previous tensions and turbulence:

> Trembling I sit day and night, my friends are astonished
> at me,
> Yet they forgive my wanderings. I rest not from my
> great task,
> To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
> Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.
> O Savior . . .
> Guide thou my hand, which trembles exceedingly upon the
> rock of ages,
> When I write of the building of Golgonooza. (p. 623)

In Milton, Blake described his over-powering vision of Ololon's descent "into the Fires of Intellect that rejoic'd in Felpham's Vale," through which his mind expanded into the Universe:

> Terror struck in the Vale, I stood at that Immortal sound.
> My bones trembled, I fell outstretch'd upon the path
> A moment, and my Soul return'd into its mortal state
> To Resurrection and Judgment in the Vegetable Body,
> And my sweet Shadow of Delight stood trembling by my side.
> (p. 534)

Blake trained his wife, the "Shadow of Delight," to see visions too, which drove George Cumberland, their lifelong friend, to aver in 1815 that though Blake was "a little cracked," his wife was "the maddest of the two" (Keynes, "Cumberland," p. 47).

That others of Blake's artistic and engraver friends worried about these often convulsive visions was revealed by Blake himself:

> I come in Self-Annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration
> . . . .
> To cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration
> That it no longer shall dare to mock with aspersion of
> Madness
> Cast on the Inspired by the tame high finisher of
> paltry blots. (p. 553)

It must also be remembered that at this time Richard Brothers was also issuing prophecies and architectural plans received in magnetic vision, and that one of Joanna Southcott's followers, William Prescott, was receiving wide publicity for his

naive and rude, but highly imaginative, paintings from his own trance-visions.[22] That Blake was classed with these other seers by many of his contemporaries was implied by Tatham's defense of Blake against such charges (Bentley, Records, p. 520).

Another aspect of Blake's visionary experiences, in the 1790's at Lambeth and from 1800-1803 at Felpham, has been briefly discussed in connection with "Allamanda," the sense of touch. The highly sexual nature of Blake's concept of vision has often been pointed out, but it has not been examined in the light of his Cabalistic and magnetic training. As noted earlier, there were rumours of "frivolous erotic practices" among the London Swedenborgians when Grabianka was instructing them in Cabalistic and Mesmeric techniques. In the previous discussion of the Cabalistic sex trance, the similarity of the erotic-visionary technique to that of Indian Tantric practices was noted. In the Tantric art, the orgasm is interrupted and sustained in order to divert the sexual energy and pleasure into a more spiritual and psychic mode.[23] As Rexroth remarked, to the Cabalists, the ultimate sacrament is the sexual act, carefully organised and sustained as the most perfect mystical trance (in Waite, Kabbalah, p. ix). That Blake believed in and tried to practice these techniques is evident throughout his works from 1790 on.

From 1790 to 1800, Blake lived at Lambeth, around the corner from Jacob Duché's gatherings of occultists, Illuminés,

[22] Eugene P. White, A Catalogue of the Joanna Southcott Collections at the University of Texas (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1968), p.66.

[23] See Max-Pol Fouchet, The Erotic Sculpture of India (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959).

and Swedenborgians, which continued after Duché's departure for America in 1792 under the auspices of other Swedenborgians at the Asylum. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, written during his Lambeth days, Blake affirmed that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul in this age" (p. 149). He also voiced the Cabalistic doctrine that "by an improvement of sensual enjoyment," man will regain the Tree of Life, and "the whole Creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy" (p. 154). In Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), Blake used the Cabalistic symbol of degraded lust ("the adulterate pair/Bound back to back"), complained of the repression of passion among frightened women, and yearned for an emancipated time of mutual "lovely copulation, bliss on bliss" (pp. 190, 195).

That sexual stimulation was connected with psychic or visionary experiences for Blake as early as 1793 is revealed in a verse fragment written then, in which a Fairy expresses his contempt for female clothing, "whatever hides the Female form/ That cannot bear the Mental Storm" (p. 183). It seems obvious that not only Mrs.Blake but Blake himself had problems with their sexual experiences, and Blake's many bitter comments in his 1793 Notebook reflect Mrs.Blake's inhibitions and fears, as well as possible sexual failure on Blake's part (pp. 161, 162, 182). The sardonic poem, "I saw a chapel all of gold," in which a phallic serpent forces the chapel doors and vomits his poison out on the altar (p. 163), should be read in the context of Blake's Cabalistic sketches of the naked female, with the Arc of the Covenant as her genitals (see Raine, Blake and Tradition, I, 196).

The Cabalistic or Tantric sustained, visionary orgasm required great discipline and training, and, after all, was reserved for the most elite adepts. In "The Human Image," Blake referred to the Tree of Knowledge or Death, which grows in the human brain, which the Cabalists saw as the enemy of

the marriage of the Lord and Matronit, which is stimulated by the perfect conjugal sexual act. In the Book of Los (1795), Blake described the state of erotic bliss which leads to the consummation of the "tinctures" or the experience of Wisdom (in the Cabalistic and Boehmenist sense):

> When I found babes of bliss on my beds
> And bosoms of milk in my chambers
> Fill'd with eternal seeds . . .
> Swell'd with ripeness and fat with fatness,
> Bursting on winds, my odors,
> My ripe figs and rich pomegranates . . .
> Then thou with thy lapful of seed . . .
> Walked forth from the clouds of morning . . .
> On the human soul to cast
> The seed of eternal science. (p. 255)

Blake's most explicit use of Cabalistic sexual theories was in Vala, or the Four Zoas (dated 1797, but written and revised from 1795 to 1804), which he never published. Since The Four Zoas (the more famous name) also contains some of the "illuminated" theories of Richard Brothers, overt Cabalistic terminology, and apparent Masonic symbolism, the graphic portrayal of Cabalistic sexual practices suggests Blake's possible study of these things within a secret Masonic, occultist group. Unfortunately, John Linnell, one of Blake's later friends, thought The Four Zoas was obscene and erased many of the drawings. In the poem, Blake described man's fall from the original, androgynous unity, from which Jerusalem (or the Shekinah), goes into exile: "Jerusalem, his Emanation, is become a ruin . . . led captive and scattered into all nations" (p. 279). As the fall into sexual division proliferated throughout the universe, Los' female emanation closed and barred the sexual gate, "Lest Los should enter into Beulah thro' her beautiful gates." The sacredness of the sexual gate was stressed by Blake's illustration to the lines, "a tabernacle of delight," which portrays a nude, crowned woman with a tabernacle covering her genitals (pp. 279, 266). This figure of the woman appears again above

Urizen, as he preaches his religion of abstinence.[24] The perverseness of chastity to the Cabalist is shown in several drawings. A woman visits a youth in his dreams and kneels over his naked, impassioned form, and though partially erased, she seems a Lilith figure, who functioned in Cabalistic lore as a punisher of masturbation or "unnatural" sexual expression. Other monstrous forms, engendered by the tortures of chastity, include a bat-winged woman embracing a hugh phallos.

Fuseli's powerful erotic drawings from this same period, including a winged phallos-bird, should be compared with Blake's drawings, for both seem to draw on Cabalistic myths. Another sketch of Blake's, "The Perversion of Women through Abstinence," shows nude women kneeling and uprooting mandrakes. Both Blake and Fuseli viewed the mandrake as an occult, sexual talisman, and Fuseli's early version of "The Witch and the Mandrake" (1785) led Walpole to diagnose madness in the artist; Fuseli, though, continued to use the symbol (Tomory, p. 123). Blake's 1793 version of The Gates of Paradise, Plate 1, shows a woman carrying a baby who plucks a mandrake from the foot of a tree, and he apparently used it as the same "talismanic instrument" that Fuseli did.

After graphically describing in picture and verse the degradation of man's imaginative and sexual life after the Fall, Blake described the Cabalistic method of regenerating body and soul:

> If we unite in one, another better world will be
> Open'd within your heart and loins and wondrous brain,
> Threefold, as it was in Eternity, and this, the fourth
>   Universe,
> Will be Renew'd by the three and consummated in Mental Fires.
> (p. 329)

The illustration to these lines shows a supine male

24 see S. Foster Damon, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1924), p. 401.

nude, with an erection, symbolized as flames in the verses (Damon, p. 401). Waite described the Cabalistic belief that Blake apparently drew on:

> The original generation of souls was in separation as male and female, and this distinction will continue to be maintained in the eternal world by the mode of simple reunion in companionship, plus a transcendental intercourse the rapture of which is increased by a visual contemplation of God and his Shekinah, who is also God. (HK, p. 592).

By 1795, when Blake was working on The Four Zoas, he also knew of Richard Brothers and referred to his theories of Albion the Ancient Man and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, which were hidden among the English people. Blake noted that "Reuben slept on Penmaenmawr and Levi slept on Snowden," and recounted the flight of all the tribes from Los, their imaginative center (pp. 281, 350). His usage of Brothers' ideas raises the possibility that Blake's Four Zoas and Four-fold Temple could have been influenced by the same Count Grabianka who influenced Brothers. Grabianka had taught the London Swedenborgians the doctrine of Quaternité, which included a potent female sexual principle, and he built a four-fold Swedenborgian Temple in his Masonic lodge at Avignon, where Brothers studied. Blake spent the years from 1790 to 1800 at Lambeth, where Grabianka maintained his contacts with Jacob Duché's family until 1792, and possibly kept them up among the Swedenborgians who replaced Duché at the Orphan Asylum.

Given Brothers' and Grabianka's Masonic involvement, Blake's use of Masonic symbolism in The Four Zoas becomes significant. Most Blake critics interpret Urizen, "the Grand Architect," as monolithically evil, but The Four Zoas makes clear that Urizen in himself is a vital "Zoa" or life-force, and that he is only evil when he disrupts the equilibrium of his relation to the other Zoas. Luvah, too often viewed simplistically as a "good" Zoa, describes the

discords which arise when the Cabalistic balance is broken:

> . . . we all go to our Eternal Death,
> To our Primeval Chaos, in fortuitous concourse of incoherent
> Discordant principles of Love and Hate. I suffer affliction
> Because I love, for I was love, but hatred awakens in me,
> And Urizen, who was Faith and Certainty, is chang'd to Doubt.
> (p. 282)

But as Urizen, "first born Son of light," and Luvah strive for dominance, they disrupt the equilibrium within man:

> . . . measur'd out in order'd spaces, the Sons of Urizen
> With compasses divide the deep; they the strong scales erect
> That Luvah rent from the faint Heart of the Fallen Man,
> And weigh the massy cubes, then fix them in their awful
> stations. (p. 283)

The scales refer to the Cabalistic "balance," that state of perfect, ecstatic harmony within the human heart or psyche, and are also a major Masonic symbol. That Luvah wrenched them from man's heart shows the disruption of the passions in the fallen world.

The compasses used to divide the deep by Urizen's sons are the dominant symbol of Freemasonry, and had already been portrayed in Blake's magnificent frontispiece to _Europe_ (1794), in which the Great Architect looms over Creation with his golden compasses. Blake's call to revolution "in the vineyards of red France" (p. 245), coupled with the famous Masonic symbol, would certainly have been interpreted as an Illuminatist text by many of his contemporaries. Waite points out that the Masonic emblem draws upon the Cabala, especially upon Knorr von Rosenroth's _Kabbala Denudata_. In one seventeenth-century work, "there is a curious _Figura Cabalae_, where the light from _Ens Entium_ falls on a bearded figure holding the compass in the right and the square in the left hand" (_HK_, p. 539). Blake may have had access to Rosenroth's emblem, for Benedict Chastanier himself studied it during the years when he and Blake were in the Swedenborg Society. Blake drew the picture of the Great Architect from a vision which hovered

over the top of his staircase at Lambeth, and on his death-bed he colored a copy of it in the excitement of ecstasy. As Damon notes, his choice of subject at such a moment is significant; "he was testing his powers to discover his worthiness of entering at last the Eternity of Imagination" (Damon, p. 347).

Blake's interest in the Grand Architect figure thus seems more complex than most criticism implies. As restrictive reason, Urizen is obviously a negative figure, and his compasses circumscribe a limited world. But Blake also asserted that the creation of the material world set limits to the Fall and thus prevented man from becoming a non-entity. Blake described the Divine Architect's construction of a magnificent Temple in the fallen world:

> . . . Urizen comforted saw
> The wondrous work flow forth like visible out of invisible;
> For the Divine Lamb, even Jesus who is the Divine Vision,
> Permitted all, lest Man should fall into Eternal Death.
> (p. 287)

Urizen's workers also created the stars of heaven "like a golden chain/To bind the Body of Man to heaven from falling into the Abyss" (p. 287). The golden chain is another Masonic symbol.

But in the deterioration of the Fall, Urizen's building of the Temple becomes an attempt to dominate over the other Zoas, and in the ensuing struggle, "Rent from Eternal Brotherhood we die and are no more" (p. 293). Universal Brotherhood is the major credo of Freemasonry and without it, Urizen's Temple becomes an inversion of the ideal Masonic Temple, in which man re-harmonizes his warring elements and achieves that tincture or blissful equilibrium of the soul described by the Cabalists and Boehme. Thus, Blake's description of Urizen's architectural work, after his battles with the other Zoas, is an inverted vision of the Masonic ideal:

> . . . he commanded his Sons to found a Center in the Deep;
> And Urizen laid the first Stone, and all his myriads
> Builded a Temple in the image of the human heart.
> And in the inner part of the Temple, wondrous workmanship,
> They form'd the Secret Place, reversing All the order of
> delight,
> That whosoever entered the Temple might not behold
> The hidden wonders, allegoric of the Generations
> Of secret lust. (p. 333)

Waite explains how speculative Masonry intimates that the Holy House or Cabalistic Temple, "which was planned and begun after one manner, was completed after another and a word of death was substituted for a word of life" (Freemasonry, p. 418).

With Urizen's failure to build the Temple of the Grand Man, the task falls to Los, the poetic imagination, to re-integrate the human vision. In many ways, Los is similar to Hiram Abif, the Biblical figure who came from Tyre to help Solomon build the Temple. Hiram was a metal-worker, engraver, and blacksmith, and was developed in Masonic legend as a type of Christ, who was murdered by his fellow workmen while re-building the "living temple." The name of Hiram was interpreted as an anagram--Homo Iesus Redemptor AnimaruM. De Quincey pointed out that English Rosicrucians elevated Hiram into their prime symbol ("Freemasonry", p. 424). In Milton, Blake definitely refers, though indirectly, to Hiram Abif, when Milton "took of the red clay of succoth" and molded new flesh on the petrified bones of cold Urizen (p.500). In I Kings VII, 46, the Scripture reads, "Of Succoth clay Hiram had various utensils made for the Temple." Interestingly, Chapter VII of Kings is the major source of the Masonic legend of Hiram Abif. There is also critical speculation that Los' name, like Hiram's, is an anagram, probably for Sol, a major alchemical symbol.

Like a magnetised visionary, Los has sparks issuing from his hair (p. 301), and he tries to salvage the imbalance and discords brought on by the Zoas' wars: "Then Los with

terrible hand seiz'd on the Ruin'd Furnaces/ Of Urizen: Enormous work, he builded them anew." As Los struggles with his hammer and furnaces, molding his metals into the Four-fold city of Golgonooza, the spirit of Revolution, in the figure of the fiery Orc, is growing into turbulent puberty (p. 307). This connection of the rebuilding of the Temple, within the individual and society, with the coming of the millenial Revolution is even more explicit in the last chapter of The Four Zoas:

> Los and Enitharmon builded Jerusalem . . .
> The thrones of Kings are shaken, they have lost their robes and crowns,
> The poor smite their oppressors, they awake up to the harvest
>
> ....
>
> And all the while the trumpet sounds, "Awake ye dead and come
> To Judgment! from the clotted gore and from the hollow den
> Start forth the trembling millions into flames of mental fire,
> Bathing their limbs in the bright visions of Eternity."
> (pp. 357-358)

The prophetic poem concludes with a call to "Brotherhood and Universal Love" (p. 374).

Thus, Blake may not have published The Four Zoas because of the explicit sexual drawings, or because of the political implications of his neo-Masonic, "illuminated" symbolism. Whether Blake intended it as such or not, the witch-hunters for suspected Illuminati would certainly have recognized the similarity to other prophetic, Masonic calls for revolution. After all, Richard Brothers was arrested for treason for almost the same kind of prophecies in 1795, the year Blake started The Four Zoas, and remained in confinement on a trumped-up insanity charge until 1806.

The questions raised by the Masonic symbolism of The Four Zoas bring us back to Francis Barrett's Rosicrucian group, whose Masonic origin was attested to by several sources.

Godfrey Higgins (1773-1833), an antiquarian, Freemason, and Druid theorist, noted in his Anacalypsis (1833), that years earlier he refused to join a Rosicrucian society in London because the Rosicrucians, like the Templars, had become an exclusively Christian order:

> On this account they are thought, by many persons, to be only a bastard kind of Masons. They are real Masons, and they ought to be of that . . . universal Christianity or Creestianity which includes Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins, Mohammedans. (quoted in Waite, Rosicrucians, p. 415)

Though the German Rosicrucians who influenced the London society in the 1790's were a tolerant, non-sectarian group, Barrett's Cabalism became stridently Christian by 1801. In the Preface to The Magus, Barrett affirmed that "the true magician is the truest Christian," and his concluding essay proved that "the first Christians were magicians, who foretold, acknowledged, and worshipped the Saviour of the World and First Founder of Christian Religion" (II, 141). If Blake was connected with this Rosicrucian society, it would perhaps explain his curious ambivalence toward the Jews, for he used their Cabalistic traditions throughout his works but vilified the Old Testament conception of Jehovah and the restrictive Torah. Blake's "Address to the Jews" in Jerusalem, his most Cabalistic poem, claimed that the Jews received the Cabala from the Druids, and concluded with a call for the Jews to take up the cross and follow Jesus (CW, pp. 649, 652). Blake's position may also have been influenced by Richard Brothers, who Judaized Christians and Christianized Jews, and maintained his connections with occultist Freemasonry.

The connection of Barrett's Rosicrucian society with Freemasonry was further attested by Wynn Westcott's history of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, which was formed in 1865. Westcott recounted how the eminent Freemason William Henry White came into possession of certain Rosicrucian

papers in 1810, when he attained office at Freemason's Hall. The papers consisted of manuscripts of ritual information and were hidden in the vaults of the Hall. White carefully preserved them but Westcott thought he made no use of them (Westcott, p. 6). As mentioned before, T.F.Ravenshaw wrote that White himself was initiated into Rosicrucianism in the early nineteenth century by adepts from Germany. The Rosicrucian papers proved that the Order was strongly Christian, which caused the members to hide the papers from 1813 on, when the Duke of Sussex became Grand Master of English Freemasonry. Sussex favored the Unitarian doctrine and "did all in his power to remove the Christian grades from notice" (Westcott, p. 7).

A final bit of evidence showing that the London Rosicrucians were a schism of Freemasonry was pointed out by Gould, who noted that Barrett's "magical alphabet" was identical with Masonic symbols. Barrett's hieroglyphics were the same as "the square characters which had been used as mason's marks at certain epochs, and on part of so-called Masonic symbols" (Gould, II, 248). This Masonic source for Barrett's alphabet is significant, for Yeats pointed out Blake's own use of a similar system:

> He [Blake] used Hebrew characters on some of his designs, which show that he had learned the unfamiliar way of writing them, known to some occult students as the "Celestial Alphabet." (Ellis and Yeats, I, 25)

Southey also noted that some Swedenborgians used a "Celestial Alphabet," "in which every letter signifies a complete thing . . . and every flexure and curvature of every curvature of every letter, contains some secret of wisdom." He added that the visionaries could thus "make thought visible" (Southey, Letters, p. 127-128). One occultist Swedenborgian and Freemason who probably would have known the Masonic alphabet was Ebenezer Sibley, who apparently was the source of the

nativity of Napoleon contributed to The Magus (II, 201), for Barrett said it came from "the most eminent astrologer of the day." That Sibley undoubedly held that position is substantiated in Naylor's history of astrology.[25]

In examining the traces of Rosicrucian and Masonic symbolism in Blake's works after 1801, one finds in Milton brief references to Rosicrucian gnomes and genii (pp. 487-488, 493), and then a long confusing account of their revolutionary role in Blake's historical cosmology:

> Towards America, India rose up from his golden bed
> As one awaken'd in the night; they saw the Lord coming
> In the clouds of Ololon with Power, and great Glory.
> And all the Living Creatures of the Four Elements wail'd
> With bitter wailing; these in the aggregate are named Satan
> And Rahab; they know not of Regeneration but only of
> Generation:
> The Fairies, Nymphs, Gnomes, and Genii of the Four Elements,
> Unforgiving and unalterable, these cannot be Regenerated
> But must be Created, for they know only of Generation:
> These are the Gods of the Kingdoms of the Earth, in
> contrarious
> And cruel opposition, Element against Element, opposed in War
> Not Mental, as the Wars of Eternity, but a Corporeal strife
> In Los's Halls, continual labouring in the Furnaces of
> Golgonooza
> Orc howls on the Atlantic: Enitharmon trembles: All
> Beulah weeps. (pp. 519-520)

This cryptic and difficult passage implies a positive attitude to the Rosicrucian elements as lower spiritual beings who are necessary to the turbulence of revolution. Their positive nature seems borne out by the next passages, with the lovely, and surprisingly simple, lines about the Lark leading all the birds in a hymn of joy, vibrating with "the effluence divine" (p.520). Denis Saurat believed that Blake wrote for an audience of fellow initiates,[26] a theory that Yeats agreed with:

[25] P.I.H.Naylor, Astrology: an Historical Investigation (London: Robert Maxwell, 1967), p. 104.

[26] Denis Saurat, "Blake et les Celtomanes," Modern Philology, 23 (1925).

"He is one of those great artificers of God who uttered truths to a little clan," for the "language of the books themselves is extremely technical" (in Wittreich, pp. 270-271). Certainly the passage above on the Rosicrucian elements seems to be densely packed with occult, technical language.

There are also specific Masonic allusions in Milton, such as "the red clay of Succoth," already noted, the repetition of "Universal Brotherhood," and the importance of rebuilding the Temple within the human body and spirit. One description of architecture, the most prestigious art in Freemasonry, is important, for it shows that Blake's attitude to architecture is not as negative as assumed by most critics:

> But in Eternity the Four Arts, Poetry, Painting, Music
> And Architecture, which is Science, are the Four Faces
> of Man.
> Not so in Time and Space: there Three are shut out,
> and only
> Science remains thro' Mercy, and by means of Science
> the Three
> Became apparent in Time and Space in the Three Professions,
> Poetry in Religion: Music in Law: Painting in Physic
> and Surgery:
> That Man may live upon Earth till the time of his
> awakening,
> And from these Three Science derives every Occupation of
> Men,
> And Science is divided into Bowlahoola and Allamanda.
> (p. 514)

This confusing "definition" of the science of architecture as a merciful act gains some significance from its relation to the physiological areas stimulated in the magnetic-trance, as a possible reference to the role of the epigastric and sexual systems (Bowlahoola and Allamanda) in re-building the human Temple. Again, the passage almost seems an occult code.

In Jerusalem, Blake's use of the Rosicrucian elements was more extensive and apparently more ritualistic:

> And sixty-four thousand Genii guard the Eastern Gate,
> And sixty-four thousand Gnomes guard the Northern Gate,
> And sixty-four thousand Nymphs guard the Western Gate,
> And sixty-four thousand Fairies guard the Southern Gate.
> (p. 633)

Now the Rosicrucian elements are clearly defined as a fallen form of the Four Zoas:

> And the Four Zoas, who are the Four Eternal Senses of Man,
> Became Four Elements separating from the Limbs of Albion:
> These are their names in the Vegetative Generation
>
> ....
>
> Fairies and Genii and Nymphs and Gnomes of the Elements:
> These are States Permanently Fixed by the Divine Power.
> (p. 663)

In Jerusalem, Blake also referred to "the Cities of the Salamandrine men," a highly technical Rosicrucian term which referred to the Salamanders' particular protection of occult philosophers (see Comte de Gabalis).

In the heavily Cabalistic Jerusalem, Blake also gave his most eloquent description of the sexual trance:

> Embraces are Cominglings from the Head even to the Feet,
> And not a pompous High Priest entering by a Secret Place.
>
> ....
>
> . . . when the lips
> Receive a kiss from Gods or Men, a threefold kiss returns
> Three-fold embrace returns, consuming lives of Gods and Men
> In fires of beauty melting them as gold and silver in
> the furnace.
> Her Brain enlabyrinths the whole heaven of her bosom and
> loins
> To put in act what her Heart wills. O who can withstand
> her power!
> Her name is Vala in Eternity: in Time her name is Rahab.
> (p. 709)

That such sexual ecstasy stimulates poetic visions was also graphically illustrated in Milton. Plate 38 is a full-page illustration of the Moment of Inspiration as seen by the poet. He lies in the arms of a woman on a rocky shore, just above the reach of the Sea of Time and Space. The woman's head is on his bosom, while his own head is thrown back to behold the

descent of the Eagle of Genius. In one of three copies of Milton, the sexual nature of the moment is clearly indicated, which is suppressed in a second copy, and only hinted at in a third (Damon, p. 432). Blake gave his most overtly Cabalistic description of the sexual act in Jerusalem:

> In Beulah the Female lets down her beautiful Tabernacle
> Which the Male enters magnificent between her Cherubim
> And becomes One with her . . .
> The Dead awake to Generation! Arise O Lord, and rend
> the Veil! (p. 656)

The Masonic references in Jerusalem also seem more overt, and the passage which clearly describes the building of the living Temple out of affections and kindness, etc., has already been quoted in the general discussion of Freemasonry. Interestingly, here "Mighty Urizen the Architect" is connected with a Temple whose "Building is Natural Religion and its altars Natural Morality,/ A building of eternal death, whose proportions are eternal despair" (p. 702). That most "official" Freemasonry in England was deistic is perhaps reflected here. Also, Blake may have known of the Duke of Sussex' campaign from 1813 on to suppress the Rosicrucian elements and impose a deistic, "Unitarian" doctrine of natural religion on all the London lodges. For in Jerusalem, Blake posited a rival Grand Architect, the visionary Los:

> . . . Los stood at his Anvil in wrath, the victim
> of their love
> And hate, dividing the Space of Love with brazen Compasses.
> . . . .
> The blow of his hammer is Justice, the swing of his
> hammer Mercy,
> The force of Los's Hammer is eternal Forgiveness. (p. 734)

After three years of turbulent visions and "automatic" writing in Felpham, Blake wanted to return to London to finish the engraving of his "giant poem." He also hoped to escape the worries and concern of his friends at Felpham over his visionary practices. Writing Butts on 25 April 1803,

Blake confided:

> I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, and that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams, and Prophecy and Speak Parables Unobserv'd at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals. (*CW*, p. 822)

Chapter XI: Blake in London, 1804-1827: Rosicrucians, Astrologers, and John Varley

When Blake returned permanently to London, there is evidence that he not only continued his trance-techniques (CW, p. 564), but that he found congenial company for a while to share his "visionary studies." Unfortunately, the evidence comes from a period when Blake and his companions had apparently parted company. In his Manuscript Notebook of 1808-11, Blake wrote cryptically of the three magnetic healers:

> Cosway, Frazer, and Baldwin of Egypt's Lake
> Fear to associate with Blake.
> This Life is a Warfare against Evils;
> They heal the sick: he casts out devils. (p. 545)

Cosway's complex career of Swedenborgianism, Freemasonry, and occultism in the 1780's and 1790's has already been discussed, but Baldwin and Fraser, who have not been examined in terms of their relation to Blake, shed more light on the Animal Magnetisers Blake was associated with.

George Baldwin (1743-1846) was a great traveler in the Middle East and became Consul-General to Egypt in 1786. In the early 1780's, Baldwin studied occultism and Animal Magnetism, and was interested in "Ossian," in William Law's edition of Jacob Boehme, and in the "Druids' intercourse with heaven, magic, and divinations."[1] Whether Baldwin was a Freemason or Swedenborgian is uncertain, though both groups would have shared his interests. He was most likely the "--Baldwin" who subscribed to George Adams' Swedenborgian essays, which suggests some connection with the London group. Baldwin had followed the French Commission's study of Mesmer in 1784 and interpreted their negative report as a testimony

[1] George Baldwin, Mr. Baldwin's Legacy to his Daughter, or the Divinity of Truth (London: William Bulmer, 1811), pp. 40-45.

to the "stupendous power" of Animal Magnetism (Baldwin, p. iv). He also found much evidence for the phenomena in Francis Bacon's works, who by this time was viewed as a proto-Rosicrucian among Magnetisers and occultist Masonic groups.

In 1789, Baldwin began to experiment with magnetic cures, defining the magnetiser as "only the mechanical instrument or '<u>organe</u>' of a stupendous power, of which he has to learn the nature and use" (Baldwin, p. vii). In 1795, he built a special temple within the British Consulary mansion in Alexandria, Egypt (next to "Egypt's Lake," as Blake noted),[2] to carry out further magnetic trance-experiments, stimulated by the visit of a wandering Italian poet, Cesare Avena di Valdieri. While magnetised, the poet produced by automatic writing descriptions of his visions, in voluminous prose and verse. Baldwin recorded that Valdieri "had seen delightful things; that he had been in a state of beatitude, never known to him before . . . The poetry seemed to announce more" (Baldwin, p. xlv). Valdieri's and Baldwin's records of "the eccentric flights of the soul" continued for nearly three years, reinforced by experiments in clairvoyance with local Arabs. In 1801, Baldwin brought the accounts to England and printed them, but was afraid to publish them until 1811.

In London, he continued his experiments, in collaboration with Cosway, Fraser, and possibly Blake (whose reference to him indicates a previous acquaintance). In 1810, Baldwin published a translation of <u>La Prima Musa Clio</u>, "or the Divine Traveller; exhibiting a series of writings obtained in the exstasy of magnetic sleep," and in 1813,

[2] Coincidentally, it is at this Consulary and Mareotic Lake that Lawrence Durrell places his Cabalists in <u>The Alexandria Quartet</u>, but whether Baldwin's temple remains there is uncertain.

A Book of Dreams, "by B.A., edited and interpreted by George Baldwin." The latter book discussed the magnetic healing of an extremely deformed young lady and the visions she experienced while in the magnetic trance (Baldwin, Dreams, p. 3). In 1818, he published a French translation of Sur le Magnetisme Animale. Of Blake's biographers, only the rarely-read Thomas Wright comments on Baldwin. He notes that Baldwin was "in respect to the healing art, the Aloysius Horn of his day; he was now famous and lolled on Oriental cushions amid strange hangings" (Wright, Blake, II, 31).

Whether Blake's implied antagonism in the Notebook to Baldwin's healing was a serious break or part of the near paranoia of his private reaction to nearly all his friends at that time is open to question. But there is too much evidence in Blake's works and letters of similar experiences with trance-visions and automatic writing to deny his own interest in and probable practice of the same technique that interested his old friend Cosway as well as Baldwin.

The other healer mentioned by Blake has been tentatively identified by Keynes as Alexander Fraser, a minor painter. (Blake, CW, p. 911), but a more plausible identification, given the "magnetic" context, is the Alexander Fraser who was a shorthand specialist and Freemason, and whose extensive Hebrew studies were useful to both vocations. Blake's reference occurred between 1808-1811, but the Fraser who was a painter lived in Edinburgh until 1813, when he moved to London (DNB). Fraser the shorthand writer had studied with Salomon Bennett, a Jewish seal engraver and Freemason who translated the Hebrew Bible into English.[3] Bennett's interest in Fraser recalls the connection between shorthand,

[3] Alexander T.Wright, Alexander Fraser and Some of his Contemporaries (London: Truslove and Brave, 1927), p.35.

Hebrew studies, Masonry, and occultism of Manoah Sibly, another friend of Blake, for "this little known mystic form of rapid writing, which largely dispensed with vowels, had a special interest to the old Hebraist and his six sons." Fraser himself was called "a perfect Adept in Short-band" by his associates, and he revealed his occultist interest in ciphers and code writings when he referred to "the Mason's mystic word an' grip" in his own works (Wright, Fraser, pp. 54, 28).

"Brother" Fraser recorded the proceedings of an important Masonic farewell festival in 1813 at Freemasons Hall for the departing Earl of Moira, who had been a high-ranking Freemason since 1792 and had just been appointed Governor-General of Ireland (Wright, Fraser, p. 15). The Earl of Moira (then Lord Rawdon) had been sympathetic to the Swedenborgians in 1790, and in 1791 he presented the New Church's petition for tolerance to the House of Peers. Before defending them, Moira had studied the works of Swedenborg which the Society presented to him (Hindmarsh, pp. 126-128; Gould, III, 237). The publication of Barruel's and Robison's books, charging the occultist lodges of Freemasonry, which included the Swedenborgian lodges, with a giant Illuminati conspiracy, evoked an elaborate defence from Moira. But later, in 1809, he practically admitted the justice of the strictures by speaking of "mischievous combinations on the Continent, borrowing and prostituting the respectable name of Masonry, and sowing disaffection and sedition through the communities within which they were protected" (Gould, III, 237). Moira's work within Freemasonry was always active and learned; references at the 1813 dinner to Arab and Hindu "mystic" literature reflect his esoteric interests.[4] Among the Masons present were the Duke of Sussex

[4] Alexander Fraser, An Account of the Proceedings at the Festival of the Society of Freemasons . . . 1813 . . . for the Earl of Moira (London: Joyce Gold, 1813), p. 60.

(who became Grand Master that year), the Duke of York (who was Prince Regent), George Harvey, and Arthur Stanhope.[5] In his speech, Moira revealed the widespread interest in Freemasonry in England:

> The prodigious extent of this Society in England, is little imagined by those who are not called upon to look to its numbers . . . That so vast a body should exist in silence . . . is the best proof of its rigid adherance to principles [of secrecy], in their nature unalterably advantageous to society. (Fraser, p. 33)

As noted earlier, Richard Cosway--the third healer--had Masonic connections dating back to the 1780's, and was probably a member of General Rainsford's elite Rosicrucian-Masonic study group in the 1790's. Thomas Wright noted that Cosway always respected and tried to help Blake (Wright, Blake, II, 31); thus, Blake's claim that the three magnetisers were avoiding him must be viewed in the context of his mental condition at that time. Bentley, whose interpretations of Blake are always judicious, admits that between 1807 and 1812, Blake's grasp on reality was shaky:

> He sometimes seems to have thought of the spiritual world as supplanting rather than supplementing the ordinary world of causality. More and more frequently the spirits seem to have been controlling Blake rather than merely advising him. (Bentley, Records, p. 180)

This was the period of Southey's pity for his "obvious madness," of Cumberland's remark that he was "cracked" and "dimm'd with superstition," of Seymour Kirkup's diagnosis of his insanity (which Kirkup later retracted after becoming an Animal Magnetiser himself!), of Blake's charges against Stothard's malignant magical spells, and of his railings against the plots of his steady patrons, Hayley and Flaxman.

[5] Interestingly, George Cumberland and Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, discussed their mutual friendship with the Duke of Sussex, after which Cumberland made a note "to see Blake." (Keynes, Blake Studies, p. 247).

Frank Podmore has discussed the paranoia that often accompanies over-indulgence in magnetic trances. He notes that conviction of persecution by distant enemies, operating by Mesmerism or telepathy, is one of the commonest delusions of incipient insanity; but sane persons have not escaped the contagion of this panic fear. He then cites the magnetic warfare of the nineteenth-century Swedenborgians, Thomas Lake Harris and Andrew Jackson Davis (to be discussed later), and the obsession of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, with the spectre of "Malicious Magnetism."[6] Certainly, the bizarre magnetic wars of the magicians--Boullan, Guaita, and the writer Huysmans--in the 1890's in France bear out the potential for persecution and paranoia among magnetisers.[7] The valid question of Blake's mental disturbance, at least during this period, needs more objective examination than it has received, especially as it seems to have been a temporary condition.

Blake continued to work on Jerusalem, with its increased use of Rosicrucian, Cabalistic, and "British Israelite" symbolism, from 1804 until 1820, and was associated with at least three Animal Magnetisers between 1804 and 1813. Thus, it is interesting to examine Francis Barrett's continued occult interest up to 1815, when he published Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers. In The Magus Barrett had revealed his great interest in Animal Magnetism, which he equated with Cabalistic angel-magic. Basing his technique of vision-inducement on "the application of passives to actives," and the power of desire and imagination (all very Blakean concepts),

[6] Frank Podmore, From Mesmer to Christian Science (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1963), p. 258.

[7] See John Senior, The Way Down and Out: the Occult in Symbolist Literature (1959; rpt. New York : Greenwood Press, 1968).

Barrett discussed "ecstatic" conditions:

> There are miraculous ecstasies belonging to the more inward man . . . there are also ecstasies in the animal man, by reason of an intense, or heightened imagination . . . there is therefore in the blood a certain ecstatical or transporting power, which if at any time shall be excited or stirred up by an ardent desire and most strong imagination, it is able to conduct the spirit of the more outward man even to some absent and far distant object, but then that power lies hid in the more outward man, as it were, in potentia . . . neither is it brought into act, unless it be roused up by the imagination, inflamed and agitated by a most fervent and violent desire. (Magus, I, 12-13)

As pointed out previously, part of the initiation rites at Avignon--undergone by Brothers and the Swedenborgians Bryan, Wright, Woulfe, and possibly Duché--included an "elixir" which exalted the blood and helped to induce visions.

At some time between 1805 and 1818, Blake re-worked a set of enigmatic emblems, For Children: the Gates of Paradise, which he originally engraved in 1793, during the period of his early association with Rosicrucian ideas. Re-naming them For the Sexes: the Gates of Paradise, he added cryptic "explanatory" keys to several of them, which made their sexual, Cabalistic nature clearer. Plate I, which depicts a woman plucking a mandrake, was given a key which clearly defined the phallic significance of the mandrake. Blake also used the mandrake symbol in Jerusalem as though it were the same kind of technical occult symbol as the Rosicrucian elements (CW, p. 631). Another of the 1793 emblems which Blake took up with renewed interest almost seems like an illustration to one of Barrett's theories. Plate 9 portrays a man beginning to climb a ladder to the moon, with a vast extent of stars beyond him: a couple off to the side embraces. The 1793 caption reads, "I want! I want!" and the later "Key" adds, "On the shadows of the Moon/Climbing thro' Night's highest noon" (CW, p. 771). One of Barrett's theories, which

he taught in his Rosicrucian school from about 1791 on, was based on the Arabian belief that man's mind, "when it is the most intent upon any work, through its passion and effects, is joined with the mind of stars and intelligences . . . and more to that which desired them with a strong desire" (Magus, I, 97). Damon has pointed out that Blake's Job drawings of 1826 were probably based on the Tarot cards, which were published and interpreted by the French Illuminé, Court de Gebelin, in his famous Le Monde Primitif (1781), (Damon, p. 237). Gebelin attended the Masonic Convent of 1784-85 in Paris, where the group of London Swedenborgians met him. Thus, Blake could have had early access to his ideas on the Tarot. It seems likely that Blake's 1793 emblems were an early attempt to develop his own "Tarot," for the plates obviously represent some secret symbolic system with which he remained preoccupied until at least 1818.

In 1815, Barrett published The Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers, which became highly influential in nineteenth-century occultism. The book revealed Barrett's interest in Jacob Boehme and included much material on him, including the first printing of Dionysius Andreas Freher's "Of the Analogy in the Process of the Philosophical Work, to the Redemption of Man, through Jesus Christ, according to the Writings of Jacob Behmen." Barrett had studied the manuscripts and emblematic drawings of Freher in the British Museum, an interest shared by Richard Cosway and Ebenezer Sibly, who both purchased some of Freher's rare manuscripts. Blake greatly admired Freher's drawings, and affirmed that "Michelangelo could not have done better" in regard to Freher's illustrations which were published in Law's edition of Boehme (an expensive set that Blake owned).[8] As Law never mentioned

[8] Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1871), p.

Freher's name in connection with the engravings, very few people in London knew anything about the artist. Thus, the common interest of Cosway, Sibly, Barrett, and possibly Blake in Freher may be significant of some common study of the unpublished manuscripts as well as of Law's edition of Boehme.

Barrett also included in The Magus a series of engravings of bizarre visionary heads, depicting the Fallen Angels, Vessels of Wrath, the Cabalistic Incubus, etc., which he drew from the spirits he saw in vision. They should be compared to Blake's own "Visionary Heads" of 1819, when Blake was definitely associated with members of an occult secret society--and one which "clearly cribbed" its materials from Barrett's book.[9]

From 1815 until his death in 1825, there is no more direct information on Barrett and his Rosicrucian society. But a little known fact about Barrett, which Robert Southey recorded in 1802, provides a valuable clue to another secret society, several of whose members became intimate with Blake, and which may have been an outgrowth of Barrett's group. While on a hiking trip in Wales, Southey wrote his wife on 23 September 1802 about meeting Barrett:

> We dined in the traveller's room at Swansea. There came in after dinner the balloon adventurer Barrett to spunge a glass of wine. Tell King I have seen a greater rogue than Solomon. This same Barrett who took in the people at Greenwich--and who wrote a book called The Magus--of which I have seen the title-page and his own rascally portrait as frontispiece. My gentleman professes to teach the occult sciences. Unhappily, I did not know this was the fellow when I saw him--and he puts all the letters in the alphabet after his name to look like honorary titles. A dog--he had better break his neck from a balloon to save the country the expense of hanging him. (Curry, I, 290)

[9] Ellic Howe, Raphael, or, The Royal Merlin (London: Arborfield, 1964), p. 17.

None of the commentators on Barrett have known of his ballooning, and his biography has remained virtually a mystery, despite his great influence on the development of nineteenth-century literary occultism. His role as a "balloon adventurer" is provocative in two ways. First, he had apparently been acquainted with Cagliostro, or his followers, and would have been a likely candidate for the rumored balloon invasion to liberate Cagliostro that the Inquisition so feared. Second, the rare combination of skills in ballooning and occult sciences was shared by another member of a London secret society, G.W. Graham. Howe notes that historians of early aeronautics are unaware of Graham's interest in occultism, and concentrate on his sensational balloon exploits (Howe, Raphael, 13; Rolt, pp. 112-115). Thus, information on Graham's occult studies is hard to come by, but it seems certain that Graham was acquainted with Barrett, for he spent many years before 1820 studying the occult sciences, especially alchemy, and made many startling experiments. Graham was also involved with the major astrologers of London, a circle shared by Barrett, according to his statement in The Magus. On the question of whether his interest in the occult arose from astrological influences, Barrett answered:

> . . . I leave to the judgment of the astrologers, to whose inspection I submit a figure of my nativity, which I shall annex to a sketch of my own history, which I intend to make the subject of a future publication, including a vast number of curious experiments in occult and chymical properties, which have fell either under my own observation or have been transmitted to me from others. In repsect of the astrologic art, . . . it has such an affinity with talismanic experiments, etc., that no one can bring any work to a complete effect without a due knowledge and observation of the qualities and effects of the constellations. (Magus, II, 197-198)

If Barrett wrote an autobiography, it is now lost. But his

probable conjunction with Graham opens a new area of investigation in Blake studies, for Graham became the center of a circle from about 1818 to 1824 (when he died in a balloon crash), of occultists and astrologers, who included Blake's good friends Richard Cosway, William Mulready, John Varley, and Robert Cross Smith.

Around 1820, Graham introduced R.C. Smith (1795-1832) to several unnamed friends who had shared his occult interests for years. The group soon called themselves the "Society of the Mercurii" and began a series of publishing ventures. In 1822, Graham and Smith collaborated on a curious little pamphlet on geomantic fortune-telling, The Philosophical Merlin. The pamphlet was dedicated to Mademoiselle Le Normand, a famous Parisian fortune-teller. Smith's description of geomancy in another publication is important, for it suggests the Rosicrucian and Masonic associations of himself and Graham. After giving a synopsis of geomancy, as practised by Chaldean, Arabian, and Rosicrucian philosophers, Smith said:

> [Geomancy] constitutes a singular feature at the present day in freemasonry, it being the chief study of the Rosie Crucians, and was much practised by that singular race of beings whose secrets are now in the care of that society.[10]

As mentioned earlier, from 1810 on, Brother William Henry White had carefully preserved the Rosicrucian documents he discovered at Freemasons Hall, and probably initiated some Freemasons into the Rosicrucian Order. That Smith made use of these Rosicrucian papers, preserved in the vaults of the Masonic hall, seems certain, for his "preoccupation with magic and geomancy" made enemies among his "purely astrologic" friends (Howe, Raphael, 20). Another bit of evidence for

10 [Robert Cross Smith], "Raphael," The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century . . . by Members of the Mercurii (London: Knight and Lacey, 1825), p. 461.

the Masonic connections of Smith's society of "Mercurii" is an article in Urania, another of his publications, which was signed "Philadelphus Hieroglyphica Propheticus." The article recommended the works of Chevalier Ramsay, who was notorious at this time as the innovator of the occultist high degrees within French Freemasonry, and the writer gave his address as the City of London Coffee House, a well-known Masonic Tavern (Smith, Astrologer, p. 243; Hutchinson, p. 338).

From 1822 to 1824, using the pseudonym "Raphael" or "Merlinus Anglicus Junior," Smith published The Straggling Astrologer, which included an eclectic and often erudite profusion of articles on astrology and occultism in general. As Naylor notes,

> From the 1820's, astrologic traditions had become firmly interwoven with the Cabalistic revival of the eighteenth century. Astrological magazines appeared under the pseudonyms of the planetary angels . . . In all the "Raphael" magazines between 1820 and 1850, articles were included on Talismanic Magic and Animal Magnetism. (p. 116)

Significantly, the "Mercurii" (or Metropolitan Society of Occult Philosophers, as they were also called), studied Elias Ashmole's little known manuscripts on Rosicrucians and Freemasonry, and included many elements of John Dee's angel-magic in their experiments, which possibly came from Ashmole's unpublished papers (Smith, Astrologer, pp. 83-85, 185). The "Mercurii" also studied the Philadelphia Society's Theosophical Transactions, from the extremely rare copies owned by Richard Cosway (Smith, Astrologer, p. 240).

In 1825, Smith re-issued a bound form of The Straggling Astrologer, re-titled it The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century, and called it the "sixth edition." Significantly, after Francis Barrett's death in 1825, Smith revised The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century and included material on magical rituals "clearly cribbed" from Barrett's The Magus (Howe,

Raphael, p. 17). He called this the "seventh edition," and claimed in the preface that "the rapid sale of the former editions and the unprecedented inquiries after the early ones" stimulated the new edition.

Despite his deceptive claims in publishing (which makes research into his works a bibliographer's nightmare), Smith was "a man of some education . . . a rara avis" in nineteenth-century astrology (Howe, Raphael, p. 12), and drew in many distinguished members to the "Mercurii," most of whom contributed articles to his journals. Richard Cosway, who died in 1821, had apparently been connected with Graham's or Smith's group, for he left the "Mercurii" many valuable occult manuscripts (Smith, Astrologer, pp. 185, 210). But most importantly for this study, two artists and students of occultism, John Varley and his brother-in-law William Mulready, were associated with the society at the same time that they were constant companions of William Blake.[11] R.C.Smith and John Varley spent many evenings with the elderly artist, which resulted in Blake's sketches of the "Visionary Heads," often with geomantic designs, stimulated by their conversations.

John Varley (1778-1842) met Blake in 1818, through an introduction by John Linnell, and their friendship was immediate and long-lasting. Varley became Blake's constant companion until the latter's death in 1827. Varley has been treated quite glibly by Blake critics, who seem embarrassed by his preoccupation with astrology. He is portrayed as credulous and profligate, merely "humored" by the safe and sane Blake. But all the contemporary evidence points to a

11 For the references to Varley and Mulready, see Smith, Astrologer, pp. vi, 428, 495, and 522.

mutual and sincere admiration, and Blake's evident enjoyment of Varley's large circle of friends demonstrates that many traits were shared by the two exuberant artists and occultists. Because Varley's whole family played distinguished roles in the arts and sciences, as well as in occultism, and maintained a consistent family tradition of learning and skills in all three fields throughout the nineteenth century--which had a direct impact on W.B. Yeats and his theosophical group--an examination of the Varley family's interests and activities provides many new keys to the complex English heritage of occult lore in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

John Varley was immersed from his early childhood in an atmosphere of radical politics, occultism, and secret societies. His father, Richard Varley (who died in 1791) was tutor in mechanics to Charles Stanhope, and his uncle Samuel Varley collaborated with Stanhope on chemical experiments.[12] The third Earl Stanhope (1753-1816) was an ardent Republican and called himself "Citizen" Stanhope. An associate of the Freemason and political liberal, John Wilkes, in the 1770's, he protested against the English war on America and worked for Parliamentary reform. There is much circumstantial evidence that suggests that Stanhope was a Freemason, and he was involved with many eminent Masons in France, including Franklin and Condorcet, and worked with the Duke of Orleans when the Grand Master of French Freemasonry visited the London Revolution Society. Robison claimed that Orleans, with Stanhope's help, turned the London association into a "true Jacobin club," aligned with Masonic groups in France (Robison, p. 495). At the fall of the Bastille, Stanhope and the Revolution Society sent a

[12] Adrian Bury, John Varley of the "Old Water-colour Society," (Leigh-on-Sea, England: F.Lewis, 1946), p. 17.

congratulatory letter to the French National Assembly, and called on English citizens to "establish Societies through the kingdom, to support the principles of the Revolution . . . and to establish a great concerted Union of all the true Friends of Liberty" (Robison, p. 496). That this Union was essentially a Masonic one was substantiated by Clifford's investigation and implied by Lord Gordon's collaborator, Robert Watson.

The Varley family, including young John, spent much time at Chevening, the Stanhope's estate. Samuel Varley worked with Josiah Wedgwood and Stanhope to establish a "Chemical and Philosophical Society." Samuel inherited all of Stanhope's scientific apparatus at the Earl's death in 1816. Interestingly, Blake was also working for the Wedgwoods in 1816, after Flaxman introduced him to Josiah Wedgwood (Keyes, Blake Studies, p. 162). The Stanhope household exerted a profound influence on young John Varley, which included an interest in astrology and occultism. Intriguingly, John was on a hiking trip in Wales in 1802, the same year that Barrett was, but we do not know if the budding occultist met the "notorious" Rosicrucian or not. By 1803, however, John had become skilled in astrology, for he cast horoscopes for his friends in that year. Whether he had studied under Ebenezer Sibly (who died in 1799) or his followers is unknown, but the "Mercurii," of which Varley was a member, later referred to Sibly's works as basic references. His astrological studies probably coincided with those of "Citizen" Stanhope's favorite child, Lady Hester Stanhope, who grew up with Varley.

Lady Hester (1776-1839), like all the Stanhope children, never went to school but was tutored at home by the political radical, Jeremiah Joice, who was arrested for treason at the Stanhope home in 1794 and stood trial with the

London Corresponding Society members.[13] She grew into a proud and free-spirited young woman, and in 1810 travelled in the Middle East with her lover Michael Bruce. What is significant for this study is that Richard Brothers had prophesied to her that she would become Queen of Jerusalem, and then the mystic bride of the new Mahdi or Messiah, whom she would lead triumphantly into the Holy City. The new Messiah would obviously be Brothers, who most likely knew the Stanhopes through Masonic or London Corresponding Society contacts. Hester was already steeped in occultism and astrology before she went to Syria, but once there, "the old prophecy of Brothers began to assume immense importance in her mind" (Armstrong,p.152). Local Arabs showed her ancient manuscripts which confirmed Brothers' prophecy, and by 1813, when Bruce left her, she believed she was "Queen of the Arabs."[14] She made a spectacular entry into Jerusalem and then stayed on in Syria, where her bizarre adventures caused a sensation in London, which regularly received accounts of her wild exploits as well as her skill in judicial astrology, phrenology, ceremonial magic, and prophecy. Interestingly, since she probably learned astrology from whomever Varley learned it from, she interpreted Animal Magnetism as "the sympathy of our stars," and attributed success in magnetizing to "the similar stars of the magnetizer and the recipient."[15] Her occult studies kept her mind

[13] Martin Armstrong, Lady Hester Stanhope (New York: Viking, 1928), p. 18.

[14] Aubrey Newman, The Stanhopes of Chevening (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 213.

[15] John Timbs, A Century of Anecdote, 1760-1780 (London: Frederick Warne, n.d.), p. 346.

"wrought to a high pitch of enthusiasm" (Armstrong, p. 154), and visitors--including the French poet, Lamartine--told of her tremendous vitality and explosions of energy, phenomena shared by all the magicians and Animal Magnetisers we have studied so far. Hester finally died in 1839, with lights for her funeral provided by candles stuck in the eyesockets of the skull of her last lover, the son of one of her prophets (Newman, p. 221).

Since the Varley family was still involved with the Stanhopes throughout this period, John Varley must have known of Richard Brothers' prophecy and Lady Hester's occultism. In the meantime, Varley had achieved a high reputation as an artist in water colors by 1804 and helped found the Old Water-colour Society (at which Blake exhibited in 1812). He became the most sought-after drawing master of his time. In 1805-06, Varley was tutor to John Linnell, who later introduced him to Blake. Blake also became friendly with Cornelius Varley (1783-1873), John's brother, who was also an artist. Cornelius was a brilliant but eccentric inventor and dabbled with John, the Stanhopes, and the Wedgwoods in strange chemical and scientific experiments. John Varley entertained a wide circle of friends at his house, including William Godwin, Shelley, and John Gisborne (Shelley's close friend, who married Varley's sister Esther). Shelley's own interest in Animal Magnetism will be discussed later, and even crusty old Godwin, the hero of the deists, wrote the Lives of the Necromancers (1834), demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the occult traditions. Varley's "salon" was an essentially bohemian group, with "free-wheeling" ideas.[16] But among his contemporaries, Varley achieved more fame as an astrologer and adept in the occult sciences than as an artist, and there are many verified accounts of the amazing accuracy

[16] A.T. Story, The Life of John Linnell (London: Richard Bentley, 1892), I, 65.

of his predictions. His interest in physiognomy was shared by Mulready, who was a student of Lavater's works. Mulready, who also saw visions, was acquainted with Blake as early as 1807 (Smith, Astrologer, p. 522; Wright, Blake, II, 21).

The interest in physiognomy shared by Varley, Mulready, and Blake is important to any discussion of Blake's "Visionary Heads," which were produced mainly in 1819, though a few were drawn later. That Blake was still an inquiring student of physiognomy is evidenced by his annotations to Spurzheim's Observations on Insanity, which Blake wrote about 1819. These are preserved on a torn scrap of paper, and the three surviving annotations show Blake's rejection of Spurzheim's definition of madness, which, after all, would have included Blake (see CW, p. 772). But Blake's possession of Spurzheim's book at all is significant, for he (with Dr. Gall) developed Lavater's theories into the newly named field of "phrenology," and Spurzheim was viewed by the Animal Magnetisers as one of their own.[17]

Blake had been influenced by William Sharp's strange physiognomical theories as early as the 1780's and included an allusion to them in An Island in the Moon (Erdman, Prophet, p. 94). Sharp had "some eccentric notions" on physiognomy and believed that "every man's countenance had depicted on it the appearance of some bird or beast" (Baker, p. 25). Varley held similar ideas about the physiognomical relation between man and animals.[18] Though most critics speculate that Blake merely humored Varley by contributing some of his "Visionary Heads" to Varley's Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy (1824),

17 Auguste Viatte, Victor Hugo et les Illuminés de son Temps (Montreal: Les Editions de l'Arbre, 1942), p. 105.

18 William Gaunt, "Series of Visionary Heads," London Times (7 April 1967), p. 1.

it was probably Blake's theories of physiognomy (influenced by Sharp, Lavater, and possibly Spurzheim) that influenced Varley's treatise, rather than vice versa. Blake's continued interest in the subject, while working with Varley on the Treatise was demonstrated by his allowing, in 1825, the phrenologist James S. Deville to take a cast of his head as representative of "the imaginative faculty" (Bentley, Records, p. 278).

Blake and Varley spent many evenings together during which Blake would enter his visionary state and carry on conversations with spirits of the dead. Many of the figures were evoked at Varley's request, and though he could not see them, he believed absolutely in Blake's powers. Blake sketched more than fifty heads, and he and Varley jotted down comments on the drawings. Significantly, geomantic figures were included in many of the drawings (see especially "Richard I" and "Empress Maud," in Bentley, Records, pp. 259, 264). R.C. Smith, who sat in on many of the sessions, had studied the Rosicrucian documents on geomancy preserved at Freemasons Hall. Linnell recorded that Blake would often assure them that they could see the same visions if they cultivated their own imaginative powers, which "they undervalued in themselves" (Story, Linnell, p. 160). Interestingly, this was the basic premise of Animal Magnetism.

Several of the "Visionary Heads" suggest Blake's continued interest in occult studies and reinforce the probability of his association with Smith's Masonic friends. In "The Man Who Built the Pyramids," there are several occult symbols, including an astrological identification, a key hanging from the builder's neck, an obviously symbolic mason's workshop, and a book with a strange "winged" key and several hieroglyphs.[19] Suggestively, the hieroglyphs are similar

[19] Geoffrey Keynes, ed. Drawings of William Blake (New York: Dover, 1970), no. 62.

to those of Francis Barrett's "Celestial Alphabet." The next drawing, "Imagination of a Man who Instructed Blake in Painting and in his Dreams," (no. 63), seems to portray a Cabalistic tree in the lines of the man's forehead. "The Visionary Head of Saladin and the Assassin" (no. 69), in which the Assassin has a dog or lion head, recalls the importance of the Assassin legend within occultist French Freemasonry as well as William Sharp's physiognomical theories. Another drawing (no. 66) portrays "Friar Roger Bacon, the Medieval English alchemist and occult philosopher." Several of the drawings include geomantic diagrams by Blake or Varley, which must have been discussed with Smith, a student of Rosicrucian geomancy.

The most famous of Blake's sketches from these midnight séances is that of "The Ghost of a Flea," which Varley had engraved by Linnell to include in his Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy. In his description of Blake's visionary experience, Varley claimed he was "anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power, of the truth of these visions" (Gilchrist, p. 266). Varley pointed out that Blake's vision of the flea's ghost agreed in countenance with one class of people under Gemini, the astrological signification of the flea, and the brown color matched the eye-color of "some full-toned Gemini persons." The "neatness, elasticity, and tenseness" of the flea were significant of "the elegant dancing and fencing sign" of Gemini (Keynes, Blake Studies, p. 133).

Blake's frequent association with such eminent astrologers as Varley and Smith raises the question of his own attitude toward astrology, which he must have been familiar with since the days of the Swedenborgian Sibly brothers. Yeats pointed out Blake's use of astrological symbolism and devoted a rather vague chapter, "The Zodiacal Symbolism of the Cherubim," to deciphering it in his edition

of Blake (Ellis and Yeats, I, 300). In 1807, Blake was indignant at the arrest of an astrologer and wrote the editor of The Monthly Magazine, Richard Phillips, demanding an investigation (CW, p. 865). The opinions of Blake's later friends about his reaction are contradictory. Samuel Palmer said Blake believed in Varley's astrology to a certain extent--"he thought you could oppose and conquer the stars."[20] Francis Barrett, who had almost certainly been involved with Blake's friends among the "Mercurii," held a similar attitude to astrology, based on his Cabalistic studies. In The Magus, Barrett argued that "Stars rule men, but a wise man rules the stars," through the liberty of his free will, and he affirmed the "Cabal, or Spiritual Astrology" as true (I, pp. 4-8). But John Linnell, who was "confessedly out of touch" with the interests of Blake's astrological friends,[21] claimed that Varley could not convert Blake. After Blake's death, however, he was listed as a "patron and admirer of the science and doctrine of astrology," in an 1836 astrological journal.[22]

In 1824, Varley published the first part of his planned four-part Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy, which included Blake's "Ghost of a Flea." The prospectus of the unpublished parts of the Treatise shows that it was to be called A List of a Portion of the Classic Fables and Sacred Histories, "of which an entirely new and detailed explanation is prepared for publication, from Discoveries founded on an Application of Astrological Knowledge, and on the Ancient Theban Art of

20 A.T. Story, James Holmes and John Varley (London: Richard Bentley, 1894), p. 274.

21 Harold Bruce, William Blake in This World (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), p. 162.

22 J.T.T. Hacket, The Students' Assistant in Astronomy and . . . "also a discourse on the harmony of Phrenology, Astrology, and Physiognomy" (London, 1836), pp. 118-120.

Geomancy, by John Varley."[23] Some of the mysteries Varley planned to elucidate were: why the sacrific of Abel was more acceptable; the Zodiacal origin of baptism; the astrological origin of Christianity; and an explanation of the four modes acknowledged by the Apostle Paul, "by which God, at various times and in divers manners spake, or 'revealed' by the prophets or seers" (Bury, p. 60). Since Varley was also interested in palmistry, talismanic magic, spirit-evocation, and the apparently Rosicrucian and Masonic studies of the "Mercurii," it is obvious that the long evenings with Blake were spent discussing many things besides astrology, which is the only "obsession" that Varley is generally credited with (see Story, Linnell, p. 30; Smith, Astrologer, passim).

Whatever Blake's ultimate opinion of astrology, he allowed R.C. Smith to publish his nativity, with a long commentary, in Urania, or the Astrologer's Chronicle and Mystical Magazine in 1825. Smith, the editor, was assisted by the "Metropolitan Society of Occult Philosophers." Arthur Symons noted that he was told (probably by Yeats, an ardent astrologer), that the most striking thing in Blake's nativity was the position and aspect of Uranus, the occult planet, which indicate in the highest degree "an inborn and supreme instinct for things occult," without showing the least tendency toward madness.[24] Smith, in his commentary, praised Blake's unequalled artistic talents and described the evenings he spent with Blake and Varley, when Blake conversed with spirits and showed his friends his poems and pictures. Smith was probably also the author of an

[23] The prospectus is presently in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, bound in a volume entitled Fine Art Pamphlets, 1801-1874.

[24] Arthur Symons, William Blake (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), p. 338.

article in The Monthly Magazine, entitled "Bits of Biography: Blake the Vision Seer and Martin the York Minster Incendiary," (15 March 1833). The section on Martin will be dealt with later, in connection with Varley's later student of occultism Bulwer-Lytton. Concerning Blake, Smith asserted that he was "not the victim of a mere optical delusion. He firmly believed in what he seemed to see," and seemed to communicate with the spirits through "some more subtle, some undefined, some telegraphic organ" (in Bentley, Records, p. 298).

That Blake's occult interests were still active during his friendship with Varley and Smith is also revealed in his work from 1818 to 1820. In The Everlasting Gospel (circa 1818), he re-affirmed the Cabalistic doctrine of sacramental sexuality and condemned repressive mores:

> . . . That they may call a shame and Sin
> Love's temple that God dwelleth in,
> And hide in secret hidden Shrine
> The Naked Human form divine,
> And render that a Lawless thing
> On which the Soul Expands its wing. (CW, p. 755)

His marginalia to Berkeley's Siris, made about 1820, reveal his concentration on occultist lore, for the annotated pages, 203-41, contained a long discussion of Hermetic philosophy.[25] Siris reveals Berkeley's wide knowledge of alchemical, Cabalistic, neo-Platonic, and Middle Eastern traditions. It is interesting that the only section Blake commented on discussed Causabon's proof of the false dating of the "ancient" Hermetic texts, after which Berkeley defended the value of Hermetic philosophy despite the errors in dating. He defined the difference between the Platonic-Aristotelian dualism and the "superior" monism of the Hermetic philosophers. Blake's dislike of the Greek

[25] George Berkeley, Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflections on and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar Water (Dublin and London: W. Innys, 1744) pp. 203-241. Blake used this edition.

philosophers was based on the same distinctions, for he saw Greek dualism as the stimulator of asceticism, versus the reverence for the body and sexuality taught by the Cabalists and Swedenborgians (CW, pp. 773-775). In the same year, 1820, Blake crowded many hieroglyphic comments into The Laocoon, which included Hebrew letters, allusions to the Cabalistic Lilith, the Cherubim of Solomon's Temple, and the Grand Man, as well as a firm defense of Cabalistic sexual theory--i.e., "Hebrew Art is called Sin by the Deist Science" and "Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed" (p. 776).

In about 1822, Blake and Flaxman (still an active Swedenborgian) both illustrated the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, which had long been spoken of in occult circles because of Cabalistic traditions about its contents, but which was first published in English in 1821. The Ethiopic book had been brought to England in 1773 by the explorer James Bruce, who was a Freemason (Gould, "Medical Profession," p. 159), and who possibly showed the book to his fellow Masons during the decades in which he kept it in private possession. The Cabalistic traditions about the various "lost" books of Enoch were considered central mysteries within Freemasonry. Mackenzie discussed the importance of Enoch to the Hermetic philosophers, who regarded him as their inspired founder. Vestiges of this belief were "still to be found in the Rosicrucian rite and in the Order of Ishmael, in which Enoch was connected with the Pillars of Wisdom, Jachin and Boaz" (Masonic Cyclopedia, p. 51). Mackenzie also noted the importance to Masonry of the "Ancient of Days," who appears in the Ethiopic Book of Enoch as "the Reverend Prince of the Universe," and concluded that "in some sections of philosophical magic, this becomes of great importance" (Masonic Cyclopedia, p. 37). Blake's great engraving of "The Grand Architect of the Universe" (1794) was also called "The Ancient of Days,"

and its possible Masonic significance has already been discussed. His interest in Enoch was of early origin, and he engraved a separate picture of him in 1807 (Bentley, Records, p. 617). One of Blake's five illustrations to the Ethiopic Book of Enoch reveals his Cabalistic interpretation, for in "The Angels and the Daughters of Man," two angels with phallic attributes, surrounded by rays or flames, descend towards one of the beautiful daughters of man (Keynes, Drawings, no. 84).

Flaxman's mutual interest in the Ethiopic book and his continued friendly collaboration with Blake in 1822 is suggestive for, though definite evidence is still lacking, there is much circumstantial evidence for his possible Masonic association. Flaxman's early association with the predominantly Masonic Theosophical Society, his appearance at Freemasons Tavern during Taylor's Rosicrucian experiment, and the collection of Masonic busts by him still preserved at Freemasons Hall all suggest his Masonic membership. He also wrote a mystical work, The Knight of the Blazing Cross (1796), with allegorical verse and drawings that seem to draw on the Swedenborgian-Masonic traditions of Knights of the Red Cross and other symbolic orders (see Mackey, pp. 241-67).

Flaxman's attitude toward occultism and Animal Magnetism near the time of his work on the book of Enoch is indicated by a valuable diary notation in Crabb Robinson's journal. In 1821, Robinson recorded:

> At Flaxman's, where . . . we talked of animal magnetism. Flaxman declared he believed it to be fraud and imposition, an opinion I was not prepared for from him. But the conversation led to some very singular observations on his part, which show a state of mind by no means unfit for the reception of the new doctrine. He spoke of his dog's habit of fixing her eye upon him . . . this he called animal power; and he intimated also a belief in demonical influence; so that it was not clear to me that he did not think animal magnetism was somewhat criminal, allowing its pretensions to be well founded, rather than supposing them to be vain. (Robinson, Diary, I, 467)

In 1823 Robinson, who was fascinated by Animal Magnetism and by Blake at the same time, had a long discussion with Flaxman again, who affirmed his belief in ghosts but thought the German magnetiser whom Robinson had praised had borrowed everything from "a much greater man, Swedenborg" (Diary, I, 494-496). Robinson added that Flaxman believed in phrenology, interpreting Gall's and Spurzheim's theories in Swedenborgian terms (Diary, II, 30).

Among the friends whom Blake met with John Varley and John Linnell were a group of young artists--including Samuel Palmer, F.O. Finch, Edward Calvert, George Richmond, Henry Richter, James Holmes, and Frederick Tatham. The youthful enthusiasts soon became disciples of Blake and were especially struck by his "power of concentration and vision." They spent long hours with the delighted Blake, talking about art and spiritual vision. By 1824 they called themselves "the Ancients," Blake the "Master," and Blake's small flat "the House of the Interpreter" (Bentley, Records, pp. 294-295). Among the many speculations about the origin of the latter phrase is the passage in Pilgrim's Progress, where Christian came to the "House of the Interpreter," and hoped the wise man would show him excellent things to help him in his journey to Mount Zion. Blake had engraved "The Man Sweeping the Interpreter's Parlour" in about 1794 and refurbished it in 1821. There have also been many guesses at the term "The Ancients," but one more possibility is the significance of the phrase in Masonic lore.

As discussed earlier, Freemasonry in England in the eighteenth century had split into two factions, the more conservative "Moderns" and the more democratic "Ancients." It was in the lodges of the Ancients that French radicalism and occultism made the most progress. According to Yeats's Rosicrucian associate Mathers, "the Ancients" played an important role in the Rosicrucian rites of Freemasonry. Mathers said the four important officers of a Rosicrucian

College, open in the Zelator grade, are named Ancients and preside over the elemental tests into the order. They also preside over the four Rosicrucian elements and spirits (which Blake made extensive use of in his poetry). Mathers gave a chart of "the course of the Zelator past the Four Ancients, which included hieroglyphs quite similar to those in Blake's visionary sketch of "The Man who Built the Pyramids."[26] Mackenzie discussed the Masonic tradition that the "Academy of the Ancients of Antiquity, or of the Mysteries" was an alchemystical fraternity, Masonically constituted, which claimed to be founded at Rome in the sixteenth century by John Baptista Porta, and which was revived in Poland by Thoux de Salverte in 1763 (Mackenzie, p. 14). Provocatively, Viatte pointed out that Salverte was a student of the London Cabalist, Dr. Falk (Viatte, I, 111). But by 1813, the Duke of Sussex re-united the two branches of English Freemasonry and the "Ancients," with all their accumulated occultism, Rosicrucianism, Cabalism, and Swedenborgianism officially ceased to exist (Mackey, p. 308).

Though there is not enough evidence at present to define Blake's group as an amateur version of the supposedly defunct Masonic group, a remark by John Linnell shows that he was surrounded by enough Freemasons to irritate him. As mentioned before, Linnell was "confessedly out of touch with the peculiar sentiment which was the bond of union of the Ancients and seldom attended their monthly meetings" (Bruce, p. 162). In 1838, when looking back on those years, Linnell wrote to Samuel Palmer, who was in Italy:

[26] Magregor Mathers, The Symbolism of the Four Ancients (London: Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, Clavicula III, 1900) pp. 1-3. Also bound with Westcott.

> Sincerity . . . does not provoke me at any time like secrecy. It is freemasonry that I detest--secret oaths and vows extracted, kidnapping of the intellect, and Burking the perceptions. How many active-minded, clever people carry about with them a load of fetters which they try, too often successfully, to fasten upon their friends under the plea of ornamenting them. Some are golden chains to be sure, but most are iron gilt. O for spiritual power to burst those bonds by which we are confined in "uncouth cells, where brooding darkness spreads his jealous wings," instead of exulting in the healthy atmosphere of divine light and truth.[27]

It was also Linnell who erased the graphic Cabalistic sexual symbolism of Blake's drawings.

Samuel Palmer took a house at Shoreham, which the "Ancients" called "the Valley of Vision" and often visited. The local villagers called them the "Extollagers" (astrologers), and the artists spent much time with Blake, speaking of the spirit world and vision (Wright, Blake, I, 91). At least two anecdotes suggest that they also spoke of Animal Magnetism, for Palmer recounted their discussions on "the traverse of sympathy," a magnetic phrase, and Calvert described Blake's clairvoyance in which he envisioned the distant Palmer walking toward them on the road. The Ancients even made a nocturnal trip to a haunted castle to search out a "rapping" ghost, which turned out to be a tapping snail.[28]

The theosophical interest in Blake of several of the group is revealed by their other preoccupations, for Finch was a Swedenborgian, Richter a student of German "Idealism," Palmer a reader of the seventeenth-century English theosophical writers and a seer of visions, and Calvert a student of the ancient mystery religions. After Blake's death in 1827, when charges of his mental disturbance were raked up by many

[27] A.H. Palmer, The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer (London: Seeley, 1892), p. 65.

[28] Mona Wilson, The Life of William Blake, new ed. (1927; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 299.

commentators, the Ancients and Blake's astrological friends felt called upon to defned his sanity. But they were not always convincing to the skeptics and rationalists because of the theosophical terminology of their own defenses. Cornelius Varley, the eccentric artist and inventor who became a convinced spiritualist and Animal Magnetiser in the mid-nineteenth century, told Gilchrist that there was nothing mad about Blake; "people set down for mad anything different from themselves" (Gilchrist, p. 321). James Ward, who "wore out the night talking astrology" with Blake and Varley, defended Blake's sanity in 1855 by arguing that he was possessed of "good spirits" rather than inferior ones (Wright I, 66; Gilchrist, p. 322). By 1869, Palmer had become a devout homoeopathist and spiritualist; he defended Blake's sanity by speculating that fallible and erroneous spirits in the upper world may have misled Blake (A.H. Palmer, p. 300). But the most singular of the defenses of Blake's sanity came from Seymour Kirkup in the 1850's, who was convinced of it after he himself conversed with Dante's spirit while in the magnetic trance.[29]

With Blake's death, the essentially eighteenth-century mentality of the secret societies which carried on the occult traditions was transformed within a different nineteenth-century milieu. But much of that milieu--especially that of Animal Magnetism, Swedenborgianism, Freemasonry, and Rosicrucianism--became defined through the reactions of its major exponents to Blake's conception of art. One of his most enthusiastic supporters, John Varley, passed the traditions down through his own family, as well as instructing such eminent nineteenth-century figures as Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Richard Burton, and John Ruskin in the occult arts. As

[29] See Kirkup's letter to W.M. Rossetti in Rossetti Papers (London, 1903), p. 171, quoted and discussed in Chapter XV of this study.

A.I. Story notes, Varley in many respects became the intellectual father or certainly major stimulator of much Victorian "spiritualism" (Story, Linnell, p. 162). Another of Blake's friends, Henry Crabb Robinson, maintained into the nineteenth century the connections between English and European occultists that had flourished in the revolutionary decades of the late eighteenth century, and the journals of his long life provide a barometer of the Continental interests and contacts of Freemasons and Animal Magnetisers in England and Germany. Thus, though we move into the drastically different cultural climate of Victorian England, the long shadow of William Blake, so often called an isolated figure, falls surprisingly on the next generations of "modern" theosophists.

Chapter XII: The Nineteenth-century Tradition of Blakean Occultism: the German Connection and the English Line of Descent

After the French Revolution, there were dozens of exposés of the Masonic Illuminati conspiracy, which either praised or vilified the suspected political efforts of the secret societies.[1] With the establishment of the French Empire, in which Napoleon's family took over the highest ranks of Freemasonry, Masonry in England became less active in radical politics and much quieter in its occult interests. Though Viatte points out the flourishing of Animal Magnetism, Boehmenism, Swedenborgianism, and Cabalism in Germany during the Napoleon Empire (Viatte, II, 45), the occultist pre-occupations of the great German Masonic writers---Goethe, Schiller, Herder, etc.---were defused of their Illuminatist connotations in England by grouping them under the harmless title of "German Idealism." Blake's friend, Henry Crabb Robinson became a major channel of German theosophic ideas into England, and though by his own admission he was too prosaic in mind to grasp their occultist complexities, it was possibly through his own Masonic connections that he imbibed the philosophy of the German literary Illuminati.

Though Robinson's commentary on Blake in his voluminous Diary is one of the most important sources of information on the artist, critics have tended to dismiss Robinson's worries about the confusions and fanaticism of many of Blake's religious beliefs as the obtuse reactions of an unsympathetic mind. But Robinson became interested in Blake as early as 1806, when few others were, and remained fascinated and supportive of him until the end of his life. As Yeats pointed

[1] see J.M. Roberts, The Mythology of the Secret Societies (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), chap. VI.

out, Robinson was generally equipped to deal with Blake through his own experiences with German theosophy (Ellis and Yeats, I, 150). An examination of Robinson's associations with radical politics, Freemasons, and Animal Magnetisers reveals that he was deeply rooted in the same occultist milieu that Blake was, but he always recognized that he was a fascinated outsider looking in, for he was not a visionary himself. Like Blake, Robinson (1775-1867) came from a Dissenter background, was an enthusiastic radical in politics, and ardent supporter of the French Revolution. When the London Corresponding Society radicals were acquitted in 1794, he "ran about the town [Colchester] , knocking at people's doors, and screaming out the joyful words."[2] In 1796 Robinson moved to London, where he met Godwin, Holcroft, Johnson, "Citizen" Stanhope, and, significantly for his early interest in Blake, William Sharp. Robinson pointed out the long previous friendship of Flaxman and Sharp, and Flaxman later discussed with him Sharp's advocacy of Richard Brothers' movement (Robinson, Diary, I, 34-35). Robinson visited Johnson and other political prisoners in Newgate in 1799, but was feeling at loose ends and worried about his lack of vocation for the law and his lack of university training for a literary career (Diary, I, 37). His fateful decision to study German came because

> . . . I was sort of Insolvent in Mind--a Debtor afraid to open his Books and see how his Accounts stood
> I came to Germany because I did not know what to do with myself in England.[3]

[2] Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary Reminiscences, and Correspondence, ed. Thomas Sadler (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1871), I, 17.

[3] John Milton Baker, Henry Crabb Robinson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 99.

Robinson went to Germany in 1800 and stayed over five years. At Frankfort, in his first year, he met Sophia de la Roche, a sentimental novelist and old friend of the Freemason Wieland (Diary, I, 48). Sophie was also a lifelong friend of Jacob Sarasin, Cagliostro's Masonic patron, and had visited Cagliostro and Lord Gordon in London in 1786, as an emissary from Sarasin (Colson, pp. 211-214). Her account of the visit is important, for it suggested that Gordon had already converted to Judaism at that time. As Robinson noted, "She herself was never tired of talking of England, of which she was a passionate admirer," and one can only be sorry that Robinson had not yet started his diary records of actual conversations (the diary covers 1811 to 1867). In 1801, Robinson was introduced to Goethe's works and began the ardent investigation of German "romantic" literature that became so important to the English literary world. With Christian Brentano, he spent a night on the Brocken, made famous by Faust, and studied its history of witchcraft and pagan rites (Diary, I, 57). Like Swedenborg, Lavater, Goethe, and so many other students of theosophical groups, Robinson visited a Moravian or "Herrnhutt" community, admired their "apostolic Christian" way of life, and compared their doctrine of love to Goethe's in Wilhelm Meister. He spent a week with Von Schall, an artist employed by Count de Brühl, the eminent Prussian Illuminé whose possible relation to Blake's patrons, the Egremont family, has been discussed earlier (Diary, I, 65).

In November 1801, Robinson arrived at Weimar, where he sought out the great artists and writers gathered there under the liberal aegis of the Masonic Duke Karl August. Though at present we have no evidence before 1814 of Robinson's sympathy for Freemasonry, and none for his membership before 1828, he somehow gained access to the most eminent

German Freemasons of the age. His first call was on the aged Illuminé Wieland, for whom Goethe later directed an elaborate Masonic funeral. Sophie de la Roche had given Robinson a letter of introduction to Herder, whose Illuminati membership in the 1780's led to his studies on the origins of Rosicrucianism. Finally, he talked with Schiller, another Illuminatus from the 1780's, about Coleridge's translations from the German (Diary, I, 73).

Throughout 1801, Robinson continued his studies of contemporary German philosophy and literature, adding Schelling and Schlegal to his acquaintance, and thought of translating Lessing's works (which included the important Masonic dialogue, Ernst und Falk, possibly based on the London Cabalist Dr. Falk), as well as those of the Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, whose debates with Lessing over Freemasonry were important Masonic source material (J.M. Baker, p. 102). In 1802, Robinson enrolled at the University of Jena, where he attended Schelling's lectures, which proved that "magnetism, electricity, and galvanism" were all various forms of the same thing. Schelling stimulated in Robinson a life-long interest in Animal Magnetism, that eventually made his journals a barometer of English interest in the subject for more than fifty-six years. Schelling also affirmed the very Blakean notion that Bacon, Newton, and Locke were "the greatest enemies and destroyers of philosophy in modern times" (Diary, I, 106-107).

As Robinson's later friend Coleridge noted, "Schelling was trying to make a coherent system out of the phantasmagoria of Jacob Boehme's dream world."[4] Interestingly, Coleridge, whose talks with Robinson on German literature and philosophy were important to his own philosophical development, had

[4] R.L. Brett, S.T.Coleridge: Writers and their Background (London: G. Bell, 1971), p.205.

"conjured over" Boehme's Aurora in his youth. He then turned to Schelling to "identify" what Boehme "jumbles," but ultimately placed Boehme in his highest pantheon. As Dorothy Emmett notes, "In the end, for all his [Coleridge's] borrowing from Schelling, it is perhaps Boehme, touching his imagination . . . who is the deeper influence. He suspected that Schelling and even Spinoza were trying to get reality out of abstractions" (see "Coleridge and Philosophy," in Brett, p. 206).

By 1804 Robinson met another literary figure who shared his interest in Animal Magnetism and the theosophy of the "illuminated" Freemasons, Madame de Stäel (Diary, I, 112). Baron de Stäel, her husband, was a Freemason and often visited the Avignon Illuminés in the 1780's. The Masonic and occultist associations of Madame de Stäel herself have been amply documented by Viatte (III, Chapter 3). She was a great admirer of Saint-Martin and Swedenborg, and she discussed her theosophical interests with Robinson, while he taught her everything he had learned about contemporary German literature and philosophy in 1804 (Viatte, II, 118). She in turn became the major channel of the traditions into France. Robinson and Madame de Stäel would both lament the lack of German-style "illuminated" philosophy in England, and during their long friendship both collaborated on spreading the doctrines in their native lands. Later in 1814, Robinson recorded a long discussion at Madame de Stael's salon in London with her protegé Benjamin Constant and Wilhelm Schlegel on Animal Magnetism.[5]

But most important to Robinson's study of the Illuminatist mentality and theosophy was his rare interview in 1804 with Adam Weishaupt, the father of the whole movement. Robinson had read Barruel's and Robison's exposés of the Illuminatist

[5] Derek Hudson, The Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson, abridged (London: Oxford, 1967), p. 35.

conspiracy, which both painted a villainous picture of Weishaupt. He sought out Weishaupt at Saxe-Gotha, where the reigning Duke, himself a Freemason, had given Weishaupt shelter after his expulsion from Germany. Weishaupt allowed few visitors, especially Englishmen, whose impertinent curiosity he abhorred, but through a servant's error Robinson gained admittance. Weishaupt liked him and spoke frankly with him on three different visits. The aging revolutionary explained the rise and fall of the Illuminati movement in Germany, the political persecution since then, and admitted that his Pythagoras "contained all the statistics of the Secret Societies." Robinson's description of the kind of radical mentality and its subsequent disenchantment that Weishaupt had so influenced in the late eighteenth century can stand as a capsule definition of a recurrently apocalyptic, fin de siècle state of mind and its aftermath: "He took a desponding view of human life, and seemed to think human society unimprovable. No wonder! He had himself failed as a reformer, and therefore thought no one else could succeed" (Diary, I, 124- 25). Robinson would hear the same sentiments from the ex-radicals Wordsworth and Coleridge when he returned to England. He left Weishaupt with a feeling of admiration for his personal integrity but felt "the vast extent of education" since his time had made Weishaupt's once valuable works passé. Interestingly, to Robinson, the education which brought this about was influenced by Freemasons from Pestalozzi to Schelling.

In the meantime, Robinson had also become increasingly intimate with Goethe and his circle and in 1805 made the acquaintance of two more "theosophic scientists," Doctors Gall and Spurzheim, who would become important in nineteenth-century Mesmeric-phrenological circles in England. Robinson attended Gall's lectures on "Craniology" at Jena, and discussed the theories with Gall and Spurzheim, his assistant:

> This science of Craniology, which keeps its place in the world, though not among the universally received sciences, was then quite new. One or two pamphlets had appeared, but the gloss of novelty was still upon it. Goethe deemed it worthy of investigation, and, when a satire upon it was put into the form of a drama, would not allow it to be acted. (Diary, I, 140)

Since Craniology was a development of Lavater's theories of physiognomy, upon which Goethe had earlier collaborated, his interest was natural. Robinson decided to introduce "this new science" to England and purchased a marked skull from Spurzheim. He also brought two pamphlets on Gall's theories, and soon after his return to England in late 1805, he published a pamphlet on the subject, Some Account of Dr. Gall's New Theory of Physiognomy . . . (London: 1807). Robinson took great pride in the "happy motto" he chose from Sir Thomas Browne, that eclectic seventeenth-century student of Cabalism and occultism:

> The finger of God hath left an inscription upon all his works, not graphical or composed of letters, but of their several forms, constitutions, parts, and operations, which aptly joined together, do make one word that doth express their nature. (Diary, I, 141)

Robinson also wrote the article on Craniology for the new edition of Rees' Encyclopedia. In 1814, he visited again with Gall and Spurzheim in London, where Spurzheim was now "the lion of the day" and preached from the skulls of several guests. Robinson noted that "he was tolerably successful in his guesses, though not with me, for he gave me theosophy, and tried to make a philosopher of me" (Diary, I, 276). Robinson's comment reveals the paradox of his long career of friendship with and admiration of occultists and theosophers, for as he observed in 1848, "it is strange that I, who have no imagination, nor any power beyond that of a logical understanding, should yet have a great respect for religious mystics" (Diary, II, 372). Significantly, he was moved to the observation by a conversation with the Swedenborgian and Animal Magnetiser Garth Wilkinson, whose "love of Blake" was delightful to Robinson.

Once back in England, Robinson maintained friendships with Flaxman, Southey, Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and introduced Madame de Staël to the London literati. He renewed his interest in Blake and was one of the few visitors to Blake's Exhibition of 1810, which he described in a German article in Vaterlandisches Museum (January 1811). Robinson noted that Blake's "religious convictions had brought on him the credit of being an absolute lunatic" (Bentley, Records, p. 448), but he pointed out the many beauties and "mystic allegories" of The Songs of Innocence and Experience: "Among them are poetical pictures of the highest sublimity; and again here are poetical fancies which can scarcely be understood even by the initiated " (Bentley, Records, p. 452). The last phrase (my italics) may be significant, for Robinson pointed out that "a host of expressions occur" among the outpourings of Blake's Descriptive Catalogue for the Exhibition that "one would expect from a German rather than an Englishman." Since nearly all of Robinson's German associates were actual initiates of high degree Freemasonry, it is interesting that he places Blake's comments on the Druids, Swedenborg, and vision-inducement within that German context. He concluded that "Germans with a higher degree even than Englishmen" were bound to take an interest in Blake's visionary works.

Robinson's diary notes on Blake's discussions of his visions, the dictation by spirits of his "automatic" writings, his praise of Boehme and Swedenborg, his belief in free love, and his Cabalistic antinomianism ("what are called vices in the natural World are the highest sublimities in the spiritual World") are invaluable source material for scholars (see Wittreich, pp. 64, 105). Though much of Robinson's confusion about Blake's beliefs may have resulted from his "untheosophic mind," much may have reflected Blake's own confusions. For throughout the period of their friendship, Robinson maintained

his study of "illuminist" German theosophy, Animal Magnetism, phrenology, Indian philosophy, and--with Coleridge--investigated Boehme, Swedenborg, and the same occult writers Blake enjoyed. That he may also have been active in Masonic affairs at this time is suggested by a Masonic anecdote in his diary, which included the German connosieur Charles Aders, another friend and patron of Blake.

In August 1814, Dr. Tiarks, an emigré German scholar, brought a German Freemason Kastner to Robinson's house. Kastner was "an enthusiast," a distinguished chemist, and a newspaper editor. He had come to England to try "to interest the Government in favor of Freemasonry, in order to oppose priestcraft, which he thinks is reviving" (Diary, I, 279). He succeeded in getting a thousand pound grant from Parliament, and hoped for much more, possibly through the influence of King George IV, who as the Prince of Wales had been Grand Master of English Freemasonry until 1813. The Duke of Sussex, the king's brother, had been initiated in a German lodge and was the present Grand Master. Kastner had corresponded earlier with Robinson from Germany and expected "great assistance" from him for his Masonic mission. Robinson was unable to help financially but Charles Aders found him cheap lodgings, and Kastner soon met Robinson's and Aders' circle of friends in London (Diary, I, 281). Significantly, Blake was a member of Charles Aders' circle for many years; in fact, it was at Aders' house in 1825 that Blake finally met Robinson, who had admired Blake from afar previously (Blake, CW, p. 936). Robinson remained interested in Kastner's work and in October 1814 noted the success of his Masonic efforts (Diary, I, 293).

During the same period of Kastner's solicitation of Masonic aid, Robinson also visited with Lafayette, the most famous Masonic adherent of Mesmer and Cagliostro in the 1780's, who still articulated republican views. Robinson

was impressed by Lafayette's continued sympathy for the French royal family (for which Lord Gordon and Blake once scorned him), and by his firm anti-slavery and anti-imperialist views. Lafayette also assured him that he was not allied with Napoleon, and criticized Talleyrand for not being "an enthusiast in anything" (Diary, I, 284- 85).

That Robinson was probably a Freemason, though not a very serious one, as well as the friend of many eminent Masons, seems indicated by his diary note for 18 June 1828, that he attended a grand dinner at Freemasons Tavern "to celebrate a really great event." The Duke of Sussex, who was still Grand Master, was in the chair, nearly four hundred people were present, and after many speeches, the gala evening broke up in the early morning (Diary, II, 84).

Throughout the 1820's and 1830's, Robinson continued his studies of Animal Magnetism and discussed the phenomenon with Flaxman and Mrs.Aders--who were involved with Blake at the time--was well as with Harriet Martineau and Basil Montagu, who both became increasingly important in English Mesmeric history. In Germany in 1829, Robinson studied Dr.Windischmann's book, Of Something that the Art of Healing Needs, which dealt with magnetic cures and faith healing (Diary, II, 99). In the 1830's, he added the salons of Sir Lyon Goldsmid (whose grandfather had been Dr. Falk's greatest benefactor) and of Lady Blessington to his sources of conversation, and both shared his interest in magnetic phenomena and theosophic speculation (Diary, II, 99, 75).

Robinson's interest in Animal Magnetism would become heightened in the 1840's by Harriet Martineau's spectacular Mesmeric cure, and he would find fresh impetus to his Blake studies from the outburst of Swedenborgian, magnetic "spiritualism" in the 1850's. But before examining these later developments, it will be important to look at Lady Blessington's salon in the 1830's to understand the vital

role that Blake's other friend, John Varley, played in passing on an English version of the late eighteenth-century Continental theosophy which Robinson largely introduced to the English literary world, but which Varley had long been practising as "practical magic."

From the time that she married the Earl of Blessington in 1818, the "Most Gorgeous Lady Blessington" established a lively salon which drew in the leading intellectuals and artists of the day.[6] At St.James Square, the Count D'Orsay, Byron, Tom Moore, Wilkie, and Landor all enjoyed her hospitality and wide-ranging curiosity. In early 1822, John Varley brought Blake to meet the Blessingtons, who welcomed him despite his plain attire among so many dandies.[7] The Blessingtons then moved to Europe, where they stayed until the Earl's sudden death in 1829 and Lady Blessington's return to England in 1831 (DNB). With the greatest of the dandies, Count d'Orsay, Lady Blessington once again established her salon and by the late 1830's, Gore House was the chief gathering-place of occultists as well as artists and statesmen.

In the 1830's, John Varley was "the wise man of her court" (Molloy, II, 182), and would discourse "vividly and sincerely" on his occult beliefs and experiences to the party.[8] Lady B., "who had spent a lonely Irish childhood of dreaming and story-telling, was fascinated by Varley, but none listened more attentively than Bulwer-Lytton and Benjamin Disraeli, who were soon "infected with his beliefs" on magic and astrology. They listened entranced to Varley's stories

[6] J.F.Molloy, _The Most Gorgeous Lady Blessington_ (London: Downey, 1896).

[7] F.G.Stephens, _Memorials of William Mulready_ (London: Sampson Low, 1890), p. 41.

[8] Michael Sadleir, _Blessington-D'orsay: a Masquerade_ (London: Constable, 1933), p. 261.

of his extraordinary friend William Blake, "whose poems held the key to spiritual knowledge" and whose pictures "were among the most wonderful the world has seen" (Molloy, II, 184). After Varley's descriptions of Blake's rapt meditations which produced the fifty "Visionary Heads," Bulwer and Disraeli plunged into discussion and experiment. Varley led them in debates on witchcraft and spiritualism, and they tried crystal-gazing, with the help of a famous crystal given to Lady B. by Nazim Pasha (Bury, Varley, p. 68). According to the Pasha, the crystal had been in the possession of his family for over twenty-four hundred years, and various generations had regulated their lives according to the symbolic visions seen in it. Lady B. allowed her enthusiastically occultist guests to experiment with it, but she refused to participate, for when the valuable gift had first arrived, Nazim Pasha helped her meditate upon it until she saw such a terrifying vision that she never looked at it again. Bulwer studied astrology, occultism and especially geomancy under Varley and made at the time a famous geomantic prediction about Disraeli's political future which came true in every detail (Molloy, II, 186- 87). Disraeli was also fascinated by occultism, stimulated by his recent trip to the Middle East which stirred his interest in esoteric Jewish lore. The meeting of Varley, Bulwer, and Disraeli had important ramifications in the history of occultism and the nineteenth-century secret societies which trained a new generation of adepts, and it is significant that all three viewed Blake as a spiritualistic medium and artist inspired by "divine influx."

Benjamin Disraeli came by his interest in Blake and occultism naturally, for his father Isaac Disraeli (1776-1848) was the first of Blake's customers outside his immediate circle of friends, and amassed a great collection

of Blake's works before 1816 (Bentley, Records, p. 243). As noted earlier, Isaac was related by marriage to the Goldsmid family, who cherished the memory of Dr. Falk. As a young man, Isaac had spent several years before 1789 conversing with Jacobins in France and England, while immersing himself in libraries to study the odd bits of occultism and antiquarian lore that filled his books. In the 1780's, Isaac was a close friend of the Orientalist Francis Douce, who was intimate at the same time with George Cumberland, one of Blake's closest friends then, and of Thomas Holcroft, whose theosophical and radical theories "filled Blake with enthusiasm."[9] Ogden points out that Isaac was on the fringe of the Jacobin circle during the revolutionary decade, and possibly got to know Blake's work at Johnson's bookshop.[10] But Isaac also knew other associates of Blake, such as William Hayley and the neo-Platonist Thomas Taylor, whom he satirized as a "half-crazy enthusiast" in his 1797 novel Vaurien (Ogden, pp. 11, 42). Thus, the question of Isaac Disraeli's relation to Blake needs new investigation, for there were many possible contacts, which may yield new areas of information on Blake.

In 1791 Disraeli published the first edition of Curiosities of Literature, which had an enormous and prolonged success, running to many revised editions. This cornucopia of scraps of rare information reveals Isaac's wide-ranging curiosity and genuine scholarly ability to examine manuscripts, archival material, diaries, etc., in the accumulation of his eclectic erudition. Its tremendous popularity--with the

[9] Eldridge Colby, ed. The Life of Thomas Holcroft (London: Constable, 1925), p. xviii.

[10] James Ogden, Isaac Disraeli (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p. 43.

public as well as with literary men like Byron and Scott--also reveals the widespread popular interest in miscellanea of esoteric lore. Isaac examined Elias Ashmole's voluminous, unpublished manuscripts on Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry and John Dee's Cabalistic angel-magic.[11] He discussed the Rosicrucian "perpetual lamps," and then scorned the "modern seekers," who included Thomas Taylor. After discussing neo-Platonic traditions from Ficino on, he ridiculed Taylor for his polytheism and his assertion that Christianity is "a bastardized and barbarous Platonism." In a section on the astrology of Ashmole and Lilly, Disraeli noted that "Lilly informs us, that in his various conferences with angels, their voice resembled that of the Irish," a point which delighted W.B. Yeats as he tried to turn Blake, whose angelic communications he believed in, into an Irishman(see I. Disraeli, I, 292-369).

Isaac's early fiction also seems to reflect Cabalistic sexual concepts and in a very Blakean way. In the short tale "The Lovers," Disraeli graphically described how "mutual desire and the necessity of reciprocal pleasure" successively give birth to the "agreeable arts" of music, dancing, painting, sailing, architecture, sculpture, poetry, and gardening. As the young lovers watch two swans making love, Disraeli concluded:

> Souls of Chastity! When ye meet ye know yourselves worthy of each other; your first embrace is the prelude of eternal confidence, and your voluptuousness is in proportion to your virtue! (Ogden, p. 57)

In the same period, Blake annotated Lavater's statement equating "the most religious" and "the most voluptuous of men" as "True Christian philosophy" (CW, p. 75). Disraeli

[11] Isaac Disraeli, Curiosities of Literature, 14th edition (1791, New York: A.C. Armstrong, 1881), IV, 197.

continued this theme in The Literary Character, in which a chapter on "The Matrimonial State of Literature" argued the importance of marriage and sexuality to men of genius (Ogden, p. 71). That Disraeli was familiar with the Cabala, which affirms these sexual notions, is shown in his discussion of the role of anagrams in Cabalistic science (I. Disraeli, III, 149).

But most interesting for Blake studies is Disraeli's later essay, "Dreams at the Dawn of Philosophy," in which he discussed the whole line of Hermetic philosophers from Trithemius to Kenelm Digby, and concluded with a contemporary anecdote:

> The late Holcroft, Loutherbourg, and Cosway imagined that they should escape the vulgar era of scriptural life by reorganizing their old bones and moistening their dry marrow; their new principles of vitality were supposed by them to be found in the powers of the mind; this seemed more reasonable, but proved to be as little efficacious as those other philosophers, who imagine they have detected the hidden principle of life in the eels frisking in vinegar, and allude to the "bookbinder who creates the bookworm." (I. Disraeli, IV, 179)

The linking of Holcroft (d.1809), who also translated Lavater and was a London Corresponding Society member, with these two Swedenborgian Masonic magnetisers is important, and suggests a larger theosophical role for Holcroft than criticism has shown.

Though Isaac Disraeli was proud of his Jewishness, he was a free-thinker and broke with the Jewish Synagogue in 1817. In his anonymous pamphlet, The Genius of Judaism (1833), he wrote enthusiastically of the past history and sufferings of the Jews, but protested against their social exclusiveness in his own day and their obstinate adherance to superstitious practices and beliefs (DNB). Thus, as he continued his life-long investigation of superstitions and occult lore, his

interest was obviously that of the curious scholar and not the believer. For his important Life of Charles I (1828-30), he utilized the unpublished Conway manuscripts with their fund of information on seventeenth-century occultism and secret societies, and he related a curious story of the announced visit of the President of the Rosy Cross to Charles I in 1628, a story which needs new investigation by Renaissance scholars of the Rosicrucian movement (I. Disraeli, III, 392). His Amenities of Literature (1841) included essays on "The Occult Philosopher, Dr. Dee," "The Rosacrucian Fludd," "The Druids," and many similar ones (Ogden, p. 174).

Given these lifelong interests and erudition in the occult tradition, Isaac Disraeli's fascination with his contemporary William Blake takes on a new significance. T.F. Dibdin, a Freemason, close friend of Disraeli, and admirer of Blake, reprinted a letter from Disraeli, describing his great Blake collection:

> It is quite impossible to transmit to you the ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY designs I possess of Blake's; and as impossible, if you had them, to convey a very precise idea of such infinite variety of these wonderous deliriums of his fine and wild creative imagination. Heaven, hell, and earth, and the depths below, are some of the scenes he seems alike to have tenanted; but the invisible world also busies his fancy; aereal beings which could only float in his visions, and unimaginable chimeras, such as you have never viewed, lie by the side of his sunshiny people . . . Blake often breaks into the "terrible via" of Michael Angelo, and we start amid a world too horrified to dwell in . . . I feel the imperfection of my general description. Such singular productions require a commentary. (Bentley, Records, p. 243).

Dibdin also described Disraeli's literary séances at which Blake's illuminated books were the central feature:

> My friend Mr. D'Israeli possesses the largest collection of any individual of the very extraordinary drawings of Mr. Blake; and he loves his classical friends to disport with them, beneath the lighted Argand lamp of his drawing room, while soft music is heard upon the several corridores and recesses of his enchanted staircase. Meanwhile the visitor turns over the contents of

> the Blakean portefeuille. Angels, Devils, Giants, Dwarfs, Saints, Sinners, Senators, and Chimney Sweeps, cut equally conspicuous figures . . . Inconceivably blest is the artist, in his visions of intellectual bliss. A sort of golden halo envelopes every object impressed upon the retina of his imagination; and (as I learn) he is at times shaking hands with Homer . . . Meanwhile, shadowy beings of an unearthly form hang over his couch, and disclose to him scenes . . . such as no other Mortal hath yet conceived! Mr. Blake is himself no ordinary poet. (Bentley, Records, p. 289)

It is surprising, given the paucity of sources of new information on Blake and the hundreds of scholars at work on the "isolated" figure, that Disraeli's important relation to him has not received scholarly investigation. Crabb Robinson was also a friend of the elder Disraeli and of Lady Blessington, and Isaac's enthusiasm for Blake must have reinforced Robinson's and Varley's at the Blessington soirées, which they all attended in the 1830's (Ogden, pp. 141, 152).

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1888), the eldest son of Isaac, was baptized in the Anglican Church in 1817 after his father's break with the Synagogue, but Isaac still had his sons circumcized and tutored in Hebrew and Jewish traditions by a visiting Rabbi (Ogden, p. 139). Benjamin achieved a huge success with his novel, Vivian Grey (1826-27), and then abruptly left London for a three-year sojourn in the Middle East (from 1828 to 1831). He returned to England, stirred by his experiences of Oriental and Semitic traditions. In 1833 he answered his father's work on The Genius of Judaism, which was addressed to the practical problems of the assimilation of Jews in a Christian society, with The Wondrous Tale of Alroy, filled with romantic ideas about the Jewish race, and in which Benjamin said he defined his "ideal ambition of reviving its former glories under his own leadership" (Ogden, p. 203). In his preface to Alroy, Disraeli wrote, "With regard to the supernatural machinery of this romance, it is Cabalistical and correct," and placed a series of learned notes on Cabalism and

astrology at the end.[12] When David Alroy emerges as the deliverer of his people, he is aided by the mystical, Cabalistic Jabaster, who keeps his Jewish powers through his adherance to the great Jewish esoteric traditions.[13]

Benjamin met Bulwer-Lytton through the latter's great admiration for his father's work, and after his return to England, the younger Disraeli shared Bulwer's interest in Cabalism and astrology. But there has been little research into this aspect of Benjamin's life, as his dominating political role after 1837, when he became an M.P., has preoccupied biographers and historians. Interestingly, J.M. Roberts, in his recent Mythology of the Secret Societies introduces his study of the possible revolutionary role of Freemasonry by ridiculing Benjamin Disraeli's obsessive belief in the reality of a radical, neo-Masonic conspiracy in Europe (pp. 3-9). In his 1852 biography of Lord George Bentinck, Benjamin claimed that King Louis Phillipe was deposed in 1848 through the manipulations of the secret societies.[14] Disraeli defined the Masonic groups in Weishaupt's anti-religious terms, and compared the 1848 revolution in France to that of 1789:

> Alone, the secret societies can disturb, but they cannot control, Europe. Acting in unison with a great popular movement they may destroy society, as they did at the end of the last century . . . It is the manoeuvres of these men, who are striking at Property and Christ, which the good people of this country, who are so accumulative and so religious, recognize and applaud as the progress of the liberal cause. (Roberts, p. 6)

[12] Benjamin Disraeli, Alroy (London: Peter Davies, 1833, pp. xi, 269- 71.

[13] Richard A.Levine, Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), pp. 53-54.

[14] N.Mackenzie points out that Freemasons in France had rejoiced at his accession to the throne, but became disenchanted, and celebrated his deposition in 1848 (Secret Societies, p. 173).

In 1856, Disraeli warned the House of Commons of the dangers of encouraging revolution in Italy because of the readiness of the secret societies to take advantage of disorder both there and in France. He again stressed the importance of 1848 in revealing the strength and aims of the societies, and claimed that "a great part of Europe--the whole of Italy and France and a great part of Germany . . . are covered with a network of these secret societies." In 1870, in his novel Lothair, the romantic plot was unwound against a background of high society and high politics into which "the myth of the secret societies was closely woven." In numerous passages, they were talked about as a "fundamental datum of the European political scene." One character, Captain Bruges, spoke of "Marianne," a legendary French secret society, and claimed that "there are more secret societies in France at this moment than at any pariod since '85 [1785], though you hear nothing of them." Another character asserts, "It is the Church against the secret societies. They are the only two strong things in Europe, and will survive Kings, Emperors, or Parliaments" (see Roberts, pp. 3-8).

Though Roberts concludes that Disraeli was "an outstanding example of the extraordinary state of mind into which otherwise shrewd and intelligent men could be transported by a belief in secret societies," and dismisses Disraeli's fears as the result of "the power of the collective dream--or nightmare--of the European mind," he fails to analyze why Disraeli may have thought this way. That Disraeli had friends for many years who were indeed members of secret societies, though as occultists rather than political radicals, from the days of the secret "Society of the Mercurii" and John Varley's lessons in occultism throughout his long intimacy with Bulwer-Lytton, who was both a Rosicrucian and a Freemason, seems to be unknown to Roberts. But after we

examine Bulwer's long association with secret societies in England and Europe, and with Disraeli's politics, it will be obvious that Disraeli's theories should not be written off so lightly.

By the time Bulwer (1803-1873) met John Varley, he had already had wide experience with occult studies. A child prodigy who was reading widely at three, at seven he spent the whole year pouring through the neo-Platonic and occultist writings collected in the family library by his mysterious seventeenth-century ancestor, Dr. John Bulwer (fl. 1654). Dr. Bulwer was said to have lived far beyond his allotted time span through his mystic knowledge,[15] an essentially Rosicrucian claim. He was the original of Glyndon's ancestor in Bulwer-Lytton's Rosicrucian novel, Zanoni. While at Cambridge in 1821, Bulwer became intimate with Chauncey Hare Townshend, who soon became one of the leading English students of Animal Magnetism. He also took a walking-tour of Scotland, where a gypsy fortune-teller, presumably with Tarot cards, predicted a life of "strange studies," a prophecy that made a profound impression on him.

In 1825-26, Bulwer lived in Paris, where he moved in the highest social circles, but periodically retired to Versailles for a life of seclusion and "voluminous reading." Nelson said he pursued his occult studies there, a claim which was confirmed by Bulwer's grandson, who noted the poetic horoscope he worked up for a Miss Cunningham and which he signed as "Magus," a contemporary Rosicrucian tag.[16] Of these days at Versailles, Bulwer himself recalled:

[15] Stewart C. Nelson, Bulwer-Lytton as Occultist (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1927), p. 6.

[16] Victor Alex Lytton, 2nd Earl of Lytton, The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton. (London: Macmillan, 1913), I, 148.

> . . . about this time one of these visitations of great melancholy to which I was subject during all my younger life--and from which to this day I am not wholly free--came upon me, and grew strong and stronger, deep and deeper. Gradually, I withdrew into myself . . . and lived greatly alone. (V.A. Lytton, I, 138)

It was probably this period of his life that Bulwer later described to Forster, after discussing several occult works:

> I know by experience that those wizard old books are full of holes and pitfalls. I myself once fell into one and remained there forty-five days and three hours without food, crying for help as loud as I could, but nobody came. You may believe that or not, just as you please, but it's true! (V.A. Lytton, II, 32)

It is unknown whether Bulwer studied occultism with any group while in France, but Mackenzie pointed out that "The Thirteen" was a society exercizing "an occult influence in Paris during the First Empire," and that Balzac founded a romance upon it. He added, "It is not improbable that Lord Lytton made use of the hint in the secret society he names in his powerful fiction, The Parisians" (Masonic Cyclopedia, p. 734).

In 1827, Bulwer married Rosina Wheeler, a match marked by violence and tragedy until the end of his life. They had a late honeymoon in Italy in 1833 and it is possible that Bulwer was in contact with some secret society there, for he later placed several of his occultist plots in Naples and suggested the real existence of Rosicrucian and Martinist groups there. Our study of Rossetti pére will bear out that this was not just a fictional device, and Chacornac points out that the Martinist branch of Freemasonry in Naples worked with the magnetism society of Avignon under a Dr. Billot (whose book on their experiences later appeared in 1839).[17] That Bulwer had long been immersed in occult studies became clear in the fiction he wrote in the early 1830's as well as in the testimony of his friends.

[17] Paul Chacornac, Eliphas Lévi, Renovateur de l'occultisme en France (Paris: Librairie Generale des Sciences Occultes; Chacornac Freres, 1926).

By 1831 Bulwar had met Lady Blessington, who became his most intimate friend until her death in 1849, and he had also been elected to Parliament. John Varley had known Lady B. for years and apparently knew Bulwer before 1830, possibly through the "Society of the Mercurii" or its related group "The Metropolitan Society of Occult Astrologers." The great influence of John Varley on Bulwer first became evident in Godolphin (1833), in which the Danish ex-sculptor, occultist, and astrologer seems modelled on Varley. In Rome, Volktman describes how to conjure up a vision or dream of an absent person: one must fast in deep solitude, until in "intense reverie," one can so well learn to control the imagination that--especially with the aid of a charmed astrological drawings of "the figure of a man asleep on the bosom of an angel"--one may see in sleep the person one summons up.[18] Whether Bulwer had in mind any of Blake's drawings with Varley's astrological and geomantic interpretations is an intriguing question. Volktman believes in magnetism, sympathy, and the power of trance to transport a man out of himself until he can see and hear events at a distance and converse with the dead. Though Godolphin's occultism is part of a much larger social context, the mainspring of the action depends upon an astrologic prophecy, revealed in a marvelous crystal:

> . . . a sort of glass dial marked with various quaint hieroglyphs and the figures of angels, beautifully wrought; but around it were . . . many stars and planets ranged in due order. These were lighted from within by some chemical process, and burnt with a clear and lustrous, but silver light. (Wolff, p. 150)

17 Paul Chacornac, Eliphas Lévi, Renovateur de l'occultisme (Paris: Librairie Generale des Sciences Occultes; Chacornac Freres, 1926).

18 R.L. Wolff, Strange Stories and Other Explorations in Victorian Fiction (Boston: Bambit, 1971), p. 149.

Godolphin also abounds with references to the Chaldeans as the wisest astrologers, and with its use of the magic crystal seems definitely based on Bulwer's "skrying" or crystal-gazing experiments with Varley.

The Last Days of Pompeii (1834) was mainly a historical romance and treated occult themes flippantly, but it contained enough on the Egyptian Isis cults for Madame Blavatsky to plagiarise it in Isis Unveiled (1877), which became the most influential book on occultism in the 1880's. The villainous Arbaces in Pompeii was a wicked Egyptian magician, who thought "the Cabala of some master soul" might divert Nature from her course and work miracles:

> He pursued Science across her appointed boundaries, into the land of perplexity and shadow. From the Truths of astronomy he wandered into astrologic fancy. From the secrets of chemistry he passed into the spectral labyrinths of magic; and he who could be sceptical as to the power of the gods was credulously superstitious as to the power of men. (Wolff, p. 151)

But it is in the short story, "Kosem Kosamin the Magician," which Bulwer outlined in his schooldays but published in 1832, that we get the clearest indication of his attitude to the relation between magic and art, a view which greatly colored his enthusiasm for Blake. In the story, the magician describes "the exercise of that high faculty--the Imagining Power . . . which trained and exercised, can wake the spectres of the dead--and bring visible to the carnal eye the Genii that walk the world" (Wolff, p. 152). In 1828 Bulwer had read Schiller's Ghost-seer, based on Cagliostro's life, and was fascinated by the Grand Cophta's techniques of vision-inducement. But that Bulwer already associated the Cagliostrian magical imagination with Blake's art was shown in an 1830 essay in the New Monthly Magazine, titled "Conversation with an Ambitious Student in Ill Health":

> A. Of all enthusiasts, the painter Blake seems to have been the most remarkable. With what a hearty faith he believed in his faculty of seeing spirits and conversing with the dead! And what a delightful vein of madness it was--with what exquisite verses it inspired him!
> L. And what engravings! I saw a few days ago, a copy of the "Night Thoughts," which he had illustrated in a manner at once so grotesque and so sublime--now by so literal an interpretation, now by so vague and disconnected a train of invention, that the whole makes one of the most astonishing and curious productions which ever balanced between the conception of genius and the ravings of positive insanity . . .
> A. Young was fortunate. He seems almost the only poet who has had his mere metaphors illustrated and made corporeal. (Bentley, Records, p. 401)

But it is in Bulwer's own favorite work, Zanoni (1842), that he most fully developed his sense of the relation of art and magic, and he based his theories on John Varley's occultist interpretations of Blake's visions and "illuminated" art (Story, Varley, p. 254). Even more provocative for Blake studies is Bulwer's detailed, complex, and historically accurate reconstruction of the occultist, Masonic milieu of France in the 1780's and 1790's. Zanoni can almost serve as an introductory textbook to the heavy cloud of occultism which brooded over revolutionary France, for the accurately drawn "fictional" context is further substantiated by scholarly footnotes on Cagliostro, Martinists, Mesmerists, Cabalists, and secret society members of all types. In the novel, the tale of Zanoni is decoded from the enciphered manuscript given the narrator by an elderly Rosicrucian, who had seen the French Revolution, was a great imaginative painter, and who educated the youthful narrator in Rosicrucianism and "elevated theories of art."[19] The temptation to see the old painter as a compound of Blake and Varley is overwhelming, especially when the origin of the book--both in reality and in its fictional version--is examined.

[19] Bulwer-Lytton, Zanoni (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), p. xi.

Bulwer said the basic idea for Zanoni came to him in a dream in the early 1830's, and he published a sketch of it in Zicci (1838). But in a footnote to "Kosem Kesamine" (1832), Bulwer said that this tale was extracted from an unfinished romance which furnished the groundwork for Zanoni. He found the outline of the 1832 story in some papers written during his schooldays (Nelson, p. 16). Thus, Bulwer developed his ideas for Zanoni throughout the 1820's, and definitely sought out Varley's advice for the "occult machinery" (Story, Varley, p. 254). That he may have been in contact with the secret "Society of the Mercurii," headed by R.C. Smith and G.W. Graham, is suggested by his introduction to Zanoni, in which he describes an old bookshop in Covent Garden, in which his old friend "D________" had accumulated "the most notable collection ever amassed by an enthusiast of the works of Alchemist, Cabalist, and Astrologer" (Zanoni, p. ix). Bulwer as narrator explains that in his "younger days, whether of authorship or life, I felt a desire to make myself acquainted with the true origin and tenets of the singular sect known by the name of Rosicrucians." After having read the scanty and superficial accounts in the available works, he sought out "D________" who possessed many manuscripts as well as rare books. The shop became his favorite haunt, and there he met the old Rosicrucian artist. This is obviously a literary device, but Bulwer's allusions in Zanoni show that he had indeed read all the available books on Rosicrucianism and had other sources of information as well. Bulwer himself wrote that "Dendy, the old magic bookseller, was a reality. He is dead" (V.A. Lytton, II, 39).

Interestingly, the curious pamphlet on geomancy, The Philosophical Merlin (1822), written by G.W. Graham and R.C. Smith, and published under the aegis of the "Society of Mercurii," was sold "at Denley, the astrological bookseller on Catherine Street" (Raphael, Astrologer, p. 463). Catherine

Street is next to Covent Garden, where Bulwer's shop was located. The coincidence of the two names, Dendy and Denley (or Denby, according to Nelson), for such a rare commercial operation in London suggests that Bulwer referred to the same shop as the "Society of the Mercurii" utilized. The mutual references of R.C. Smith and Bulwer to a secret fraternity which preserved the Rosicrucian manuscripts reinforces the similarity. As noted earlier, Smith explained that the London Freemasons preserved in their archives the Rosicrucian documents which teach geomancy, and in Zanoni, p. 129, Bulwer seems to refer to the same materials: "Venerable Brotherhood, so sacred and so little known, from whose secret and precious archives the materials for this history have been drawn." One of Bulwer's biographers, Escott, asserted that he "had dabbled in Rosicrucianism long before writing or thinking out Zanoni,"[20] but unfortunately gave no evidence. In the late 1830's William Bell Scott verified the existence of the bookstore mentioned by Bulwer, and noted that it was "filled with alchymical and astrological books, and other related works."[21]

In the introduction to Zanoni, the narrator develops his friendship with the old artist, who shows him his extraordinary pictures and informs him of "the tenets of the Rosicrucians, some of whom . . . still existed, and still prosecuted, in august secrecy, their profound researches into natural science and occult philosophy" (p. xiv). That this too may have been more than a fictional device is suggested by a letter Bulwer wrote in 1870 to Hargrave Jennings,

[20] T.H. Escott, Edward Bulwer (London: George Routledge, 1910), p. 86.

[21] William Bell Scott, Autobiographical Notes (New York: Harpers, 1892), I, 117.

in acknowledgment of a copy of Jennings' book, The Rosicrucians (1870). As early as 1842, Bulwer had written Jennings, a Rosicrucian himself, to praise a poem; he now praised Jennings' new book, which will be discussed in more detail later. Bulwer wrote:

> There are reasons why I cannot enter the subject of the "Rosicrucian Brotherhood," a Society still existing, but not under any name by which it can be recognized by those without its pale. But you have with much learning and much acuteness traced its connection with early and symbolical religions, and no better book upon such a theme has been written, or indeed, could be written, unless a Member of the Fraternity were to break the vow which enjoins him to secrecy. Some time ago a sect pretending to style itself "Rosicrucians" and arrogating full knowledge of the mysteries of the craft, communicated with me, and in reply, I sent them the cipher sign of the "Initiate,"--not one of them could construe it." (Wolff, p. 233)

In Zanoni, the old Rosicrucian dies and leaves to the narrator a huge manuscript in cipher which relates the tale of the protagonist Zanoni. Curiously, the cipher signs in Zanoni (p. xviii) are similar to those of Francis Barrett's "Celestial Alphabet," to those of the Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century, and to the hieroglyphs in some of Blake's works.

Bulwer's grandson, a careful biographer, confirmed his Rosicrucian membership:

> He was himself a member of the Society of Rosicrucians and Grand Patron of the Order. As this was a secret society, it is not surprising that among Bulwer's papers there should be no documents which throw any light upon it, nor any mention of it in his correspondence. (quoted in Wolff, p. 233)

The development of this English Rosicrucian Society in the mid-nineteenth century, and its important connections with the French occultist Eliphas Lévi will be discussed later. But, for now, an examination in Zanoni of the Rosicrucian and Cabalistic visionary training, as related to the highest

imaginative art, will shed much light on what Bulwer learned from Varley's enthusiastic discourses on magic and Blake.

Throughout Zanoni, Bulwer demonstrated his thorough knowledge of eighteenth and nineteenth-century theories of Animal Magnetism and of its roots in Cabalistic and alchemical traditions. When Glyndon, the disillusioned painter and would-be Rosicrucian (modelled on Bulwer himself), finally sniffs the elixir's vapors, he sees a vision of coiling shapes in the mist, of which only one will manifest itself. The description was drawn from old alchemical accounts of hallucinations at tense moments in the process of the Great Work, especially as in Raymond Lull's descriptions (Wolff, p. 123). As Glyndon's training proceeds, Bulwer describes it in magnetic terms:

> As a patient on whom, slowly and by degrees, the agencies of mesmerism are brought to bear, he acknowledged to his heart the growing force of that vast universal magnetism which is the life of creation, and binds the atom to the whole. (Zanoni, p. 216)

While Glyndon's visionary capacity grows, he becomes increasingly confident of his artistic powers and tries to speed up the process of initiation which will render him "magically" crative.

But Mejnour, the possessor of a wisdom older and purer than Rosicrucianism, warns him about his impatience and about easier but inferior methods of achieving visions into the spiritual world:

> There are pretenders to the solemn science, which could have shown thee the absent; and prated to thee, in their charlatanic jargon, of the secret electricities and the magnetic fluid, of whose true properties they know but the germs and elements. (p. 222)

As Glyndon continues his alchemical and Cabalistic studies, Mejnour reveals the higher Magnetism, upon which the magical consciousness is based:

> Mejnour professed to find a link between all intellectual beings in the existence of a certain all-pervading and invisible fluid resembling electricity . . . a fluid that connected thought to thought with the rapidity and precision of the modern telegraph; and the influence of this fluid . . . extended to the remotest past . . . Thus, if the doctrine were true, all human knowledge became obtainable through a medium established between the brain of the individual inquirer and all the furthest and obscurest regions in the universe of ideas. (p.228)

Zanoni, the hero of the novel, who has passed through his Rosicrucian training to reach the highest magical knowledge, informs Glyndon that "Man's first initiation is in Trance. In dreams commences all human knowledge." As Glyndon falls under the spell of Zanoni's magical personality, he comes to despise the realism of the painter Nicot (based on Jacques Louis David), and studies the paintings of the Italian Renaissance, with their complex Hermetic symbolism and talismanic nature. In words that echo Blake's theory of art and spiritual vision, Glyndon concludes:

> Yes, he felt Nicot's talk even on art was crime: it debased the imagination itself to mechanism. Could he, who saw nothing in the soul but a combination of matter, prate of schools that should excel Raphael? Yes, art was magic; and as he owned the truth of the aphorism, he could comprehend that in magic there may be religion, for religion is essential to art. (p. 118)

After Glyndon's ultimate failure in his Rosicrucian initiation rites, Zanoni describes the rarity and the exaltation of the ultimate experience of the magical imagination, and quotes Iamblichus to illustrate his point:

> There is a principle of the soul superior to all external nature, and through this principle we are capable of surpassing the order and systems of the world, and participating in the immortal life and the energy of the Sublime Celestials. When the soul is elevated to natures above itself, it deserts the order to which it is a while compelled, and by a religious magnetism is attracted to another, and a loftier, with which it blends and mingles. (p. 376)

Zanoni concludes his explanation of the near extinction of the sublime tradition of adepts, by pointing out that he and Mejnour, the last survivors, represent the two vital poles of the visionary mind: "We are the types of the two essences of what is imperishable---'Art that enjoys, and Science, that contemplates!'" (p. 376). That Glyndon eventually fails at his effort to become a great artist through becoming a great occult "scientist" reveals Bulwer's theory of ideal art. His fascination with Blake was based on his belief that Blake embodied both vital capacities.

Interestingly, another painter whom Bulwer admired for the same reasons may have had similar connections with Varley and his occultist friends, as well as with Richard Brothers' British-Israelite movement. This was John Martin (1789-1854), who has not been examined for a possible relation to Blake, but whose history has been linked with Blake's, especially in France, due to a confusion of identities. Martin came from a family possibly touched by hereditary insanity, for all three brothers were extremely eccentric. His brother Jonathon had extraordinary dreams and was stimulated by "his religious enthusiasm" to bizarre behavior.[22] In 1829, Jonathon set fire to York Minster, and was confined as a lunatic until his death. In 1833, Robert Cross Smith, mutual friend of Blake and Varley and avid student of occultism, published an account of Blake and Jonathon Martin in Tilt's Monthly Magazine, entitled "Bits of Biography: Blake the Vision Seer and Martin the York Minster Incendiary" (March 1833). In the section on Blake, Smith described his evenings with Blake when the "Visionary Heads" were produced, and in the section on Martin, he described Jonathon's symbolic drawing of a seven-headed Bishop rushing into the jaws of a crocodile. A French translater conflated Blake and Martin into one figure and started the nineteenth-century legend that Blake had been confined in Bedlam (Bentley, Records, p. 299).

[22] Thomas Balston, John Martin (London: Gerald Duckworth,1947),p.46

This peripheral case of mistaken identities becomes more interesting, though, when John Martin and his family are examined. Smith's reason for seeking Jonathon Martin out in the first place may have come from some knowledge of the family. John Martin was a political radical and painter, whose bizarre, highly visionary scenes from the Bible were exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1812 on. That these pictures, which Bulwer thought similar to Blake's, were possibly inspired by similar occultist interests and contacts is suggested by several bits of information. In 1821, John Martin was included among the Stewards for the Seventh Anniversary Dinner of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution at Freemasons Hall, with the Duke of Sussex in the chair. Martin was still associated with Freemasonry in 1832, when he dined with some Scotsmen at Freemasons Tavern to celebrate the anniversary of Robert Burns' birthday (Balston, pp. 65, 162). Burns was an enthusiastic Freemason, whose birthday was always honored by Scots Masons. Martin also knew John Varley and R.C.Smith, whose "Society of Mercurii" had access to the Masonic archives and were probably Freemasons themselves. Varley was interested in Martin's work, at the same period of his friendship with Blake, and owned one of his pictures.

That Martin may have been a Rosicrucian as well as a British Israelite is suggested first by his interest in spiritualism at a time (circa 1812) when he lived in Marylebone, the area where Francis Barrett maintained his Rosicrucian school. John's early art teacher was Boniface Musso, whose son Charles Musso worked with John in London from 1806 to 1812. Musso and Martin were interested in spiritualism and made a pact that whoever died first should communicate with the other:

> After Musso's death [in 1824], Martin invoked his spirit to manifest itself by some sign, such as the candle burning blue, or the door opening and shutting three times; he often repeated the invocation alone or in his room at night, or in the fields or on a misty moor. In these rites he had been careful to use only his left hand, "wishing to save the one he painted with, lest the foul spirit might wither the one he put forth to take Musso's hand." (Balston, p. 162)

As early as 1832, Martin was an adherant of Richard Brothers' British Israelite movement and published "A Divine and Prophetic Warning to the British Nation . . . a Prophetic Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem," and he signed the pamphlet "A Christian Magia," suggestive of the Rosicrucian cipher "R.·.Cru.·." and title of "Magus" (see Todd, p. 120 and Waite, Brotherhood, p. 562). The pamphlet was reprinted in 1845, and included an announcement of the future publication of "The Gathering Standard of the World, seen in the British Flag. The Threefold Banner and Cross of the Holy Bible--The Ensign of Messiah's Coming," which was another British Israelite pamphlet (Balston, p. 293). Martin's surreal use of complex architectural detail in his pictures may have been influenced by Richard Brothers' architectural designs for the New Jerusalem.

Given these scanty but provocative hints of Martin's possible association with secret societies, Bulwer's high opinion of him seems based on his own interest in the visionary artist who uses magical trance techniques to achieve ecstatic flights of the imagination. Interestingly, Bulwer's close friend, Dr. John Elliotson (1791-1868), who founded the London Phrenological Society in the mid-1830's and became a famous proponent of Animal Magnetism, knew Martin for many years and made the painter's visionary experiences the center of his Mesmeric investigations (Balston, p. 237). Elliotson believed in the "substantial truth of the occult agency and of the abnormal phenomena" produced by the magnetic trance (DNB). Thus, when Bulwer

wrote his "ecstatic and unqualified panegyric" of Martin in England and the English (1833), he described him in the same terms he used for Blake and the fictionalized Rosicrucian artist in Zanoni:

> . . . I hasten to Martin, the greatest, the most lofty, the most permanent, the most original genius of his age. I see in him . . . the presence of a spirit which is not of the world--the divine intoxication of a great soul lapped in majestic and unearthly dreams . . . Vastness is his sphere . . . alone and guideless, he has penetrated the remotest caverns of the past, and gazed on the primaeval shapes of the gone world . . .
>
> If you would know the victorious power of enthusiasm, regard the great artist of his age immersed in difficulty, on the verge of starvation . . . finding in his own rapt meditations of heaven and heaven's imagery, everything that could reconcile him to earth. Ask you why he is supported, and why the lesser genii droop and whine for the patronage of Lords?--it is because they have NO rapt meditations.[23]

Bulwer corresponded with Martin, who was also a friend of Gabriele Rossetti in the 1820's, when the elder Rossetti was working obsessively on his theories of an ancient Masonic, revolutionary conspiracy. Martin's paintings were also greatly admired by William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the 1840's. From the brief sketch given here, it becomes evident that further research into Martin's life may shed new light on the theosophic milieu of the early nineteenth century, especially in its Masonic, British Israelite, Rosicrucian, and Mesmeric elements.

When Bulwer finished writing Zanoni, he said the book "has given me a vent for what I long wished to symbolize and typify," and believed it to be "the loftiest conception in English prose fiction." He also knew it "will be no favorite with that largest of all asses--the English public," but he affirmed that "it is wonderful read in the proper spirit--nothing like it in the language" (V.A. Lytton, pp. 34-35). Interestingly, when he sought for an artist to dedicate the

[23] See Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English, ed. Standish Meachem (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970).

book to, he chose John Gibson, a sculptor trained by Fuseli and Flaxman and acquainted with Blake, as the embodiment of Zanoni's theories of visionary art. Gibson (1790-1866) worked with Blake's two friends and visited Blake in 1817, before moving to Rome (Bentley, Records, p. 245). That his move was prompted by a dream-vision of an eagle carrying him to Rome must have impressed Bulwer. Gibson studied under Canova and apparently met Bulwer in Rome in 1833. Whether Gibson was a member of any of the secret societies Bulwer may have visited in Italy is uncertain, but Bulwer implied some such connection between them in the "enthusiastic" dedication:

> . . . to select one to whom I might fitly dedicate this work,--one who, in his life as in his genius, might illustrate the principle I have sought to convey, elevated by the ideal which he exalts, and serenely dwelling in a glorious existence with the images of his imagination, . . . my thoughts rested upon you . . .
> I, Artist in words, dedicate, then, to you, Artist whose ideas speak in marble, this well-loved work of my matured manhood . . . My affection for my work is rooted in the solemn and pure delight which it gave me to perform . . . this apparition of my own innermost mind, in the still, the lonely, and more sacred life, which, for some hours, under the sun, the student lives,--his stolen retreat from the Agora to the Cave,--that I feel there is between us the bond of that secret sympathy, that magnetic chain, which unites the Everlasting Brotherhood, of whose being Zanoni is the type. (Zanoni, pp. v-vi)

The impact that Bulwer and Zanoni had on Mesmeric circles and Rosicrucian groups in England and France will be discussed later, in relation to the great outburst of occultist activity and magnetic "spiritualism" in the 1850's and 1860's. But, for now, another look at John Varley's theosophical associates will show how widespread was his influence on a new generation of occultists, astrologers, Animal Magnetisers, and visionary artists.

One of Varley's friends was Dr. Walter Cooper Dendy (1794-1871), a distinguished surgeon, scholar, poet, and artist.

Dendy was an avid student of "dreams, spectral illusions, and other imperfect manifestations of the mind" (DNB). He was also a sensitive student of literature, who observed Keats' literary talents while both were in medical school. Among Dendy's many publications was The Philosophy of Mystery (1841), which presented a learned history of Animal Magnetism, including rare facts about De Mainaduc and the eighteenth-century Swedenborgians. Dendy also discussed the visions of Paracelsus and Boehme, and threw some interesting light on Cagliostro's use of magic mirrors and lanterns to create "spectral illusions." Within this context of the history and methods of vision-inducement, Dendy recounted a story about Blake, related to him by John Varley:

> Look on those splendid illustrations of the Gothic poets by the eccentric . . . Fuseli. Look on the wild pencillings of Blake, another poet-painter, and you will be assured they were ghost-seers. An intimate friend of Blake, himself a reader of stars, has told me the strangest tales of his visions. In one of his reveries he witnessed the whole ceremony of a fairy's funeral, which he peopled with mourners and mutes, and described with high poetic beauty. He was engaged, in one of these moods, in painting King Edward I, who was sitting to him for his picture. (pp. 93-94)

Dendy was also well-versed in the phrenological theories of Gall and Spurzheim, and revealed the source of so many phrenologists' interest in Blake:

> There is one spot on the cranium, identified by Dr. Spurzheim, as a most important item in the composition of a good dreamer. He tells us that persons who have the part above and a little behind the organ of ideality highly developed are much prone to mysticism, to see visions and ghosts, and to dream. (p. 292)

Dendy's works on the complex traditions of magic and magnetism were highly esteemed in his day, and his placing of Blake within such traditions was repeated by most of Blake's nineteenth-century admirers.

Another of Varley's students of occultism was the famed explorer, linguist, and Orientalist, Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890). When Burton was expelled from Oxford in 1841, he went to London and sought out "old Mr. Varley, the artist, of whom I was very fond." Burton said Varley had just finished Zodiacal Physiognomy and was "a great student of occult sciences," with astrology his favorite. Burton then pointed out that it is curious how little London knows of what goes on in the next-door house: "a book on 'Alchemy' was printed, and the curious fact came out that at least one hundred people were studying the philosopher's stone."[24] Interestingly, Burton's anecdote comes from The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century, which carried the same story in 1825. William Bell Scott noted the existence in London in 1841 of a secret club of "enthusiasts," who met to read papers on esoteric lore. The sculptor Henning, who took Scott there, said several of his acquaintances were searching diligently for the elixir vitae. Henning then took Scott to meet John Varley, who cast a geomantic prediction for him and discoursed on "curious and interesting theories." (W.B. Scott, I, 115- 20). That this club was a continuation of the "Society of the Mercurii" or the "Metropolitan Association of Occult Philosophers," which contributed to The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century seems probable. Varley, who was involved with this secret group, drew up Burton's horoscope and predicted that he would become a great astrologer. Burton was fascinated by Varley's theories and studied all the books he could find on "dark spells and devilish enginery."[25] But

[24] Isabel Burton, The Life of Captain Sir Richard Burton (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), I, 16.

[25] Farwell Byron, Burton (London: Longmans, 1963), p. 27.

Varley died in 1842 and Burton said the prophecy came to nothing, "for although I had read Cornelius Agrippa and others of the same school at Oxford, I found Zadkiel quite sufficient for me." (Isabel Burton, p. 16).

Burton's reference to "Zadkiel" was not as off-hand as it seemed, however; for Zadkiel was the pseudonym of Lieutenant Richard James Morrison (1795-1874), one of the members of the "Society of the Mercurii" in the 1820's, along with Varley and R.C. Smith. Morrison had succeeded Smith as publisher of Smith's various "Raphael" astrological journals from 1831 on, and wrote of Smith--Blake's friend--that he had a "poetic soul and the highest philosophical principles" (Howe, Raphael, p. 30). That Morrison may also have known Blake, or at least his work before Tatham's destruction of Blake's manuscripts, is suggested by his statement that "some years ago, I saw some voluminous manuscripts, compiled by an artist who mixed up magical rites and geomancy with his divination."[26] Though this may have been Varley, it was more likely Blake, who did indeed have voluminous manuscripts, of which few survived Tatham's pious destruction. Richard Burton, who had studied "Zadkiel" at Oxford,[27] was interested in his works at the same time that he was reading up on Varley's brand of occultism. Morrison was a good linguist, especially in Hebrew, and had already published essays on Hindu astrology. Thus, Morrison shared Burton's budding interest in Oriental lore. Interestingly, Morrison, a brilliant inventor, utilized his knowledge of Cabalistic letter and number systems in his important development of electric telegraph codes--an interest shared by Cromwell Fleetwood Varley (Cooke, p. 261).

[26] C. Cooke, Curiosities of Occult Literature (London: A. Hall, 1863), p. 105.

[27] Jean Burton, Sir Richard Burton's Wife (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1941), p. 52.

The lessons in occultism that Burton took from John Varley, and possibly from "Zadkiel," stimulated a life-long interest which he pursued by research and experiment throughout his adventures in the East and in Africa. In 1842, Burton went to India and stayed six years, studying the languages, customs, erotica, and occultism of the various races. Taking copious notes on everything he investigated, Burton experimented with hashish and aphrodisiacs and studied yoga, producing one of the first detailed, factual accounts of it in English. He believed that "Yoga Power" was a matter of "the Zoo-electric force, which Mr. Crooke's instrument has proved to be material as any other form of electricity." He also identified this force with that of Animal Magnetism (Jean Burton, Burton, pp. 57-58).

In 1853, in order to achieve his sensational penetration into the forbidden city of Mecca, Burton disguised himself as an Indian magician in Alexandria and practised his trade on the journey to Arabia. He wrote that the people

> . . . opined that the stranger was a holy man, gifted with supernatural powers, and knowing everything. But the reader must not be led to suppose that I acted "Carabin" or "Sangrodo" without any knowledge of my trade. From youth I have always been a dabbler in medical and mystical study.[28]

Part of his "dabbling" was training in the use of magic crystals, or skrying, and here again there is a link with Varley. In 1852 Burton needed crystals for his proposed Arabian adventure and sought help from the fourth Earl Stanhope, who carried on his family's interest in occultism. According to Wyndham, Stanhope had received from Lady Blessington the famed crystal of Nasim Pasha,[29] which Varley, Bulwer, and

[28] W.H.Harrison, ed. Psychic Facts: a Selection from the Writings of Various Authors on Psychical Research (London: W.H. Harrison, 1880), p. 74.

[29] Horace Wyndham, Mr. Sludge, the Medium (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937), p. 46.

Disraeli had conjured over in the 1830's. But the London Times (30 June 1863) pointed out that it was "Zadkiel," or Lieutenant Morrison, who had bought the crystal in 1849 after Lady Blessington's death. The Times also noted that Morrison was celebrated in 1852 for his séances with the globe, which were attended by many of the nobility. Thus, when Stanhope arranged a meeting between Burton and the best skryers in 1852, it must have included his old friend "Zadkiel." Morrison was still president of a secret astrological society at this time, as well as editor of Zadkiel's Almanac.

Much light is shed on this bizarre meeting in 1852--which had such sensational effects after Burton's famous journey to Mecca--in the Times account of a libel trial in 1863, brought by Morrison against Admiral Belcher, who accused Morrison of imposture and fraud.[30] Referring to the 1852 skrying sessions, the accuser noted Morrison's use of a young boy or girl as seer (he did not see the visions himself), who held converse with the spirit of the Apostles--"even Our Saviour, with all the angels of light as well as of darkness, and to tell what was going on in any part of the world." Drawings were made of these visions, as well as by later adult skryers who were artists (interestingly, one showed Morrison dressed as a Knight Templar, a probable Masonic allusion). Morrison also claimed to possess John Dee's magic crystal (DNB), and excerpts from Aubrey's seventeenth-century Miscellanies were read at the trial, describing the "consecrated Beryl" which Aubrey had personally examined. The opposing counsel also read from the 1851 Zadkiel's Almanac a long account of the visions seen in Lady Blessington's crystal, including one of Judas Iscariot, who was very wretched

30 Theodore Besterman, Crystal-gazing, new ed. (1924; New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1965), p. 58.

and begged to be let go from the crystal. The reader concluded with angry accusations that "the Scriptural subjects of the visions was blasphemous, and calculated to bring religion into contempt." Morrison defended himself, saying that "for many years have seers of all ages and conditions given me reason to believe that the visions given in the crystal emanate from spirits of a high and holy class." Morrison asserted that the real question of the trial was not the charge of imposture but "the mysteries of animal magnetism, or mesmerism, which . . . had engaged a great deal of attention in the fashionable world a few years ago."

At the trial Bulwer-Lytton spoke up for Morrison, for he had been to many of his séances. Given Bulwer's known Rosicrucianism, it is interesting that another crystal-expert at the 1852 meeting was Frederick Hockley, who was definitely a Rosicrucian in the 1860's (Waite, Brotherhood, p. 569), and perhaps earlier. According to Francis King, Hockley had been a pupil of a member of Francis Barrett's magical school, but he gives no evidence. King also asserts that Kenneth Mackenzie was a pupil of Hockley, who persuaded Mackenzie to record his conversation with the French Cabalist and Rosicrucian, Eliphas Lévi, in 1861.[31] Hockley amassed a valuable collection of magical, alchemical, and Rosicrucian manuscripts and documents, with illustrations of sigils, seals, and elaborate symbolic drawings. He had written "On the Ancient Magic Crystal, and its Connexion with Mesmerism," in The Zoist (1849), a Mesmeric journal (Besterman, p. 159), and was interested in the inducement of the magnetic trance through skrying (Waite, Brotherhood, p. 569). Earl Stanhope introduced Hockley to Burton, and under the tutelage of

31 Francis King, The Rites of Modern Occult Magic (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 28.

Morrison, Hockley, and un-named others, Burton became a genuine adept at divination, trance induction, etc. He collected enough crystals and occult apparatus to convince the Arabs that he was indeed a magician. In Pilgrimage to el Medinah and Mecca, Burton gave an account of his initiation into the Order of Kadiri, which he regarded as an Oriental form of Freemasonry. The occultist secret society had three degrees and gave its adepts the right to initiate others (see Waite, Freemasonry, p. 192).

While Burton was in Arabia, Hockley's seeress saw a vision of him in the desert, involved in a quarrel, which Burton verified in 1861 as true in every detail (Harrison, p. 76). Burton returned with many stories of trances and clairvoyance among the Arabs, and had even become a Master Dervish himself (Jean Burton, Burton, p. 66). The inevitable speculation that Bulwer-Lytton was involved in all this arises from his discussion in A Strange Story (1862) of the magnetic trance state and its long-distance clairvoyance, which he illustrated with an account of an entranced Arab child who described complex events in England at the moment of their occurance,[32] possibly basing his account on Hockley's and Burton's similar ones.

Sir Richard Burton's life became increasingly more sensational than any fictional romance, as he searched for the source of the Nile, explored West Africa, Brazil, Egypt, and the Middle East. He learned over thirty-five languages and dialects, and investigated in minute detail the customs, folklore, and religions of every area he visited--but his main interests were always the erotic and occult practices of the different cultures. When he married Isabel Arundale, whose

[32] Bulwer-Lytton, A Strange Story (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1892), p. 159-61.

Victorian Catholic inhibitions led her to burn his journals after his death, it was a match marked by a mutual sense of astrological determination, the power of prophecy, and a heavy usage of "conjugal" magnetism. Because it sums up the underlying but persistent milieu of occultist preoccupations in the nineteenth century, a brief look at the Burton's marriage is illuminating.

As a young girl in the 1840's, Isabel was interested in astrology and phrenology, and was "although a staunch Catholic," an ardent disciple of Benjamin Disraeli--"I do not mean as Prime Minister of England, but as the author of Tancred." She said that "Tancred and similar occult books were my favourites," and stimulated a yearning for "gypsies, Bedouin Arabs, and everything Eastern and mystic; especially a wild and lawless life" (Jean Burton, Burton, pp. 16-17). This romantic restlessness sent her to the camps of "Oriental gypsies" near her home, where she spent much of her youth. One day, a gypsy named Hagar Burton prophesied that she would cross the sea to meet her man of destiny, would lead a wandering life of adventure, would bear the name of the gypsy tribe "Burton," and would become "One soul in two bodies in life and death." Hagar told her to show the prophecy to her future husband, which Isabel later did--after all the details had come true. Burton was not even surprised, and accepted the prophecy's role in his life as fated.

Burton had asked Isabel if she were prepared to lead the life of Lady Hester Stanhope, and there could be no more apt yet ironic comparison (Jean Burton, Burton, p. 72). By the time he and Isabel married in 1861, he was an erudite student and practitioner of magical and visionary techniques from all over the world. For various reasons, including obviously sexual ones, he regularly Mesmerized his repressed wife, who would pour out her deepest secrets as well as complex prophecies while in the magnetic trance. Isabel revealed that Lady Hester Stanhope had been her girlhood idol,

and she later became obsessed with equalling her magnetic cures and occult powers, which were still legendary in the East. Isabel described Jerusalem as "the fountain head of my religion, founded by my Hebrew Saviour," a Catholic tribute to Disraeli's Tancred, "where the magnetic influence lingers still" (Jean Burton, pp. 109, 133, 207, 180).

During the great wave of spiritualism which swept England in the 1860's, the Burtons took an active interest. They were friendly with Bulwer-Lytton, attended séances at Knebworth, and Isabel immersed herself in "the hidden meanings" of Zanoni (Jean Burton, Burton, p.239). They also attended séances with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose occult interests will be discussed later. That Isabel's interests were enduring is shown by her association with Madame Blavatsky, Anna Kingsford, and their theosophical followers of the 1880's. Since it was John Varley who first got Richard Burton interested in occultism, it is fitting that Mrs. Burton was a fellow Blavatskyite with Varley's grandson in the early days of the Theosophical Society.

Isabel Burton possessed the ardent religious nature and naive credulity that nineteenth-century occultism thrived on, but Richard Burton brought an open and enquiring mind, plus a vaster experience and erudition in the subject, garnered from many cultures and languages, than perhaps any other figure in history. His lecture on "Spiritualism, or rather Magnetism, Occultism, etc. in Eastern Lands," given in 1878 to the British National Association of Spiritualism, was a tour de force of comparative anthropology, scientific speculation, and great wit on the whole perplexing history of occultism (reprinted in I. Burton, II, 138-156). He concluded that he "must be content to be at best a Spiritualist without the Spirits," and while never denying the reality and vast varieties of the occult phenomena he had witnessed, affirmed that "the superhuman is the superlative of the human"

(Joan Burton, Burton, p. 294). Interestingly, at this lecture, Burton rejected Madame Blavatsky's recently published Isis Unveiled, noting that "she evidently knew nothing of the subject." Madame Blavatsky, however, was defended by Dr. Carter Blake--who became Yeats' source for the "Irish ancestry" of William Blake--despite Burton's gentle reprimands at their lack of historical perspective and provincial failure to understand that the "New Spiritualism" is found in every age and land (I. Burton, II, 156).

Burton spent his final years working with Swinburne (who idolized him) and Monckton Milnes (then Lord Houghton), on his researches and translation of Eastern erotica. Swinburne was also working on his passionate defense of William Blake as an emancipator from sexual and political repression, while Lord Houghton was buying up all of Blake's art works that he could find. The combined interests in occultism, sensual liberation, and the arts of the three companions testifies to the vitality of this type of temperament in English literary and artistic traditions.

A last example, for now, of John Varley's direct impact on prominent nineteenth-century figures is his meeting with John Ruskin in 1842. Ruskin's letter recorded that he chanced to call with Dr. Acland on Varley:

> . . . the conversation falling on his favourite science of astrology, and we both laughing at it, he challenged either of us to give him the place and hour of our nativity, saying that, if either could, he could prove the truth of the science in ten minutes to him. I happened to be able to give mine, and in certainly not more than ten minutes, occupied in drawing the diagram of its sky, he fastened upon the three years of past life when I was fourteen, eighteen, and twenty-one as having been especially fatal to me.[33]

[33] John Ruskin, Works, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1908), XXXV, 298.

Ruskin examined these periods in his life and agreed with Varley that they were "foci" of his troubled developmental process. Ruskin then became a student of astrology himself, and in later years would refer to Varley's astrological diagnosis as a proven fact and point of reference. He would also explain to people that he was born "under Aquarius" and seriously traced the leaden influences on himself of the planet Saturn, to which in the older systems Aquarius was assigned as the "house."[34] Ruskin was also interested, though not uncritically, in Varley's painting and theories of art, and he became seriously involved in spiritualism throughout the 1860's and 1870's. Thus, it was fitting that Ruskin was the first critic to defend Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, with their interest in astrology, spiritualism, and the history of esoteric societies.

[34] E.T. Cook, The Life of John Ruskin (New York: Macmillan, 1911) I, 6.

Chapter XIII: The Nineteenth-century Masonic and Rosicrucian Channel of Occultism

Though at present we have mainly circumstantial evidence rather than definite proof that the occult interests of Blake and Varley were passed down through secret societies as well as through personal contacts, there is documented evidence for the establishment or revitalization in the 1860's of a London Rosicrucian Society formed under the aegis of Freemasonry. It is this society that Bulwer-Lytton was Grand Patron of in 1873, though he was a Rosicrucian much earlier (Westcott, p.8). Since this order apparently grew out of the Rosicrucian documents preserved at Freemasons Hall in the early nineteenth century, and since it developed into the Rosicrucian Society that Yeats joined in the 1890's, a survey of the development of Rosicrucian and Masonic traditions in the nineteenth century will demonstrate the continuity of late eighteenth-century "Illuminist" teachings into the Victorian age and beyond.

One of the best nineteenth-century essays on the Rosicrucians and Freemasons was written in 1824 by Thomas De Quincey and was titled "Historico-Critical Inquiry into the Origin of Rosicrucians and Freemasons," published in the London Magazine (January-June, 1824).[1] De Quincey became a Freemason himself "with the single-minded intention of betraying that secret to a dear female friend" (De Quincey, VII, 201). His comments form a valuable link between the Swedenborgian and Masonic enthusiasm of the revolutionary 1780's and 1790's and the state of Freemasonry and Rosicrucians in the 1820's. In an essay on "Secret Societies" (1847), De Quincey noted:

[1] Essay reprinted in Masson's edition of De Quincey's works, XIII, 384-448. All subsequent references are to this edition of De Quincey's works.

> At a very early age commenced my own interest in Secret Societies . . . To be hidden amidst the crowds is sublime; to come down hidden amongst crowds from distant generations is doubly sublime. (VII, 173)

The figures who stimulated De Quincey's early interest are surprisingly familiar ones. In 1796 his elder brother William, a precocious artist, was placed under P.J. de Loutherbourg and moved in with the famous painter, who was still a Masonic proselytiser for Swedenborg's and Cagliostro's system of Animal Magnetism. William died of typhus while at Loutherbourg's house, but the De Quincey family maintained their interest in and respect for Loutherbourg's "high reputation" (I,114).

In 1801 Thomas De Quincey was sent to school in Manchester and formed an intimate friendship with John Clowes, the eminent Swedenborgian. As noted earlier, Clowes saw visions, conversed with angels, and produced voluminous writings "dictated by the spirits." Clowes and his Swedenborgian friends made a profound impression on young De Quincey, and thirty-five years later he eulogized him as "the holiest of men whom it has been my lot to meet" (II, 121). At first, De Quincey was put off by the "grossness, almost sensuality" of Swedenborg's visions, but admitted being struck by the occasional brilliance of some passages (II, 118). His 1837 opinion that Swedenborg was essentially a madman was tempered, however, by 1853. Preoccupied again with his reverence for Clowes, and discussing the Swedenborgians' religious mysticism and apocalyptic visions, De Quincey pointed to the increasing interest in Swedenborg in the 1850's.

> At present [1853], I presume the reader to be aware that Cambridge has, within the last few years, unsettled and even revolutionized our estimates of Swedenborg as a philosopher. That man, indeed, whom whom Emerson ranks as one amongst his inner consistory of intellectual potentates, cannot be the absolute trifler that Kant . . . supposed him. (I, 138)

This was quite a retraction from the man who twenty years earlier translated and published the extremely hostile work, "Kant's Abstract of Swedenborgianism" in the London Magazine (May 1824).

It may well have been Clowes who led De Quincey to Barruel's and Robison's books on the Illuminatist conspiracy of late eighteenth-century Freemasonry. In 1800 Clowes had written a defense of the Swedenborgians against Barruel's charges that they were part of the Illuminatist plots.[2] De Quincey said he first became interested in Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism from reading Barruel and hearing Robison discussed. He said Abbé Barruel's wild, terrifying account of the cancerous conspiracy "perplexed me, though also fascinating me by its grandeur" (VII, 173-74). At the same period, De Quincey went hiking in Wales and met an old Welsh astrologer who cast his horoscope and inspired in him a life-long interest in astrology--"a very profound, or, at least, a very lofty science"--but not in astrologers, whom he branded "humbugs" (XIII, 259, 269). During the years from 1801 until his Masonic essay in 1824 De Quincey studied Boehme (and gave Coleridge Law's edition of Boehme, which Coleridge copiously annotated), phrenology, German metaphysics, and--perhaps most significantly--his own opium dreams. Thus, he brought to his research on the secret societies a wide experience of the theosophical traditions which formed the higher degrees of Freemasonry.

De Quincey's 1824 essay was both an exposé and a learned history of Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry. He noted how he schemed for an introduction to the Society of Masons,

[2] See "Letters to a Member of Parliament on the Character and Writings of Baron Swedenborg, containing a refutation of Abbé Barruel's Calumnies against the Honorable Author . . . " (London: 1800; 2nd ed. 1822).

"and of course to their honourable secret," and affirmed the maliciousness of his intent to demolish Freemasonry as "the great and illustrious humbug of Modern History," just as the Eleusinian Mysteries were in Ancient History (De Quincey, VII, 191, 201). That he succeeded in getting initiated is revealed in his footnote to fellow Masonic members:

> Masonic readers will remember a ceremony used on the introduction of a new member which turns upon the distinction between lead and gold as the symbol of transition from the lost state of Adam to the original condition of innocence and perfection. (XIII, 423)

Despite his intention of exposing Freemasonry, however, De Quincey did not break his vow of silence concerning the two pillars, Jachin and Boaz, which "have an occult meaning to Freemasons; which, however, I shall not undertake publicly to explain" (XIII, 425). To write his essay, he studied many works on Masonic history, especially Lessing's and Nicolai's, and then translated, condensed, and re-wrote Professor J.G. Buhle's 1803 German essay, calling it the best informed and fullest treatment of the matter. Masson notes that this shortened version of Buhle is a very "De Quinceyfied translation, with even the matter owing a good deal to De Quincey's digestion of it" (XIII, 387).

De Quincey's theories of the origins of Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism became predominant in England in the nineteenth century, and included such data as Leibnitz' association with a Rosicrucian group in Nuremburg, William Lilly's initiation into Ashmole's Masonic lodge, debateable claims about Cromwell's association with Freemasonry, the Grand Mastership of Christopher Wren, and an interesting rejection of Francis Bacon's role in early Freemasonry. Nicolai and the German historians hold that the seventeenth-century Freemasons hoped to build the Temple of Solomon, as described in _The New Atlantis_. De Quincey pointed out that Bacon stood at the head of the _exoterici_, who afterwards composed the

Royal Society and were the antagonistic party to Fludd's Cabalists and alchemists, "from whom Freemasonry took its rise" (XIII, 429). As we have seen, however, the recent publication in Ambix of the occultist and alchemical papers of many seventeenth-century Royal Society members raises Nicolai's hypothesis into new respectability.

But it is De Quincey's theory of the relation of Rosicrucianism to Freemasonry that is important to this study, for it was based on his experience in a London lodge in the days of Johann Falk's and Francis Barrett's supposed Rosicrucian Colleges. De Quincey affirmed that "Freemasonry is neither more nor less than Rosicrucianism as modified by those who transplanted it into England" (XIII, 419). Thus, English Freemasonry arose out of"the Rosicrucian mania," probably between 1633 and 1640:

> Their object was magic in the Cabalistic sense; i.e., the occult wisdom transmitted from the world, and matured by Christ . . . under an oath of secrecy. This object of Freemasonry is represented under the form of Solomon's Temple--as a type of the true church whose cornerstone is Christ. This temple is to be built of men, or living stones; and the true method or art of building with men is the province of magic to teach. Hence . . . all the Masonic symbols either refer to Solomon's Temple or are figurative modes of expressing the ideas and doctrines of magic in the sense of the Rosicrucians . . . Christ is the Grand-Master, and was put to death whilst laying the foundation of the Temple of Human Nature. (De Quincey, XIII, 426)

The cabalistic magic was interpreted by De Quincey as a means of healing the body and mind (XIII, 413). He added that Rosicrucianism is not Freemasonry, but that the latter borrowed its form from the first; however, "he that gives himself out for a Rosicrucian without knowing the general ritual of Freemasonry is unquestionably an impostor" (XIII, 394).

De Quincey's comments on contemporary Rosicrucianism are important, for he asserted that "in England the Rosicrucian

Order still exists, under a different name," and added that France's "Animal Magnetism, and many other fantastic follies" are part of the same Rosicrucian mentality, but collectively organized Rosicrucianism did not survive in Germany and France (XIII, 419). He also substantiated Godfrey Higgins' remark about the overly Christian emphasis of the London Rosicrucians. He pointed out the inclusion of Jews and Moslems in contemporary lodges of Freemasonry in London and Paris, but observed that in certain sects of Rosicrucians, their "mysticism leads them to demand special religious qualities in their proselytes which are dispensed with by common Freemasonry," and thus they excluded Jews and non-Christians (XIII, 391). He also noted that the term "Magus"---used by Francis Barrett and Bulwer-Lytton---was a Rosicrucian title of honor (XIII, 396). De Quincey then concluded these informative remarks

> We must not forget . . . that the Rosicrucian and Masonic orders were not originally at all points what they are now: they have passed through many changes and modifications; and no inconsiderable part of their symbolic system, etc., has been the product of successive generations. (XIII, 392)

Despite De Quincey's claim that "the whole bubble of Freemasonry was shattered" by his essay, he maintained his interest in secret societies until the end of his life. He knew a great deal about Animal Magnetism (XIII, 263), and developed some strikingly similar theories of "the fluid" in his essay on "The Essenes" in 1840. He noted that the Essenes particularly applied themselves to the practice of medicine, and that nine out of ten of Christ's miracles were medical or therapeutic miracles, "applied to derangements of the human system." This healing office was adopted, not chiefly for its own sake, but partly as a symbolic annunciation of a superior healing, already expressed in the name Ieusus, from the Greek verb for healing. Significantly, de Quincey concluded

that the Essenes were the first Christians, "formed in a secret society" (VII, 159-67).

Another writer who was also fascinated by Barruel's Masonic exposure was the poet Shelley (1792-1822). Hogg noted that Barruel's History of Jacobinism was one of Shelley's favorite books at college:

> He went through the four volumes again and again, swallowing with eager credulity the fictions and exaggerations of that readily believing, or readily inventing author. He used to read aloud to me with rapturous enthusiasm the wondrous tales of German Illuminati; and he was disappointed, sometimes, even displeased, when I expressed doubt or disbelief.[3]

The irony is that Shelley believed Barruel's charges against the "Illuminated" Freemasons and therefore thought the Masons were heroic.

In his youthful enthusiasm for the occult and for political "Illuminism," Shelley relived the mentality of the 1780's. At ages eleven and twelve, Shelley was taught by Adam Walker, a "scientist," interested in magnetism and religious enthusiasm.[4] From 1808 to 1810, he spent much of his time with Dr. Lind, an eccentric, elderly physician, full of esoteric lore and conjuring skills gained from his early life in the East. Shelley studied chemistry and alchemy with Lind, and venerated him until the end of his life. The stately, philosophical old man in The Revolt of Islam was modelled on Lind, and Shelley referred to him again as Zonoras, who filled Prince Athanase's mind "with soul-sustaining songs of ancient lore/ And philosophic wisdom clear and mild." At

[3] T.J.Hogg, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), p. 379.

[4] N.I. White, Shelley (New York: Knopf, 1940), p.22.

this period, Shelley also borrowed "ancient books of Chemistry and Magic" from Medwin's father, which Shelley said he perused "with an enthusiasm of wonder, almost amounting to belief" (White,p.42). He also practiced Animal Magnetism, tried to raise a ghost by magic spells,[5] affirmed his belief in the Panacea, and called himself the "wierd Archmage."[6] In his last year at Eton (1810), Shelley studied hard at German and read Gothic romances.

Thus, it should not be surprising that he climaxed his alchemical and occultist studies with the almost incoherent novel, St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian, written in 1809 and published at Oxford in 1810. Trying to explain the murky plot to his publisher, Shelley wrote first of Ginotti's "natural magic," and then explained "what I mean as Rosicrucianism is the elixir of eternal life," and pointed to Godwin's St. Leon as using a similar device (Grabo, p. 16). The novel's only interest is in its autobiographical portrait of Shelley at seventeen, as revealed in Ginotti's self-description: "from my earliest youth, . . . curiosity, and a desire to unveil the latent mysteries of nature, was the passion by which all the other emotions of my mind were intellectually organized" (White, p. 572).

We know from an 1812 letter to Godwin that Shelley hoped to purge his imagination of occult interests and to concentrate on political reform:

5 Carl Grabo, The Magic Plant: the Growth of Shelley's Thought (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 9.

6 Thomas Medwin, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913), pp. 49, 72.

> To them [Godwin's books], to you, I owe the inestimable boon of granted power, of arising from a state of intellectual sickliness and lethargy into which I plunged two years ago, and of which "St. Irvyne" and "Zastrozzi" were the distempered although unoriginal visions.[7]

But how far he was still a "votary of Romance," though now in political terms, in 1812 is shown in his enthusiasm for the Illuminatist conspiracy as described by Barruel. Shelley mentioned Barruel's work in his Proposals for an Association (Dublin, 1812), and hoped to found a "methodical society" for the defence of "rational liberty," according to the Masonic plan exposed by Barruel. From Dublin he wrote Elizabeth Hitchener, advising her to read the French work--"although it is half-filled with the vilest and most unsupported falsehoods"--and describing his proposed "Philanthropic College":

> Whilst you are with us in Wales, I shall attempt to organize one there, which shall correspond with the Dublin one. Might I not extend them all over England, and quietly revolutionize the country?--How is Sussex disposed? Is there much intellect there? (Jones, p. 264)

The reference to the Duke of Sussex is suggestive, for he was an eminent Freemason and became Grand Master of re-unified English Masonry in 1813. Shelley included Sussex in the list to send copies "from the author" of his pamphlet, A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote in 1817 (Jones, p. 533).

Mary Shelley noted in 1814 that Shelley was again reading bits about the Illuminati to them from Barruel, and he often signed himself "Philalethes" after the French Illuminé groups of the 1780's (Roberts, p. 201; Medwin, p. 74). Interestingly, during this period, Shelley was also friendly with John Varley, whose occult preoccupations were widely

[7] F.L. Jones, ed. Mary Shelley's Journal (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1947), p. 206.

known, and both he and Mary remained interested in Varley's powers of "prediction and antediction" (Bury, Varley, p. 58). Shelley also wrote on the Middle Eastern secret society of "Assassins" at this time, interpreting them in the same favorable light as the French Illuminés had. Whether Shelley actually contacted any secret society or Masonic group in London in order to further his own Illuminatist plan is unknown, but his movement from occultism and fantasies about the Rosicrucians into active political "Illuminization" reveals that in at least one Englishman's mind, the Masonic spirit of 1789 lived on.

When Shelley went to Italy in 1821, he was disenchanted with politics and becoming more drawn to the life of Platonic contemplation. But he was still fascinated by the tales of Masonic conspiracy which he heard from another English poet who had joined an Italian version of the Illuminati. This was Lord Byron, whose family had been connected with Freemasonry since the mid-eighteenth century, and who joined the Carbonari in Italy in 1820. The role of the Carbonari as a politically radical, "illuminized" branch of Freemasonry in Italy will be discussed in more detail later, as related to Gabriele Rossetti's Masonic literary histories. Byron became involved with the Carbonari through his intimacy with the Gamba family and rose to a high position within Italian Freemasonry. He enjoyed the conviviality of the Masonic banquets, at which he gave speeches, as well as the cloak and dagger aspects of the genuine revolutionary activities. The Austrian rulers and the Papal police viewed Byron as a serious threat, and charged him as the Masonic agent of English Liberal influence.[8] Byron discussed his Carbonari

[8] For a detailed account of Byron's Carbonari activities, see Iris Origo, The Last Attachment (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1949), passim.

activities with Shelley during their daily rides at Ravenna in 1821, for both had shared the great hopes for and bitter disappointment at the Neapolitan rebellion of 1820, largely organized by the Carbonari (with Gabriele Rossetti as an active participant), and which inspired Shelley's "Ode to Naples."

Shelley would not have found much of the organised political radicalism of the late eighteenth century still alive in London Freemasonry from the 1830's on, for the majority of Masons were liberal but solid citizens, who met mainly for enlightened discussion and convivial society, while the wilder spirits immersed themselves in antiquarianism and occultism. An example of a political radical who became a Freemason because of his antiquarian researches into occult traditions rather than because of his political interests was Godfrey Higgins (1773-1833). His works on The Celtic Druids (written 1827, published 1829) and Anacalypsis: or an Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations, and Religions (printed 1833, published 1836) developed an eclectic theory of the origins of religions and occultism, colored by his enthusiastic researches into phallic worship, which had a tremendous impact on nineteenth-century Freemasonry. Higgins said he did not become a Mason until after writing The Celtic Druids, and explained why he had refused to join the Rosicrucians or Templars. Interestingly, his studies on the Druids and Assassins of Sufi traditions led him to his interest in Freemasonry, for he concluded that the word "May's-sons" came from the Druid Maypole, and that the Assassins were the forerunners of modern Freemasonry.[9]

9 Godfrey Higgins, Anacalypsis . . . (London: Longmans, 1836), I, 716, 704.

When he joined the order, Higgins became an ardent Mason, calling himself a "Philalethean" like Shelley, and his next book Anacalypsis was full of important Masonic lore (Higgins, II, viii). He cited the need for scholarly study of the Cabala, which was in bad repute with the enlightened Jews of the nineteenth century, and he lucidly discussed Rosicrucianism as a religion of sacramental sexuality (I, 817, 723). He confirmed the Irish Freemason General Vallancey in his theories of the relation between the Cabalistic Sephiroth and the old Irish alphabet. Before his death in 1833, Higgins had planned a journey to the East "in search of Wisdom." Higgins had written Anacalypsis with his Masonic fellows in mind, and it provides a valuable source for the preoccupations of early nineteenth-century Freemasonry:

> Many passages in this book will be perfectly understood by my Masonic friends . . . who will find their Craft very often referred to. I believe, however, that they will not find any of their secrets betrayed; but I trust they will find it proved, that their art is the remains of a very fine ancient system . . . a branch of the fine and beautiful system of Wisdom, which, in this work, I have developed. (I,xx)

The question of the development of Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism from the 1830's until the official establishment of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia in 1866 is fraught with controversy (and muddled by the fantastic claims of credulous modern Rosicrucians). According to Wynn Westcott, who was Yeats' source on these matters, the Rosicrucian papers of the Falk family were preserved at Freemasons Hall by Brother William Henry White, who was Grand Secretary from 1810 to 1857. There are conflicting claims about White's own Rosicrucian role, which have been discussed earlier, but by the 1850's another Mason, Robert Wentworth Little (1839-1878) found the Rosicrucian documents and used them for Rosicrucian initiations within Freemasonry. At the same

time, with the object of reconstituting a Rosicrucian College in London, Little called on Brother Kenneth R.H. Mackenzie, who years earlier had been connected with a Rosicrucian group in Germany. The German group permitted Mackenzie to attempt the formation of a group of Masonic students in England, who might form a partly esoteric society under the Rosicrucian name. With Mackenzie's "license" and with the manuscripts of ritual information which Little had discovered in the vaults of Freemasons Hall, Little founded the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia in 1866, and became the first "Supreme Magus" in 1867. Other members were Hughan, Woodman, O'Neal, Haye, Irwin, and later Hockley, Woodford, and Benjamin Cox. Westcott noted that the manuscripts Little got from White are probably still in the vaults of Freemasons Hall (Westcott, pp. 6 ff.).

The official statement of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia defined its aims as

> . . . the study of the system of philosophy founded upon the Kabalah and the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus, which was inculcated by the original Fratres Rosae-Crucis of Germany, A.D. 1450; and to investigate the meaning and symbolism of all that remains of the wisdom, art, and literature of the Ancient World. (Westcott, 6)

Out of the confusion of genuine facts and hyperbolic legend that makes up the contemporary accounts of this English Rosicrucian group, there arise many provocative theories and anecdotes about prominent figures of the mid-nineteenth century who were claimed as Rosicrucian initiates.

The most verifiable claims center on Bulwer-Lytton and reveal his connections with French secret societies, which may well have stimulated his friend Benjamin Disraeli in his Masonic conspiracy fears. The credulous modern Rosicrucian historian Clymer claimed that Bulwer was already "Supreme Grand Master" of Rosicrucianism in 1853 (Clymer,III,48), which, if true, would connect him with Mackenzie's German-

based group. We do know that in the 1850's Bulwer was heavily involved in magic and Animal Magnetism, and that he was holding conversations with his dead daughter Emily, as well as with Shakespeare and other luminaries (V.A.Lytton, p. 43). His letters from 1853 to 1863 bear ample witness of his preoccupations. In 1853 he wrote his son Robert Lytton, who later became a convinced spiritualist, that he had been visited by some American "rappers" and mediums, and was interested and puzzled by the phenomena--"it does not inspire awe, but rather heightens the spirits and produces a gay humour." Bulwer had his own theories on spiritualism, though:

> I have been interested in the spirit manifestations . . . there is no trick, but I doubt much whether all be more than some strange clairvoyance, passing from one human brain to another, or if spirits, something analogous to fairies or genii . . . Still, whatever these communicants be, as yet they "palter with us in a double sense," do not enlarge our knowledge, and I doubt if any practical end can be gained. I shall now, therefore, in all probability, dismiss these researches. Their interest is too absorbing for human life and true wisdom. (V.A.Lytton, p. 42)

Bulwer's dismissal of popular spiritualism, however, was accompanied by his increased research into the older magical traditions. In the same letter to his son, Bulwer noted his renewed study of astrology and "the old sorcery, divination by lot (sors)," and concluded, "I keep a book of my communications and researches--it will be curious." This journal, if it still exists, has never been published. Later in 1853 he wrote Lord Walpole, "I have been pursuing science into strange mysteries . . . and gone far into a spiritual world, which suffices to destroy all existing metaphysics and to startle the strongest reason (V.A.Lytton, p. 44). It was in that year that Bulwer became acquainted with an equally learned adept, the French Cabalist Eliphas Lévi, who said he came to London with letters of

introduction

> . . . for important people who were curious about revelations of the supernatural world. I saw several of them, and found in them, together with a great deal of courtesy, a basic indifference or lack of seriousness. At first, everybody asked prodigies of me, as if I were a charlatan. I was a little discouraged, for, to tell the truth, far from being inclined to initiate others into the mysteries of ceremonial magic, I always was afraid, for myself, of its illusions and tiring aspects. Moreover, these ceremonies require apparatus that is expensive and difficult to assemble. So I shut myself up and studied the high Cabala. (quoted in Wolff, p. 260)

However, Lévi did find two worthy students of magic, Dr. John Ashburner (an Animal Magnetiser and spiritualist) and Bulwer-Lytton. Lévi and Bulwer became good friends, for according to Lévi's biographer, the "great novelist knew how to appreciate the last knowledge of the Master." Chacornac also claims that Lévi received the "Baptism of Light" from Bulwer while in London (Wolff, pp. 260-61). The latter is an advanced Rosicrucian ceremony, and coincides with the claims of Sax Rohmer that Lévi learned more from Bulwer than vice versa (Nelson, p. 36). Naylor says that Lévi was invited by Bulwer to play a part in and talk to a society of occultists conducted by the latter (Naylor, p. 108).

While in London, Lévi was contacted by a heavily veiled lady "of high rank," who had been told by a friend of Bulwer that Lévi had been refusing to perform experiments. She hoped he would change his mind upon seeing her completely equipped magic room. Levi agreed to try a "complete evocation" of Apollonius of Tyana, and recorded the full details of his three-week preparation in Chapter XIII of <u>Transcendental Magic</u>. After several intermediary spirits appeared, Lévi finally evoked Apollonius, who appeared as a man-like shape "wrapped in a sort of shroud." It was a traumatic experience for Lévi, who fainted before he could ask his questions. Though he "felt dreadful," Lévi summoned Apollonius twice more and

obtained "the revelation of two Cabalistic secrets, which if they were known to the general public could in a short time change the bases and laws of society as a whole." Lévi was not sure of the spiritual reality of Appollonius and worried that "his efforts may have intoxicated his imagination" (Wolff, pp. 261- 62). But he added that he "did see . . . and did touch, apart from dreaming, and this is sufficient to establish the real efficacy of magical ceremonies."[10] Interestingly, Lévi--a talented artist--drew the "visionary heads" he had conjured up, just as Francis Barrett and William Blake did before him (Chacornac, p. 150).

Though Bulwer was apparently not present at this magical ceremony, Lévi repeated it in 1861, with Bulwer as participating Magus, on the roof of the London Pantheon. Bulwer was inspired by the experience to write A Strange Story (1862), with its eloquent tribute to the Rosicrucian ideal at the end. But between Lévi's visits to London in 1854 and 1861, both he and Bulwer greatly enriched their erudition and practical experience in Cabalistic magic and Animal Magnetism.

When Lévi returned to France in 1854, he began writing the series of "large and learned" books on magic, Cabalism, magnetism, and the mystery religions which made him a major influence on French symboliste artists and philosophers. Lévi has long been recognized as an important figure in nineteenth-century literary history in France, but his early influence in London--both on the development of the Rosicrucian Society and on several artists--has been little examined. Since he formed a transition from eighteenth-century style "Illuminist" theosophy into the nineteenth-century terminology of Odic forces, astral lights, electro-biology, and zoo-magnetism, an examination of his career

[10] Colin Wilson, The Occult: a History (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 327.

is important to an understanding of the cross-currents between nineteenth-century French and English Rosicrucianism and occultism.

Lévi's real name was Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810-1875). He had been educated for the priesthood but quit the seminary in 1836. Naylor claims that Lévi became the "most famous convert" of the English Rosicrucian Francis Barrett (p. 107). Lévi also read and met Balzac, whose Louis Lambert (1832) and Seraphita (1835) were full of Swedenborgianism and bizarre theories of Animal Magnetism (see Darnton, p. 155, and Senior, pp. 60 ff.). Lévi then became one of the adepts of "the Mapah," a wierd, highly erotic development of Swedenborgianism, led by Monseiur Ganneau (the Mapah). The cult attracted many radical and militantly feminist followers, including Flora Tristan, a disciple of the Socialist Fourier, and even at times Victor Hugo, who studied all the occult traditions (Wolff, pp. 127-28). Lévi was introduced to Ganneau in 1839 by Alphonse Esquiros, whose book Le Magicien Lévi had illustrated in 1838. Ganneau, whose visionary prophecies were stimulated by a combination of Animal Magnetism and Swedenborgianism, inspired Lévi and Esquiros to publish two radical, Socialist pamphlets--The Gospel of the People and The Bible of Liberty--in which they hoped to "communicate the last word of revolution to the world and to seal the abyss of anarchy . . . by casting ourselves therein."[11] Instead, Lévi landed in jail for these radical pamphlets, and then began his occult studies in earnest. He had met Höene Wronski earlier, the famous Polish occultist and inventor of the "Prognometer" machine for predicting the future. After Wronsky's death

[11] Eliphas Lévi, The History of Magic, trans. A.E. Waite (London: W.Rider, 1913), p. 497.

in 1853, Lévi inherited some seventy of his unpublished manuscripts (Clymer, p. 427). The genuine erudition that Lévi accumulated over the next years make his later works still valuable, despite their bizarre personal tone and eclectic mingling of many theosophical traditions.

In 1847 Lévi was in prison again for La Voix de la Famine, and was active as a militant Socialist and feminist in the Revolution of 1848 (Chacornac, p. 109). He gave a fantastic version of the beginning of the Revolution, which he traced to the "magnetic influence" of Ganneau:

> A nervous and delicate young man named Sobrier was numbered among the Mapah's disciples; he lost his head completely and believed himself predestined to save the world by provoking the supreme crisis of an universal revolution. The days of 1848 drew towards the threshold . . . Suddenly a young man appeared in the populous streets of the Quartier Saint-Martin. He was preceded by two street Arabs, one bearing a torch, and the other beating to arms. A large crowd gathered; the young man got upon a post and harangued the people. His words were incoherent and incendiary, but the gist was to proceed to the Boulevard des Capuchines and acquaint the ministry with the will of the people. The demoniac was marching at the head of a great concourse, pistol in each hand, still heralded by torch and tambour . . . In the midst of this the young man and his street Arabs disappeared, but . . . a pistol shot was fired at the people. This shot was the revolution. (Lévi, p. 498)

Lévi claimed Sobrier was in a state of magnetic trance during this affair, which "had for a moment shaken the world" (Lévi, p. 499). Significantly, for Disraeli's fears, Lévi was a Freemason throughout this period and regularly attended meetings at the Lodge "Rose of the Perfect Silence," a Rosicrucian rite, and was elevated to Master Mason in 1861 (Chacornac, p. 200). Colin Wilson observes that the flavor of Paris in mid-century--"all the talk of ecstasy and occultism and revolt"--was accurately caught in Lévi's writings (p. 325). After the failure of the Revolution,

Lévi became a full-time occultist and took the name Eliphas Lévi Zahed as a Cabalistic title.

In 1861 he returned to London and visited Bulwer-Lytton at Knebworth. It was on this visit that Bulwer and Lévi performed a complicated rite of ceremonial magic, in which they evoked "the elementary spirits" on top of the London Pantheon, an incident Bulwer confirmed in a letter (Nelson, p. 36). In that same year, Bulwer became Grand Patron of the Rosicrucian Society, and Lévi received his Rosicrucian "Baptism of Light." Though Chacornac says Bulwer maintained "le silence le plus absolu" about his Rosicrucian activities, he published in the next year a novel full of Rosicrucian theories, which concluded with a powerful description of a rite of ceremonial magic.

A Strange Story (1862) is as valuable in its descriptions of mid-nineteenth-century magnetic and occultist preoccupations as Zanoni is for the late eighteenth century. Bulwer skillfully wove a romance and mystery-story out of genuinely learned references to Animal Magnetism, Cabalistic magic, phrenology, alchemy, the books of Esdras and Enoch, and Scandinavian spirit-lore. His main concern was with the possibilities of visionary experiences, and he gave a remarkable account of Fenwick's state of "somnambulistic lucidity" or "magnetic ecstasy." Because Bulwer had experienced this state himself, and because it is one of the clearest accounts of the ecstatic trance state in literature, it is worth quoting at length:

> My first sensation was that of passive subjugation; but soon I was aware of a strange intoxicating effect . . . and then suddenly came pain . . . Every bone, sinew, nerve, fibre of the body, seemed as if wrenched open, and as if some hitherto unconjectured Presence in the vital organization were forcing itself to light with all the pangs of travail . . . This dreadful interval subsided as suddenly as it had commenced . . . I was sensible of the passive bliss that attends the release

from torture, and then there grew on me a wonderful calm, and, in that calm, a consciousness of some lofty intelligence immeasurably beyond that which human memory gathers from earthly knowledge. I saw before me the still rigid form of Margrave, and my sight seemed, with ease, to penetrate through its covering of flesh, and to survey the mechanism of the whole interior being . . .

And the brain now opened on my sight, with all its labyrinth of cells. I seemed to have the clew to every winding in the maze.

I saw therein a moral world, charred and ruined, . . . yet withal it was a brain of magnificent formation . . . and still continuing to gaze thereon, I observed three separate emanations of light,--the one of a pale red hue, the second of a pale azure, the third a silvery spark.

The red light, which grew paler and paler as I looked, undulated from the brain along the arteries, the veins, the nerves. And I murmured to myself, "Is this the principle of animal life?"

The azure light equally permeated the frame . . . as in the outer world, a ray of light crosses or unites with a ray of heat . . . "Is this the principle of intellectual being, directing or influencing that of animal life; with it, yet not of it?"

But the silvery spark! What was that? Its centre seemed the brain . . . "Can that starry spark speak the presence of the soul? Does the silver light shine within creatures to which no life immortal has been promised by Divine Revelation?"

Involuntarily, I turned my sight towards the dead forms in the motley collection, and lo, in my trance or vision, life returned to them all!--to the elephant and the serpent; to the tiger, the vulture, the beetle, the moth; to the fish and the polypous, and to yon mockery of man in the giant ape . . . I turned my eyes from the creatures around back again to the form cowering under the huge anaconda, and in terror at the animation which the carcasses took in the awful illusions of that marvellous trance. (<u>Strange Story</u>, pp. 165-167)

The ability to see into one's own and other's "internal mechanism" was, of course, the means of magnetic healing, practised by so many of Blake's associates and described by Blake himself in <u>Milton</u> and <u>Jerusalem</u>. Interestingly, when Lillian, the heroine, becomes completely absorbed into a somnambulistic state, Bulwer describes her

drawings as Blake-like:

> . . . the drawings were strange and fantastic; they had a resemblance to those with which the painter Blake, himself a visionary, illustrated the Poems of the "Night Thoughts" and "The Grave,"--faces of exquisite loveliness, forms of aerial grace, coming forth from the bells of flowers, or floating upwards amidst the spray of fountains, their outlines melting away in fountain or flower. (Strange Story, p. 351)

Given Bulwer's position as the most eminent Rosicrucian of his day, his comments on Francis Bacon, in A Strange Story are significant for the late nineteenth-century Rosicrucians who became fanatical supporters of the "Bacon as Shakespeare" theory. While discussing various theories on magnetism and trance, Bulwer noted that Bacon in his Natural History pointed out "the force of the imagination, and the help it receives by one man working by another." Bacon cited an instance he had witnessed of a kind of juggler, who could tell a person what card he thought of. A sage told Bacon that "It is not the knowledge of the man's thought, for that is proper to God, but the enforcing of a thought upon him and binding his imagination by a stronger, so that he could think of no other card." Bulwer then asserted, "You see this sage anticipated our modern electro-biologists!" After summarizing Bacon's theories of imagination and of the power of magic to elevate the consciousness, Bulwer concluded:

> And Lord Bacon, were he now living, would be the man to solve the mysteries that branch out of Mesmerism or (so called) spiritual manifestations, for he would not pretend to despise their phenomena for fear of hurting his reputation for good sense. (p. 387)

Bulwer reflected that if some great philosopher had acted upon Bacon's call for investigation of the power of imagination on plants, "we should by this time know all the secrets of what is properly called witchcraft" (pp. 386-87).

Bulwer's absorption in practical magic as well as Animal Magnetism is revealed in a footnote where he refers to Eliphas Lévi:

. . . the magician requires the interposition of a third imagination between his own and that of the consulting believer . . . Hence the author of "Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie," printed at Paris, 1852-53---a book less remarkable for its learning than for the earnest belief of a scholar of our own day in the reality of the art which he records the history--insists on the necessity of rigidly observing Le Ternaire. (pp. 386-87)

That the evocation with Lévi had powerfully affected Bulwer is revealed in the conclusion to A Strange Story, in which Fenwick and the evil magician Margrave perform a Rosicrucian rite of ceremonial magic in order to liberate Lillian from her trance and to gain the elixir of life for the dying Margrave. They constructed a glowing circle and marked out the seals of Solomon within it. In a bubbling cauldron, they brewed the elixir. As the hours passed by, strange phenomena disturbed them--the undulation of the earth, huge terrible eyes glowing in the darkness, the whir of invisible wings, etc. When Fenwick accidentally touched the edge of the circle, his arm "felt a shock like that of electricity" and fell to his side numbed and nerveless. This was a direct reference to Lévi's experience, for when he touched Apollonius of Tyana, his arm was stunned and swollen, remaining sore for days. The climax of the ceremony came when the "Rose of the alchemist's dream enlarges its blooms from the folds of its petals," and Bulwer's vivid description was an eloquent tribute to the ultimate Rosicrucian vision:

I looked, and the liquid which glowed in the caldron had now taken a splendour which mocked all comparisons borrowed from the lustre of gems. In its prevalent colour it had, indeed, the dazzle and flash of the ruby; but out from the mass of the molten red, broke corruscations of all prismal hues, shooting, shifting, in a play that made the wavelets themselves seem living things, sensible of their joy. No longer was there scum or film upon the surface; only ever and anon a light rosy vapour floating up, and quickly lost in the

> haggard, heavy, sulphurous air, hot with the conflagration rushing towards us from behind. And those coruscations formed, on the surface of the molten ruby, literally the shape of a Rose, its leaves made distinct in their outlines by sparks of emerald and diamond and sapphire.
>
> Even while gazing on this animated liquid lustre, a buoyant delight seemed infused into my senses; all terrors conceived before were annulled; the phantoms, whose armies had filled the wide spaces in front, were forgotten; the crash of the forest behind was unheard. In the reflection of that glory, Margrave's wan cheek seemed already restored to the radiance it wore when I saw it first in the framework of blooms. (p. 488)

The closest similarity in English literature to Bulwer's long and eloquent description of ceremonial magic is in Yeats' Rosicrucian stories, _The Secret Rose_ (1897), _Stories of Red Hanrahan_ (1897), and _Rosa Alchemica_, _The Tables of the Law_, and _The Adoration of the Magi_ (1897). All of these may have been influenced by Bulwer, whose occult books were among the "sacred lore" of Yeats' own secret societies.

In this momentous year of 1861, Bulwer summed up his views on magic in a letter to John Foster, which clearly defined the mentality of the intelligent, erudite, and curious Englishmen of the nineteenth century whose research into occultism was much more than "mere dabbling":

> I do believe in the substance of what used to be called Magic, that is, I believe that there are persons of a peculiar temperament who can effect very extraordinary things not accounted for satisfactorily by any existent philosophy. You will observe that the constitution or temperament is always more or less the same in these magicians, whether they are clairvoyant or media; the wonders are produced thro' them and cease in their absence or inactivity. In their constitution I find a remarkable agreement--it is only persons who are highly susceptible of electricity who have it, and their power is influenced according as the atmosphere is more or less charged with electricity. This all Media and Mesmerists will acknowledge . . .

> Abnormal phenomena may solve some great problems in real science. Thus common reasoners reject a good, well-authenticated ghost story altogether. But real philosophers delight in one . . . The mystery of dreaming is the vexed question to this day between materialists and immaterialists.
> Spectral phenomena are dreams turned inside out. (V.A. Lytton, pp. 48-49)

According to Clymer, who unfortunately mixes occasionally valuable fact with constant fancy throughout his Rosicrucian histories, another eminent Rosicrucian of the 1850's who became involved with Bulwer and Lévi was the distinguished American General Ethan Allen Hitchcock (pp. xxiv-xxvi). Whether Hitchcock was definitely a Rosicrucian remains to be proved, but he was a brilliant scholar of Rosicrucian, Masonic, and Hermetic traditions. His works helped to shape many of the ideas of late nineteenth-century occultism in England, especially through his influence on A.E. Waite. Hitchcock (1798-1870) lived an incredibly active, nomadic, and dangerous military life, while amassing in his army tents and barracks one of the greatest private collections of Hermetic books in America or England. He is one of the most interesting figures in American history, but he has not received full scholarly investigation. The grandson of the Revolutionary hero, Ethan Allen (a prominent Freemason), Hitchcock became an instructor at West Point. After military prominence in the Mexican War (in which he branded the U.S. as aggressor), he was asked by Lincoln to be Commander-in-Chief of the Northern armies in the Civil War. Hitchcock declined for reasons of health and instead became first military adviser to Lincoln and Secretary Stanton. He worked with Lincoln daily throughout the war and handled all of the President's military correspondence.[12] According to

[12] Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Fifty Years in Camp and Field, ed. W.A. Croffut (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1909), p. 446.

Clymer, both Hitchcock and Lincoln were active in a small secret Rosicrucian group in Washington at this time, but as usual gives no evidence for this startling claim (II, 133).

Throughout his life, Hitchcock kept a journal in which he made systematic records almost everyday which Croffut describes as "a voluminous chronicle of passing events which has no parallel in the literary remains of any other distinguished American" (Hitchcock, p. 111). The closest parallel to Hitchcock is obviously General Rainsford, with the same military prominence, occult learning, and voluminous journals, who is also surprisingly under-researched. In Croffut's greatly shortened and too often paraphrased edition of his diary, which makes no use of his correspondence, Hitchcock's tremendous erudition and original research into alchemical, Cabalistic, and Hermetic traditions were interwoven into perceptive, thorough, and always well-documented analyses of political and military events. But as Cohen points out, "Nowhere can one find the public career and private studies of Hitchcock described together," and adds that "the lack of interest in Hitchcock by students of Poe is remarkable."[13] For when Edgar Allan Poe was at West Point, supposedly withering away in a dry military milieu, Hitchcock, a learned and enthusiastic student of the alchemystical, Mesmeric, and visionary traditions, was Poe's instructor in 1830 and 1831 (Cohen, p. 33).

Poe wrote his step-father on 28 June 1830 that he was "very politely received by Captain Hitchcock,"[14] and ranked first in Hitchcock's class for over six months (Hitchcock, p. 63). But the most recent study of Poe at West Point,

[13] I.B. Cohen, "Ethan Allen Hitchcock of Vermont, Soldier, Humanitarian, and Scholar," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 61 (1951), p. 80.

[14] J.W. Ostrom, ed. The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe (Harvard, 1948), p. 37.

ironically called "A Revaluation," does not even mention Hitchcock, despite the author's intention of debunking the notion that "there was little available at West Point, . . . in the persons of his instructors or companions, to provide intellectual stimulation."[15] Oelke does point out, though, that there were several extra-curricular societies for the study of literature and philosophy, which the professors often took part in (p. 4). Since Hitchcock was one of West Point's most respected and popular instructors and possessed an enormous personal library while West Point's was minimal, his participation in the societies' discussions seems probable.[16] Before briefly looking at Poe's own interest in alchemy, occultism, Swedenborgianism, and Mesmerism, we need to examine Hitchcock's contributions to the field.

Hitchcock had begun his philosophical researches as a young West Point cadet, when he became troubled by religious doubts (his revered grandfather, after all, authored Reason, the only Oracle of Man in 1784, before the works of Thomas Paine). Hitchcock became "desirous to know what a certain class of men called philosophers thought of God and man and life," and began the voracious reading program which he maintained until his death (Hitchcock, p. 46). By 1825, he concluded that "the great whole is one and all the parts agree with all the parts," and sought out books on pantheism and the philosophy of correspondences (p. 51). Reading in several languages, and especially interested in little known Elizabethan and Jacobean literature and eighteenth-century German philosophy,

15 E. Oelke, "Poe at West Point--a Revaluation," Poe Studies, 6 (June 1973), pp. 6-8.

16 Intriguingly, the article following Oelke's in Poe Studies, "Poe's Devoted Democrat, George Lippard," pp. 6-8, discusses another figure whom Clymer claims as a fellow Rosicrucian with Hitchcock and Lincoln.

Hitchcock was also the teacher of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Joseph Johnson, and W.T. Sherman (American DNB).

Hitchcock gradually became aware of the continuing Hermetic tradition underlying the symbolism of many philosophical poets. While his brother Samuel worked on the first English translation of Spinoza's works (p. 238), Hitchcock read Spinoza, Swedenborg, the Animal Magnetisers, Boehme and his eighteenth-century German followers, and Hindu philosophy.

But his great discovery, made in 1844, was the work of Gabriele Rossetti on the esoteric meaning of Dante and the Medieval romance writers, who were claimed as members of a vast secret society which used symbolism to mask their political activities (p. 186). Rossetti, father of the famous Rossetti clan, was a Masonic Carbonari, who devoted his life to researching the "great Masonic conspiracy" (which, like Shelley, he admired), from Dante into the nineteenth century. The influence of his Masonic theories on the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood will be discussed later, but Hitchcock was one of the few contemporaries who even read Rossetti's rare works. From a barren military camp in Corpus Christi, Texas, Hitchcock corresponded in 1846 with the poet Longfellow concerning Rossetti's adepts and their esoteric theories (Hitchcock, p. 207). While preoccupied with Rossetti's theories, Hitchcock also published an anonymous pamphlet, "De Obfuscationibus, or a glimmering light on Mesmerism: drawn from documents known before Mesmer was born" (1845). He also read all of Chevalier Ramsay's works, the Freemason held responsible for introducing the occultist high degrees in Continental Freemasonry (p. 190) After studying Swedenborg and his contemporaries, he wrote The Doctrines of Spinoza and Swedenborg Identified (1846). In 1847 Hitchcock was a commander in Mexico, despite his bitter opposition to the Mexican War, and applied his growing Masonic theories to his analysis of the secret "robber-bands" which were formed for self-protection against the rapacious Mexican army. He pointed out that they recognized each other

"by certain signs as infallible and secret as those of Masonry," and he became the champion of the "robber chief," Manuel Dominquez (p. 335).

When Hitchcock returned from Mexico, he made a "mysterious sojourn" to New Orleans for six weeks in 1849, when the city was almost deserted because of pestilence. He spent all his time with a group of un-named friends with whom he studied hard on his philosophical theories. It is in the deliberate silence about such periods as this and his travels in Europe later in 1849 that the possibility of Hitchcock's own activity in some secret occult society does seem a valid one. While he was in New Orleans, he also met Delia Bacon, who was developing her own theories of the secret group authorship of Shakespeare's plays. Her theories were still "obscure" when she discussed them with Hitchcock, and it is possible that he influenced her by his own Rossettian studies into secret societies and their "symbolic" literature. For in 1857, Miss Bacon startled the literary world with her <u>Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded</u> (with a preface by Nathaniel Hawthorne, who got the book published), in which she sought to prove that a secret literary sect, headed by Bacon, Raleigh, and Spenser, produced the plays of "Shakespeare" in order to set forth a liberal political philosophy directed against the royal government. They communicated by cipher and inserted cipher clues in the plays. In light of Ben Jonson's connection of English actors with Rosicrucians, the thesis was intriguing, but it reached its most absurd climax in the Rosicrucian and Masonic claims of Wigston and Potts in the 1880's.

In August 1849, Hitchcock left for Europe where he travelled and studied for fourteen months. Clymer claims that he met Rosicrucian adepts in England, France, and Germany, and rose to a prominent position in international Rosicrucianism (II, 123). Whether this is true or not, Hitchcock returned

from London more convinced than ever at the truth of Rossetti's theories. While governing the turbulent California-Oregon military territory, Hitchcock got hold of the remarkable booklet, The Story of Reynard the Fox, which he believed revealed the esoteric method by which the Medieval writers concealed the true meaning of their assaults on the Church. But it was a chance discovery in a New York bookstall in 1854 which set Hitchcock on his serious authorial career. There he found several antique alchemical works on magic, and "these moved him strangely." He thought he had come upon "a valuable revelation of the antique mind"--that heretics in those remote ages could not speak plainly about the Church without personal danger and therefore spoke in symbols. He bought Dante's Vita Nuova in French, and became convinced that Beatrice was no woman at all but a vision of Wisdom, just as the alchemists' gold was (Hitchcock, pp. 412- 14).

Hitchcock resigned from the army in 1855 in protest against the promotion of a brutal officer who had exterminated the Brule Indian tribe. He then contemplated a future civilian life of philosophical studies:

> The prosecution of my studies ought to be carried on in a sort of serious silence . . . The Hermetic philosophers are the true philosophers. They are a solemn class of writers, for a glimpse of a true eternity abolishes all selfishness and fills the soul with an amiable tenderness toward mankind . . . how little sympathy I may look for from what is called "the world" in my alchemical studies. So be it! (p. 415)

He plunged more deeply into his Hermetic researches, and soon published Remarks upon the Alchemists, "Being an attempt to rescue from undeserved opprobrium the reputation of a class of extraordinary thinkers" (1857). Hitchcock's books were the most learned English works on alchemy yet produced and became the major influence on A.E. Waite's voluminous works at the end of the century, which formed the basis of much of Yeats'

knowledge of the subject. Cohen points out that the Viennese psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer got his theories on psychological alchemy from Hitchcock, and then passed them on to Carl G.Jung (Cohen, pp. 64-65).

In his alchemical works, Hitchcock asserted that Berkeley wrote Siris as a Hermetic allegory, discussed the alchemical symbolism of Boehme and Goethe, pointed out Giordano Bruno's Hermetic connections, and learnedly analyzed the relation of occultism to secret Protestant political maneuvering. Significantly, he pointed to the role of Freemasonry in carrying on the Hermetic traditions:

> There are many signs in alchemical volumes of a Secret Society, in which possibly the language used was conventionally determined. I have at times thought that some members of the Masonic fraternity might have found the secret language of the alchemists a convenient mode of which they had taken "an oath" not to speak directly . . . It is quite certain that books in a mysterious language were written by members of the Rosicrucian Society.[17]

Clymer reprinted Hitchcock's rare 1857 work on alchemy in 1907, added many of his own interpretations, and used it as a major document for the teaching in a "secret Rosicrucian school which pretends to make alchemists of its pupils" (Cohen, p. 119).

In 1848 Hitchcock had remarked that "it is wonderful how little his open followers know of Emanuel Swedenborg---a mere refiner upon Spinoza, or a sort of dreamer upon the principles of the Jew (Hitchcock, p. 331). After ten more years of research he published an important book, Swedenborg, a Hermetic Philosopher (1858) which perceptively defined the symbolic and psychological nature of the Hermetic writings and asserted that Swedenborg's constant allusions to "a society of angels"

[17] Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Swedenborg, A Hermetic Philosopher (New York: D.Appleton, 1858), p. 151.

referred to a real society of "regenerated men . . . in communication with angels." Whatever was thought in the view of such men was called a conversation in the spiritual world, for they had penetrated into the "angelic" level of their own consciousness. Hitchcock's criticism of Swedenborg was penetrating, and is still the best available in English; it also sheds much light on Blake's criticism of Swedenborg. According to Hitchcock's view, Swedenborg never fully understood the alchemical writings, used circular reasoning in his descriptions of the different levels of heaven and hell within the Grand Man, and constantly contradicted himself out of an inadequate understanding of the proprium (Swedenborg, pp. 58-59). Hitchcock also accused Swedenborg of violating the Hermetic laws of secrecy, and then claiming to have "originated" his essentially Hermetic ideas (p. 80), which may have some relation to Swedenborg's guilt-ridden dreams about accusing Jews, as discussed earlier. He pointed out that Swedenborg's theory of the celestial world which can be entered "even here in the body" (with which Blake once annotated his agreement), is found substantially in the Hermetic writings:

> . . . the difference being that Swedenborg undertook to develop the doctrine more fully and to write more openly than any genuine Hermetic philosopher has ever felt at liberty to do, though Swedenborg himself has exhibited his opinions under a veil.(p. 92)

While discussing the winged Cherubim within the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple, Hitchcock made an important personal revelation:

> The Masonic Society is said to make great use of the story of the Temple of Solomon, as symbolical of a temple not made of hands; but I am not a Mason, and may be supposed not to know anything on the subject; and yet Dr. Oliver's Landmarks of Masonry, an authorized Masonic work, very plainly shows how the subject is understood by the truly initiated within a lodge. (p. 222)

But Hitchcock's remarks on Swedenborg's secret society are suggestive, for he implied the continued existence of it, with an unusual tone of sincere advocacy:

> Many men have sprung up from time to time with the idea that they had reached the secret of this doctrine, and have audaciously and presumptuously written books to publish it to the world . . . For the most part these men have known nothing of the secret.
> Most of the real adepts have written nothing at all, while those who published anything have limited themselves to very small tracts, published not so much with the object of making known a doctrine, as to indicate to the initiated their claim to brotherhood, and these works have been almost invariably anonymous.
> . . . the members, to call them such, of this "society" are scattered, both as to time and space, there being a few in every age, but not many in any age; and from the same necessity they do not and cannot form an organized body, for this would be to put limitations upon that which in its nature is absolutely free. Yet they truly exist, and know each other by signs more infallible than can be made effectual by any organized society whatever; and why? --because they live in the fear of the Lord, and have become depositors of his secret (Psalm 25:14).
> The members of this society have in former times communicated with each other by a secret language, which has had many forms, and will have many more, but which can never utterly perish. (pp. 194-95)

If Hitchcock were indeed connected with a Rosicrucian group, the description above would suit the conditions of Rosicrucians in the 1850's, when Mackenzie, Bulwer, and Lévi were all loosely associated with a few Rosicrucians in France and Germany, and nearly ten years before the organized "Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia" was established. After completing his work on Swedenborg and his secret Hermetic society, Hitchcock spent several weeks in 1860 examining the current wave of spiritualism. He attended lectures and séances, and though not overwhelmed, concluded that those whom he saw here honest and, as the editor amibguously sums up, "assisted in some peculiar way, like the Illuminati" (Hitchcock, p. 462).

Throughout the turbulent years of the Civil War, Hitchcock worked tirelessly with Lincoln, while maintaining

his occult studies. In 1860 he published Christ, the Spirit, dealing with the symbolic nature of primitive Christianity. The Red Book of Appin (1863), Spenser's Poem . . . Explained (1865), and Remarks Upon the Sonnets of Shakespeare (1865) all traced the neo-Masonic fraternity through the Medieval and Elizabethan writers. In 1866-1867, he was still pre-occupied with Rossetti's interpretation of Dante and published Notes on the Vita Nuova and On the Meaning of Isaiah VII, 14 ("A Virgin Shall Conceive," etc., as seen in the Hindu drama Sakoontala"). Throughout the 1860's, he was also in contact with Emerson, Hawthorne, Bronson Alcott, Horace Mann, the Lowells, the Peabodys, and the Winthrops, making trips to Massachusetts to discuss his theories with them (Hitchcock, pp. 432-444).

In the last year of his life, in the intervals of illness, Hitchcock assiduously sought "the relations between alchemy and masonry, and between both and the New Testament, where he finds esoteric mysteries." Hitchcock's unpublished diary notes on this subject may provide valuable insights on two earlier writers, since this seems to be exactly what Richard Brothers and William Blake had sought. Whether he eventually became a Freemason or not, Hitchcock reached the conclusion that Swedenborg was"a High Mason," and that the Society of Essenes, of which Jesus was perhaps a member, was the ancient order of Masons. His friends--un-named by the editor--came in during these months and joined him "in studying with the Rosicrucians and searching for the clews of alchemy with Eirenius Philalethes" (Hitchcock, p. 484). This ambivalent reference to the Rosicrucians was used by Clymer as final "proof" of his Rosicrucian membership.

Happily, for a man who so tirelessly sought philo-sophical Wisdom, Hitchcock felt that he was reaching a joyous illumination in his last years. In 1866 he cautiously recorded:

> I wish to say that I saw, a moment since, what the Philosopher's Stone signifies.
> I do not omit a statement of it from any desire to make a mystery. My relation to it is still to be determined. A great number of passages in books of alchemy seem perfectly clear now. I have nowhere told what it is or even what I think it is. It is a kind of revelation, but, when seen, has an effect like looking at the sun. Personally, I have much to fear from it, before I can look forward to its benefits. I have nothing to unsay in my books, and have but this to add: that they are studies to reach the one thing. (p. 482-83)

In his last diary notes in 1868, two years before his death, Hitchcock often declared that the "Secret" was revealed to him more clearly than ever before.

It must be stressed after these gleanings from Hitchcock's journal (in its overly edited, published form), that he was indeed one of America's most distinguished military men and scholars, called the "Caesar of the Army" by all the Union newspapers in tribute to his military skill, renowned personal integrity, and massive learning. The influences and ramifications of the theories and scholarship of this important nineteenth-century figure--in the works of Poe, the New England Transcendentalists, the late nineteenth-century Rosicrucian and Masonic groups in England, France, and Germany which used his works, and the alchemical and esoteric studies of Jung's whole school of psychoanalysts--are a fresh and valuable new area for future literary and historical research.

To conclude this section on the Rosicrucian and Masonic channel of occult traditions into nineteenth-century English literature, we need to examine the contributions made by the irrepressible Gabriele Rossetti, who provided such stimulation to Hitchcock and to the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Gabriele Rossetti (1783-1854) grew up in Vasto, Italy, where by 1799 he had become interested in French Jacobinism. In 1804 Gabriele moved to Naples, which was

seething with Carbonari activity, and became a Freemason by 1809, when Italian Masonry was linked with French Revolutionary movements and was outlawed by the Papacy. The memory of Cagliostro's death for his Masonic work fifteen years earlier was still fresh in Italy. Through his Masonic connections, Gabriele became a member of the Carbonari by 1812, which was a revolutionary offshoot from Freemasonry.[18] He had favored the French Revolution and welcomed the French armies to Italy as upholders of liberty. He called himself the "Poet of the Revolution" in the 1820 rebellion against the restored Bourbons and, at the failure of the revolution, he became a political exile. While in exile, Gabriele maintained a melodramatic sense of himself as a perpetual Carbonaro of 1820, though he was actually naive about politics and had fluctuated with the political currents in Italy--backing first the rebels, then the kings.[19]

From Naples, however, Gabriele fled to Malta in 1821, where he became friendly with John Hookham Frere (1796-1846), a retired diplomat and author who was also an ardent Freemason[20] and had been, ironically, an editor of the Anti-Jacobin in England. After three years in Malta, Gabriele sailed for England and on the long voyage experienced a powerful dream-vision of Dante. In his later autobiography, Gabriele said Dante promised to reveal to him the secret sect-language (gergo) of

18 E.R. Vincent, Gabriele Rossetti in England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. xi.

19 Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Oxford Univ.Press, 1860), pp. 19-20.

20 Ross Waller, The Rossetti family, 1824-54 (Manchester Univ. Press, 1932), p. 100.

his writings (Waller, p. 76). When Gabriele arrived in London in 1824, he immersed himself in Dante studies and soon developed a theory of the neo-Masonic nature of Dante's writings, which through their symbols disguised an anti-Papal, occultist secret society. Coleridge was impressed enough with Gabriele to write H.F. Carey, the famous translator of Dante, requesting that he read the manuscript of Dante's Inferno, with its "Comento Analytico" which set out Gabriele's thesis (Vincent, p. 182). Carey agreed, read the manuscript and, though he had doubts about the central thesis, wanted to subscribe to the published version which came out in 1825 (Waller, p. 83). Carey became a lifelong friend of Gabriele, whose son Dante Gabriel attended Carey's school in the 1840's (Doughty, p. 51).

Interestingly, Carey was also a friend of William Blake in 1824, who was working on his series of illustrations to Dante, for which he used Carey's translation. Carey told Gilchrist that he gave up his pre-conceived notion of Blake's madness after he came to know him personally, regarding him only as an enthusiast. One would give much to know if Carey discussed Gabriele Rossetti's Masonic theories with Blake, for Blake's theories on Dante are highly similar to those Gabriele eventually arrived at. Blake called Dante an atheist like Wordsworth, who placed too much emphasis on the objective reality of this world and nature. He said Swedenborg made the same mistake, but granted that Dante was inspired by the Holy Ghost, i.e., by the divine gift of poetic imagination (M.Wilson, p. 360). Much to his own fascinated horror, Gabriele Rossetti began to find that Dante was not only anti-Papal but anti-Christian, inspired by a Hermetic vision of the female Sophia or Philosophia, symbolized by Beatrice and functioning like Boehme's and Blake's "Holy Ghost of the Imagination."

By the late 1830's, Rossetti decided to never publish Dante's arcanum magnum, which he interpreted as the belief that there is no god but man--"that god is man and man god" (Waller, p. 92). This heretical idea had been much in the air in eighteenth-century occultist Freemasonry, and was supposedly asserted by Cagliostro and the Rosicrucians. Hindmarsh, Blake's fellow Swedenborgian, reported meeting a man of "religious frensy" (at the same time as Grabianka's visit) who asserted that there was "no God in the universe but man; that he himself was a God, in common with others" and that there was "a society of such as professed to be Gods, and he was one of their number" (Hindmarsh, p. 44).

The publication of Gabriele's Comento Analytico brought him some ridicule but also several valuable friends.[21] Isaac Disraeli, Blake's patron and student of occult history, subscribed to the work before publication, followed Gabriele's later work, and believed in the whole Masonic thesis.[22] This point is important when considering Benjamin Disraeli's later belief in the widespread existence of radical secret societies all over Europe. Another convert was Charles Lyell (1767-1849), a Scots botanist and father of the famed geologist, Sir Charles Lyell. The senior Lyell aided Gabriele financially, became a translator of Dante himself, acted as godfather to young Dante Gabriel, and though he ultimately panicked at the heretical nature of Gabriele's work, was a close friend until his death. The third important adherent was Frere, who had discussed Freemasonry with Gabriele earlier in Malta. For

[21] Volume II on the Inferno was published in 1827. The Purgatorio and part of the Paradiso were written, but never published (Waller, p. 85)

[22] Gabriele Rossetti: a Versified Autobiography, trans. and supplemented by William Michael Rossetti (London: Sands, 1901), p. 66.

a sober classicist and one-time anti-Jacobin, Frere entertained wildly millenarian hopes, which he believed Masonic lore confirmed (Waller, pp. 100, 107).

After the publication of his first Masonic analysis of Dante, Gabriele gained a teaching position in 1828 in the family of Sir Isaac Goldsmid, whose family connections with Dr. Falk and Cabalism in the late eighteenth century have been pointed out. Gabriele became a close friend with the Jewish stockbroker, and the Rossetti children were friendly with the Goldsmid household. Sir Isaac helped to place William Michael Rossetti in the Civil Service in 1845. Throughout this period, the Goldsmids were the principal supporters of Dr. Elliotson's theories of Animal Magnetism.[23] The vexing question of the possible connections of the Goldsmid family with Freemasonry needs further investigation, for their friendships with eminent Freemasons over several generations is highly suggestive and may shed new light on much Anglo-Jewish history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[24]

The Rossetti home was a gathering place for exiled Italians and revolutionaries, who were especially welcome "if they gave a Masonic knock or made a Masonic sign on entering" (Waller, p. 60). Stimulated by this conspiratorial milieu and encouraged by Lyell and Frere, Gabriele plunged into his literary and Masonic investigations with new vigor, until his home "became the very Scotland Yard of letters" (Doughty, p. 33). In 1832 Gabriele published The Anti-Papal Spirit which Produced the Revolution (in Italian; English translation 1834), in which his Masonic thesis was extended throughout the ages. He covered five epochs, including the

23 R.K.Webb, Harriet Martineau: a Radical Victorian (New (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 247.

24 Cecil Roth points out that the assimilation of Jewish families into London society was assisted by the spread of Freemasonry, and that Jews held high offices within English Freemasonry as early as 1732. See A History of the Jews in England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), p. 224.

eighteenth century and his own era, and defined more agressively and minutely the nature of the Masonic political scheme.

Gabriele had read all the available sources on Freemasonry, but was mainly inspired by Barruel's work which was recommended to him by Lyell in 1828. Rossetti "immediately devoured Barruel" and believed even his wildest charges, while ignoring his anti-Masonic bias (Vincent, p. 100). Thus, he included the seventeenth-century Puritans and Cromwell's "wild bloodshot mystics," as well as Swedenborg and his followers, in the secret societies. He asserted that their writings were entirely allegorical in nature and were concerned with sectarian organization and arcana (Waller, p. 88). Constantly coming back to Dante, after dealing with all the Renaissance Italian writers, Milton, Chaucer, etc., he finally claimed that Dante himself was a Freemason and that Ficino's Platonic Academy at Florence was in reality a Masonic lodge (Vincent, pp. 105-106). Gabriele also studied Indian mythology, seeking the primal origins of the sect, and discussed his theories with Rajah Rammabun Ray, a Bengali who formed a theistic sect in London called the Brahmo-Souaj. His other sources for the Indian influence on Freemasonry were Sir William Jones' Lectures to the Asiatic Society (1824) and the Freemason, Thomas Maurice's Indian Antiquities (1793-1800).

Gabriele's works had a large clandestine circulation in Italy, but the ramifying network of the Masonic conspiracy began to intimidate Lyell and Frere, reinforced by a barrage of ridicule from the critics, including Schlegel, who attacked Gabriele's theory in 1836. Echoing Blake's charges against Stothard's "malignant spells," Gabriele accused his most hated critic Panizzi of black magic and sorcery (Waller, p. 96). In 1836 Gabriele read Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris (1831) and placed it within his secret Hermetic context. He told a friend of Hugo's in London that he "comprehended the inner

spirit of that romance," and the friend relayed the message and a copy of The Anti-Papal Spirit to Hugo. After Hugo read Gabriele's book, he sent congratulations to the delighted Carbonaro, "adding that he was not surprised at my understanding the inner sense of his romance."[25] Though most of Gabriele's modern critics have assumed that Hugo must have been joking, Hugo himself was deeply involved in occultism and secret societies at the same time.[26]

One more sympathetic critic was Henry Hallam, who wrote a long, impartial essay on Gabriele's work in 1836. Hallam admired Gabriele's learning and curiosity and found the thesis suggestive for many poets--"some of the obscure poems brighten up under the new lights sufficiently well." But Hallam, a student of Animal Magnetism, objected to the sweeping assertions about Masonry, especially the claim that Petrarch's Laura was a Masonic lodge (Waller, p. 97). This was the only criticism that Gabriele respected, but it frightened off Lyell and Frere, who urged Gabriele to limit the work to one edition. Frere was also worried about the increasing revelation of the secrets of Freemasonry. Gabriele was stymied by their non-support and became wracked with guilty nightmares about the increasing heresy of his findings. Just when he seemed to have given up his obsession though, he received a letter in 1837 from Seymour Kirkup, an English painter in Rome, who praised Gabriele's fearless investigation, agreed with all his theories, and appealed to his Carbonaro spirit (Vincent, p. 51).

Fired with new enthusiasm, Gabriele buried himself in esoteric research again and maintained a life-long correspondence with Kirkup. The entrance of Kirkup on the nineteenth-century Masonic scene provides another link between Blake's

[25] Gabrielle Festing, John Hookham Frere and his Friends (London: James Nesbet, 1899), pp. 325-26.

[26] See Viatte, Victor Hugo et les Illuminés de son Temps.

milieu and the occultist secret societies of the mid-nineteenth century. Kirkup (1788-1880) had been friendly with Blake, Fuseli, and Flaxman around 1811 and moved to Italy in 1816. He was present at the funerals of both Keats and Shelley, and became a leader in the Anglo-Italian artistic community at Florence (DNB). He was a fiery republican and spoke openly for the Carbonari cause in Italy, though we have as yet no evidence of his definite Masonic membership. Thriving under Kirkup's encouragement, Gabriele worked on The Mystery of the Platonic Love of the Middle Ages derived from the Ancient Mysteries, which ran to five volumes and was printed in 1840. But it was never published in England, due to Lyell's and Frere's pressures.

In this confusing and complex work, Gabriele proved the continuity of secret mysteries from pagan days, with a center at Eleusis and having kinship with the religions of Egypt and the Far East, through such sectarian movements as the Manichean to modern Freemasonry. Dante was the touchstone of his thesis, for he interpreted the Vita Nuova as a late work, written as a key to the Commedia. Utilizing his vast new researches on Hermetism and occultism, Gabriele claimed that the source of all Dante's mystical symbolism was the scienza occulta, which had been secretly practised in Europe since time immemorial (Vincent, p. 94). Interpreting the Vita Nuova as a Masonic rite of initiation, he described the Cabalistic elements in the book as arising from esoteric ceremonies. The ritualistic aspect of the work was supported by Dante's own interest in mystic numbers and by the architectural (i.e. Masonic) structure of the poem. He saw Beatrice as the symbol of Dante's own soul, who as a neophyte to the secret society underwent a ritualistic conversion to a "new life" and finally ascended to a mystic heaven within his own consciousness. Beatrice also symbolized the secret philosophy of the sect, "which has permeated and, as it were, created the poet's soul" (Vincent, pp. 88-89).

Kirkup was ecstatic about this work and quarrelled with Lyell over its non-publication. After Lyell refused to allow the work to be dedicated to him, Gabriele dedicated it to Kirkup. The ardent republican told his friends in Italy that Rossetti was the Messiah of a new revelation. But Platonic Love was not published in England, and only a few copies were distributed on the Continent; thus, it does credit to General Hitchcock's bibliomania that he apparently had a copy sent to Texas. At Gabriele's death, his wife burned all his copies, and no one knows how many still exist. But Gabriele had another encourager, an Anglican clergyman named Nolan, who was "very erudite in the occult," and urged him to keep writing (Waller, p. 113).

In February 1842, Gabriele was delighted to find Balzac expressing the secret philosophy. He wrote Lyell, "Have you ever read Le Livre Mystique of De Balzac, a living French author?" Gabriele pointed out that the three parts of the book developed a Hermetic, Swedenborgian theme, culminating in Seraphita, who was an androgynous nephew of Swedenborg. Balzac's use of Dante seemed consistent with Gabriele's theories and drew on similar experiences of occultist Freemasonry (Rossetti, Autobiography, p. 143). Inspired again, in 1842 Gabriele continued his thesis in La Beatrice di Dante, of which only the first of three volumes was published. With even greater attention to occult symbolism, he showed how Dante was essentially twofold, man and woman, male on earth and female in heaven. The two deaths mentioned by Dante referred to himself, who in being born to a "new life" must first undergo a mystic dissolution as in Masonic ritual. This Masonic sense of dying in order to be reborn, through successive rituals, may explain Balke's cryptic comment about himself in William Upcott's autograph album: "Born 28 November 1757 in London and has died several times since" (Blake, CW, p.781).

The initiate passed through three spheres of knowledge: first, the reality and evils of the natural world; second, the defining of a higher morality; third, elevation through "seven degrees of occult science, described as heavens, until he can regard the mystic Trinity which is the perfection of the human in the divine" (Vincent, p. 90). Gabriele traced the influence of the Manichean heresies of outlawed Medieval sects on the troubadours' concept of Platonic love and its preservation in the secret societies which were eventually assimilated into Freemasonry.

Though this was to be Gabriele's last work on the subject---and he apparently never knew of Hitchcock's continuation of his research--he received increasingly more enthusiastic and more bizarre support from Kirkup. In 1840 in Florence, Kirkup searched for and found the lost fresco portrait of Dante by Giotto. He was able to make an accurate drawing and a tracing of the masterpiece before an ill-fated restoration attempt distorted the painting. He gave the valuable drawing to a thrilled Gabriele, who handed it on to his son Dante Gabriel at his death (DNB). In 1844, Kirkup urged Gabriele to make a final revelation of the _gergo_, the sect's secret symbolic language, in collabroation with himself, which seems to indicate first-hand Masonic knowledge on Kirkup's part. Kirkup also became increasingly involved in occult studies, practising Animal Magnetism and the "New Spiritualism," and by the 1850's was receiving regular spirit communications, including many with Dante himself (Vincent, pp. 51-53).

Kirkup had long been interested in the capacity for intense meditation and visionary concentration and had advised the Rossetti's not to inhibit young Dante Gabriel's dreaminess: "That _immerso tutto_ is the surest sign of genius. The rarest of all gifts in the present day" (Waller, p. 137). As he became more visionary himself---through

séances with mediums, somnambulistic trances, and magical practices--Kirkup took a renewed interest in his old acquaintance William Blake. In answer to William Michael Rossetti's inquiries about Blake in 1866, Kirkup wrote a revealing letter:

> When I had the short pleasure of seeing you [in 1860] I had long been living an exceptionable life of incredible phenomena, and since then they have increased beyond any expectation of mine. Do not think that any early acquaintance I had with Blake can have led to it. I thought him mad, I heard no more of him, till I heard that Lord Houghton was collecting his works at great expense! I had picked up Blair's Grave, and five little engravings by Blake himself . . . I don't think him mad now . . . Blake was an honest man, and I always thought so--but his sanity seemed doubtful because he could give only his word for the truth of his visions. There were no other proofs; such as, with most jealous, scrupulous, suspicious, investigation, have been for eleven years by me directed to the subject. . . . . . I was led to it by magnetism. I neither expected it nor believed in it . . . I have procured visions for other persons, who have drawn them, . . . though I have never succeeded in having visions myself worth copying. But all of this is of less value to me than my knowledge of a future state, and a better than this . . . As for Death, we never die . . . the last of the many bodies we have possessed is dispersed underground as the preceding ones in the air . . . and we, disencumbered like some of Blake's visions, are free, and as happy as our tempers will allow . . . [27]

Kirkup also received direct confirmation from Dante's spirit that all of Gabriele's theories were true, and the first-hand assurance that Dante was no longer a Ghibelline but now a republican, marching into battle with Garibaldi, a fellow Freemason (W.M. Rossetti, Papers, p. 254; Mackenzie, p. 172).

[27] William Michael Rossetti, Rossetti Papers, 1862-1870 (London: Sands, 1903), pp. 171-72.

Throughout his lifetime of obsessive conspiracy hunting and literary as well as real Masonic associations, Gabriele Rossetti dominated the homelife of his talented children. William Michael wrote that "Dante Alighieri was a sort of banshee in the Charlotte Street House; his shriek audible even to familiarity, but the message of it not scrutinized" (Waller, p. 118). Though none of the children adopted their father's theories *in toto* after they grew up, all were marked by "the shadow of Dante" and the secret societies. Doughty draws a vivid picture of the children, listening to their father sing the "Marseillaise" and Italian revolutionary songs:

> . . . the children, gazing in awe upon their father, as he sat surrounded by ponderous folios, mystical works, treatises on alchemy, freemasonry, Swedenborg, the Cabala, and Brahminism, to which his Dante studies had led him . . . a domestic atmosphere so intolerably overcharged with Dante and his secret propaganda. (p. 39)

Though as children all the Rossetti clan reacted against Dante and heartily disliked him, the influence of their father's research was strong, and all of them in later life occasionally wrote on Dante.

But the greatest impact was on Dante Gabriel, to whom his father's study had seemed filled with supernatural presences. Doughty points out that the predominance of "mysteries and secret conspiracies" in Gabriele's obsessive preoccupations left their negative mark on Dante Gabriel, who in later life exhibited a marked tendency towards a persecution complex and paranoiac belief in secret conspiracies of enemies (p. 40). What is significant for this study is Dante Gabriel's interest in William Blake at the same time that he felt the need of his own "secret society" in the late 1840's. Besides his father's occult interests, Dante Gabriel had immersed himself in medieval and German romances and was particularly responsive to the visionary art of Blake, whose

valuable Notebook Rossetti bought from Samuel Palmer's brother at the British Museum in 1847. With its scathing judgments of artists like Rubens and the Venetians and its strange symbolic poems of spiritual and psychic voyages, the Notebook made a profound impression on the young painter.[28]

Interestingly, a close friend of Rossetti at the time was Holman Hunt, "who was himself a juvenile disciple of John Varley, the discoverer of Zodiacal Physiognomy," according to Ford Madox Hueffer, who remarked:

> Zodiacal Physiognomy was in fact a very logical product of the human reasoning. And, indeed, the tendency to seek to discover secret rules is inborn in humanity and undying. For what is Pointillism but an attempt to deduce from the theory of light what the eighteenth century attempted to deduce from the practice of the old masters.[29]

Sometime later, Dante Gabriel acquired a rare copy of Varley's Zodiacal Physiognomy and counted it among his valuable possessions. He loaned it to Alexander Gilchrist in 1859 and Mrs. Gilchrist remained fascinated by Varley's astrological prowess throughout 1863, when she was working on Blake's biography. She wrote William Michael Rossetti, "I have a friend staying with me, some of whose relatives were intimate with John Varley, and had their nativities cast by him, which continue down to the present year to come astoundingly true!" (W.M. Rossetti, Papers, p. 43).

1848 was a year of revolutions all over Europe, and Gabriele Rossetti was delirious with joy at the developments in Italy. He viewed the 1848 revolutions as a continuation of the 1820 Carbonari movement and watched Mazzini, a fellow

[28] John Nicoll, The Pre-Raphaelites (London: Studio Vista, 1970), p. 70.

[29] Ford Madox Hueffer, The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (London: Duckworth, 1907), p. 38.

Freemason, leave London to join in the Lombard revolt (Vincent, pp. 141-144). In Paris, the Cabalist Eliphas Lévi worked with radical Freemasons and Socialists to bring about the "magnetic" apocalypse of the Paris Commune. Freemasonry flourished under the French Third Republic, but the lodges were dissolved after Napoleon III's coup d'état in 1851 (Mackenzie, pp. 173-174). In London itself, there were fears of a Chartist uprising (Doughty, p. 71). Dante Gabriel was fired with enthusiasm for this "aurora" of a new age as well as for Blake's dicta on art; thus, he gathered his friends into his own secret society, complete with its own gergo (which must have pleased his old father). The "Pre-Raphaelite" tag had many possible sources, reflecting the return to primitive Christianity of the German "Nazarene" group of artists (Hueffer, p. 17), as well as a Blakean concern with more "spiritual" art. But the "Brotherhood" aspect was all Dante Gabriel's doing. He suggested that they adopt "the collective noun then fashionable among revolutionary bands in Italy" (Nicoll, p. 26), and insisted on the vows of secrecy and the closeness of the union (Hueffer, p. 69). He also designed the cryptic sign, PRB, with which the Brothers signed their paintings, vowing to never reveal the meaning of the cipher.[30] As Hueffer observed "Pre-Raphaelism was a revolt in the midst of revolts, a Gironde, a Mountain in a very French Revolution of the plastic arts" (p. 2).

The PRB's one maxim was "Death to Slosh!" (Hueffer, p. 51), and their first public manifestation was their four paintings--mysteriously signed PRB--at the Royal Academy's spring exhibit of

[30] Timothy Hilton, The Pre-Raphaelites (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1970), p. 35.

1849. Interestingly, Holman Hunt's contribution was an illustration of Bulwer-Lytton's novel Rienzi, and Bulwer wrote an enthusiastic letter of appreciation for that "enciphered" painting (Hilton, pp. 38, 49). Though there were a few warnings about the strange "hieroglyphic PRB" by the critics, the Brotherhood received a warmer reception than they wanted at first. But by 1850, Dante Gabriel's conspiratorial fantasy was fulfilled, as the Brotherhood's eccentricities were viewed as "part of the dangerous doctrines of anarchism" and the storm broke. For the outside world, Pre-Raphaelitism had begun to exist. The 1850 Royal Academy exhibition marked the opening of a two year campaign against the PRB, in which the rebels were almost overwhelmed: "such subversive men were capable of attacking even the British Constitution itself" (Doughty, p. 99). In 1851 John Ruskin's defense of the Brotherhood helped defuse the public's fear of an insidious moral, religious, and political revolt, and helped the artists to define an aesthetic creed (Doughty, p. 112). By 1853, the first PRB began to break up, and Dante Gabriel would later look back with amusement on their youthful enthusiasm.

Though the political revolutions of 1848 were ultimately suppressed, the preoccupations of the secret societies with occultism, Animal Magnetism, and especially spiritualism were externalized into a public wave of faddism throughout the 1850's and 1860's. Throughout the whole bizarre frenzy within the popular culture as well as in the learned classes, the role of Blake, Varley, and their occultist associates continued its vital influence.

Chapter XIV: The Victorian Magnetisers

Of the crowds of adepts in Animal Magnetism who burst on the public eye in the mid-nineteenth century, the most interesting were the Swedenborgians, who had a great impact on the literary and artistic worlds, both in England and France.

One of the most distinguished of the Swedenborgians was J.J. Garth Wilkinson (1812-1899), who published the first printed edition of Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience in 1839. Wilkinson was a physician who specialized in homeopathy, a "vitalistic" form of medicine associated with Mesmerism and phrenology. He became interested in Blake's work, at a time of almost total eclipse of Blake's reputation, through a fellow Swedenborgian Charles A. Tulk (1786-1849), who had known Blake personally and received an inscribed copy of Poetical Sketches from him.[1] Tulk's father, John A. Tulk, was an original member of the Theosophical Society of 1783 at the time of heavy Masonic and Mesmeric influence. His son Charles was active in Swedenborgian affairs throughout his life. A social reformer and liberal M.P. in 1820-26 and 1835-37, Charles Tulk turned to the study of chemistry and physiology in an effort to combat materialism on its own ground. He corresponded with the phrenologist Spurzheim and consistently tried to relate developments in magnetism, homeopathy, etc., to Swedenborgian philosophy.

Charles Tulk possessed one of the original illuminated copies of Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience, which he loaned to Coleridge in 1818. He also owned copies of America and Thel. Tulk was probably the author of the March 1830 article in the London University Magazine, which praised

[1] Geoffrey Keynes, "Blake, Tulk, and Garth Wilkinson," The Library, 26 (1945), p. 191.

Blake's visionary work and attributed its scanty audience to the lack of "a good philosophy, which, Madame de Stäel says, has not yet been taught in England" (Bentley, Records, p. 381). In 1838 Tulk persuaded Garth Wilkinson to bring out the first edition of Blake's Songs, and Wilkinson's published reasons for doing so point to the prevailing nineteenth-century interpretation of Blake as a spiritualistic medium, whose visions came in a state of magnetic trance. In his preface to the Songs, Wilkinson said they attested to the reality of immaterial things, demonstrating the superiority of "Spiritual Phenomena" over sensational evidence, and he hoped the publication would give impetus to a "new Spiritualism."[2] As William Bell Scott, who met Wilkinson about the time, recalled, the young physician "discerned in them Swedenborgianism and spiritual magnetism" (Dorfman, p. 48). But Wilkinson condemned Blake's prophecies as the self-indulgence or "ego-theism" which resulted from giving himself to an uncontrolled "interior naturalism, which he was . . . beginning to mistake for spiritualism, listening as he did to voices of the ground."

As Wilkinson continued his study and translation of Swedenborg, culminating in his 1849 biography of the Swedish seer, he also mastered Scandinavian and Icelandic literature, became friends with Henry James, Sr. (a fellow-Swedenborgian), Emerson, Carlyle, Dickens, Tennyson, and many others (DNB). What is important to Blake studies is that Wilkinson became immersed in Animal Magnetism and produced a volume of highly Blake-like poems, Improvisations from the Spirit (1857), via spirit-dictation while in the magnetic trance. His brother

[2] quoted in Deborah Dorfman, Blake in the Nineteenth Century (Yale Univ. Press, 1969), p. 47.

W.M. Wilkinson produced Spirit Drawings, a Personal Narrative in 1858. Both Dante Gabriel Rossetti and James Thomson, as ardent Blakeans, were fascinated by Wilkinson's poetry and descriptions of his magnetic ecstasies. When Dante Gabriel helped Mrs. Gilchrist finish her recently deceased husband's biography of Blake in 1863, he was amazed to come across Wilkinson's poems. In a supplementary chapter to Gilchrist, Rossetti noted:

> . . . the closest and most elaborate resemblance to Blake's poetry may be met with . . . in a phantasmal sort of little book . . . entitled Improvisations from the Spirit . . . These improvisations profess to be written under precisely the same kind of spiritual guidance, amounting to abnegation of personal effort, in the writer, which Blake supposed to have provided over the production of his Jerusalem, etc. . . . Many passages and indeed whole compositions of a remote and charming beauty, or sometimes of a grotesque figurative relation to things of another sphere, which are startingly akin to Blake's writings, could pass in fact, for no one's but his. Professing as they do the same new kind of authorship, they might afford plenty of material for comparison, and bewildered speculation, if such were in request. (Gilchrist, 1880 edition, p. 428)

In Thomson's valuable 1879 essay "A Strange Book," he described Swedenborg's trances as well as Wilkinson's automatic writing. Thomson recounted Wilkinson's explanation that

> . . . writing from an Influx, which is really out of yourself or so far within your self, as to amount to the same thing, is either a religion or madness. I know of no third possibility . . . Many of the poems are written by correspondences, as Swedenborg terms the relation which natural objects bear to spiritual life; or to varieties of Love, which is the grand object of all. Hence it is the readers of Swedenborg who will best understand this class of poems.[3]

[3] James Thomson, "A Strange Book," Biographical and Critical Studies (London: Reeves and Turner, 1896), pp. 299-300.

Wilkinson said the spirit dictation took up to forty-five minutes a poem and, like Blake, he refused to revise the poetry. The subjects of Wilkinson's poems included Mesmer, Poe, Flaxman, Chatterton, and Kant, and included complex visionary scenes as well as communications from human spirits. Though Thomson ranked Wilkinson's poems lower than Blake's, through their over-dependence on rigid Swedenborgian correspondences, he asserted his belief in Wilkinson's veracity and pointed out the value of his rare volume to students of literature:

> . . . He is a man of science, a philosopher, and was a doctor of long practice . . . and thus a trained and experienced observer, specially fitted for discriminating and recording the phenomena of his own being, whether physical or mental. Lastly, he is a man of subtlest insight, of far-reaching vision, of massive and magnificent genius; a man of whom Emerson wrote . . . "Swedenborg . . . has at last found a pupil in Mr. Wilkinson, of London, a philosophic critic, with a coequal vigor of understanding and imagination comparable only to Lord Bacon's . . . The discourses . . . threw all the contemporary philosophy of England into shade." (Thomson, p. 319)

Rossetti was delighted at Wilkinson's apparent "explanation" of Blake's gift, for he was preoccupied with spiritualism and occult studies himself in the 1850's and 1860's. William Michael Rossetti noted his brother's interest in "electro-biology" and magnetic trances in 1855.[4] In 1858 one of Garth Wilkinson's protegés, Mary Hewitt, addressed many of her megnetically "inspired" works to Dante Gabriel (Angeli, p. 205), and the worried poet sent Lizzie Siddall, a spiritualist herself, to Wilkinson for medical help.[5] After his wife's death in 1862, Dante Gabriel

[4] Helen Rossetti Angeli, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 208.

[5] Violent Hunt, The Wife of Rossetti (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1932), p. 62.

tried desperately to call up her spirit at séances (Scott, II, 66). After Seymour Kirkup read Gilchrist's Life of Blake, with Rossetti's comments on Wilkinson, he wrote William Michael in 1866 that Dante Gabriel seemed to have misinterpreted Blake's visions: "I don't think him [Blake] a madman now. I wonder what your brother thinks he was, for he derides spiritualism towards the end of that book, and he is wrong." William Michael explained that his brother's allusions to Wilkinson's spirit-dictated poetry were indeed light in tone, "but his real disposition was towards believing in spiritualism too much rather than too little" (W.M.Rossetti, Papers, pp. 170-71).

William Michael Rossetti said he himself never paid much attention to spiritualism but that he witnessed twenty séances between 1865 and 1868 (Papers, p. 153). Dante Gabriel attended séances held in Cagliostro's old house at 22 Sloane Street, where the sensational medium Daniel Douglas Home communicated with spirits while in the magnetic trance and even levitated, yoga-style.[6] D.D. Home was often compared to Cagliostro, usually by those who ranked the Grand Cophta far above Home. Rossetti was also a great admirer of Alexander Dumas' fiction and possessed over one hundred of his volumes. It is significant that Dumas stimulated renewed interest in Cagliostro, picturing him as a great "magnetic" medium and magician and, more importantly, as a great Masonic revolutionary hero (Viatte, Hugo, 113). Rossetti was also acquainted with Sir Richard Burton, who was full of magical lore and magnetic expertise, and he was fascinated by Swedenborg's trance visions (J. Burton, Burton, p. 135).

[6] Jean Burton, Heyday of a Wizard: Daniel Home, the Medium (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1944), p. 195.

That Dante Gabriel was not just dabbling in the popular fad was further suggested by his brother, who found among the former's papers a curious manuscript on "Lilith" by Ponsonby Lyons. Dante Gabriel had consulted Lyons for information on the Lilith tradition, and Lyons sent him a long discussion of Cabalistic and Talmudic "Lilith" material, based on "the high authority of the book Zohar" (W.M. Rossetti, Papers, p. 481. Rossetti's famous painting of "Lilith" drew on this material. Rossetti's interest in astrology, stimulated by Varley's Zodiacal Physiognomy, also influenced his great sonnet sequence The House of Life, in which the "house" was used in the sense of an astrologic conjunction (Doughty, p. 685).

In their collaboration with Mrs. Gilchrist on the Blake biography, both Rossettis were reinforced in their interpretation of Blake as an occultist, "magnetic" medium. Anne Gilchrist added the sections on Blake's last prophetic books, which her husband had not analyzed, and believed that Boehme and Swedenborg held the key to those difficult works.[7] She later wrote the Rossettis that she was delighted that the "latest views of science corraborate Blake and the mystics in regarding everything as Force Power," the newest Odylic term for Animal Magnetism (Dorfman, p. 181). Gilchrist's biography was followed by Swinburne's libertarian essay on Blake in 1868, and by W.M.Rossetti's Aldine edition in 1874, the first edition of Blake's lyrical poems. In the introduction, William Michael spoke of Blake as "the author or amanuensis" of his poems, accepting the automatic nature of their composition, and placed him within the tradition of "mystical or Cabalistic writers," including Paracelsus, Agrippa, and Boehme. He pointed out the need after Swinburne's

[7] H.H.Gilchrist, Anne Gilchrist (New York: Scribner, 1887), p. 256.

ground-breaking essay for "some thoroughly competent writer" to trace out the relation of Blake to the mystics and Cabalists, and recommended M. Jules Andrieu, "one of the survivors of the much maligned Paris Commune," for the job (Aldine, p. lxxxi). It is interesting that nearly twenty years later, W.B.Yeats, who asserted, "I was in all things Pre-Raphaelite" (Autobiography, p. 76), finally undertook Rossetti's commission.

Another mid-century Swedenborgian magnetiser who fascinated many literary men was the American Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), whose sensational "psychic flights through space" and complex cosmological visions point out the difference in imaginative quality between the Swedenborgian magnetisers and the more turgid Victorian spiritualists. The decline in imaginative vigor, complexity, and "universal" comprehensiveness, which had undoubtedly characterised the great somnambulists and ecstatic trance seers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, into the tawdry, sentimental, and prosaically "metaphysical" table-rapping of the Victorian spiritualists is an important point to keep in mind. As Bulwer-Lytton noted, after the spiritualist vogue,

> . . . we members of the Protestant Established Church are always bringing Heaven into our parlour, and trying to pare religion into common sense. Who can pack the infinite into the finite, or the ocean into a silver teaspoon? (V.A.Lytton, p. 485)

Andrew Jackson Davis was a magnetic visionary of the old school. In trance the whole of nature became transparent to his spiritual vision; he could see the blood and nerves, veins and fibres of plants, "veins of metal as rivers of fire in the earth" (Podmore, p. 221). From this perspective of medical clairvoyance, Davis prescribed magnetic cures for his patients. He also voyaged through the cosmos and described in surreal detail the denizens of other planets and unveiled

the primal sources of cosmic energy in the "univercoelum."[8]

What is significant to this study about Davis' visions is that he was a major influence on Edgar Allan Poe, and provides evidence that Poe indeed carried on his interests in the favorite subjects of his old instructor, Ethan Allen Hitchcock. Poe attended Davis' lectures on Animal Magnetism in the 1840's, which probably provided the "initial idea for Eureka," his last book.[9] A comparison of Eureka (1848) with Jackson's Principles of Nature (1847) shows striking similarities. Interestingly, the main supporter of Poe's fantastic cosmological vision in Eureka was Nathaniel Parker Willis, who had been present at Lady Blessington's soirées in the 1830's when Bulwer, Disraeli, and Varley were engaged in magnetic and magical experiments. Willis helped to advertise Poe's lecture, "On the Cosmogony of the Universe" and the reading of Eureka--"in which he became the high priest unveiling the mysteries of God and Nature" (Allen, II, 741).

Eureka had been preceded by a short essay, Mesmeric Revelations (1844), in which Poe asserted, "Whatever doubt may still envelop the rationale of mesmerism, its startling facts are now almost universally admitted."[10] Poe recounted how he had long been in the habit of Mesmerizing "Mr. Vankirk," and then described the cosmological system revealed to Vankirk in a state of somnambulistic lucidity. Though garbed in the neo-scientific terminology of the day, Poe described the same

[8] N.L.Rice, Phrenology Examined, and the Claims of Mesmerism (New York: Robert Carter, 1849), pp. 216-89.

[9] Hervey Allen, Israfel: the Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), II, 758.

[10] The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: Kelmscott Society, 1902), IV, 241).

vitalistic theory of the universe, as permeated by a divine "substance" of which man's and God's consciousness partakes, that the Renaissance occultists and eighteenth-century magnetisers affirmed.

Mesmeric Revelations caught Baudelaire's attention in 1846 and coincided with his own increasing occult interests. Baudelaire later declared that "De Maistre and Edgar Poe taught him how to think."[11] The conjunction of the two figures in Baudelaire's mind is suggestive, for De Maistre was a Martinist Freemason and occultist, carrying on a politically conservative form of eighteenth-century "Illuminism." Baudelaire's preoccupation with Poe was reinforced by his studies of Swedenborg and the Cabalism of Eliphas Lévi, who was his friend from the 1840's on.[12] The first step of Baudelaire's lifelong literary devotion to Poe was his 1848 translation of Mesmeric Revelations, which he said should be read before Eureka (1848) as a key to the "metaphysical tendencies of our author" (Hyslop, p. 83). That Baudelaire placed Poe in the "Illuminist" tradition, while rejecting the eighteenth-century revolutionaries' belief in progress, is shown in his comments on the Mesmeric Revelations. Praising Poe's anti-democratic bias, he pointed out that the liberal "Swedenborgians congratulate him on his 'Mesmeric Revelations,' like those naive Illuminati who formerly hailed in the author of the Diable Amoreux [Jacques Cazette, executed in 1792] a discoverer of their mysteries" (Hyslop, p. 124). In the preface to his translation of Mesmeric Revelations, Baudelaire pointed out the difference

11 Lois and Francis E. Hyslop, ed. and trans., Baudelaire on Poe (Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1952), pp. 15, 15.

12 Enid Starkie, Baudelaire (New York: New Directions, 1958), pp. 124, 188, 226.

between the "philosophic" or "curious" artist and the more ordinary or "imaginative" one, a valuable distinction when dealing with the artistic productions of "magnetic" visionaries. He noted that philosophic artists are usually much more surprising and original than those who simply possess imagination but completely lack the philosophic spirit:

> In the works of several of these men there can be seen a preoccupation with a perpetual supernaturalism, that comes from an inherent tendency to seek animal unity, the unity of a universal fluid, the unity of matter; all these recent theories, by a strange coincidence, have somehow entered the minds of poets at the same time that they have entered the minds of scientists.
> Thus, finally, there always comes a moment when writers of the type . . . become jealous of philosophers, as it were, and then they also set forth their own system of natural philosophy, sometimes even with a certain lack of modesty which has its ingenuousness or charm. Everyone knows Seraphita, Louis Lambert, and a multitude of passages in other books in which Balzac, a great mind devoured by encyclopedic pride, has attempted to harmonize in a unified and definitive system different ideas drawn from Swedenborg, Mesmer, Marat, Goethe . . . Edgar Poe was also absorbed by the idea of unity, and he expended as much energy as Balzac on that fond dream. It is certain that when specifically literary minds put themselves to it, they make strange excursions through philosophy. They cut abrupt openings and see sudden vistas on paths which are entirely their's. (Hyslop, pp. 148-49)

In his long essay on Poe in 1852, Baudelaire described "the grand outlines of his terrible book Eureka," which he said was "doubtless Poe's most cherished and long dreamed of book" (Hyslop, p. 62). Poe's debt to the "somnambulist" Davis for this major work was extended by his consultation with Davis on the technical details of "The Case of M. Valdemar," and Davis mentioned Poe several times in his own works.[13]

[13] Allen, p. 758. Also, see Davis' The Magic Staff, p. 217; Events in the Life of a Seer, pp. 18-19; and Answers to Questions, p. 63--all on Poe.

One of Davis' most eminent backers was George Bush, Professor of Hebrew at New York University, who was a Swedenborgian, student of Animal Magnetism, and teacher of Emerson (Podmore, p. 227). In his book, Mesmer and Swedenborg (1847), Bush described the "celestial, psychic journeys" of the highest trance state and published in full the letter from the Swedish Exegetic-Philanthropic Society to the French Amis Réunis, which related Swedenborg's doctrines to Animal Magnetism and caused such a Masonic furore in 1787.[14] Bush viewed Davis as carrying on the exalté eighteenth-century version of Animal Magnetism. Mesmerists in England and Scotland also wrote to Poe as one of their own after reading his "scientific" mysteries (Allen, p. 674). Poe also had great appeal to Swedenborgians, and he himself set much store by The Domain of Arnheim and its pendant, "Landor's Cottage," as having hidden spiritual meanings (Allen, p. 763).

Thus, in Baudelaire's famous critical act of bringing Poe into the tradition of French literary history, he rightfully saw the American as part of the "Illuminist," Swedenborgian, and "magnetic" philosophic tradition. The still unanswered question--in fact, the still unasked question--of whether General Hitchcock, Eliphas Lévi, Bulwer-Lytton, Poe, Baudelaire, and other students of Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism, occultism, and Animal Magnetism in the mid-nineteenth century had more than just literary relationships seems worthy of more scholarly investigation.

The long roll-call of other Victorian Mesmerists and spiritualists presents a much less interesting "visionary scene," and points to the difference in imaginative intensity and philosophical sophistication that genuine study of the ancient traditions of magic and theosophy brought to its adepts in comparison to the limited personal concerns of the "table-rappers."

[14] George Bush, Mesmer and Swedenborg (New York: John Allen, 1847), p. 240.

A revealing example of the range from real erudition to the prosaic commonplace among English magnetisers is the career of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), which demonstrates the recurring co-existence of radical millenarianism with credulity for "wonders" (Webb, p. 237). Miss Martineau came to London in 1832, as a Unitarian disciple of Joseph Priestley, a political radical, a freethinker, and---most significantly---an "enthusiast." She was friendly with Crabb Robinson, who followed her later Mesmeric career with amazement. While pouring out "rational" books on economics, history, etc., Miss Martineau was in a terrible state of health. By 1841 she believed she was dying of cancer and was morbidly depressed. But then she read Bulwer's Zanoni and was inspired by its Rosicrucian philosophy, which she deemed "worthy of Schiller's meditations." She wrote Bulwer, offering to draw up a scheme of guidance for Zanoni, to help "her mystified friends . . . without German . . . unfamiliar with the language of the Ideal Region." Despite the scheme's unimaginative, heavy-handed allegorical interpretation, Bulwer added it to the 1845 edition of Zanoni. Bulwer, in turn, advised the ailing authoress to consult Mesmerists in Paris and was backed up by Basil Montague, another devotee of Animal Magnetism. By 1844, Miss Martineau experienced a spectacular magnetic cure in England and became a tireless crusader for the cause. Her articles on the wonders of the trance state in the Athenaeum (November-December 1844) were a sensational sell-out, and even Prince Albert expressed interest. By 1850, Charles Dickens too was fascinated by the furor over magnetism and magical conjuration, and he collaborated with Bulwer in the production of a dramatic farce, Animal Magnetism, at Knebworth to benefit struggling artists (V.A. Lytton, p. 131). The magnetic comedy was re-enacted at Knebworth in the summer of 1973. The interest of such social reformers as Dickens and Miss Martineau in Bulwer's theories of magnetism was

rooted in their visionary hopes for political regeneration.[15]

Combining Mesmeric terminology with that of phrenology, the radical Harriet Martineau used the new "science" as a diatribe against the reactionary "heads" of her opponents, a political view of magnetic physiognomy which had been prefigured by Blake, who exclaimed that he had to be a Republican because of the shape of his head. As Webb points out, Miss Martineau "was prepared to love the Mesmerists for the enemies they had made" (p. 247), a mentality which repeated the radical Mesmeric campaign of the 1780's in France. The major "enemies" at the time were critics who blasted Professor Gregory's translation of Von Reichenbach's work on magnetism in 1856 (Webb, p. 242). Reichenbach introduced a new term--"Odylic force--for the ancient phenomenon of magnetism, which gave it a new "scientific" respectability. One favorable reviewer declared that odyle is a "nerve-stirring resultant of the general cosmic powers of nature," and Reichenbach has established the proposition "that the whole of Nature is reactive on the nervous system of man, on a breadth of basis which cannot be shaken" (Podmore, p. 161). Bulwer too leaped into the fray, during which "Od" became a household word, but by 1870 he had developed his own term, "Vril," which he used in his last work, a science-fiction, occultist fantasy, The Coming Race (1871). Discussing the work-in-progress, Bulwer summed up the era's increasing technocratic (rather than "magical") terminology:

> I did not mean Vril for magnetism, but for electricity, developed into uses as yet only dimly guessed, and including whatever there may be genuine in mesmerism, which I held to be a mere branch current of the one great fluid, pervading all nature . . .

15 The most radical millenarian of them all, Robert Owen, was also an Animal Magnetiser and eventually became an obsessed convert to the "new spiritualism."

> Now, as some bodies are charged with electricity like the torpedo or electric eel, and never can communicate that power to other bodies, so I suppose the existence of a race charged with that electricity and having acquired the art to concentre and direct it--in a word, to be conductors of its lightnings . . . Probably even the notion of Vril might be more cleared from mysticism or mesmerism by being simply defined to be electricity and conducted by those staves or rods, omitting all mesmeric passes, etc. Perhaps, too, it would be safe to omit all reference to the power of communicating with the dead. (V.A. Lytton, pp. 466-67)

But the effort at scientific rationalization of the magnetic experience defused the imaginative intensity and highly imagistic quality of the "old" Animal Magnetism. Pushing her way through Florence Nightingale's hospital in order to re-align the beds in congruence with earth's magnetic fields, assuring everyone that Jesus' miracles were "merely" magnetic, and triumphantly mesmerizing a cow and a bear, Harriet Martineau in her public crusade indeed brought Heaven into the Victorian parlor and pared religion into common sense (see Webb, pp. 36, 238, 251). Though as Webb points out, "at bottom, we are dealing with a religious faith which has borrowed the trappings of science" (p. 251), the divestment of Animal Magnetism from its ancient Cabalistic, alchemical, and magical contexts by most of its Victorian practitioners made for a very secular and prosaic religion.

The difference between even such a second-rate novelist as Bulwer, in his genuinely eloquent tributes to the old occult traditions, and the pronouncements of his friend Harriet Martineau, a student only of "modern" Mesmerism, testifies to the value of thorough and scholarly occult research as a stimulus to the creative imagination. But from the 1850's on, when magnetism "went public" as spiritualism in England, the artist had to deal with a generally stolid world of arcana. The contrasting vigor and brilliance of French occultism from the 1850's on--as reflected in the works of Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, etc.--arose from the continued study of the Cabala, alchemy, magic, and the great

Renaissance practitioners of the art, as well as of Animal Magnetism.

One of the major centers of the "new spiritualism" among Victorian writers and artists was the English colony in Florence, where Mrs. Browning avidly followed all the newest developments and welcomed fellow "rappers" to her séances. Despite the frowns of the Catholic Church, the local inhabitants were also caught up in the craze; as Mrs. Browning wrote, "Here, from the priest to the Mazzinian, they are making circles. An engraving of a spinning table at a shop window bears this motto: 'E pur si muove!'" (J. Burton, Home, p. 65). The great attraction in Florence, as well as in London, Paris, and Russia, was the self-levitation and furniture-moving of D.D. Home, whose singular trance powers are still acknowledged as genuine (DNB). Home was an old friend of Seymour Kirkup, whose communications with spirits were the talk of Florence. Mrs. Browning wrote, "There is a real poem being lived between Mr. Kirkup and the 'spirits,' so called. If I were to write it in a poem I should beat 'Aurora' over and over."[16] But Robert Browning detested spiritualism and ridiculed Home in "Mr. Sludge, the Medium."

Another participant in the Florentine séances was Robert Lytton, Bulwer's son, who shared his father's interest in Animal Magnetism. Robert was a thorough student of occultism and magic, though, and advocated careful and pains-taking investigation of the phenomena (Harlan, pp. 50-51). Unlike Mrs. Browning, he was struck by the triviality of the messages conveyed and shared Bulwer's discrimination between the "palterings" of the séance spirits and the higher imaginative and philosophical reaches of ancient ceremonial

[16] A.B. Harlan, Owen Meredith (Columbia Univ. Press, 1946), p. 50.

magic. It is unknown whether Robert participated in Bulwer's Rosicrucian gatherings, but he agreed with his father's theories and collaborated in his occult studies. Robert's poetry, during this period, written under the pseudonym "Owen Meredith," showed the influence of his spiritualistic interests and was greatly admired by the Rossettis. William Morris, and Burne-Jones (Harlan, p. 77).

There was a definite but rather timid Swedenborgian influence on the Florentine colony, which had a direct impact on Frederick Tennyson, brother of the poet Alfred (Harlan, p. 55). Frederick eventually became an ardent Swedenborgi-an. His related interest in Mesmerism and Spiritualism is provocative and raises questions about Alfred Tennyson's "mystical" experiences---especially the famous spirit-communication with Arthur Hallam in In Memoriam. Though there is not sufficient evidence yet to pinpoint the time when Frederick's interests began, or exactly how much Alfred may have shared them in the early days, there are enough suggestive facts to make the question worth looking into.

Harriet Martineau pointed out the enthusiastic belief in Animal Magnetism of Henry Hallam, father of Arthur, and of Samuel Rogers, a lifelong friend of Alfred Tennyson, in the early nineteenth century:

> He [Hallam, Sr.] used to tell how he and Rogers had, long years before anybody in England had revived the subject, seen in Paris and carefully tested, phenomena which could not possibly leave them in any doubt of the leading facts of Animal Magnetism.[17]

Samuel Rogers had been a steady visitor at Lady Blessington's gatherings and may have participated with Bulwer, Disraeli,

[17] Harriet Martineau, Biographical Sketches (New York: John B. Alden, 1868), p. 81.

and Varley in discussions and experiments in Animal Magnetism, but he was discrete on the subject at other social gatherings. Henry Hallam, on the other hand, was an earnest and public devotee, and "bore witness" in the face of many hostile critics:

> It appears to me probable that the various phenomana of Mesmerism, together with others independent of Mesmerism, properly so called, which have lately been brought to light are fragments of some general Law of Nature which we are not yet able to deduce from them, merely because they are destitute of visible connection--the links being hitherto wanting which are to display the entire harmony of effects proceeding from a single cause. (quoted in Martineau, p. 82)

Arthur Hallam was close to his father and shared his intellectual interests; thus, it seems likely that Animal Magnetism was at least in the air when the Hallams, Rogers, and the Tennyson brothers were close friends.

Among the "Apostles," Arthur Hallam read a very abstract paper "On Sympathy" and Alfred Tennyson read one on "Ghosts."[18] Before his death, Arthur was moving from poetry into metaphysics and looked up to Coleridge as his master, which indicates his sympathy for the mixture of German theosophy, Swedenborg, Boehme, and Animal Magnetism which permeated Coleridge's "metaphysical" work up until that time. Alfred Tennyson's poems of the period--especially "The Mystic"--reveal his own power of direct spiritual experience (C. Tennyson, p. 89). Though this is scanty "evidence" of any serious interest in Animal Magnetism before Hallam's death in 1833, the present gap in our knowledge about Frederick Tennyson's developing Mesmeric, Swedenborgian, and spiritualistic interests before the publication of In Memoriam in 1850, may give way to some new light on Alfred's mystic re-union with the dead Hallam.

[18] Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 83.

Frederick Tennyson went to Florence in 1834 and spent most of the next twenty years there, where he was intimate with the Browning circle of spiritualists. Seymour Kirkup, a friend of Frederick, became immersed in occult studies and Animal Magnetism in the 1840's, and by the 1850's was holding regular spirit-communications with the dead. Mrs. Browning had become a convert to spiritualistic Mesmerism in 1845, after Harriet Martineau's spectacular cure, and pursued her interest--which included Swedenborgianism--after her move to Florence in 1847.[19] Frederick participated in all of this and corresponded about it with Alfred in England, but when he definitely became a Swedenborgian is as yet unknown. Interestingly, his brother's visionary description of Hallam's spirit in _In Memoriam_ had a strikingly Swedenborgian or "magnetically ecstatic" tenor:

> So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touched me from the past,
> And all at once it seemed at last
> The living soul was flashed on mine,
>
> And mine in this was wound, and whirled
> About empyreal heights of thought,
> And came on that which is, and caught
> The deep pulsations of the world,
>
> Aeonian music measuring out
> The steps of Time--the shocks of Chance--
> The blows of Death. At length my trance
> Was cancell'd, stricken through with doubt.
> (_In Memoriam_, XCV, ll. 33-44)

The phrase "my trance" is rendered even more suggestive by the evidence we do have of Alfred Tennyson's interest in Swedenborg in 1855, when he and his wife studied _Heaven and Hell_. In 1858 he had many long discussions about Swedenborg with Frederick, who had become "a very combative adherent" (C. Tennyson, pp. 303, 341).

[19] Dorothy Hewlett, _Elizabeth Barrett Browning_ (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952), p. 119.

By 1862 Frederick Tennyson had also become an "Anglo-Israelite," following in the footsteps of Richard Brothers, and an enthusiastic proselytiser for spiritualism in general. In 1865 at a doctor's urging, Alfred successfully Mesmerized a sick patient, who later demonstrated a "clairvoyant" awareness of Tennyson's presence, according to the Mesmerizer's own account. That Tennyson's interest in "magnetic" phenomena continued is attested by his well-known letter of May 1874, referring to his "waking trance" and the fading away of his individuality into "boundless being."[20] In that same year, Tennyson wrote a friend who had recently lost her husband, "You will believe that I feel with you, and that I feel that the dead lives, whatever the pseudo-savants may say" (C. Tennyson, p. 408). By 1882, Tennyson was one of the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research, but he became disillusioned at the triviality of table-turning. A long day of discussion with Frederick in 1887 about spiritualism and Swedenborgianism, however, renewed his interest, and Alfred said that "not for twenty years had he had such a happy day" (C. Tennyson, p. 499). In "The Ring," written soon after, Alfred showed clearly that Frederick's enthusiasm had done something to restore his faith:

> The Ghost in man, the Ghost that once was Man,
> But cannot wholly free itself from Man,
> Are calling to each other thro' a dawn
> Stranger than earth has ever seen; the veil
> Is rending, and the Voices of the day
> Are heard across the Voices of the dark.

Though the case for Tennyson as spiritualist or adept in the magnetic trance obviously needs much more investigation in the unpublished Tennyson papers, it is interesting that W.B. Yeats (an expert on trance visions, through study and experiment, affirmed that Tennyson was "scarce less of a

[20] J.C. Walters, Tennyson (London: Kegan Paul, 1893), p. 213.

visionary than Blake himself, for has he not told us of visions and trances obtained by meditating on the letters of his own name, and how in these visions and trances the spiritual world became 'the clearest of the clear, the surest of the sure.'" He added the "startling fact that Lord Tennyson believed himself, like Blake, to be in constant commuication with unseen intelligences."[21]

One last Victorian magnetiser to be discussed provides an important link in the direct handing-down from one family generation to another of occult interests throughout the nineteenth century. This is Cromwell Fleetwood Varley (1828-1883), son of Cromwell Varley and nephew of John Varley. C. F. Varley was an artist, scientist, and electrician, who supervised much of the laying of the Atlantic Cable. Prior to 1860, he was "a hard-headed unbeliever" in spiritualism and ridiculed the "phenomena" and "manifestations" of the spiritualist circles in the 1850's. Then he began to investigate them in order to expose them through "the application of a little scientific method" (Story, Varley, p. 297). He experimented with Mesmerism as a curative agent and with three clairvoyants, when "suddenly and unexpectedly, spiritual phenomena developed within his own family." The skeptic became a convert, met famous mediums in America in the 1860's, and reported his findings to the Dialectical Society (Harrison, pp. 32-35). That Cromwell Fleetwood's nephew and John Varley's grandson, also named John Varley, carried his family's interest in occultism, visionary art, and secret societies into W.B.Yeats' family in the next generation, provides striking evidence of the common heritage that artists and occultists from Blake through Yeats all directly shared.

[21] W.B. Yeats, "The Death of Oenone," Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats, ed. John P. Frayne, (Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), p. 253.

Chapter XV: W. B. Yeats and Fin de Siècle Occultism

All the occult traditions which have been discussed in this study--from John Dee's angel magic to Eliphas Lévi's evocations--which were maintained in secret societies and articulated by "illuminated" artists, converged in the life and work of William Butler Yeats at the end of the nineteenth century. They were revitalized artistically by Yeats' assimilation of them into public political and dramatic efforts as well as in his lyric poetry. Because Yeats became a seminal literary figure in English in the early twentieth century, his lifelong preoccupation with Cabalistic magic and "magnetic" trance-induction forced many other writers to deal with occultism, whether to accept or reject it.

Yeats' interest in visionary magic, which even in his teens was his "secret fanaticism,"[1] was stimulated by an Irish childhood in which fairies, spirits, and "second-sight" were still a vital part of the popular culture. His rejection of his father's liberal rationalism was reinforced by the occult interests of other members of his family as well as fellow artists. Though Yeats' occultism was treated as an aberration or "the price one had to pay for his poetry"[2] for many years by critics, and though the secret societies he joined were viewed as rootless, theosophic "mushrooms," there is substantial evidence that Yeats received a tradition of occult teaching handed consistently down from the late eighteenth-century secret societies of Blake's milieu. Thus,

[1] Richard Ellmann, Yeats: the Man and the Masks (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 45.

[2] Curtis B. Bradford, "George Yeats: Poet's Wife," Sewanee Review, vol. 77 (Summer 1969), p. 403.

when he and Edwin Ellis worked on the first large critical edition of Blake's prophecies from 1889 to 1893, Yeats brought to his study not only a sympathetic attitude to Blake's theosophy but a heritage of oral and archival information about occultism in Blake's day that was uniquely available to him in his own Hermetic societies.

Yeats' first contact with organized occultism came through Madame Blavatsky's theosophical movement, which he became interested in as early as 1884 and which he was associated with until 1890. Interestingly, the major inspiration for Madame Blavatsky's movement was Bulwer-Lytton, whom she revered as a semi-supernatural occult "Master."[3] Amidst the wild legends of her earthly youth and "astral life," a few facts have been ascertained about Madame Blavatsky, which reveal her role in carrying on the Blake-Varley-Bulwer-Lévi tradition of occultism. She was born in Russia in 1831, studied books on alchemy and magic in her grandfather's library,[4] and was brought to London in the 1840's, where she became fascinated by Bulwer's occult novels. Her interest in the cult of Isis portrayed in The Last Days of Pompeii was reinforced by a sojourn in Egypt in 1848. She returned to London in 1851 and probably observed Bulwer, who was heavily involved in Animal Magnetism and ceremonial magic at the time. Liljegren and Bulwer's son both believed the "maître des mes rêves" mentioned in her diary of 1851 was Bulwer, though by 1885 she claimed that her Master was a supernatural Hindu. There is some evidence that H.P.B. (as she was later called) was also an assistant to the famous medium D.D. Home in 1851, and may have observed Bulwer at Home's

[3] S.B.Liljegren, "Bulwer-Lytton's Novels and Isis Unveiled," Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, 18 (Upsala, 1957), p. 13.

[4] Harbans Rai Bachan, W.B. Yeats and Occultism (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), p. 218.

séances (Liljegren, pp. 28, 52).

After many years as a spiritualistic "adventuress" in the Mediterranean countries, H.P.B. landed in America, where she attended a lecture on Egyptian occultism by a Mr. Felt in 1875. Felt had publicly promised to "materialize" the famous "Dwellers of the Threshold" described in Zanoni, but he failed in his efforts. H.P.B. helped him organize a Theosophical Society, which promised to send a member to Egypt to fetch an African wizard to help in the evocation. H.P.B. wrote that the Society hoped to make an experimental comparison between spiritualism and the magic of the old Cabalas, both Jewish and Egyptian. By 1877 she had published from New York her massive Isis Unveiled, in which she traced all occult wisdom to the ancient Egyptians. Though there were over two thousand plagiarisms in the book from modern works on occultism, the dominant source was Bulwer. In Isis Unveiled, she wrote that "no author in the world of literature ever gave a more truthful or poetic description of those beings (the soulless elemental beings) than Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the author of Zanoni (Liljegren, p. 12). But she tried to pass off her plagiarisms as originally found in rare and ancient texts.

In order to strengthen her theosophical movement, H.P.B. moved to India in 1879, where she shifted from Egyptian to Hindu lore and developed the theory of the "Mahatmas," astral Masters who lived in the Himalayas. She made an important convert in A.P. Sinnett, editor of an influential Anglo-Indian newspaper, who summarized her history and doctrine in The Occult World (1881), in which Sinnett acknowledged the influence of Bulwer on the Theosophical Society. He next published Esoteric Buddhism (1883), which revealed the increasing Indian veneer over H.P.B.'s essentially Western occultism. Yeats read

Esoteric Buddhism in 1885 and recommended it to his friend Charles Johnston, who became an immediate convert and abruptly abandoned his planned career as a Christian missionary. Sinnett had established a London branch of the Theosophical Society in 1883 and Johnston visited him in London to make plans for an Irish branch. He returned to Dublin to found the new group, which soon attracted George Russell and several other friends of Yeats. But Yeats had just read the report of the Society for Psychical Research which exposed H.P.B.'s deceptions in India, and he refused to join the Dublin society, though he often attended its meetings (Ellmann, Yeats, pp. 63-65).

In 1887 Yeats moved to London, where he called on H.P.B., who was now personally running the London branch. Yeats was profoundly impressed by her powerful personality and overcame enough of his worries about the fraud charges to officially join her lodge. When her clock "hooted" at him, Yeats wanted to examine it to see if there were a spirit in it, but she stopped him; "I should have been put out, I suppose, had I found any [hidden mechanism], though Henley had said to me, 'Of course she gets up fraudulent miracles, but a person of genius has to do something; Sarah Bernhardt sleeps in her coffin'" (Yeats, Autobiography, p. 117). As she smoked her endless cigarettes and wiped her greasy playing cards on her apron, while unleashing great bursts of wit, exuberant accounts of the reincarnations of Cagliostro and Saint Germain, or ponderous theosophical explanations, she seemed to Yeats to embody "all the folk-lore of the world" (Autobiography, p. 118).

In his reaction to H.P.B., Yeats revealed an enduring personal criteria of judging human worth---by one's "energy of being." He wrote John O'Leary in 1889,

> . . . she is the most human pe on alive, is like an old peasant woman, and is whol.. devoted, all her life is but sitting in a great chair with a pen in her hand. For years she has written twelve hours a day. (Bachan, p. 223)

Yeats found H.P.B. always full of gaiety, "with an air of humour and audacious power":

> A great passionate nature, a sort of female Dr. Johnson, impressive I think to every man or woman who had themselves any richness, she seemed impatient of the formalism and the shrill abstract idealism of those about her, and this impatience broke out in railing and many nicknames: "O you are a flap-doodle, but then you are a Theosophist and a brother." (Autobiography, p. 119)

Yeats was upset when a London wit called H.P.B. the "low comedian of the world to come," for to him she seemed vital, witty, and all primeval peasant as she proclaimed to her vegetarian chelas why she was bored with Victorian spiritualism:

> I would rather accept "the New Jerusalem" of [Swedenborg] with its streets paved like the shop-windows of a jeweller's shop, than find consolation in the heartless doctrine of the Spiritualists. (Key to Theosophy, p. 148; quoted in Bachan, p. 130)

A point that has never been mentioned in Yeats criticism is that Yeats was preceded in H.P.B.'s London group by his maternal aunt, Isabella Pollexfen from Sligo, who was married at the time to John Varley's grandson, a skilled artist, linguist, astrologer and occultist. The most articulate and complex of the Sligo Pollexfens, Isabella had travelled to London in the 1870's to visit her sister, Susan Yeats, the poet's mother, and there she met John Butler Yeats' Pre-Raphaelite friends. The "Pre-Raphaelite wonder boy," Oliver Madox Brown, fell in love with her and wanted to follow her to Sligo, but John Butler Yeats dissuaded him, thinking that he and the Pollexfens would not understand each other. Isabella soon went to Paris, where she studied

art in the studio of the famous Julian.[5] She met John Varley the second at the studio in 1876 and shared his interest in art and magic. In her marriage to Varley, Isabella found a learned companion and willing experimenter. John Varley (1849-1933) was the son of Albert Fleetwood Varley and maintained his family's traditional interest in occultism and visionary art. He was a great traveller and Arabist, who knew seven languages, and achieved some reputation for his paintings of Egyptian subjects.[6] Interestingly, he was an eminent Freemason, which raises the question of his grandfather's possible Masonic connections once again.

According to C.W. Leadbeater, Madame Blavatsky's associate, John and Isabella Varley were early drawn to theosophy and were of the Inner Circle "who gathered around Madame Blavatsky in London in 1883-1884":

> They were among the first group of Theosophists who offered themselves to be disciples of the Masters, and their signatures appear in the unique document on the matter which bears the handwritings and initials of the two Masters M. and K.H.[7]

The question thus arises whether W.B. Yeats was first led to his interest in Madame Blavatsky by John and Isabella Varley, for he was apparently already preoccupied with the subject when he talked with Charles Johnston in 1885. He had been studying the manuals of the London Society, which may have come from his aunt. Though in presently published letters

[5] Joseph Hone, J.B. Yeats: Letters to his Son W.B. Yeats & Others (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946), pp. 48-49.

[6] William M. Murphy, The Yeats Family and the Pollexfens of Sligo, New Yeats Papers I (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971), p. 36

[7] C.W. Leadbeater, The Soul's Growth through Reincarnation: Lives of Erato and Spica, ed. C. Jinarajadasa (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1941), p. 11.

and biographical material on Yeats, there is little material on the Varleys, there is a good possibility that the forthcoming publication of Yeats' occult journals and novel on his fellow occultists of the 1880's and 1890's will yield significant information on his relation to them.

That Yeats must have taken an interest in his talented aunt is suggested by his father's admiration and fondness for Isabella for many years, for from the 1870's on, J.B.Yeats sent her bits of gossip about the London art world. An unpublished 1916 letter to Yeats from his father described Isabella in provocative terms; he wrote that she had real intelligence and a passion to rule, but no opportunity to exercize it. "She is somebody and you cannot easily set her aside," but she filled up "the vacuum of her days studying occult philosophy," in which her powerful imagination was a great help (quoted in Murphy, p. 36). Yeats was also interested in the first John Varley as a personal friend of Blake as well as a Zodiacal physiognomist (Yeats and Ellis, Blake, I, 122), and would surely have been curious about his grandson. But as Murphy points out, John Varley the second was only beginning "to be properly appreciated by art critics" in 1971, so more biographical information may be forthcoming from art historians also. Among the scanty data available on the twentieth-century John Varley, however, is an interview with him by A.P. Sinnett in The Occult Review (June 1916), in which Varley recounted many anecdotes about his grandfather's astrological skills.[8] Sinnett pointed out that he had been interested in the Varleys for many years, and C.W.Leadbeater noted his own long friendship with "the Varley family." Thus, it is possible that the archives of the London Theosophical Society will yield new material on

[8] A.P.Sinnett, "Astrological Predictions of the late John Varley," Occult Review (July 1916), pp. 38-43.

this intriguing figure and his links to the occultist milieus of Blake and Yeats.

Among the Theosophists whom Yeats met in 1885 was Mohini Chatterji, who came to Dublin from India as an agent of Madame Blavatsky. Chatterji possessed a considerable knowledge of ancient Hindu philosophy and literature and fascinated Yeats with his discussion of the rarified Samkara philosophy, which preached "a detachment from action itself" (Bachan, p. 22). Bachan points out Yeats' struggle to free himself from this seductive Indian abstraction, which led him to an increasing stress on experimental magic and concrete experience of the supernatural, a preoccupation which eventually led to his ejection from the Theosophical Society. Yeats constantly criticized the abstraction, vague Platonism, and vapoury nature of George Russell's theosophy, who swallowed Asian mysticism whole. He worried that so much abstract metaphysical talk led to the substitution of spiritual ideas for concrete spiritual experience.

Thus, though Yeats wrote a worried John O'Leary that he need not be afraid of Yeats' "going in for mesmerism," and that H.P.B. herself "hates spiritualism vehemently," he eagerly attended the séances which the more "practical" Theosophists began to hold (Bachan, p. 223). Before joining the London lodge, he had already studied Von Reichenbach on the "Odylic force" and was fascinated by Animal Magnetism (Bachan, p. 10). He wrote Katherine Tynan in 1889 that when he shaved off his beard, H.P.B. promised him a bad illness in three months "through the loss of all the mesmeric force that collects in a beard."[9] As the spiritualists among

[9] Katherine Tynan, The Middle Years (London: Constable, 1916), p. 61.

the Theosophists insisted on continuing their séances, George Russell wrote H.P.B., warning her of the danger of changing the goal of the society from Union with the Absolute to "proving phenomena of spiritualism, table-rapping, and the evocation of spooks" (Ellmann, Yeats, p. 66).

Under pressure from her more enthusiastic disciples, H.P.B. formed an Inner Circle of her "sincerest Chelas" in 1888 which taught, but was not supposed to perform, Cabalistic magic. Yeats, who with the Varleys was a member of this exclusive group, plunged into experiment. He studied Ebenezer Sibly's 1784 book on The Celestial Science of Astrology, which included a lengthy section on magic and raising the spirits of the dead. Yeats was especially interested in Sibly's description of a magical ritual which would raise the ghost of a flower (Yeats, Memoirs, p. 23). It is significant that Yeats in 1889 was studying Sibly, who was an occultist Freemason and associated with Blake's Swedenborgian group, at the same time that he was working on the critical edition of Blake. In fact, Blake's drawings of tiny fairies within flower cups may have been related to Sibly's theories on the "spirits of flowers." Blake's own hatred of abstraction reinforced Yeats' determination to persuade the members of the Esoteric Section to carry out Sibly's experiments. His insistence on experimental "verification" reached the point that he was asked to resign by one of H.P.B.'s officials. As Yeats noted:

> I was causing disturbance, causing disquiet in some way. I said, "By teaching an abstract system without experiment or evidence, you are making your pupils dogmatic and you are taking them out of life. There is scarcely one of your pupils who does not need, more than all else to enrich his soul, the common relations of life. They do not marry and nothing is so bad for them as asceticism. (Memoirs, p. 24)

Yeats felt that the imposed sexual celibacy of "chela-ship"

and the vegetarian diet drove the Theosophists into violently dogmatic abstract political views, which distorted their imaginative faculties (Autobiography, p. 317).

Yeats' relation to H.P.B.'s group had never been smooth, though, for in 1888 he had refused to sign his unquestioning obedience to her "Himalayan Masters," and asserted instead that "I myself was to be judge as to what Theosophy is (the term is wide enough) and I consider my work at Blake a wholly adequate keeping of this clause" (Memoirs, p. 281). His ejection from the society in 1890 was also stimulated by his criticism of Lucifer, a publication of the Theosophical Society, which he contributed to Charles Johnston's Weekly Review. Yeats wrote O'Leary that "they were turning a good philosophy into a bad religion," but added that "We are of course good friends and allies," and that he would possibly join H.P.B.'s group again later.[10]

A few months before his ejection from the Theosophical Society, Yeats had met Magregor Mathers at the British Museum, who was working there on ancient magic texts and invited Yeats to join the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn, a Rosicrucian group whose ties with Freemasonry would later cause Yeats some personal grief. The Golden Dawn was founded by Dr. Woodman, Wynn Westcott, and the Reverend A.F.A. Woodford, all high-ranking Freemasons and members of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, established in 1865 and including only Master Masons. It numbered among its members Bulwer-Lytton, Eliphas Lévi, Frederick Hockley, and Kenneth Mackenzie. Woodford had been a close friend of Mackenzie and the compiler of much of Mackenzie's Royal Masonic Cyclopedia, which was full of material on the late eighteenth-century secret

[10] Allan Wade, ed. The Letters of W.B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 159-60.

societies, including those with which Blake was associated.[11]

In 1887 Magregor Mathers, also a Freemason and the first English translator of Knorr von Rosenroth's Kabala Unveiled (1887), joined the three Rosicrucians to form the Isis-Urania branch of the society. Mrs. Mathers, the former Moira Bergson, sister of the French philosopher Henry Bergson, told Yeats that Mathers received the Rosicrucian rituals and documents from a friend of Kenneth Mackenzie, whom Yeats called "the reputed instructor in magic of Bulwer-Lytton" (Yeats, Autobiography, p. 388). Mrs. Mathers claimed that the Order teachings were based on these documents and upon her own revelations gained in the magnetic trance.

The question of the origin of the Golden Dawn has been disputed by many adherents of the schisms that later developed, however, and a challenge to Mathers' claim came from Dr. Wynn Westcott, who said he himself discovered in the library of the Societas Rosicruciana the cipher manuscripts originally rescued by Robert Wentworth Little from Freemasons Hall. Another account claims that Woodford found them among Frederick Hockley's papers (Regardie, p. 11). Someone else claimed that the cipher manuscripts were found accidently in a London bookstall, thus repeating Cagliostro's story about the manuscripts for the Egyptian Rite of Freemasonry in the 1780's. What is significant about all these claims, except the last one, is that they apparently point to the same Rosicrucian documents that John Varley's "Society of the Mercurii" and Bulwer-Lytton had access to in the 1820's and 1830's. A.E. Waite, who was a Golden Dawn member but split off from the "practical magic" group centered on Mathers and Yeats, acknowledged that the "so-called ciphers, or Ritual

[11] Francis King, The Rites of Modern Occult Magic (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 42.

Summaries in a certain Magical Alphabet" were on papers bearing the watermark of 1809, as well as on later ones (Waite, Rosicrucians, p. 583). This certainly suggests a connection with Francis Barrett's Rosicrucian College, which was functioning in 1809 and which used the Magical Alphabet. As noted earlier, the ciphers revealed a "skeletonic system" of German Rosicrucian rituals, used in late eighteenth-century Continental Freemasonry.

Westcott called upon Mathers, who was studying Cabalistic magic under him, to decipher the manuscripts. They found among them a later message to contact Anna Sprengel, a Rosicrucian adept in Nuremberg. After a lengthy correspondence with Fraulein Sprengel, who was connected with a Rosicrucian rite of Continental Masonry (Yeats, Autobiography, p. 388), she eventually transmitted authority to the London Rosicrucians to formulate "a semi-public occult organization which was to employ an elaborate magical ceremonial, Cabalistical teaching, and a comprehensive scheme of spiritual training" (Regardie, p. 11). The group usually met at Mark Masons Hall, and though a candidate apparently did not have to be a Freemason, many of them were. Though Yeats was always careful to point out the non-Masonic basis of the Golden Dawn, he had a vested emotional interest in his claim, for he wanted Maud Gonne, with whom he was passionately involved from 1889 on, to join the Golden Dawn. Maud Gonne, however, was violently opposed to Freemasonry, which she viewed as "one of the mainstays of the British Empire," which she was determined to dismantle (Hone, p. 90). She joined the Rosicrucian Order for a while, but eventually left because of what she viewed as its Masonic connections.

Though Yeats continued to downplay the Order's connections with Freemasonry (which were apparently not

official, but more through overlapping membership), the Golden Dawn was involved in many complicated and obscure charges of connections with "secret chiefs" and revived Illuminati among German Freemasons. Anna Sprengel and her followers were indeed connected with Rosicrucian rites of Freemasonry and attempted to establish closer connections with the English group. But King recounts the independence and nationalism of English Freemasonry, which made it suspicous of "pseudo-Masonic," foreign intrusions (King, p. 104).

Yeats' collaboration with Magregor Mathers had a profound impact on his poetic concerns and methods, for Mathers trained him in the Cabalistic vision techniques which Yeats practised until the end of his life:

> It was through him mainly that I began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or unconscious memory. (Yeats, Autobiography, p. 124)

Yeats was accompanied on his first visit to Mathers in 1890 by an acquaintance (un-named) who told him that he did not believe in magic,

> . . . but that a novel of Bulwer-Lytton's had taken such a hold upon his imagination that he was going to give much of his time and all his thought to magic. He longed to believe in it, and had studied, though not learnedly, geomancy, chiromancy, and much cabbalistical symbolism, and yet doubted if the soul outlived the body.[12]

When Yeats and his friend arrived at Mathers' house, Mr. and Mrs. Mathers taught Yeats how to meditate upon a Cabalistic symbol painted on a card, until a state of waking trance was reached:

[12] W.B.Yeats, "Magic" (1901), Essays and Introductions (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 29.

> Almost at once my imagination began to move of itself and to bring before me vivid images that, though never too vivid to be imagination, as I had always understood it, had yet a motion of their own, a life I could not change or shape. (Yeats, "Magic," p. 29)

Yeats described one vision of "a desert and black titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins" (Autobiography, p. 125). Mathers explained that he had seen "a being of the order of Salamanders," which, as noted earlier, Blake also referred to. Yeats also described a vision of the magical creation of a homunculus or golem, which startled his friend who had always secretly dreamed of performing such a feat. Using the Enochian Tables of John Dee's angel magic, which were known to occultists in Blake's day and possibly reached Mathers through the Masonic-Rosicrucian archives (King, p. 20), Mathers evoked in Yeats a vision of a symbolic Masonic house. As Yeats recounted, "Mathers' mind, like the minds of so many students of these hidden things, was always running on Masonry and discovering it in strange places" ("Magic," p. 34).

Francis King, who was once a Golden Dawn member, defined magic as "the science and art of creating changes in consciousness," and of "entering into contact with non-human intelligences" (King, p. 54). This concentration and exaltation of the imagination is what Yeats avidly sought in his secret society training, and the powerful images and visions of his poetry bear eloquent witness to its effectiveness. In a 1901 credo, Yeats echoed Bulwer-Lytton's statement of 1861:

> I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truths in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:--

(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. (Yeats, "Magic," p. 28)

Mathers was also a student of military history and ardent believer in the Ossianic fantasies of the Celtic Revival. He encouraged in Yeats a messianic, fin de siècle sense of impending violence and revelation, which reproduced in all details the mentality of the 1790's. Yeats wrote that Mathers and his wife used evocations to try to influence the politics of the world and foresaw immense wars and apocalyptic turbulence in the future (Memoirs, p. 75). Mathers even learned ambulance work in the 1890's and made his followers learn it too (Autobiography, p. 225). Yeats also noted that the world-shaping evocations were a terrible strain on Mathers and that he would spit blood after a session. Worried by the deterioration of Mathers' character under the burden of his "magical forces," Yeats nevertheless shared his mentor's millenialism. He recorded that he "too became violent with the violent solemnity of a religious devotee" (Autobiography, p. 99). Yeats summed up the yearnings of fin de siècle visionaries, which recur so regularly through European history, when he asked:

> Is it true that our air is disturbed, as Mallarmé said by "the trembling of the veil of the Temple," or "that our whole age is seeking to bring forth a sacred book"? Some of us thought that book was near towards the end of the last century, but the tide sank again. (Autobiography, p. 210)

His belief that religion would bring round its antithesis in apocalyptic turbulence found its most powerful expression in "The Second Coming" (1919), which was largely influenced by Mathers' previsions of the violence of World War I:

> . . . a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
> Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, . . .
> . . . what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

When Yeats visited Paris in the 1890's he stayed with the Mathers, who introduced him to two famous French occultists, the Rosicrucian Gerard Encausse or "Papus," and the Martinist Stanislaus Gauita, whom Yeats called "the one eloquent learned scholar who has written of magic in our generation."[13] The French magicians were involved in resurrecting the Rosicrucian, Swedenborgian, and Martinist forms of Freemasonry which had flourished in the late eighteenth century, and Yeats visited them several times. He also experimented with hashish among the Martinists in the Latin Quarter, and listened avidly to their descriptions of visions, but he could never give up his will to the drug ("Discoveries," in Essays, p. 282). In his Cabalistic visionary techniques, the will was intensified rather than relaxed, into what King described as a "blazing stream of pure energy" (King, p. 55). Interestingly, it was while he was with the Mathers in 1896 that Yeats was taken by Arthur Symons to meet Verlaine, who confirmed Yeats' accurate conclusion that the French symbolistes carried on the occult traditions of the secret societies. He also saw Strindberg,who was "always seeking the Philosopher's Stone," and after a performance of Villiers d'Lisle Adam's Rosicrucian drama, Axël, he felt surer than ever of the "trembling of the veil" and of the international scope of the coming occult revelation.

[13] W.B. Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," Mythologies (New York: Collier Books, 1969), p. 348.

Yeats was so impressed by the effectiveness of the Golden Dawn visionary training and the profundity of its magical philosophy that he persuaded his uncle George Pollexfen of Sligo to come to London and join the Rosicrucian group. Pollexfen (1839-1910), the brother of Isabella Varley, shared his sister's interest in occultism and, like her husband, John Varley, he was a skilled astrologer. Yeats' sister Lily wrote that "in Willie's eyes, the Pollexfens appear something grand like the figures of Stonehenge seen by moon-light." The Pollexfen family shared a melancholia, primitivism, and "magnetism," which Yeats' father defined as "a closeness to nature, an almost animal connection with earth, air, and water, the stuff of which poets and poetry are made." Surrounded by servants who "knew so intimately angels, saints, banshees, and fairies," and who lived in a mental world of vision and clairvoyant prophecy, George Pollexfen developed a powerful, brooding imagination and a love for ceremony and ritual (Murphy, pp. 28, 13, 19). He became a Freemason and rose to the highest occult degrees, and Masonic ritual and symbolism remained an important preoccupation throughout his life.

In the 1890's, Yeats spent much time with his uncle in Sligo, and after he "cured" Pollexfen of a dangerous illness by casting Cabalistic images over him, the amazed doctor in attendance said, "I suppose it is a kind of hypnotism" (Yeats, Memoirs, p. 75). Pollexfen was fascinated and joined his Rosicrucian nephew in Cabalistic trance-experiments, skrying over a crystal ball, and discussing occult ritual and philosophy. Pollexfen helped Yeats with astrological studies, and though he never equalled his uncle's skills or erudition in the subject, Yeats cast horoscopes almost daily for the rest of his life and consulted the stars for many fateful decisions. When Pollexfen joined

the Golden Dawn, he worked with Yeats and Mathers on writing and designing the Rosicrucian rituals. The ceremonies, whose beauty and effectiveness were testified to by all who experienced them, reflected the Masonic training of Pollexfen and Mathers and the absorption in Blakean language and symbolism of Yeats. Though his uncle was a staunch Unionist and Anglophile, Yeats was able to hold together a long-distance friendship between the old Freemason and his anti-Masonic, Irish Nationalist sweetheart Maud Gonne, through their mutual interest in the Golden Dawn and visions of an occultist regeneration of Ireland. When Pollexfen died in 1910, Yeats attended his spectacular funeral in Sligo, which was attended by over two thousand people and included an elaborate Masonic ceremony (like the one Goethe directed for Wieland), which greatly moved Yeats. A group of eighty Masons, in full ceremonial regalia, threw acacia leaves "into the grave with the traditional Masonic goodbye, "Alas my brother so mote it be!" Then there came two "who threw each a white rose, and that was because they and he were 'Priori Masons," a high degree of Masonry."[14] The Masonic symbolism of the roses seemed to Yeats an eloquent tribute to one of his most intimate and respected fellow-students of vision and occult ceremony. Interestingly, Yeats received "messages" from Pollexfen for years after his death (Murphy, p. 55), like Blake from his dead brother Robert.

Among the other members of the Golden Dawn were several figures who became mines of information on the occultist milieu of Blake, Varley, and Bulwer. The most important was A.E. Waite, whose childhood also was immersed in fairy tales and folklore. As a youth, Waite wrote a

[14] Hilary Pyle, Jack B. Yeats (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 110, 118.

lyrical drama Zastroni, as a hybrid of Shelley's occultist Zastrozzi and Bulwer's Zanoni. He read all Bulwer's occult works, the Blakean-Swedenborgian works of George Macdonald, and the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites. He gradually became devoured with the encyclopedic curiosity about the occult traditions and the history of secret societies that made him the most learned and prolific of twentieth-century English writers on occultism. From Madame Blavatsky, he moved on to Eliphas Lévi. He realized that both drew on older traditions that were richer and more enduring than their modern compilations of them; thus, he produced the first sound book on the Cabala, examined the works and historical context of Swedenborg, Boehme, St. Martin, Cagliostro, Saint Germain, Francis Barrett, and investigated the secret societies of the late eighteenth century. He also studied and publicized the alchemical theories of Ethan Allen Hitchcock.

In his autobiography, Waite noted his acquaintance with Yeats during their Golden Dawn days:

> Yeats, among the moderns, of course I knew, and we used to see one another some years later on. It was often in secret circles, but occasionally I looked him up and occasionally he came to Ealing . . . The password between us was Magia, seeing that when we first met I was still apprising the bits and pieces of occult schools, which--for all that I know--Yeats may never have left. More seriously, I was drawn to him because he also was soaked in faerie lore, and lived amongst it more even than myself.[15]

It was Waite who designed the Tarot set used in the elementary grades of the Golden Dawn, and which had such an impact on Yeats' symbolism and meditation techniques. Both Waite and Yeats talked with Jessie Weston about various theories of the Tarot's origin and significance, though Waite considered her

[15] A.E.Waite, Shadows of Life and Thought (London: Selwyn and Blount, 1938), p. 119.

book From Ritual to Romance a mongrelization of Celtic myth and doubtful history. He wrote:

> I almost expected Jessie Weston to denounce me through some trance-medium for suggesting that the occultists had hoaxed her about initiation on the Astral Plane and the secret perpetuation of a Ritual Worship of Mithra to the present day. (Waite, Shadows, p. 246)

Waite recommended the Tarot as an aid to symbolic meditation and followed Eliphas Lévi's Cabalistic interpretation of the twenty-two Trumps Major as representing the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[16] Interestingly, when T.S. Eliot caricatured Madame Blavatsky in The Wasteland as "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyant . . . known to be the wisest woman in Europe," he noted that her "wicked pack of cards" was the "traditional pack." But it was actually Waite's Golden Dawn pack, which was designed for special symbolic meditation.[17]

During one of the many quarrels in the Golden Dawn, Waite split off from Yeats' group, which stressed practical magic and Cabalistic rituals, for as King points out, Waite "remained suspicious of the Occult teachings of the Order . . . for at heart he was always a mystic rather than a magician" (p. 53). Israel Regardie, a later Golden Dawn member, writes disparagingly that Waite's group cast aside as valueless "the whole of the magical tradition" and retained "a clandestine backdoor to the Church."[18] As noted before, this "spiritual lubricity" and "exhausted Platonism"

16 A.E. Waite, The Pictorial Key to the Tarot, new ed. (1910; New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1959).

17 Gertrude Moakley, "The Waite-Smith 'Tarot': a Footnote to The Wasteland," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 58 (Oct. 1954), p. 471.

18 Israel Regardie, My Rosicrucian Adventure (Chicago: Aries Press, 1936), p. 19.

is what led to Yeats' earlier break with George Russell's Asian Theosophists. However, Waite maintained his ties with the Golden Dawn for years, and after his interest in late eighteenth-century Freemasonry led him to become a Mason himself in 1901, he exerted a further Masonic influence on the rituals and grade-initiations.

Yeats, worried that so many of his fellow Rosicrucians were "falling off into Freemasonry" and covering his own Masonic tracks for Maud Gonne's sake, went to his usual pains to both praise the rituals as "traditional" and to divorce them from traditional Freemasonry. He admitted that Mrs. Mathers believed the rituals were based on a recent Rosicrucian rite of Continental Freemasonry:

> I add, however, that I am confident from internal evidence that the rituals were in substance ancient though never so in language, unless some ancient text was incorporated. There was a little that I thought obvious and melodramatic, and it was precisely in this little I am told that they resembled Masonic rituals, but much that I thought beautiful and profound. (Autobiography, p. 389)

Since both George Pollexfen and Magregor Mathers--men whose taste in matters ceremonial he admired immensely--were sincere Masons and the source of much of the Golden Dawn's Masonic rituals, Yeats' ambivalence towards Masonry was obviously always tied to his ambivalent situation with Maud Gonne. Ironically, the woman Yeats eventually married had been a member of a German-based Rosicrucian rite of Freemasonry.

Three other Golden Dawn members possessed much knowledge of the late eighteenth-century occultist and Masonic milieu. The first, Arthur Machen, was Waite's closest friend and a fellow Celtic enthusiast with Yeats. Machen researched thoroughly Casanova's life and Masonic experiences and translated his voluminous Memoirs. Arthur Symons, Yeats'

roommate during much of this time, was also a Casanova buff. The third Golden Dawn member who was soaked in eighteenth-century occult lore was Alistair Crowley, who terrified Yeats and brought much scandal to the Order. (Crowley also terrified Dylan Thomas later, who believed in his reputation as a Black Magician and ran whenever he saw him). Crowley plunged into study of the eighteenth-century secret societies and thought of himself as the re-incarnation of Cagliostro. In 1912 he joined a German secret society of Knights Templar, which developed a high-degree Masonic rite based on Tantric sexual magic (King, p. 118).

Though Yeats was horrified in the 1890's at Crowley's immorality, he himself became interested in Tantric theories in his old age, when he yearned to be a "wild old wicked man":

> An Indian devotee may recognise that he approaches the Self through a transfiguration of sexual desire; he repeats thousands of times a day words of adoration, calls before his eyes a thousand times the divine image. He is not always solitary, there is another method, that of the Tantric philosophy, where a man and woman, when in sexual union, transfigure each other's images into the masculine and feminine characters of God, but the man must not finish, vitality must not pass beyond his body, beyond his being. There are married people who, though they do not forbid the passage of the seed, practise, not necessarily at the moment of union, a meditation, wherein the man seeks the divine Self as present in his wife, the wife the divine Self as present in the man. There may be trance, and the presence of one with another though a great distance separates. If one alone meditates, the other knows; one may call for, and receive through the other, divine protection. Did this worship, this meditation, establish among us romantic love, was it prevalent in Northern Europe during the twelfth century? (Yeats, "The Mandukya Upanishad" [1935], Essays, p. 484)

The closeness of the Tantric technique, as described by Yeats, to the Abulafian sexual trance-techniques of Cabalistic traditions is immediately apparent. Yeats' familiarity with

these techniques helped him to interpret Blake's cryptic sexual myths and erotic drawings.

The German Templars that Crowley joined included many members who had unsuccessfully tried in the 1890's to revive Weishaupt's Order of the Illuminati, basing their organization and subversive political aims on his papers (King, p. 118). And, as in the heyday of Mesmerism in the eighteenth-century, Crowley and Mathers engaged in magnetic warfare and the casting of "malignant spells" against the Rosicrucians, including Yeats, who eventually ejected both megalomaniacs from their order.

Two other Golden Dawn members--Florence Farr and Annie Horniman--played important roles in Yeats' literary career. Florence Farr, who was a skilled Cabalistic magician and Animal Magnetiser, headed Yeats' section of the Golden Dawn. She worked with him on setting his verse to music and gave readings, or rather chantings, of his poems to the music of the psaltery. Miss Horniman subsidized both Macgregor Mathers' Cabalistic studies and the Abbey Theater, though she eventually broke with the Rosicrucians over a member's advocacy of Thomas Lake Harris' "strange sexual-pneumatic philosophy"--a bizarre Swedenborgian form of Celestial Intercourse with the Lily Queen, that was among the wierdest of the many developments of Swedenborg's theories of "conjugial love." Yeats himself read Harris' books and enjoyed them, but he pragmatically backed Miss Horniman's crusade against them as "pornographic" (King, p. 52).

The last, and to Yeats the most important, Golden Dawn member to be dealt with is Maud Gonne, whose passionate political activism and extroverted life forced Yeats to find a publicly accessible mode of expressing his occultist arcanum. This desire for a broad public audience made a great difference between the art of himself and of his "master," William Blake.

Maud Gonne had long been a seer of visions and believer in the spirit world, and she was a member of a secret political society in France when Yeats met her in 1889. In the desperation of his unrequited love for her, he persuaded her that by joining the Golden Dawn, the two of them could regenerate Ireland. Yeats ruefully admitted later that his major motive was to so thoroughly blend their minds and souls, through mutual experiences of trance-visions and explorations into hidden knowledge, that she would have to be his entirely. Yeats' accounts in the first draft of his autobiography of his visionary and telepathic experiences with Maud Gonne, however, are truly remarkable and reveal a kind of visionary imagination present in both of them and heightened by Cabalistic and Mesmeric trance-techniques that almost equalled Blake's in scope and intensity.

Though Maud Gonne became friendly with Mathers, who greatly admired her violence of rhetoric and militance of action, and with George Pollexfen, who hated her politics, and plunged with Yeats into occult studies, she soon grew restless and disenchanted with the "air of British commonplace" about the other Rosicrucians. "Aren't they an awful set?" she complained to the haughty Mathers and the desperate Yeats (Hone, p. 90). Though Yeats felt that "surely if I told her all my thoughts, all my hopes and ambitions, she would never leave me," he soon knew that her volcanic energies would return and that he must "set her to some work--a secret mystic propaganda might be insufficient" (_Memoirs_, p. 50). Hoping to find "sufficient" scope for his second Helen, who had no Troy to burn, Yeats surprised his introverted self by yearning "to found societies and to influence newspapers." From this new public role, "in which there was much patriotism and more desire for a fair woman" (_Memoirs_, p. 59), came Yeats' important and famous work with the Abbey Theater and the "Irish Literary Renaissance." But throughout this active,

combative, public effort, the major preoccupation of Yeats' soul was the foundation, with Maud Gonne and George Pollexfen, of a secret mystical order of Irish spiritualism. He found an empty castle on an island and dreamed of a "Castle of Heroes" who would usher in a new Ireland of the Magical Imagination:

> I believed that the castle could be hired for little money, and had long been dreaming of making it an Irish Eleusis or Samethrace. An obsession more constant than anything but my love itself was the need of mystical rites--a ritual system of evocation and meditation--to reunite the perception of the spirit, of the divine, with natural beauty. I believed that instead of thinking of Judae as holy we should (think) our own land holy, and most holy where most beautiful . . . I was convinced that all lonely and lovely places were crowded with invisible beings and that it would be possible to communicate with them. I meant to initiate young men and women in this worship, which would unite the radical truths of Christianity to those of a more ancient world . . . My own seership was, I thought, inadequate; it was to be Maud Gonne's work and mine. (Memoirs, p. 124)

Yeats asserted that Maud Gonne entirely shared these ideas, and "I did not doubt that in carrying them out I should win her for myself." With Pollexfen, they cast Cabalistic sigils, skryed over crystals, consulted the stars and Tarot cards, and induced visions in each other. They sought a "symbolic fabric" in which the new religion would "hide within the work of art as God within his world." Yeats did not wish "to compose rites as for the theater," that real world where he did daily battle, for the rites "must in their main outline be the work of invisible hands" (Memoirs, p. 124). Like Swift and the eighteenth-century Freemasons before him, Yeats viewed Irish and Cabalistic mythology as streams from the same fountain, and like Richard Brothers, Blake, and the British Israelites, he believed that the Cabalistic New Jerusalem could be rebuilt within one's native land. When Maud Gonne finally quit the Golden Dawn and blamed its

Masonic elements for her exit, it was a wrenching blow to Yeats and foreshadowed his ultimate failure to win her soul through Rosicrucianized Irish lore and mutual "magnetic ecstasies."

That Yeats was working on his edition of Blake, and then defending it to hostile critics, throughout this period is highly significant, both to his attitude toward and interpretation of Blake and to his own decisions about how best to utilize his "secret studies" in a publicly viable form. Furthermore, that Blake, his idol, seemed both to succeed fantastically in his personal occult "illumination" and the personal joy of his "illuminized" art, and to fail in making that illumination communicable to those who were not "initiates" of the same secrets, was a problem Yeats wrestled with till the end of his life. In struggling with it honestly and with recurring disturbance, Yeats raised many valid critical questions about the nature, limitations, success, and failure of Blake's work, which have never been objectively or thoroughly dealt with by Blake critics.

Echoing Southey's criticism of Blake, but with much greater imaginative sympathy and almost equal familiarity with the historical context of Blake's work, Yeats raised questions about the occasional obscurity and confusion of Blake's language and symbolism. Like Southey too, Yeats was motivated by a sincere admiration and concern for the quality and significance of his art. Thus, an examination of Yeats' interpretation of Blake's visionary works not only reveals that Yeats is still probably the best critic of Blake but that his criticism raises provocative questions about the relation of art to magic and of the conscious crative mind to the "automatic" productions of vision that still need open-minded investigation by literary scholars.

As a boy, Yeats read Blake, Rossetti, and Shelley, under the enthusiastic guidance of his Pre-Raphaelite father,

and much of his own poetic development was determined by his "lover's quarrel" with those three artists. Edwin Ellis was a painter and friend of Yeats' father, who had become enthusiastic about Blake during Rossetti's collaboration with the Gilchrists. Ellis studied Boehme and Swedenborg in an effort to find the "key" to Blake's "giant propheccies," which the Rossettis and Gilchrist had given up on. He once pointed out to Yeats that "the four quarters of London represented Blake's four great mythological personages, the Zoas, and also the four elements" (Yeats, Autobiography, p. 108). But it was not until Yeats began to study Cabalistic symbolism with Mathers that Ellis' interpretation took on any significance. With great excitement in 1889, Yeats realized that "much of Blake's four-fold symbolism was identical with the Kabalistical symbols of the angels of the four points" (Ellis and Yeats, Blake, I, 255). He told Ellis, who knew nothing previously of Christian Cabalism, and "with this proof that his interpretation was more than fantasy, he and I began our four years' work upon the Prophetic Books of William Blake" (Autobiography, p. 108).

They soon learned that the descendants of John Linnell owned the manuscript of Vala, or the Four Zoas, which had never been published and had been ignored by the Rossettis. Ellis and Yeats spent much time with the Linnells, attempting to decipher and transcribe the poetry and illustrations, many of which had been prudishly erased by John Linnell. As discussed earlier, The Four Zoas was Blake's most explicitly Cabalistic poem, with graphic illustrations of Cabalistic sexual concepts. Thus, as Magregor Mathers and the Rosicrucians trained Yeats in Cabalistic symbolism and trance-techniques, he came to value "a ritual full of the symbolism of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, with many

later additions," and was delighted, after the rarified ascetism of the Theosophists, that in Cabalistic philosophy there was "no abstraction to deaden the nerves of the soul." Mathers told him, "We only give you symbols because we respect your liberty" (Memoirs, p. 27). Thus, also, Yeats and Ellis came to realize that Blake's work was "no mere freak of an eccentric mind, but an eddy of that flood-tide of symbolism which attained its tide-mark in the magic of the Middle Ages" (Ellis and Yeats, I, x). As Yeats placed Blake within the Renaissance occult tradition of talismanic art, he concluded that

> . . . all art that is not mere story-telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which mediaeval magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine Essence. (Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," Essays, p. 148)

Also, significantly, Yeats learned in the knowledge-lectures, study of archival materials, and oral traditions of the Rosicrucian society much about the occultist milieu of Blake's day that was not available in other sources. Though he was not at liberty to reveal his sources of information, due to the Order's vows of secrecy, in the Blake edition he threw out enough allusions to Cosway's magical practices and manuscripts, Dr. Falk's Rosicrucian College, Varley's astrological influences, etc., to reveal his own access to the Rosicrucian traditions handed down from Francis Barrett's days. From Mathers he learned the "Magical Alphabet," used by Barrett and Bulwer-Lytton, and recognized elements of it in Blake's peculiar designs of Hebrew letters (Ellis and Yeats, I, 25). Yeats' study of Boehme and Swedenborg and their developments in Ebenezer Sibly's books led him to an accurate understanding of the

predominantly occultist nature of Blake's Swedenborg Society, which no other criticism had taken account of. Though Yeats claimed, without sufficient evidence, that Blake's father was not just a Dissenter but a Swedenborgian, he correctly pointed out that in Blake's day, "ordinary dissent was more closely allied to mysticism in its manner of dealing with the Scriptures than in our own" (Ellis and Yeats, I, 4), which the Cabalistic Scriptural interpretations of Lord Gordon, Richard Brothers, Loutherbourg, and Cosway all bear out. Yeats also studied Garth Wilkinson, the Swedenborgian Animal Magnetiser, who more than any other early critic understood the Mesmeric context of Blake's visions (Yeats, "Blake's Illustrations to Dante," Essays, p. 124).

As important to their interpretation of Blake's philosophy through Yeats' Cabalistic studies was the interpretation of Blake's vision through their own trance experiments. Yeats said he thought the mind of Ellis was constantly upon the verge of trance, and once while they were arguing over Blake's sexual symbolism, Ellis saw a series of symbolic visions simultaneously with Yeats' sudden perception of the same meaning. Ellis said, "In another moment, I should have been off." Yeats further described such visionary moments:

> The mind is known to attain in certain conditions of trance a quickness so extraordinary that we are compelled at times to imagine a condition of unendurable intellectual intensity from which we are saved by the merciful stupidity of the body. (Autobiography, p. 110)

As they became increasingly absorbed in Blake's rapturous outbursts about being "drunk with intellectual vision" (Blake, CW, p. 852), both editors experienced such vivid trance-visions that they "felt supernatural assistance"

(Memoirs, p. 30). Yeats noted that it was during this period that he mastered "a practice, a form of meditation that has perhaps been the chief intellectual influence on my life up to perhaps my fortieth year" (Memoirs, p. 22):

> I now began to experiment myself, finding that many people, after fixing their attention on the symbol, would pass not into reverie as I did but into a state of partial or complete hypnosis. Later on I discovered that it was enough to give their visions the direction I would if I myself called up the symbol to the mind's eye. My mind would influence theirs directly. I then noticed that various systems of evocation, of command, or of prayer were more powerful because of more prolonged attention than these detached symbols, and that I could discover occasionally among the symbols that came at my command some that I could never have heard of, though they had some historical foundation and could not be the result of chance. I allowed my mind to drift from image to image, and these images began to affect my writing, making it more sensuous and more vivid. I believed that with the images would come at last more profound states of the soul, and so lived in vain hope. (Memoirs, pp. 27-28)

Thus, when they published their explanations of Blake's visions, Ellis and Yeats confidently wrote:

> The writers of this book may say with the famous Eliphas Lévi Zahed: "I have evoked and I have seen," and in the visions produced by the evocations of symbolic magic they have learnt, what Blake knew so well. (Ellis and Yeats, I, 288)

With a sense that they now understood through personal experience and Cabalistic training the nature of Blake's visions, Ellis and Yeats "explained" them in terms of Animal Magnetism and Cabalism that were much more historically accurate than any critics have given them credit for. Yeats wrote that Blake taught that

> . . . Nature,--or Creation,--is a result of the shrinkage of consciousness,--originally clairvoyant,--under the rule of the five senses, and of argument and law. Such consciousness is the result of the divided portions of Universal Mind obtaining perception of one another . . . In Imagination only we find a Human Faculty that touches nature at one side, and spirit on the other. (Ellis and Yeats, I, 12)

Yeats lucidly explained Blake's difficult conception of "Opacity" as resulting from "perverted attention," the inability to see the spiritual significance of nature. Its opposite, "Transparence," resulted from "diverted attention," in which the perception of visionary wholeness meant this world indeed "burnt up when we ceased to behold it." He went on to explain that Satan is pain, sin, delusion:

> He is the "limit of opacity," but prophecy and poetry, and the philosophy that claims what we call clairvoyance as a matter of course, are mental rights of humanity and the healthful life. Here is to be found the "enlargement of the senses" through which the enlargement of the mind is to come, when we shall all awake from "single vision and Newton's sleep." . . . Meanwhile we live in "a world of unbelief and fear," and it requires "all our might" to "believe vision." (Ellis and Yeats, I, 158)

Yeats pointed out the "trance-like absorption" of Blake's whole nature, "that accompanied his finest writing, a mood from which he returned to the ordinary conversation of life as a man from another land" (I, 89). He noted that Blake once said one's entrance to the world of vision could be assisted "by the advice of a friend" and that Blake taught his wife how to achieve trance-visions also, probable references to the magnetic rapport between two people practiced by the late eighteenth-century Mesmerists. He realized that Blake's statements that digestion is carried on by spirits were a "figurative way" of reminding us that "the problems of hypnotism and medicine are the same," and then recommended a Mesmeric experiment to prove it (I, 157). Yeats also described the state of "somnambulistic lucidity" which he and Ellis had experienced and believed Blake had experienced:

> The creative visionary or man of genius has all the thoughts, symbols, and experiences that enter within his larger circle. If he has developed his perception of mental sound it will give him music; if his perception of thought, philosophic generalizations; and if his sense of mental sight, visions, strong or giant, according to his power of concentration upon them. The mood of the seer, no longer bound in by the particular experiences

> of his body, spreads out and enters into the particular experiences of an ever-widening circle of other lives and beings, for it will more and more grow one with that portion of the mood essence which is common to all that lives. The circle of individuality will widen out until other individualities are contained within it, and their thoughts, and the persistent thought-symbols which are their spiritual or mental bodies, will grow visible to it. He who has thus passed into the impersonal portion of his own mind perceives that it is not a mind but all minds. (I, 24)

After describing several of the Swedenborgian, Cabalistic, and Rosicrucian groups and individuals to whom Blake had access in his own day, Yeats alluded to Mathers' claim of an oral tradition of the "unwritten Cabala" which Blake gained access to, at the least through vision if not through direct Rosicrucian training:

> Without being a magician, Blake was naturally liable to some of the experiences of trance, and may, if we accept the mystical position, have obtained thereby a knowledge of certain intricate details of symbolism which one of the most distinguished Kabalists of our time believes to be absent from all published books of his day, and to exclusively belong to the "unwritten Kabala." Vision, or waking dream, with its almost illimitable extent of mental territory, on which the unspoken thought of persons expert in the use of trance enables them to meet each other on purely mental territory . . . may, according to this theory, have supplied all that Blake knew. He himself claimed such a faculty. Other and more ordinary sources of mystical information were open to him. (I, 24)

In dealing with the difficult problems of the names of Blake's mythic personages, Yeats guessed that they were talismanic names, used for incantation, which is one of the few lucid explanations for the long chant-like repetitions of the Rosicrucian gnomes and genii in <u>Jerusalem</u>. He explained that upon the symbolic value of sound is based the doctrine of incantation, as may be seen by the analysis of any of the famous medieval Cabalistic conjurations:

> The names of Blake's personages are incantations of this nature, as are also the various Hebrew names of God, and of the angels according both to Boehme,

> Swedenborg, and the Kabalists. The writers of this book have summoned the great symbolic beings--Ololon, Urthona, Orc, and others--into the imaginations of entranced subjects by merely pronouncing and making them pronounce the words. (I, 327)

Yeats was also the first critic to point out the definite occult sources of such names as Tiriel and Zazel, which were either from Agrippa's or Francis Barrett's works (I, 329).

Yeats and Ellis also took seriously Blake's repeated claims about the "automatic" nature of his poetry, a claim that has been almost unanimously ignored by critics after them. He pointed out that he and Ellis, working with the manuscripts, had many scraps of Blake's writings which overlapped in their "exposition of the great story," but which had no formal or structural unity:

> The fragments of which the whole is formed are often ill-joined and sometimes not joined at all, but such as they are, they bear every sign of having come straight to the mind in large segments at a time. Most of _Vala_ appears to have been written at speed, in divisions frequently containing over a hundred lines . . . the upshot of the whole thing, viewed as an experience, was that it was "dictated," and however this may be accounted for, the very appearance of Blake's manuscripts supports the assertion as fully as the matter of the work. (I, 95)

Honestly admitting the incoherence of many of these "dictated" passages, Yeats worried about the "visionary" reasons for them, as well as about their artistic validity. The cryptic, convoluted myth of Reuben in _Jerusalem_, which we have examined in connection with Richard Brothers, especially bothered Yeats (no other critic has seriously tackled it).

> There is perhaps none among the minor myths in Blake's complicated system of symbolic narratives so scattered and so difficult to put together as the "Story of Reuben" . . . But a reader who considers how Blake's visions came to him, in irregular flashes, so that he himself was surprised, as we are to this day, at the

> continuity of myth revealed by them, will perhaps be glad that there are enough fragments to make the collection intelligible, and will not wonder that in the huge mass of visionary experiences Blake should have been content sometimes to leave the task of sorting his coloured seeds to some Psyche who should come after him. (I, 381)

Yeats reminded readers that Blake himself complained of the annoying incoherence of some of his own visions, when during a "spiritual conversation," he had to bid the spirit of Schofield to "state explicitly whether he is Bath or Canterbury" (I, 341). Yeats maintained to the end of his life an objective yet ambivalent attitude to Blake's work. He was the first critic to assert that the "apparent incoherence" of the Prophecies "veils a unity of significance that becomes more astonishing and fascinating the more closely it is studied." But, unlike the unity-hunting New Critics who followed him, Yeats always admitted that the "vast symbolic myth" was expressed "by fits and starts" (I, 95).

Yeats' interpretations of Blake in the critical edition of 1889-93 have been given at length because they are rarely seriously considered in works dealing with either author. From the historical documentation presented in this study, it becomes obvious that Yeats was analyzing objectively and with an accurate sense of historical perspective in his work on Blake. From his reaction to the barrage of ridicule and hostile criticism the Blake edition drew from academic critics for many years, it becomes obvious that Blake's trance-induced poetry influenced Yeats in two opposite ways.

First, in his positive reaction, he genuinely believed that poetry was "a cult with ancient technicalities and mysteries." He admired the Irish folk poetry in which "they can hardly separate mere learning from witchcraft, and are fond of words and verses that keep half their secret to themselves" (Yeats, "What is Popular Poetry?" Essays, p. 10). He applied Blake as his critical touchstone, both as a man of

"joyous intellectual energy" and as the possessor of a precise, concrete, technical language to express the "substantiation of the soul," and thus found Shelley too amorphous by comparison. Though Yeats rightly asserted that Shelley was fascinated by magical traditions and philosophy in his early romances, he concluded that his "ignorance of their more traditional forms gives some of his poetry an air of rootless fantasy" (Yeats, "Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," Essays, pp. 78, 74). He compared Blake's love of sexuality, life, and human reality, and his hatred of abstraction, to Shelley's reversed attitude:

> In ancient times, it seems to me that Blake, who for all his protest was glad to be alive, and ever spoke of his gladness, would have worshipped in some chapel of the Sun, but that Shelley, who hated life because he sought "more in life than any understood," would have wandered, lost in ceaseless reverie, in some chapel of the Star of infinite desire. (Yeats, "Shelley," p. 94)

He concluded that Shelley, unlike the essentially eighteenth-century Blake, was indeed born out of due time, "in a day when the old wisdom had vanished and was content merely to write verses, and often with little thought of more than verses" ("Shelley," p. 95). Given Yeats' own tendencies to watery, escapist verse in the 1880's, Blake's vivid, precise language of "minute particulars" which articulated "giant forms" served as an astringent to Yeats.

But at the same time, in a negative reaction, Yeats sensed that Blake was "a too literal realist of the imagination" and that "the limitation of his view was from the very intensity of his vision" (Yeats, "Blake's Illustrations to Dante," Essays, p. 119). He knew that when the moment of "spirit-dictated" writing was over, Blake did not care if his manuscripts were destroyed. The ambivalence Yeats always felt from his introspective yearnings for arcanum and illumination and his opposite desire for an energetic, heroic life of action was reflected in and reinforced by his

ambivalence to Blake's "joyous little songs" made out of "almost unintelligible visions" (Yeats, "Edmund Spenser," Essays, p. 378), and his later fear that Blake was "isolated by an arbitrary symbolism" (Yeats, "Prometheus Unbound," Essays, p. 424).

When Yeats finished his critical work on Blake, which had been so radiated by his own visionary experiences and Cabalistic revelations, he proudly took it to a meeting of the Irish National Literary Society--"I was very proud; here at last was a substantial book; perhaps even, a little erudition" (Memoirs, p. 69). He was dismayed that a member felt obliged to apologize for the many nude figures in The Four Zoas by assuring everyone that they were reproduced "for exclusively artistic reasons," for the Cabalistic doctrine of visionary sexuality was the core of his own and Blake's philosophy. But, ironically, the call from Blake, which so few understood, to fight abstraction and to see visions, coupled with Yeats' practice of the same Cabalistic and Mesmeric techniques of trance-induction that helped to shape and isolate Blake, led Yeats to a determination to live an active public life. Working on Blake and with Mathers, he "made a curious discovery":

> After I had been moved by [Cabalistic] ritual, I formed plans for deeds of all kinds I wished to return to Ireland to find there some public work; whereas when I had returned from meetings of Madame [Blavatsky's] Esoteric Section I had no desire but for more thought, more discussion. (Memoirs, p. 27)

Yeats followed in the footsteps of other "illuminated" activists of the secret societies, for Lafayette's "magnetic ecstasies" led him to work for the revolutionary Mesmeric regeneration of society and Richard Brothers' "somnambulistic visions" led him to draw up plans for new thoroughfares in London as well as for the New Jerusalem.

Thus, it was with both positive and negative lessons

learned from his fellow occultist Blake that Yeats turned to public theatrical work, in which his "mystery plays" must be communicable enough to a popular audience to stimulate the "spiritual regeneration of Ireland." Though he never gave up his occult studies and continued to admire the "old man's frenzy" of Blake, "who beat upon the wall/ Till Truth obeyed his call," he concluded in A Vision (1925) that Blake "remains himself almost unintelligible."[19] Meanwhile, Yeats trained himself in the public language and externalization of symbolism necessary for theatrical and political work, and became determined to write for the hardy, sun-freckled fisherman of Ben Bulben "one poem maybe as cold and passionate as the dawn."

It is perhaps ironic, then, that after years of public work, Yeats at age fifty was startled by new "occult" experiences that almost duplicated those of Blake and his wife. For in 1917, four days after his marriage to George Hyde-Lees, his wife attempted automatic writing:

> . . . my poetry has gained in self-possession and power. I owe this change to an incredible experience.
> On the afternoon of 24 October 1917, four days after my marriage, my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing. What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life piecing together those scattered sentences. "No," was the answer, "we have come to give you metaphors for poetry."
> (Yeats, A Vision, p. 8)

The spiritual-dictations and trance-speaking continued from 1917 to 1925, and from them Yeats articulated in A Vision what he

19 W.B. Yeats, A Vision (1925; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 24.

felt was a systematic and important exposition of his spiritualistic philosophy. Though several explanations of the phenomena have been hazarded by critics, including the probability that Mrs. Yeats faked the first automatic session to take his mind off Maud Gonne, to Yeats it was an event of epoch-making importance. George Harper, who is presently editing Yeats' unpublished diary of these experiences and the automatic scripts, told a 1973 South Atlantic Modern Language Association meeting that the papers reveal one of the most startling and provocative examples of literary collaboration in history.

George Hyde-Lees, whom Yeats married in a state of confusion and hesitation, brought to their union experience in occult societies and considerable sophistication in Western philosophy. In 1914 she had joined a Rudolph Steiner theosophical society, which was an English branch of Rosicrucian Freemasonry in Germany (King, p. 101). In the same year, Yeats himself was her mentor when she was initiated into the Golden Dawn (Ellmann, Yeats, p. 222). She had earlier read Madame Blavatsky's works and was thus well-grounded in contemporary esoteric lore. Mrs. Yeats told Bachan that automatic writing meant "writing after suspending the will" and that one aimed at evoking the subconscious, through which she and Yeats believed revelation was possible (Bachan, p. 239). After Yeats' death, she would never show the scripts to anyone and refused to discuss A Vision with the many scholars who visited her.

To Yeats, their spiritualistic collaboration was a joyful intellectual inspiration--as was Blake's with his wife --and he affirmed that "the marriage bed is the symbol of the solved antinomy" (Vision, p. 52). The fundamental symbols of the gyres, phases of the moon, and the anti-self were given to Yeats by his spirit "instructors," and

he experienced the same annoyance at the shiftiness and contradictions of the spirits as Blake had complained of. For the first time since he had formulated the complicated charts which diagrammed Blake's symbolical correspondences in 1893, and moved by the same intellectual need to rationally systematize his intense symbolic visions, Yeats embarked on an open, "logical," and organized attempt at a coherent metaphysical explanation of his occultist, magical view of the universe. As he noted in the introduction,

> Some will ask whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon . . . To such a question I can but answer that if sometimes overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice. (Vision, p. 25)

Though after he finished A Vision and went on to write the great, tautly designed poetry of his next twenty years, Yeats always hoped in the future to re-write the book and to "wake these dry astrological bones into breathing life" (Vision, p. 207). But what the dry bones gave him was a solidity of form and coherence of philosophical view that he knew Blake, once his "Master" and still his touchstone, had lacked:

> Some, perhaps all, of those readers I most value, those who have read me many years, will be repelled by what must seem an arbitrary, harsh, difficult symbolism. Yet such has almost always accompanied expression that unites the sleeping and waking mind. One remembers the six wings of Daniel's angels, the Pythagorean numbers, a venerated book of the Cabala where the beard of God winds in and out among the stars, its hairs all numbered, those complicated mathematical tables that Kelly saw in Dr. Dee's black scrying stone, the diagrams in Law's Boehme, where one lifts a flap of paper to discover both the human entrails and the starry heavens.

> William Blake thought those diagrams worthy of Michelangelo, but remains himself almost unintelligible because he never drew the like . . . (those hard symbolic bones under the skin). (Vision, pp. 23-24)

And though he had rather off-handedly claimed that his reason soon recovered after he was overwhelmed by the miracle of the spiritual communications, Yeats privately believed to the end of his life what he affirmed in 1898:

> Every visionary knows that the mind's eye soon comes to see a capricious and variable world, which the will cannot shape or change, though it can call it up and banish it again. I closed my eyes a moment ago, a company of people in blue robes swept by me in a blinding light . . . and I recognized one of the company by his square, black curling beard . . .
>
> Are he and his blue-robed companions, and their like, "the eternal realities" of which we are the reflection "in the vegetable glass of Nature," or a momentary dream? To answer is to take sides in the only controversy in which it is greatly worth taking sides, and in the only controversy which may never be decided. (Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," p. 152)

Though the taking of definite sides in the controversy over the reality of the world of spirits did not seem as urgent to many of Yeats' contemporaries, the very force of his own passionate involvement in such a quest meant that other serious artists could not ignore Yeatsian theosophy. With Dadaists in Zurich joining Rudolph Steiner's Rosicrucian groups and the heirs of the symbolistes in Paris blowing up laboratories in attempts at the Philosopher's Stone, occultism was still very much in the air during and after World War I. But for English writers, the constantly increasing imaginative power and artistic coherence of Yeats' work, which could not be divorced from his occult studies, his "eminent domain" in the English world of letters, forced such different creative minds as Pound's Joyce's, and Eliot's to be at least temporarily immersed in Yeats' "vision."

Pound, whose oppositeness of mind and personality proved astringent and valuable to Yeats, had the most fun with Yeats'

"secret fanaticism," though he at first dreaded the boredom of the occult (Ellmann, Domain, p. 69). Mrs. Yeats told of taking Pound to a séance at Cambridge House, the headquarters of the Society for Psychical Research. Most séances began with the singing of a Gospel hymn, but Pound surprised everyone when he was the only one present who knew all the verses and sang out loud and clear (Bradford, p. 399). After sharing a Sussex cottage with Yeats in the winter of 1913-14, Pound nostalgically described their pleasant life, discussing Noh Plays and Yeatsian theories of Mesmerism.

> well those days are gone forever
>   and the travelling rug with the coon-skin tabs
> and his hearing nearly all Wordsworth
>   for the sake of conscience but
> preferring Ennemosor on Witches. (Pound, Canto LXXXIII)

Significantly for this study of the continuity of the Cabalistic and Magnetic visionary traditions, Ennemoser's book describes and interprets the history of Western magic entirely in terms of Animal Magnetism. Pound grudgingly granted intellectual respectability to "the 'new' doctrine of the suggestibility or hypnotizeability of ghosts," but only because it explained much in the Japanese Noh plays.[20]

By June 1914, Pound was tolerant enough of occultism to write a jocular reply to an article on "The Dangers of Occultism" in the Egoist. The magazine had run a serialized translation of the late seventeenth-century Rosicrucian novel, The Comte de Gabalis, at the same time as Joyce's Portrait of the Artist. The Rosicrucian installments elicited criticism from H.C. Binns on 15 May 1914 about the dangers and self-deception in Cabalistic efforts at communicating

[20] Richard Ellmann, Eminent Domain (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965, p. 90).

with elemental spirits. Pound replied, ridiculing Binn's belief "in a general djinn like Jehovah having droits du Seigneur over all his female connections . . . Mr. Binns objects to M. de Gabalis, permit me to object to Mr. Binns."[21] Yeats was always exhilarated by Pound's ribald jokes and erudite historical skepticism about much in the occult traditions, and he dug in his heels with more precision and facts in order to counterattack his abrasive collaborator. Thus, though Yeats dedicated the first edition of A Vision to "Vestigia," Mrs. Magregor Mathers, he introduced the 1928 version with "A Packet for Ezra, whose art is the opposite of mine" (Yeats, Vision, p. 3)

Another contemporary of Yeats'--James Joyce--also dabbled in occultism. But Joyce, whose habits of mind and conception of the world were suffused with his "Jesuitical" education, was an adamant unbeliever in any spirit world, whether of Catholic saints or Rosicrucian genii. However, his insatiable curiosity and encyclopedic bent for historical and philosophical "trivia" led him into many "peekings" at occultists and their lore. Avid to find out what was going on at George Russell's theosophical séances, the youthful Joyce and Gogarty made "an investigatory raid upon the rooms of the Hermetic Society." Here they played a joke upon a theosophist who "combined wandering in the astral envelope with travelling for ladies' underwear." Attaching a note to a pair of ladies' drawers which said, "I never did it!" and signing it John Eglinton (an ostentatiously celibate chela),[22] they ran away before Russell and the Blavatskyites arrived.

21 Ezra Pound, "The Dangers of Occultism," Egoist I, 11 (1 June 1914), p. 220.

22 Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (Oxford Univ.Press, 1959), pp. 179-80.

But Joyce did read Madame Blavatsky's <u>Isis Unveiled</u> and Sinnett's <u>Esoteric Buddhism</u>. In <u>Ulysses</u>, J.J. O'Molley asked Stephen Dedalus:

> What do you really think of that hermetic crowd, the opal hush poets: A.E. the master mystic? That Blavatsky woman started it. She was a nice old bag of tricks. A.E. has been telling some yankee interviewer that you came to him in the small hours of the morning to ask him about planes of consciousness. Magennis thinks you must have been pulling A.E.'s leg.[23]

That he followed even the stranger aberrations of the Theosophical Society is shown in his references in <u>Ulysses</u> to Mrs. Cooper-Oakley, who actually went to Transylvania to search for the eternally "rejuvenescent" Saint-Germain, and to Colonel Judge, one of H.P.B.'s more credulous American Babbitts of theosophy:

> Dunlop, Judge, . . . A.E., Arval, the Name Ineffable, in heaven hight, K.H., their master, whose identity is no secret to adepts . . . The life esoteric is not for ordinary person. O.P. must work off bad karma first. Mrs.Cooper Oakley once glimpsed our very illustrious sister H.P.B.'s elemental. (<u>Ulysses</u>, p. 183)

As always with Joyce, "jocoserious" but a self-proclaimed "priest of the imagination," his parodies were based on precise knowledge:

> Yogibogeybox is Dawson chambers. <u>Isis Unveiled</u>. Their Pali-book we tried to pawn. Crosslegged under an umbrel umbershoot he thrones an Aztec logos, functioning on astral levels, their oversoul, mahamahatma. The faithful hermetists await the light, ripe for chelaship, ringroundabout him. Louis H. Victory. T. Caulfield Irwin. Lotus Ladies tend them in the eyes, their pineal glands aglow. Filled with his god he thrones, Buddha under plantain. Gulfer of souls, engulfer. Hesouls, shesouls, shoals of souls. Engulfed with wailing creecries, whirled, whirling, they bewail.
>
> <u>In quintessential triviality</u>
> <u>For years in this fleshcase a shesoul dwelt.</u>
> (<u>Ulysses</u>, p. 189)

[23] James Joyce, <u>Ulysses</u> (1914; New York: Random House, 1946), p. 138.

Joyce also knew a great deal about Freemasonry, much more than his usual source of eclectic facts--the eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Brittanica--could have offered. Whether he gathered his Masonic lore from various Masonic encyclopedias, from initiated acquaintances, or from personal "peeks" is as yet unknown, but when he made Leopold Bloom a "Past Master" of Freemasonry in Ulysses, he knew what he was talking about. As Nosey Flynn praises Bloom, for his "good points," to Davy Byrne, he first "made swift passes in the air with juggling fingers," and then winked; Byrne immediately surmises that Bloom is "in the Craft." Flynn agrees and explains:

> Ancient free and accepted order. Light, life and love, by God. They give him a leg up. I was told that by a, well, I won't say who . . . O, it's a fine order. . . they stick to you when you're down. I know a fellow was trying to get into it, but they're as close as damn it. (Ulysses, p. 177)

Joyce's allusions to Freemasonry, which was still forbidden by the Catholic Church and, since the failed Irish Rebellion of 1794, tied more to English institutions, were always in a positive context.[24] His Everyman, Bloom, who hates the violence and narrow-minded patriotism of Irish nationalism, found as a Jew a haven in Irish Freemasonry. The non-sectarian, internationalist mentality of Masonry apparently represented to Joyce that same flight to a freer, cosmopolitan milieu that the "Cyclopian" blindness of Irish chauvinism drove him to make. Thus, when Bloom is arrested in Nighttown-- "When in doubt persecute Bloom"--he desperately tries to defend himself by making "the sign and due-guard of

[24] See Leonard Albert, "Ulysses, Cannibals, and Freemasons," A.D., II, 265-83, for an analysis of the many Masonic elements in the "Lestrygonians" chapter of Ulysses.

fellowcraft" to the threatening soldiers (Ulysses, pp. 445-448). Later, when he tries to gain control over his nightmarish accusers, he tries to combine the compelling power of the Masonic magician and head of state:

> (In Svengali's fur overcoat, with folded arms and Napoleonic forelock, frowns in ventriloquial exorcism with piercing eagle glance towards the door. Then, rigid, with left feet advanced, he makes a swift pass with impelling fingers and gives the sign of past master, drawing his right arm downwards from his left shoulder.) Go, go, go, I conjure you, whoever you are. (Ulysses, p. 514)

At the climax to the "Circe" chapter, Bloom recites a parodic form of the Masonic oath of secrecy, as the glorious vision of his dead son rises before his awed eyes:

> (He murmurs) . . . swear that I will always hail, ever conceal, never reveal, any part or parts, art or arts . . . (Silent, thoughtful, alert, he stands on guard, his fingers at his lips in the attitude of secret master. Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven) . . . (Wonderstruck, calls inaudibly.) Rudy! (Ulysses, p. 593)

That Joyce knew much eighteenth-century Irish Masonic lore is revealed in his reference to the only female Freemason in Ireland, one Elizabeth Saint Leger, daughter of the first Viscount Doneraile (Ulysses, p. 175), who in about 1710, at age seventeen, witnessed the Masonic ceremonies at her father's house. Rather than killing her, though, the Masons swore her in and she rose to Master Mason.[25] Interestingly, this little known anecdote may explain Swift's 1724 parody

[25] Weldon Thornton, Allusions in Ulysses (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 147.

in the letter from "the Grand Mistress of the Irish Freemasons," already discussed in Chapter V. Joyce also knew the Masonic tradition, mentioned by Swift and developed by General Vallancey, of the similarity of the Old Irish and Cabalistic Hebrew alphabets. Thus, in the catechismic questioning of "Ithaca," Bloom is first placed within the Hebraic philosophical tradition, and then is merged with Stephen Dedalus' Irish tradition, according to the Cabalistic-Irish theories:

> What fragments of verse from the ancient Hebrew and ancient Irish languages were cited with modulations of voice and translation of texts by guest to host and by host to guest. . .
>
> How was a glyphic comparison of the phonic symbols of both languages made in substantiation of the oral comparison . . . Stephen wrote the Irish characters for gee, eh, dee, em, simple and modified, and Bloom in turn wrote the Hebrew characters ghimel, aleph, daleth and (in the absence of men) a substitute geph, explaining their arithmetical values as ordinal and cardinal numbers, videlicet 3, 1, 4, and 100. (Ulysses, p. 672)

Joyce goes on to describe the parallels in Jewish and Irish history and in their radical political aims, "the restoration in Chanan David of Zion and the possibility of Irish political autonomy or devolution."

Joyce's familiarity with these eighteenth-century Masonic political, antiquarian, and linguistic theories is significant, for there could be no more Cabalistic Irish book than Finnegans Wake. The transposition of letters, intricate puns, numerical-linguistic computations, and "Masoretic" arrangement of paragraphs and marginalia, etc., reach such imaginative complexity and force that the book often seems to duplicate in a wildly comic way Abulafia's devout "combining of the letters" and intellectual "skipping" from correspondence to correspondence, until one is released into the grand vision of Adam Kadmon, here in the proletarian form of Finnegan the Irish giant. That Joyce was well-read in Cabalistic works is

demonstrated throughout Finnegans Wake by his manic puns ("though Esot fibble it to the zephiroth and Artsa zoom it round her heavens forever"), his use of Cabalistic number symbolism based on the ten sephiroth and thirty-two paths of wisdom, and by the nearly pornographic Cabalistic geometry lesson in Book II, chapter 2.[26] The dirty-minded little Shem, Joyce's prototype, learns the Cabalistic notion that "maker mates with made (O my!)" and then seeks and finds the Shekinah under his mother's skirt. As the creative "Vortex," her privates, carefully and geometrically diagrammed, are the "Spring of Sprung Verse" (Finnegans Wake, p. 293).

In fact, the whole structure of Ulysses and Finnegans Wake is essentially "occult," for both novels are built on the system of macrocosmic-microcosmic correspondences, which the non-religious Joyce believed in almost to the point of superstition. He was soaked in the works of Bruno, Swedenborg, Blake, and Yeats, and constantly alluded to French symbolistes and nineteenth-century theosophical works. Thus, as universal history and all creation perpetually take place within the giant form of Finnegan, who is also an Irish pub-keeper, Joyce brings the Cabalists' Adam Kadmon, Swedenborg's Grand Man, and Blake's Albion into the democratic twentieth century. Though he approached the occultism of the secret societies with a comedian's instinct, he found in its cosmological, linguistic, and sexual theories the complex scaffolding for one of the most serious and sustained efforts of imaginative creation in literary history.

The final figure to be discussed, who also fell under Yeats' "eminent domain," is T.S. Eliot, for in his familiarity with the occultist world of Yeats, his similar deep religious

[26] James Joyce, Finnegans Wake (1939; rpt. New York: Viking Compass Books, 1961).

needs, and his steady discrimination between the mystical and the magical mentality, Eliot provided a constant, sophisticated counter-definition to all that Yeats stood for. Eliot's debt in The Wasteland to Jessie Weston's book, From Ritual to Romance, was a debt to a theosophist who quoted Yeats, A.E. Waite, and G.R.S. Mead as her "authorities," and who confidently asserted:

> The Otherworld is not a myth but a reality, and in all ages there have been souls who have been willing to brave the great adventure, and to risk all for the chance of bringing back with them some assurance of the future life. (quoted in Senior, p. 177)

As noted earlier, Eliot's version of Madame Blavatsky in The Wasteland used Waite's Golden Dawn Tarot cards, and in "A Cooking Egg," Eliot wrote:

> I shall not want Pipit in Heaven:
> Madame Blavatsky will instruct me
> In the Seven Sacred Trances.
> Piccardia de Donati will conduct me.

Senior also points out that "some of the behavior of Sir Henry Harcourt Riley" in The Cocktail Party "is suspicously like Cagliostro's" (p. xv).

That Eliot was aware of the Masonic controversies troubling France and Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century--in which Yeats' Rosicrucian mentor Wynn Westcott was accused of being part of a French Masonic conspiracy (King, p. 48)--is demonstrated by his adherence to the anti-Masonic side of the controversy. Whereas Waite felt compelled to defend the Golden Dawn from charges that it was part of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy by complaining that, alas, there were not enough Jews interested in the Cabala to suit him, Eliot sympathized with L'Action Française and the anti-Masonic press in France which envisioned a combination of Jewish financiers and secret societies who hoped to change the European political order (an idea that would have delighted

Lord George Gordon). Though for many years, Eliot's genuinely reactionary, in the root sense of the word, political views were treated with contemptuous scorn by liberal critics, he was reacting to actual contemporary affairs with the same honesty, intelligence, and worry about the megalomaniacal tendencies of apocalyptic revolutionaries that Edmund Burke articulated in the late eighteenth century.

Interestingly, whether dealing with questions of politics, religion, or poetry, Eliot--like Yeats--used William Blake as a critical touchstone. He brought to his Blake studies, which were thorough and life-long, wide erudition in both cultural traditions, the "heretical" and the "orthodox," in which he classified the authors who most concerned him. Though Eliot concluded in 1920 that what Blake's genius required and what it sadly lacked "was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas, which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated on the problems of a poet,"[27] he knew that Blake operated within a "tradition" of occult ideas but it was not one that Eliot could accept. In "A Cooking Egg," he had already posited as two different types of spiritual instructors Madame Blavatsky and Piccardia di Donati, the spiritual guide in Dante's Paradise, III. Eliot pointed to Blake's gift of "hallucinated vision" and "remarkable and original sense of language," but thought:

> . . . the weakness of the long poems certainly is not that they are too visionary, too remote from the world. It is that Blake did not see enough, became too much occupied with ideas. (Eliot, "Blake," p. 278)

[27] T.S. Eliot, "William Blake," Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1964), p. 279.

This, in essence, was Yeats' criticism of Blake also, that he was "isolated by an arbitrary symbolism" and was "a too literal realist of the imagination."

But it is Eliot's distinctions between the mystic and the visionary which are most valuable in his criticism of Blake, for it is an important distinction and one which is too often glossed over in literary and philosophical criticism.[28] In a 1927 review of six books on Blake, Eliot discussed the relation of mysticism to poetry:

> Our chief interest in the subject, in this context, is that we want to make up our minds about the value, as poetry, of the "prophetic books." I am not sure that there is any such thing as "mystical poetry." Mysticism, after all, and whatever we think of it, is a whole-time job; and so is poetry . . . Miss White proceeds, very rightly, to discuss Blake as a _visionary_, in contrast to _mystic_, and all that she says is excellent. Blake was not even a first-rate visionary; his visions have a certain illiteracy about them, like those of Swedenborg . . . Was he, then, a great philosopher? No, he did not know enough. He made a Universe; and very few people can do that. But the fact that the gift is rare does not make it necessarily valuable. It is not any one man's business to make a Universe; and what any one man can make in this way is not, in the end, so good or so useful as the ordinary Universe which we all make together . . . Blake is philosophically an autodidact amateur; theologically, a heretic.[29]

Nevertheless, Eliot insisted on the importance of studying all of Blake's poetry, including the too little read prophecies, and always granted the visionary his "genius and inspiration."

[28] Gershom Scholem's similar distinction between the monistic Cabalistic visionary and the dualistic neo-Platonic mystic has already been noted.

[29] T.S. Eliot, "The Mysticism of Blake," _The Nation and Athenaeum_, 41, (17 September 1927), p. 779.

That Eliot's own religious experiences were much more mystical than visionary is born out in The Four Quartets, in which the difficulty of expressing in language the mystical moment is a major concern of the poem:

> . . . words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still. (Burnt Norton, p. 190)

The masses of concrete details, "minute particulars," and precision of language in Blake's descriptions of his visions--which were repeated by all the "somnambulists" of the Cabalistic and Mesmeric traditions--and the vividness and solidity of Yeats' symbolic images point to the different quality of consciousness involved in visions induced by essentially "magical" processes. Eliot also reflected the ascetic, dualistic nature of mysticism, which yearns for release from the body and ordinary human experience, when he described the sudden "mystical" flash, and then the forlorn sense of loss and anti-climax which follows: "Riciculous the waste sad time,/Stretching before and after" (Burnt Norton, p. 191). In contrast, the sense of "joyous intellectual energy" and revitalized vision of reality--in which "everything that lives is holy"--that results from the exaltation of consciousness and heightened sense of individual power attained in magically-induced visions was testified to by occultists from Bruno, Boehme, Goethe, Blake, Bulwer-Lytton and Yeats onward. Thus, Eliot's quarrel with Blake and the occultist visionaries, that they were "deficient in humility, or exceeding in pride," was a valid one, and echoed the quarrel of another student of the occult imagination, Francis Bacon, who perceptively warned of the megalomania of the magical consciousness.

But as Eliot granted Blake his constant genius and inspiration and Yeats his position as the age's greatest poet, and as he expressed the pain of spiritual loss and

emptiness in his own fine religious poetry, he must have envied the high spirits and joyful energy of the heretical "Rosicrucian" in Yeats, who in his old age could write of the only controversy worth taking sides in: "Although I saw it all in the mind's eye/ There can be nothing solider till I die" (Vision, p. 208).

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Conclusion

Since the secret societies--whether Giordanisti, Boehmenist, Rosicrucian, Invisible College, Illuminatist, or, summing them all up, Masonic--kept alive the occult traditions which continued to "exalt" the imaginative visions of many of the finest writers in the European literary tradition and continued to re-unify that "dissociation of sensibility" that Eliot bemoaned, it makes for a great loss to English literary scholarship not to investigate the nature and historical context of the esoteric orders. As R.F. Gould, the able Masonic historian, remarked in 1891:

> It has long seemed to me that--by no means exclusively from the point of a Freemason--there is something seriously amiss in the science of biography. The oldest song of the Craft includes among the standing puzzles that beset the external critic of our Institution,
>
> "Why so many great Men of the Nation,
> Should Aprons put on
> To make themselves one
> With a Free and Accepted Mason."
>
> The lines last quoted were printed in 1723 . . . but the sentiment they embody is the same now as then. No one outside the pale of the Craft--and not everybody within it--has yet been able to grasp the fact that Freemasonry is capable of exercising a profound influence upon the minds not only of men of action, but upon those of scholars, thinkers, and men of the highest intellectual attainments . . .
>
> What has often struck me . . . is the profound indifference displayed by historical writers, who are not members of the Craft, with regard to the evidence which so constantly crops up, not only of persons distinguished in every walk of life being Freemasons, but of their actions being in large numbers of instances shaped and influenced by the teachings of Masonry. (Gould, "Medical Profession," pp. 145-46)

Gould's puzzlement would still hold true today, though the Masonic role in studying and advocating Animal Magnetism

and its origins in Cabalistic and alchemical visionary techniques was vitally important to eighteenth and nineteenth-century intellectual and political history. For Animal Magnetism and all its related "sciences," from phrenology to electro-biology, played a cultural role similar and equal to that of Freudian and Jungian psychology in the twentieth century. Since the study of such visionary techniques was largely carried on in the secret societies, they were indeed the "singing masters of the soul" to many of the West's most compelling imaginative artists, and certainly deserve their rightful and as yet unacknowledged position in English literary history.

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