

**HIEROGLYPHICS OF NATURE:  
SWEDENBORG, ECOLOGY AND ROMANTIC AESTHETICS**

by

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## Abstract

### HIEROGLYPHICS OF NATURE: SWEDENBORG, ECOLOGY, AND ROMANTIC AESTHETICS

Adviser: Professor Joan Richardson

This project examines the role that the Scandinavian scientist-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) played in shaping Romantic nature aesthetics. Although studies have noted Swedenborg's importance for individual Romantic figures, there has yet to be a sustained attention to the ways Swedenborg contributed to early 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptualizations of nature. "Hieroglyphics of Nature" builds on the recent historical frameworks and interpretative methodologies established by ecocriticism that situate the emergence of a modern sense of the environment within Romantic aesthetics. I argue that Swedenborg's particular concepts of "correspondence" and "influx" reinforced a Romantic tendency to translate nature and wilderness into a hermeneutical network of signs, a network that adumbrates later ecosystemic models of holism. The title is paraphrased from Emerson's observation that Swedenborg saw nature as a "grammar of hieroglyphics."

The first chapter surveys scholarship that has addressed the problem of Swedenborg's influence on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, noting the lack of attention to specifically environmental concerns within this body of work, on the one hand, and the critical neglect towards Swedenborg within ecocriticism on the other. Chapters two and three expand on an ecocritically-based reading of Swedenborg's life and work, and argue for repositioning aspects of Swedenborg's corpus within

a certain trajectory of English-language poetics. Emerson famously calls for the literary critic in *Representative Men* who would be able to “draw the line of relation that subsists between Shakspeare and Swedenborg”—a seemingly strange statement that starts making sense when Swedenborg’s readings in English poetry, especially Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, are seen as formative agents for Swedenborg’s own projects. Chapters four and five then turn to William Blake and Ralph Waldo Emerson, unpacking the precise ways Swedenborg’s influence on their respective poetics can be read as carrying environmental import.

“Hieroglyphics of Nature” thus demonstrates how the evolution of 19<sup>th</sup> century nature aesthetics (and its related properties of conservation and preservation) are inextricable from the wider problem of religion’s place within transatlantic Romantic cultures. The study shows how the Romantic imagination negotiated differing spheres of religion and natural philosophy, and the specific conceptualizations of form that moved between aesthetics, poetics, and science throughout the period.

## Acknowledgements

This project would have been impossible without the guidance and wisdom of key individuals, and the generous support and sponsorship of several funding bodies. Foremost I am grateful for the sustained input and steady encouragement of my dissertation adviser, Joan Richardson. Without her original thinking about thinking and deep insights into Swedenborg's place within a natural history of the intellect, the chapters that follow would have been unimaginable. I am indebted to her initial encouragement to jump down the rabbit hole, that there was indeed still much to be explored around Swedenborg's place within Romanticism, and I am all the more thankful for our conversations that have subsequently developed into a rich transatlantic correspondence over the last three years.

Joseph Wittreich and Joshua Wilner provided invaluable feedback as committee readers at various stages of this dissertation, and the writing here is the better thanks to their rigorous scrutiny and constructive criticism. I am particularly grateful for Joe's knowledgeable assistance in helping me open up a Miltonic reading of Swedenborg—something that would have gone unexplored, had Joe not shared his infectious enthusiasm for why Milton matters.

I am also much indebted to Jane Williams-Hogan at Bryn Athyn College, certainly one of the most knowledgeable Swedenborg scholars working in the field today, who has supported this project from the very get-go. Her careful critical reading of chapters two and three corrected several serious slips and errors about Swedenborg's biography, and I much benefited from her generous sharing of insights from various archival materials in Sweden that I did not have access to. Some of the ideas on Blake have their origin in conversations I once had at Jane's house,

where we stayed awake into the wee hours of the early morning looking at paintings on her walls and discussing aesthetics and Swedenborg.

The Blake chapter was further improved from two kind invitations to present at the University of Oxford, an honor for which I have Kathryn Barush to thank. Participating in Oxford's Romantic Realignments lecture series particularly prompted a number of new insights into *The Book of Thel* that subsequently changed the shape of chapter four.

My parents, Phil and Janna Zuber, also gave concrete suggestions on several early chapter drafts. Indeed, if it were not for their "vast, even though incomplete, array of Swedenborg's works" (as Henry James remembered his father's imposing collection of Swedenborgian theology) that occupied a special living room bookcase in the Zuber family home, this dissertation might have taken a very different shape, if indeed any at all.

I owe a big thank you to Ed Gyllenhaal, curator at the Glencairn Museum who arranged (at the last minute) the reproduction permissions for many of the images that appear in this dissertation, and even had a nobleman in the Swedish House of Nobles securing on my behalf the rights for using the Swedenborg coat-of-arms. Thanks to Ed, I also received valuable input from the Swedenborg scholar and translator Jonathan Rose, who provided useful information about sketches of cities in Swedenborg's *Experientiae Spirituales*.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this work to my wife Suzanne Schwarz, who has been a constant and patient friend throughout this project's many twists and turns. She took the time to listen and reflect, all the while bearing our two beautiful daughters into the world.

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**CHAPTER ONE:**

***Introduction:  
Entering Swedenborg's Garden***

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“ ... there is either more cleverness and truth in Schwedenberg's [sic] writings than first appearances allow, or it is only by accident that his system coincides with mine... ”  
Emanuel Kant, 1765

“The works of this visionary are well worthy the attention of Painters and Poets; they are foundations for grand things...” William Blake, 1808

“I have sometimes thought that he would render the greatest service to modern criticism, who shall draw the line that subsists between Shakespeare and Swedenborg.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1850

Just what was it about Emanuel Swedenborg that made him such a consistent touchpoint for Romanticism? Swedenborg was “perhaps a genuine visionary, not at all to be sneezed at,” Johann Herder scrawled in his lecture notes as he heard Emanuel Kant discourse on the mystic, shortly before Kant published his monograph on Swedenborg, *The Dreams of a Spirit Seer* (1766), perhaps the strangest, most unusual book that Kant ever wrote. Slightly later, William Blake publicly announced at his one-man 1808 exhibition that all “Painters and Poets” should use Swedenborg's voluminous writings for nothing less than the “foundations for grand things,” something Blake attempted himself in a large painting at the exhibition which depicted scenes taken from Swedenborg.<sup>1</sup> Some forty years further, reflecting on the implications of

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<sup>1</sup> Herder qtd. in Immanuel Kant, *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory R. Johnson (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 74. William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982)., 546; Blake's larger painting

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Swedenborg's correspondence theory for language, Ralph Waldo Emerson made the equally curious assertion that a vital line "subsists between Shakespeare and Swedenborg."<sup>2</sup> Emerson's line and Blake's enthusiasm pose an immediate challenge for the historian: just how is it that such a seemingly obscure Swede arrives at the center of Romantic poetics and painting?

Although scholars of Romanticism have long nodded towards Swedenborg's significance for the period, there has yet to be a comprehensive mapping of this influence in a transnational and comparative framework. As both Arthur Versluis and Alfred Gabay have demonstrated, the esoteric aspects of Swedenborg became part of Romanticism's use of hermetic traditions as a backlash against the Enlightenment, especially its deification of Reason. Gabay argues that the ideas of Swedenborg and Franz Anton Mesmer formed a twinned, systematic "covert" Enlightenment that percolated behind the surface of the 18<sup>th</sup> century's rational materialism, and ultimately led to a new investigative space around (sub)consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Versluis begins his important study by emphasizing that "without a doubt, the most influential European esotericist for nineteenth-century America was Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's name and influence are to be found virtually everywhere, even where it seems unlikely... [.] But who was this strange figure, the spirit-seer from Sweden who had such attraction and impact on American literature, philosophy, religion?"<sup>4</sup> As Isaiah Berlin has further shown with his work on the

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drawn from Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* remains lost. See Chapter 4 here for further discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 661.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Gabay, *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17. Versluis draws his definition of esotericism from Antoine Faivre's well-known body of work on the subject. For an illuminating contextualization of Swedenborg within Esotericism vis-à-vis Faivre, see Jane Williams-Hogan, "The Place of Emanuel Swedenborg in

“irrational” qualities of Johann Georg Hamann, apparently fringe figures (like Hamann) could occupy central roles for Romantic movements—Hamann, claims Berlin, “struck the most violent blow against the Enlightenment and began the whole Romantic Process,” despite being “an obscure figure.”<sup>5</sup> Berlin’s rigorous scholarship shows that this claim is not mere critical bombast: Hamann’s writings became essential reading for Kant, Herder, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. This study is founded upon an idea of recovery similar to the one Berlin undertook for Hamann: that Swedenborg occupies a place in the history of ideas akin to Hamann’s, and that his contributions have been overlooked by critics, despite tantalizing statements offered by several major scholars of the period. Perry Miller, for one, claimed that Swedenborg was “as significant as Coleridge or Carlyle” for fomenting the energies of American Romanticism, and while the problem of Coleridge and Carlyle’s relationship to American authors has become the object of numerous studies, with limited exceptions this has not been the case for the question of Swedenborg’s American legacy.<sup>6</sup> Miller’s Harvard colleague and American Studies co-founder, F.O. Matthiessen, even joked that his pioneering study of Emerson and his circle, the *American Renaissance* (1941), could have been titled under slightly different circumstances and inflections *The Age of Swedenborg*.<sup>7</sup>

If one common strand runs between Swedenborg’s use in these American fields and other, disparate Romantic moments—be it Blake putting Swedenborg to painterly use in the

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Modern Western Esotericism,” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. Antoine Faivre (Leuven, Netherlands: Peeters, 1998), 201-252.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Perry Miller, ed., *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 49.

<sup>7</sup> F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), viii.

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early 1800's, or the frequent surfacing of his name in German Idealist circles—it could be said to be in the domain of aesthetics. Swedenborg's concept of language and correspondence, his idea of a perpetual "influx" that flowed beneath the skin of nature, and especially his overall rejection of Lockean epistemology as it was understood at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, all fed, in one way or another, different Romantic formulations of not only what was beautiful, but how the human mind perceived the non-human world moving around it.<sup>8</sup> We immediately collide with a problem inherent in the word "aesthetic," however, for perhaps especially within the tumults of Romanticism, the concept is amorphous, vague, and contradictory. In the short-lived journal, *Aesthetic Papers* (1849), a key text for American Romanticism where Thoreau first published his famous "Resistance to Civil Government" essay, the editor Elizabeth Peabody cautioned that with the word aesthetic,

...perhaps no one conveys to the mind a more vague and indeterminable sense than this, at the same time that the user is always conscious of a meaning and appropriateness; so that he is in the position of one who endeavors to convey his sense of the real presence of an idea, which he still cannot himself fully grasp and account for.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, Swedenborg's theory of "correspondence" not only denotes a semiotic function within a typological tradition whereby the visible world becomes a matrix of symbols for an invisible, ideal world, but it must be also understood as implying dialogue and communication, listening and speaking, an exchange between divine and earthly agents. Correspondence—as will be taken up in chapter two—thus bears strong parallels with how "Kannon" has functioned in certain forms of Buddhism ("Kannon," an incarnation of Avalokitesvara, literally translates as "to watch attentively or heed the sounds of prayers"). See Katharina Epprecht and Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Kannon: Divine Compassion: Early Buddhist Art from Japan* (Zurich: Museum Rietberg Zürich, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Peabody, "The Word "Aesthetic"," in *Aesthetic Papers* (Boston: G. P. Putnam, 1849), 1.

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For Peabody, the problematic ambiguity of aesthetics conveniently allows her to include a diversity of authors in the journal that follows—from Emerson writing on war, to the Swedenborgian James John Garth Wilkinson on Swedenborg’s correspondence theory, to Thoreau on civil disobedience.<sup>10</sup> The aesthetic, claims Peabody, is “neither a theory of the beautiful, nor a philosophy of art, but a component and indivisible part in all human creations which are not mere works of necessity; in other words, which are based on idea, as distinguished from appetite.”<sup>11</sup> Peabody’s emphasis on “idea” and the ideality of the aesthetic in her short essay indicates the partial debt that she and other American Transcendentalists owed to German Romantic Idealism (from whom their nomenclature as “transcendentalists” was, of course, derived), as it also reveals, in turn, Peabody’s awareness of the roots of the aesthetic in ancient Greek philosophy.

Plato is usually credited with first describing the realm of the aesthetic in the fifth century B.C., where *The Republic* grapples with the problem of mimetic representation, poetry, and the ideality of truth.<sup>12</sup> It wasn’t until the 18<sup>th</sup> century work of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, however, that the phrase “aesthetic” was explicitly used to denote a special science of cognition

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that Peabody’s *Aesthetic* journal featured two “Swedenborgian” essays, one by James John Garth Wilkinson, and the other by Samson Reed. Peabody was quite familiar with Swedenborg’s works: her eccentric parents had made Swedenborg part of their children’s syncretic religious digest as they were growing up, and later, Peabody most significantly put an English translation of the French Swedenborgian Guillame Oegger into Emerson’s hands, a text which particularly marked the “Language” section of Emerson’s 1836 *Nature*. The fifth chapter will elaborate on Oegger and Emerson; for background on Swedenborg in the Peabody household (and the irritation this ultimately provoked from Elizabeth), see Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 89-90, 96.

<sup>11</sup> Peabody, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> For the place of Plato and early Greek philosophy within a teleological development of aesthetics, see Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (New York: Noonday Press, 1956), 155-174.

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that included questions of poetics and beauty.<sup>13</sup> For this study's purposes of following certain engagements with Swedenborg's ideas across a transnational framework of Romanticism, it is sufficient to ground aesthetics in Baumgarten's original sense of the word as an apprehension of phenomena obtained through the senses (as opposed to pure mental concepts)—*aisthētikos*, drawn from *aisthēta* ("perceptible things") and *aisthēsthai* ("to perceive")—while allowing for the ways that Romantics quickly mediated aesthetics into problems of the beautiful, language, and the categorization of various arts, all things that pertain to the interior processes of the mind.

The evolution of Romantic aesthetics, moreover, is inextricable from the shifting grounds of religious experience at the end of the eighteenth century. As certain Romantic authors became disenchanted with traditional ecclesiastical structures and were shaken by the theological implications of the Higher Criticism, but could not commit wholeheartedly to the Enlightenment's positive materialism, they tended to uproot a structure of religious experience and project it onto aesthetic encounters in natural space. Two well-known representative examples can be cited here, on either side of the Atlantic, one in painting, the other in literature: Emerson's influential *Nature* treatise from 1836, and the iconic landscapes painted by Caspar David Friedrich. "In the woods we return to reason and faith," extols Emerson in his first chapter: "The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them."<sup>14</sup> The function of Emerson's experience of natural beauty is wholly pastoral (in all senses of that word), troping on terms that Emerson would have earlier regulated to sermons

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<sup>13</sup> Baumgarten's 1735 doctoral thesis -- *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* – first coined the term aesthetics in this way, but it wasn't until his 1750 *Aesthetica* that the concept was fully elaborated as a distinct science. Croce, 212.

<sup>14</sup> Emerson, 10-11.

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given in the meeting house when he was still an ordained minister: “greatest delight,” “minister,” “return to reason and faith.” Slightly earlier Friedrich had embarked on painting his groundbreaking landscapes of figures immersed in contemplating natural beauty, depicted in such a way that the act of beholding the sun, clouds, or mountains deliberately evokes a pious engagement, often framed in halos of natural light. “I must surrender myself to what surrounds me, unite myself with its clouds and rocks, in order to be what I am,” wrote Friedrich to a friend about the relationship between nature and his painting process; “I need solitude in order to communicate with nature.”<sup>15</sup> Friedrich’s language about “surrendering” himself to unite with his surroundings bears obvious parallels with the famous lines from Emerson’s *Nature*, where the sharp beauty of winter twilight on the commons makes Emerson feel he is “nothing,” but “sees all,” as “the currents of the Universal Being” circulate through him.<sup>16</sup> For Friedrich and Emerson, to “communicate” with nature became to commune, in its full religious and ritualistic sense (indeed, according to the art historian Norbert Wolf, Friedrich’s landscapes came to embody August Wilhelm Schlegel’s contention that life was a continuous process of Holy Communion).<sup>17</sup> Only communion was no longer the wine and bread of Sunday, but the flesh of an aesthetic participation with nature.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Qtd. in Norbert Wolf, *Caspar David Friedrich: The Painter of Stillness* (Cologne: Taschen Books, 2006), 47.

<sup>16</sup> Another parallel is that Emerson locates this moment in a liminal space of transition, a “twilight” between day and night—which is precisely the same representational space that Friedrich often chooses to depict.

<sup>17</sup> Wolf, *Caspar David Friedrich: The Painter of Stillness*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Although Friedrich’s religious beliefs took the form of an intensely private Protestantism that is difficult to decipher, and his later religious iconography becomes entangled with nationalism in complicated ways, his aesthetic relationship to nature has been read by art historians as a project of reenchancement. See, for example, Cordula Grewe, *Painting the Sacred in the Age of*



Caspar David Friedrich, *Woman Before the Rising Sun* (1818-1820)  
Museum Folkwang, Essen



Caspar David Friedrich, *Evening Landscape with Two Men* (1830)  
St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum

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*Romanticism* (London: Ashgate, 2009), as well as Grewe, "Reenchantment as Artistic Practice: Strategies of Emulation in German Romantic Art and Theory," *New German Critique* 94 (2005).

As Joan Richardson writes, by the end of the eighteenth century,

The pressure on the classical episteme, as we know from Michel Foucault, was extreme. ‘Aesthetics’ emerged as a distinct term on the intellectual horizon at roughly the same time different ‘sciences’ were emerging from natural philosophy. They became the containers for what theology once held, the excess of experience described by ‘more than rational distortion.’<sup>19</sup>

Given that Swedenborg never wrote an aesthetic treatise, nor systematically spelled out his ideas about beauty and the imagination, the subsequent incorporation of his theology and science into Romantic aesthetic enterprises is quite surprising, a kind of jarring discrepancy that should give scholars pause. Besides elaborating on the failure of the Enlightenment episteme that Richardson cites above, Foucault has influentially argued for a historiography more attuned to the discontinuities of the past. The unexpected (and plethoric) integration of Swedenborg into Romantic aesthetics opens precisely the kind of “geological crack” into paradigms of continuity that Foucault originally challenged in *The Archeology of Knowledge*.<sup>20</sup> In addition to Blake’s visual productions, Swedenborg became aesthetic in the modern sense of the word (as intrinsically related to the visual arts) when a number of nineteenth century artists began using his writings as the grounds for different theories of painting and sculpture, be it the sculptor

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<sup>19</sup> Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>20</sup> On discrepancies that jar the continuity and mythical sense of a “unity” behind history, Foucault writes that “to show that discontinuity is one of those great accidents that create cracks not only in the geology of history but also in the simple fact of the statement; it emerges in its historical irruption; what we try to examine is the incision that it makes, that irreducible—and very often tiny—emergence.” Michel Foucault, “The Archeology of Knowledge,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivken (London: Blackwell, 2001), 424.

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Hiram Powers or the painters George Inness and William Page, or even the writer William Stillman, who often quoted and excerpted Swedenborg in the pages of *The Crayon*, one of the most influential art journals in 19<sup>th</sup> century America.<sup>21</sup> What were the conditions that made Swedenborg systematic to these respective creative processes—to take Swedenborg’s words on correspondence, or spiraling crystals, or angels, and derive from them, as it were, a science of beauty, a method for painting landscape and carving stone?

To answer such a sweeping question is beyond the scope of this present study, and runs the methodological risk (the very kind Foucault attempted to circumvent) of treating Romanticism as a stable concept that facilely blends discrete, heterogeneous moments together. Certainly, Blake painting scenes drawn from Swedenborg in London, in 1808, is worlds apart from Hiram Powers conducting séances with expatriate American Swedenborgians in Florence in the 1850’s, and then carving his famous pair of marble, disembodied hands. Whether there ever was such a single thing as “romanticism” is a very old argument, a tedious Pandora’s box

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<sup>21</sup> For the importance of Swedenborg to Inness, see the monographs by Adrienne Baxter Bell, *George Inness and the Visionary Landscape* (New York: George Braziller, 2003). and Rachel Ziady Delue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). The role Swedenborgian correspondence played in 19<sup>th</sup> century color theories (especially as developed by Inness) is comprehensively addressed by Sally M. Prome, “The Ribband of Faith: George Inness, Color Theory, and the Swedenborgian Church,” *American Art Journal* 26, no. 1/2 (1994): 45-65. Further aesthetic theories based in Swedenborg were developed by Hiram Powers and William Page while both lived near each other in Italy—see Robert Gladish, “Tre Amici Artistici: E.B. Browning, Hiram Powers, and William Page in Florence and Rome,” *Covenant: A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Five Churches* 1, no. 4 (1998): 273-91. On the presence of Swedenborgian ideas in the *Crayon* and the editorial work of Stillman, see Richard Kenneth Silver, “The Spiritual Kingdom in America: the Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on American Society and Culture, 1815-1860” (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1983), 237-271.

not to be opened here.<sup>22</sup> While agreeing with the New Historicist contention that there never was one cohering trend that can mandate a singular, monolithic Romanticism, that there are only contingent and plural Romanticisms, this study is invested in certain parallel turns towards natural space that cut across boundaries of nation and culture. Critically, a growing number of scholars have returned to Romantic nature aesthetics and argued that within its multifarious articulations we can locate the roots of our modern sense of ecology and the environment. This might seem immediately contradictory, or least unexpected, if we reflect back on the two earlier examples provided by Friedrich and Emerson. Friedrich's contemplative figures and Emerson's self that "is nothing" yet "sees all" appear more emblematic of a shift into subjective interiority that marks much Romantic writing, and less concerned with the actual materiality of the earth, its systems of being, and more-than-human nature. Nonetheless, although "ecology" as a term was not first extensively used until Ernst Haeckel's *General Morphology of Organisms* (1866), environmental historians and literary critics have argued that the seeds of the idea—its sense as a systematic study of organic relations and symbiosis—lay nestled within Romantic aesthetics and its problematic constructions of subject-object relationships.

Robert Richards has illuminatingly shown, for example, how the philosophic and aesthetic explorations of early Romantics in Germany, especially the Jena circle around the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich Schelling, and Goethe, were largely responsible for instigating a paradigm shift that moved empirical science out of mechanistic frameworks into models of organicism, whereby concepts of dynamism, holism, and "archetypes" critically anticipated later

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<sup>22</sup> For a useful overview of the issues of periodization and historiography around Romanticism, see David Simpson, "Romanticism, Criticism, and Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-24.

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theories of evolution (as primarily developed by Charles Darwin). These German Romantic philosophers and poets were often equally invested in the burgeoning fields of natural and biological science. Richards writes that after Immanuel Kant drew a line of equivalence between aesthetic and scientific judgments in the influential *Critique of Judgment* (1790), subsequently

Romantic biologists came to regard these two kinds of judgment as complementary approaches to nature, approaches that penetrated to the same underlying object. This meant that artistic experience and expression might operate in harmony with scientific experience and expression: the basic structures of nature might thus be apprehended and represented by the artist's sketch and the poet's metaphor, as well as by the scientists' experiment and the naturalists' observation. Further, Romantic biologists maintained, sometimes explicitly, often implicitly, that the aesthetic comprehension of the entire organism or of the whole interacting natural environment would be a necessary preliminary stage in the scientific analysis of respective parts: both in art and science, comprehension of the whole had to precede that of the parts... [.] Initially, for the biologist, then, *ineffable aesthetic experience had to open the way to articulate scientific understanding*.<sup>23</sup>

Richards writes the above as a historian of science. Within literary studies, the growing field of ecocriticism has addressed the intersection of Romantic aesthetics, science, and nascent ecology from a more textual perspective, taking an approach attuned to poetics and language and

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<sup>23</sup> Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12 (my emphasis); from a similar perspective grounded in the hard sciences (rather than the humanities), see also the important earlier work of Philip C. Ritterbush, *Overtures to Biology; the Speculations of Eighteenth-Century Naturalists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

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adjusting it to reflect a concern for how nonhuman nature becomes constituted by different systems of signs, and what this means for the phenomenological world “off the page.”<sup>24</sup> Karl Kroeber’s influential *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994) surveyed a number of canonical British Romantics to argue that while Samuel Taylor Coleridge or William Wordsworth may have lacked the scientific rubric of ecology as it developed after Haeckel, their use of imagination as a human faculty capable of integrating all experience both anticipated and fed into later models of holism that under-girded the basic idea of an ecosystem. Kroeber, as well as Jonathan Bate, whose *Romantic Ecology* stands as the first extensive ecocritical study, both posit that Romantic aesthetics developed in tandem with the exploding pressures of industrial modernity and nascent capitalism, and contained the seeds not only for later scientific branchings into ecology, but also a kind of instructive agency for contemporary environmentalism, a belief in “the ethical efficacy of acts of imagination.”<sup>25</sup>

For American Romanticism, the most prominent ecocritic remains Lawrence Buell, whose *Environmental Imagination* (1996) is arguably still the most influential piece of environmental literary criticism yet written. Buell argues that writers like Henry David Thoreau exhibited the first glimmerings of a modern environmental sensibility and exemplify “how

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<sup>24</sup> In *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2004), Kate Rigby writes how an ecocritical account of Romanticism “can only play its part in restoring us to the earth to the extent that it succeeds in causing us to lift our eyes from the page, not only to seek the givenness of our earthly environment but also to recognize how and where it is being obliterated,” 127.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 19.; Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991).

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aesthetics can become a decisive force for or against environmental change.”<sup>26</sup> Numerous critics have subsequently built on the original framework that Buell’s book provided. Angus Fletcher’s idea of an “environment poem” is an especially useful elaboration for this study and its interests. Romantic descriptive approaches to nature and text, and nature-as-text, Fletcher claims, instigated a new genre of poetry in which language and writing aspired not to be mimetically *about* the surrounding world, but to become an actual experience of nature itself: thus, reading these environment poems “is to have an experience much like suddenly recognizing that one actually has an environment, instead of not perceiving the surround at all.”<sup>27</sup> Long before both Buell and Fletcher, however, environmental historians have emphasized how American Romanticism created a kind of perceptual foundation for John Muir and his corollary ideas of the sanctity of wilderness, and the subsequent establishment of the National Park System and the Sierra Club.<sup>28</sup> Roderick Frazier Nash has particularly acknowledged American environmentalism’s debt to 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcendentalism, and that at “the core of [this] was the belief that a correspondence or parallelism existed between a higher realm of spiritual truth and the lower one of material objects.”<sup>29</sup>

Given the unavoidable way that Swedenborg’s doctrine of correspondence explicitly lay at the heart of Transcendentalist aesthetics, why have ecocritics and environmental historians

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<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Angus Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9, 136.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 190-194.

<sup>29</sup> Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 85.

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done so little with Swedenborg? How can one theorize this very real line that runs from a Scandinavian seer and terminates in Muir's Sierra Nevadas? Eric Wilson, building on Buell and other first-wave ecocritics, has traced the development of what he terms "gnostic ecology" in American Romanticism, a perceptual method that embraced both empirical experience and the inward turning of neo-platonic "gnosis," an intuitive insight that comes in flashes, between gaps, suddenly illuminating larger wholes. Although Wilson deftly handles the importance of other esoteric traditions (such as the work of Jakob Böhme and the kabala), there is scant reference in his valuable study to Swedenborg—a rather large lacuna, given Versluis's earlier work that asserted (in Versluis's words) "that without a doubt, the most influential European esotericist for nineteenth-century America was Emanuel Swedenborg."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Kate Rigby's groundbreaking study, *Topographies of the Sacred* (2004), which situates British and German Romantic eco-poetics in a valuable transnational dialogue, goes so far as to acknowledge how Romantic aesthetics were contingent on "the hermetic tradition, which posited a complex series of correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm," but then falls short of drawing out the explicit and direct implications that Swedenborg's correspondence theory had here.<sup>31</sup>

Conversely, extensive treatments of Swedenborg in Romanticism have done next to nothing with the environmental ramifications of his influence, despite the clear impact he made on nature writings by Thoreau, Emerson, and certain German Romantics, or the fact that Swedenborg's mystical theology was a key part of John Muir's eclectic religious digest.

Kathleen Raine's extensive scholarship on William Blake has brought out how central

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<sup>30</sup> Eric Wilson, *Romantic Turbulence: Chaos, Ecology, and American Space* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 10; Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Kate Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2004), 31.

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Swedenborg was to Blake's complex ideas about nature, but neither she, nor subsequent ecocritics, have brought these readings to bear on what we might call "environmental" aspects of Blake's poetry.<sup>32</sup> Kevin Hutchings' excellent monograph, *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics*, even illuminates how the first attempt to situate Blake as a "nature-poet" was made by James John Garth Wilkinson, a Swedenborgian largely responsible for reviving public interest in Blake in the 1840's, and yet Hutchings does not unravel the background conditions and overlap of readings that would make this kind of "greening" of Blake possible.<sup>33</sup> The closest work that approximates an appreciation of Swedenborg's impact on nascent 19<sup>th</sup> century environmental thought is Catherine Albanese's *Nature Religion in America: From Algonquin Indians to the New Age*, an anthropological study which demonstrates Swedenborg's position in what Albanese loosely calls "nature-religion": a popular, symbolic center that took shape throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century American thought, united by a tendency to sacralize non-human, natural space.<sup>34</sup> While Albanese thoroughly accounts for the importance of Swedenborg, her primary emphasis is on 19<sup>th</sup> century healing and medical contexts—the ways Swedenborg fed into popular fads of mesmerism, homeopathy, and other "nature cures"—and thus leaves little room for a consideration of aesthetics. Her book is further limited to exclusively American

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Raine's discussion of nature symbolism and Swedenborg in Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 1-33.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics* (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 37.. Wilkinson's reading of Blake's nature appears in Wilkinson's 1839 Preface to the first letterpress publication of *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*. As Hutchings notes, however, and as Chapter Four will take up in this dissertation, the "natural" qualities of Blake's poetry disturbed Wilkinson.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonquin Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 11-12. Swedenborg is also further investigated, albeit for different purposes, in Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

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cultural contexts, and does not include the way Swedenborg's ideas interfaced with a "nature religion" at similar moments in Europe, and what might be gained by doing such a comparative study.

Several current disciplinary dynamics might explain why ecocriticism has carved so little space around Swedenborg. For one, ecocriticism is relatively young as a field, and has not yet produced the rigorous kind of critical self-reflexivity that other turns in culture studies have fostered, like feminism, queer studies, or African-American studies. Like ecocriticism, the development of these as professional academic terrains was intrinsically linked to identity politics and struggles for certain rights within legal and social frameworks of representation, especially after the turmoil of the 1960's and the later so-called "culture wars" within the (American) academy. But whereas feminism, queer studies, or different ethnic studies have correspondingly bloomed and thrived as academic specializations, environmentalism's analogue in the humanities has emphatically not: even as "environmentalism" as a loose social movement was arguably larger and more widespread than feminism, or queer rights. Ecocriticism's general antagonism to poststructuralist thought is certainly one ground for this discrepancy, as Dana Phillips and Ursula Heise have both emphasized, as is perhaps its basic (and problematic) a priori assumption that it can ethically "speak for" the rights and spaces of non-human nature.<sup>35</sup> The scope of inquiry for ecocriticism has remained accordingly small, with much particular work

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<sup>35</sup> Ecocriticism's problematic relationship to post-structuralism is partially treated by Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008); see also Dana Phillips, "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology," *New Literary History* 30, no. 3 (1999): 577-602.

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needing to be done on how the field has defined itself in relationship to (or against)

Romanticism.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, and certainly due in part to its Romantic origins, ecocriticism has generally had an incoherent relationship to the role of religion. As John Gatta notes,

Most ecocriticism published thus far presumes that nature writing must be interpreted in purely secular terms. Ironically, though, much of the primary literature it addresses displays a religious sense of wonder at nature's endlessly textured abundance, variability, and dynamism.<sup>37</sup>

Earlier ecocritical studies—be it Kroeber, Bate on Wordsworth, or Buell on Thoreau—tended to read their representative Romantics as aligned with a larger teleological process of secularization brought on by advancements in science. As Rigby points out, this has made dominant ecocritical readings of Romanticism share certain shibboleths with the older work of M.H. Abrams, especially his influential contention that Romanticism more or less boils down to “the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking.”<sup>38</sup> While Romantics certainly modified exegetical methods of scriptural interpretation and applied them in new and complicated ways to other domains (like nature, or concepts of history), Rigby writes that

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<sup>36</sup> While much ecocriticism has taken a recuperative approach to Romanticism and located positive environmental ethics in its different formulations, more recent studies have critiqued Romanticism as evincing precisely the problem: that its sacralizing projections, the “otherness” of its natural beauty and sublime, have led to a critical, schizophrenic view of nature that is incapable of handling contemporary environmental crises. See, for an incisive example, Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12..

<sup>38</sup> M. H Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 12.

(contra-Abrams), “reconsidered in relation to the mechanistic and atomist models of scientific rationalism which the romantics were also keen to overthrow, their project appears to be a very different one: something more like reenchancement rather than secularization.”<sup>39</sup> Emphasizing secularization over a process of reenchancement runs the risk of eliding the varied Romantic responses to esoteric and gnostic traditions, and how they crucially mediated Romantic negotiations of natural space. Such Romantic gnosis, as Wilson has demonstrated, went hand-in-hand with serious scientific commitments, something that might seem incompatible (if not ludicrous) from a 21<sup>st</sup> century secular perspective, where our own borders between science and religion seem firmly entrenched, if not downright acrimonious.<sup>40</sup> Re-examining Swedenborg’s place in Romantic aesthetics can restore the role that religious experience played in forming the environmental imagination; indeed, his Janus-faced career as both scientist and mystical exegete suggests specifically how he fit within certain increasing tensions between the new science and traditional religion, and the ways his ideas allowed for the Romantic transfer of religious experience into the natural space of the aesthetic.

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<sup>39</sup> Rigby, 12; see also 45-46.

<sup>40</sup> I am thinking of the present polarity exhibited, on the one hand, by the troubling popularity of the new Creation Museum in Florida that presents a Christian fundamentalist view of the earth, not to mention the related normalization of the debate around teaching “Intelligent Design” within American public school systems; and on the other hand, Richard Dawkins’ symptomatic claim that the “God Delusion” has been an overwhelmingly “very evil” and pernicious force throughout world history—that “rearing children in a religious tradition amounts to child abuse.” See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006). These respective polemics seem locked into a kind of binary that allows for no complexity, a rigidity which many Romantics would consciously eschew. As a recent reviewer of Dawkins’ popular book noted, “it is far from certain that there is an ineluctable conflict between the acceptance of evolutionary mechanism and the belief that, as William James put it, ‘the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe.’” See H. Allen Orr, “A Mission to Convert: Richard Dawkin’s ‘Delusion’,” *New York Review of Books*, January 11, 2007: 24.

This study argues that Swedenborg presents an opportunity to rethink some of ecocriticism's assumptions about secularism and religion during the Romantic period, and that the net effect of his ideas underscores how the structure of Romantic aesthetics could be formulated by both "hard" scientific forays and simultaneous engagements with the *via-negativa*, an apophatic and mystical tradition that initially seems anathema to the logic of science. The central work of *The Science of Beauty* is to build a coherent bridge between ecocritical studies of Romantic aesthetics and the pre-existing scholarship on the influence of Swedenborg's religious ideas in different fields. Three particular ideas from Swedenborg will be traced across a transnational context to see what they do to Romantic aesthetics at different moments and places: his "doctrine of correspondence" that transformed nature into a kind of personalized, sacred language that spoke to an authentic self; his idea of "influx," that nature was shaped by a ceaseless flow of divine emanations, a variation on Neoplatonic idealism that had particular gravity for Romantic models of dynamism that broke down mechanistic models of the universe; and finally, his micro-and-macrocosmic analogies—his figures of the human form as reflecting all of the universe, and conversely, that the cosmos reflected the shape of a person, a "Grand Man"—an idea which deeply informs Blake's writings on "The Eternal Great Humanity Divine," to cite just one relevant example.<sup>41</sup>

But first, it is necessary to clarify further the scope and range of the chapters that follow—to account for why certain authors (like Blake and Emerson) are included in this discussion, and others are not: why other Romantic figures that were influenced by Swedenborg, and might seem to have obvious import for ecocriticism and environmental history (such as John

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<sup>41</sup>Blake's "Universal Man" in *Jerusalem* is an explicitly Swedenborgian inflection of this concept; see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 178.

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Muir), do not appear here. To explain the selection criteria, I propose first turning to Swedenborg's eighteenth century garden in Stockholm—the plot of land he tended and managed for many years—and using the garden's structure and significance as a loose metaphor for this study's rationale. Moreover, as *The Science of Beauty* attempts to think through the relationship between Swedenborg's ideas, aesthetics, and early Romantic ecology, it seems wholly appropriate to begin with the natural space where Swedenborg actively cultivated an earthly paradise, and subsequently wrote the heavenly tomes that later nurtured the seeds of Romantic environmental aesthetics.

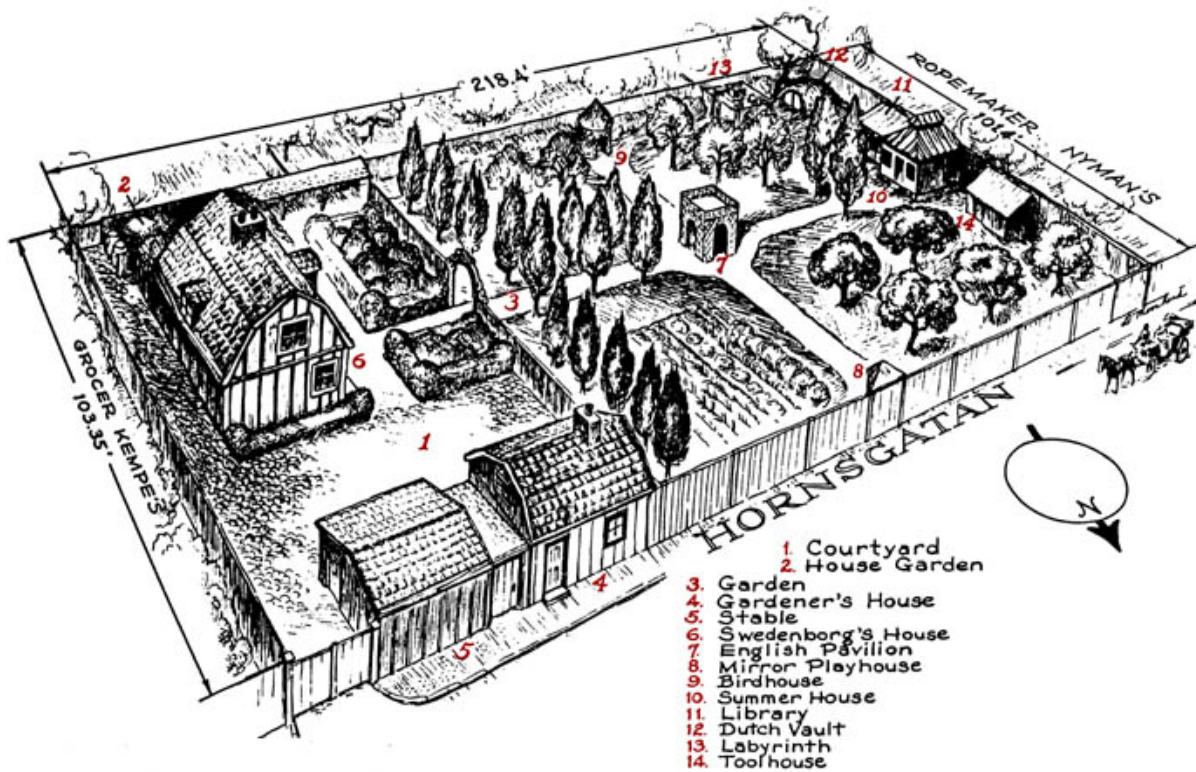
**“Flowers and flower beds mean truths of information and insight”:  
Swedenborg’s Sodermalm Garden<sup>42</sup>**

At some point in the early 1750’s, several years after undergoing his profound existential crisis and shifting his writing away from the natural sciences into exegetical theology, Swedenborg planned and built an elaborate garden surrounding his home in southern Stockholm. It was divided into four sections, with a central avenue of lime trees running down the center. A small pavilion lay in the middle of the quadrants, furnished with comfortable benches, a copy of a structure in a garden that Swedenborg had seen on previous sojourns to England.<sup>43</sup> At the back of one section, facing the main house and the pavilion, stood a small summerhouse painted in bright yellow—a traditional Swedish *lusthus*—with windows that opened to the beds of flowers around it. In the sparse interior of the summerhouse lay a small writing desk, where many of Swedenborg’s famous visionary texts came to be written during the warm summer months, as well as a small chamber organ that Swedenborg sometimes used for meditative playing. In one corner of the garden was a small maze (with no apparent exit) that delighted guests and small children who came to visit; on the northern side of the garden one found an equally puzzling folly, a door in the wall that seemed to lead to another garden, but when opened, a mirror was revealed that was disguised as a window in yet another door, that then reflected back the garden behind the viewer.

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<sup>42</sup> Quote taken from Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), no. 489, note f.

<sup>43</sup> Cyriel Sigrid Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic; the Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 243.



Drawing of Swedenborg's garden property on Hornsgatan, as it might have looked in his time  
Donald Moorhead, 1953.

Image reproduced kind courtesy of the Swedenborg Scientific Association



Swedenborg's garden summer house, as it currently sits in Skansen, Stockholm.  
Photograph by Devin Zuber

A large volière, a brass cage filled with exotic birds, lay directly opposite this false reflecting door, so that when the door was opened the flitting birds of paradise were refracted and doubled behind the viewer, creating “an effect most charming and surprising,” according to one contemporary visitor.<sup>44</sup>

The four quadrants of the garden itself functioned like many similar gardens of the period as a veritable microcosm of known botanical knowledge. Fruits, vegetables, and flowers from all over the world were categorically laid out in a methodological order that partially corresponded to geographic location and different kinds of vegetation.<sup>45</sup> Swedenborg was quite familiar with using garden space as a kind of nascent botanical classification system. When he was growing up in Uppsala, university professor Olof Rudbeck and his famous classical botanical garden practically lay next door to the Swedenborg family home, and later, Carl Linnaeus, the veritable father of modern botany and plant classification, married into the Swedenborg family and had close professional contact with Swedenborg throughout the 1740’s.<sup>46</sup> Swedenborg was further

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<sup>44</sup> Qtd. in Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret: The Meaning and Significance of the Word of God, the Life of the Angels and Service to God* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2005), 243.

<sup>45</sup> As historians have noted, the different contemporaneous descriptions of Swedenborg’s garden span a wide variety of dates, and suggest that the garden’s stock organically changed over time. Thus, the later illustrations made of the garden—as with figure two here—can stand only as rough approximations of what it actually looked like. For full descriptions of the garden, see Sigstedt 237-246; Bergquist 237-243; and George F. Dole and Robert H. Kirven, *A Scientist Explores Spirit: A Compact Biography of Emanuel Swedenborg with Key Concepts of Swedenborg's Theology* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992), 41-43.

<sup>46</sup> Linnaeus married the daughter of Swedenborg’s first cousin, Johann Moraeus, at the ancestral Swedenborg home (Sveden) in 1740; Moraeus had earlier been Swedenborg’s appointed tutor when Swedenborg was eight years old in Uppsala (Dole and Kirven, 35-36). The same year Linnaeus married into the family, Linnaeus sponsored an invitation for Swedenborg to join the newly established Swedish Academy of Sciences, and shortly before purchasing the property for his own house and garden in 1741, Swedenborg rented Linnaeus’ former fashionable apartment

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impressed by what later became the Jardin des Plantes during his extended stays in Paris.<sup>47</sup>

Called the Jardin du Rois then, it was already a major scientific center for Europe, and its space had been intentionally designed by the Comte de Buffon as an emblem of the order and structure of the natural world, the rectangular sections arranged according to different schemas of type and terrestrial locale. The precise, orderly grid of the Jardin du Rois reflected the confidence of the eighteenth century that the unfolding mysteries of the plant and animal “kingdoms” could be neatly systematized by the human mind. The garden’s net effect, in the words of Lee Rust Brown, “was always one of systematic integrity.”<sup>48</sup> It wasn’t until after the Revolution that the garden was transformed into the official Jardin des Plantes, and not until the major reorganizations of 1821 did the garden acquire the meandering paths of the *labyrinthe* and the more Romantic shape that greeted Emerson in 1833, when Emerson experienced a profound vocational epiphany in the gardens that scholars today can only term “catalytic.”<sup>49</sup>

Besides Emerson’s life-changing experience, the Parisian gardens have a curious history as serving as a kind of threshold for other Romantic figures who were also engaged with

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in Stockholm (Sigstedt, 161-163). Historians have been cautious, however, to extend intellectual affiliations beyond these bare facts of biography, despite some compelling similarities: both, for example, were deeply invested in the indigenous culture of the Swami in Lapland. Notably, after Linnaeus—who had lived and traveled with the Swami people in the 1730’s—had entered the orbit of the Swedenborg family, Swedenborg became interested in Lapland shaman techniques that reputedly could separate the soul from the body. This will be more fully treated in the next chapter; see also Lars Bergquist, “Linnaeus and Swedenborg: Two Complementary Figures in Eighteenth Century Sweden,” *Arcana* 3, no. 2: 23-39.

<sup>47</sup> Of Swedenborg’s eleven continental sojourns, he made at least four extended stays in Paris (in 1713, 1736, 1748, 1769). During his fourth European trip—in 1736—he makes note of visiting gardens while living on the Rue de l’Observatoire. Dole and Kirven, *A Scientist Explores Spirit*, 90.

<sup>48</sup> Lee Rust Brown, “The Emerson Museum,” *Representations*, no. 40 (Autumn 1992): 60..

<sup>49</sup> Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003), 86.

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Swedenborg. Shortly before Emerson's 1833 visit, Honoré de Balzac's meanderings through the garden provoked him to reflect on the "correspondence" between animal and human life that coupled with a subsequent immersion in Swedenborg's writings, produced Balzac's most explicitly "Swedenborgian" novels, *Seraphita* (1832) and *Louis Lambert* (1833). Later, August Strindberg found the garden's approach to space made it "the most important place on earth" because of the way it categorized knowledge; Strindberg, with his interest in Swedenborg, noted the appropriate coincidence of a Swedenborgian chapel but a stone's throw away from the Jardin des Plantes (at 12 Rou Thouin), and later wrote a reflective essay about Swedenborg's own experiences in Paris—"Swedenborg i Paris" (1898).<sup>50</sup>

It is hard to say to what degree the Jardin du Rois may have impressed Swedenborg when he began mapping out his humbler garden in the 1750's, though it is clear he went through great lengths to acquire the rarest, most obscure plant specimens from Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and accordingly arranged them around geographic distribution.<sup>51</sup> Besides the surviving letters written to seed distributors in Holland and England, an almanac from 1752 was discovered in the Royal Library of Stockholm roughly one hundred years ago, crammed with marginal notes written in Swedenborg's characteristic spidery hand. Many of them concern sending manuscript pages and drafts of his *Arcana Caelestia* to a London printer (these so-titled "Secrets of Heaven", his first full-blown theological project as mystical exegete, was too heretical for

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<sup>50</sup> Anders Hallengren astutely points this overlapping of authors and place in Anders Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson's Search for Universal Laws* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksel, 1994), 60-63.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the surviving letters that attest to Swedenborg's efforts to acquire (then) exotic vegetables like cucumber and eggplant, and ensuing confusion on the part of seed and bulb distributors who have never heard of the strange plant names. Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, ed. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955), 511-513.

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publication in conservative Sweden). Interspersed among the annotations of page numbers that reference Genesis and Swedenborg's spiritual experiences come meticulous accounts (in Swedish) of Swedenborg planning and imagining his Stockholm garden, then under construction. These numbered to-do lists are accidentally poetic, strikingly aphoristic—"African rose bed, at the far end, large African, also velvet roses; at the sides white liliium, hollyhocks, at the tree, sunflowers"—as well as providing a rough sense as to how Swedenborg arranged his plantings. He writes about his American specimens,

Planted this afternoon American seeds in three of the long boxes on the farthest side—mulberry seed in all of them. In the fourth box, to this end of the garden, planted a kind of podbearing tree from America, three seeds. In the center buttonwood and beech and three kinds of American dogwood. American maize, on all four sides of two pease [sic] beds, ten of two kinds. In the upper square box put three kinds of seeds that were among the American melons; in the center of the box, a smooth shiny black seed. Back of the young trees, one seed of African melons.<sup>52</sup>

For the more delicate, tropical species, Swedenborg converted the second floor of his modest house into a large conservatory, with glass skylights in the roof and openings to the ground floor so that the fragrant plants (and the sound of singing birds from the volière, during the winter), poured into the sleeping, living, and writing chambers below. Thus, whether he was writing in his summerhouse outside in the warm months, or indoors below the conservatory during the winter, Swedenborg was surrounded by a kind of terrestrial heaven of his own making. It is no

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<sup>52</sup> These hard-to-read annotations can be found transliterated in Alfred Stroh, *Anteckningar i Swedenborgs Almanacka för ar 1752, forvard a Kungl* (Stockholm: Biblioteket i Stockholm). An English translation first appeared in "Swedenborg's *Almanacka för 1752*" *New Church Weekly* (1915): 211.

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surprise, then, that the space and imagery of the garden occupies such a prominent location in the subsequent theology. He writes in *Heaven and Hell* (1758), in a passage that Emerson later painstakingly copied word-for-word into his journal:

[Angels] live in gardens where you can see flower beds and lawns beautifully marked off, surrounded by rows of trees with arcades and promenades. The trees and flowers change from day to day. Looking at all this brings pleasure to their minds generally, and the specific changes make it constantly new. Further, since all this corresponds to divine qualities, and since these people are drawn to their knowledge of correspondences, they are constantly being filled with new insights and thereby having their spiritual rational faculty perfected. They enjoy these pleasures because gardens, flowerbeds, lawns, and trees correspond to information, insights, and the intelligence that ensues.<sup>53</sup>

By learning from the text of beauty around them, Swedenborg's angels, like Henry David Thoreau, live out Emerson's declaration that nature should be "a mute gospel... a sacred emblem from the first furrow of spring to the last stack which the snow of winter overtakes in the fields."<sup>54</sup> In the idealism of both Thoreau's *Walden* and Swedenborg's heaven, close observation of natural phenomena leads to spiritual enlightenment.

Images of seeds and developing insect larvae further pepper Swedenborg's writings as metaphors for human regeneration and the refinement of perception. Swedenborg also deliberately chose graphic vignettes that depict green spaces and people at work in them to accompany the text of in the first editions of his theological writings (many of these graphic

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<sup>53</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard*, no. 489. As is the standard practice within scholarship on Swedenborg, all textual references in his work are to section numbers—irrespective of publication date—and *not* page numbers.

<sup>54</sup> Emerson, *Essays* 29.

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ornaments, moreover, were hand-drawn and engraved by Swedenborg himself).<sup>55</sup> The garden as a metaphor for spiritual aspects of the mind is, of course, nothing new: Zen Buddhist poetry carries a strong tradition of imaging the garden as mind, and the mind-as-garden; particularly in the *ghazals* of Sufi poetry, the garden becomes a richly metaphorical space for human desire and spiritual hunger.<sup>56</sup> What is worth emphasizing here with Swedenborg's practical experience of gardening is its (perhaps obvious) relationship to his correspondence theory, and the later ripples into Romanticism: that Swedenborg's reading of "absolutely everything in nature, from the smallest to the greatest"<sup>57</sup> as perpetual spiritual signifiers was perhaps less contingent on a resort to other-worldly transcendence as on a daily immersion in his prolific garden, the grubby work of his hands and close attunement to the natural cycles there, and the space of wonder that this opened up. "There is sort of an immensity and eternity inherent in the seed of every animal or vegetable," he wrote in one of his final, late works, the *True Christian Religion* (1772), "immensity in that the seed is capable of infinite multiplication; and eternity in that process of change and multiplication has continued without interruption from the creation of the world down to the present day, and will continue perpetually."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Jonathan Rose, "The Ornaments in Swedenborg's Theological First Editions," *Covenant: A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Five Churches* 1 (1998): 293-363.

<sup>56</sup> The link between gardens and Zen poetics and painting has been consistently emphasized, by among others, D.T. Suzuki (whose work on Swedenborg and Buddhism has been important for this dissertation). See also Joseph D. Parker, "Attaining Landscapes in the Mind: Nature Poetry and Painting in Gozan Zen," *Monumenta Nipponica* 52, no. Summer (1992): 235-257. On gardens in Sufism, see Julie Scott Meisani, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafiz," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 2: 229-260.

<sup>57</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, no. 106.

<sup>58</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, trans. John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1998), no. 32.



Headpiece ornament that appeared in the first editions of Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia* (Volumes 1, 2 and 6, 1749-1753); *De Equo Albo* (1758).

Image reproduced by kind courtesy of the New Church History Project, Glencairn Museum, Academy of the New Church, Bryn Athyn, PA

And again, earlier, in the *Divine Love and Wisdom* (1763), Swedenborg writes how there is “the marvelous ability in every seed generating its growth in sequence all the way to new seeds. In every seed, then, there is an image of something infinite and eternal, an inherent effort to multiply and bear fruit without limit, to eternity.”<sup>59</sup> The words here have a wondering sense at a perpetual striving towards propagation that are located within the plain minutia of nature: such observations should “stun” our minds into awe, Swedenborg writes.<sup>60</sup> Swedenborg’s tone comes close to the homeliness of Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence,” a poem that has received much ecocritical attention for obvious reasons, as chapter four here considers. Given that Blake closely read both Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion* and *Divine Love and Wisdom*, perhaps Swedenborg’s seeds indeed lie somewhere behind this poem’s famous opening lines: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.”<sup>61</sup> In Blake’s lyric, heaven is not other-worldly and transcendent, but a question of phenomenology in the here and now: a matter of adjusting perception to see broader spheres of time, a potentiality contained in the tiny and the everyday (a grain of sand, a flower; or, as it would be in Swedenborg’s recurrent trope, seeds). Swedenborg himself self-consciously represented his garden as a literal paradise of sorts, at least on one occasion. After gaining notoriety for his claims of open communication with heaven, a young little neighbor in the Sodermalm district, Greta Askbom, pestered the gardener-mystic to show her one of his famous angels. At last Swedenborg consented: taking the girl before a corner of the garden and

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<sup>59</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003), no. 60.

<sup>60</sup> Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom*, no. 351.

<sup>61</sup> Blake, *Complete Poetry* 493.

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saying with a flourish, “Now you shall see an angel!”, he swept back a curtain in front of a door—and Greta found herself and the garden behind her staring back and multiplied. She stood before the reflecting windows of the strange mirror-door.<sup>62</sup>

A recent scholar has proposed treating Swedenborg’s garden as a kind of symbol for the entire shape and nature of his written corpus. According to Jonathan Rose,

In a number of ways Swedenborg’s theological works resemble his garden. Viewed in general terms, they display symmetry and balance, method and sequence.... As

Swedenborg’s garden had large scale symmetry both east to west and south to north, his theology shows horizontal symmetries of love and wisdom, will and intellect, good and truth, goodwill and faith; and vertical symmetries of the Lord and humankind, heaven and hell, heaven and earth, spirit and body, and inner and outer levels of the mind.

Although twenty-two years passed between publication of the first and last title, the theology of [Swedenborg’s] eighteen works is extremely coherent and consistent. Viewed more narrowly, however, Swedenborg’s published theological works—again, like his garden—contain many elements that excite bafflement, wonder, or delight.<sup>63</sup>

Keeping in mind the garden’s international scope—its American mulberries and dogwoods, the African melons, tulips from Holland—this dissertation will further take this arrangement as a symbiotic template for the deliberate transnational and cross-cultural framework of the chapters that ensue.

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<sup>62</sup> Sigstedt, 347.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Rose, “Swedenborg’s Garden of Theology: An Introduction to Swedenborg’s Published Theological Works,” in *Emanuel Swedenborg: Essays for the New Century Edition on His Life, Work, and Impact*, ed. Jonathan Rose (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2005), 55.

But before getting to a discussion of relevant Romantic authors, just as the main entrance to Swedenborg's garden was preceded by an elaborate baroque gate, the first chapter here will focus on Swedenborg's equally baroque and elaborate life. His career as an esteemed mineralogist, his accomplishments in physiology, anatomy, and other disciplines that crested on a confident wave of 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific empiricism, will be charted in tandem relation to the later mystical theology: the other supporting pillar, if you will, of the arch that allows access into the garden of Swedenborg's ideas. In briefly surveying Swedenborg's prodigious life, this dissertation will emphasize two relevant dimensions. First, I will consider Swedenborg's lifelong relationship to mining and mineralogy, his family connections (and fortunes) that were linked to iron mines in Sweden. The rush into modern industrialization instigated a mining boom across 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and with it a corresponding representational shift in how mountains (and deep spaces) were being aesthetically conceived, in addition to an increased awareness of the tremendous costs and degradation that mining could bring to place.<sup>64</sup> As the royally designated "Assessor of Mines" for Sweden, Swedenborg was responsible for the largest open-pit copper mine in the north, at Falun. Already an environmental catastrophe by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the mine later became an important location for the German Romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffman, whose *The Mines of Falun* (1811) dramatizes the environmental and human costs of the mine's operation. Swedenborg's writings on mines—that descending into their depths made him aware of a dynamic geologic energy, "that the rocks were alive, an outflowing of higher

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<sup>64</sup> For this key aesthetic shift in mountains and mines, see Marjorie Hope Nicholson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959).

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power”<sup>65</sup> — makes Swedenborg share more with later German Romantics (like Hoffman), than many 18<sup>th</sup> century figures who regarded mountains, mines, and caves as places of terror, dark signs of man’s postlapsarian nature. As we will see, Swedenborg spent considerable and formative time at the same mines across northern Germany and Bohemia that later became significant places of exploration for authors like Goethe and Novalis.

Secondly, Swedenborg’s general relationship to literature and poetics will be stressed. Swedenborg wrote poetry throughout his life; indeed, perhaps the strongest register of Swedenborg’s ambivalence about the conditions at the Falun mine come in a Latin poem about descending into their smoky depths.<sup>66</sup> As a young 18 year old during his first liberating sojourn in England, he eagerly embarked on an ambitious course of reading at Oxford’s Bodleian library, especially savoring the works of Dryden, Spenser, and Shakespeare. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* left a particularly deep mark on Swedenborg’s imagination. Later, while in the middle of his existential crisis, as Swedenborg was shifting his focus from physiology into biblical exegesis, he wrote an extended, lush prose-poem on the creation of the universe entitled *De Cultu et Amore Dei* (“The Worship and Love of God”), that is heavily indebted to Milton’s epic account of the Garden of Eden. As many scholars have pointed out, Swedenborg’s *De Cultu* is unusual and unique in his corpus, and stands as a seminal transitional piece that mediates the claims of his earlier science with the transcendental demands of the later theology. An attention to the importance of Milton’s poetics for Swedenborg as he shifted intellectual directions might help us better understand how Emerson was able to claim that when we read Swedenborg’s dry

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<sup>65</sup> Qtd. in Bergquist 116.

<sup>66</sup> This poem will be discussed in the next chapter; it can be further pointed out that many of Swedenborg’s mechanical inventions were attempts to improve the dreadful working conditions at Falun.

theology, “we enter a world that is a living poem.”<sup>67</sup> Also, as ecocriticism has made the relationship between science and poetry one of its major theoretical problems, the link in the *De Cultu* between Swedenborg’s scientific endeavors and his subsequent mystical turn, the dialogues the text constructs with the hexaameron tradition, are all worth evaluating from an ecocritical perspective.

As we move beyond the baroque entrance of Swedenborg’s life into the Romantic garden beyond, it must be first pointed out what is conspicuously not here. This study will not substantially consider Henry David Thoreau, obviously a key figure for American environmentalism and Romantic nature aesthetics, even as Thoreau was affected by currents of Swedenborgian ideas (particularly by those expounded by James John Garth Wilkinson)<sup>68</sup>; nor will I deal with the slightly later writings of Sarah Orne Jewett, both a serious reader of Swedenborg and an author important for later ecocritical accounts of American regional writing.<sup>69</sup> The early conservation efforts of John Chapman—better known by his folk moniker, Johnny Appleseed—do not appear here, even though Chapman often distributed his famous apple seeds to people along the frontier accompanied with pages torn from Swedenborg’s *Arcana Caelestia*, viewing his mission as one of both apple tree propagation and proselytizing

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<sup>67</sup> Emerson, “Swedenborg; or, the Mystic” in *Essays*, 678.

<sup>68</sup> Thoreau’s engagement with Wilkinson’s influential *The Human Body and its Connexion to Man* (1851) can be traced in Thoreau’s journals, as chapter five will cursorily address; for a particularly suggestive way of approaching the Thoreau-Swedenborg relationship, see the discussion of Swedenborg’s science in Eric Wilson, “Thoreau, Crystallography, and the Science of the Transparent,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43, no. 1 (2004): 99-117.

<sup>69</sup> Swedenborg’s important influence on Jewett’s religious aesthetics is established by Josephine Donovan, “Jewett and Swedenborg,” *American Literature* 65, no. 4 (1993): 731-751.; for Jewett’s standard canonization in ecocriticism, see Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*.

the spiritual seeds of Swedenborg's "news right fresh from heaven," in Chapman's words.<sup>70</sup> John Muir presents an additional opportunity to examine the peculiar ways that Romantic rhetoric, Swedenborg's theology, and wilderness immersion led to formative conservation attempts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Muir, however, will not be a major part of the ensuing discussion as his dates fall significantly outside the chronological brackets of Romanticism.<sup>71</sup>

An important selection criteria has been for how within the purvey of Swedenborg's influence and nascent ecology, certain Romantic authors brought the structure of aesthetics to impinge on visual fields and helped different artists develop a "science of beauty" in their respective material productions and representations of nature. Emerson's 1836 *Nature* plays a formative role in the subsequent development of American Romantic landscape painting, or at least in ways much more significant than the texts written by Thoreau, Jewett, Muir, or Chapman. William Blake's capacities as engraver, illustrator, and painter make him as much a significant Romantic artist as he was poet and author (and the problematic divorce of Blake's writings from his images in scholarship is a matter to be treated later). A major shortcoming in ecocriticism remains its general blind-spot to art historical developments, and its exclusive preoccupation with printed text as if it were the sole mediator of ideology: the more recent debate between Buell and other ecocritics over the problem of mimesis underscores this dearth,

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<sup>70</sup> See Robert Price, *Johnny Appleseed: Man and Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), 105.

<sup>71</sup> While certainly not a card-carrying "Swedenborgian," the Swedish mystic's name and ideas appear enough in Muir's journals and letters to suggest a deep familiarity. Dennis Williams covers the general significance of Protestant mystical traditions for Muir's sense of nature in Dennis Williams, "John Muir, Christian Mysticism, and the Spiritual Value of Nature," in *John Muir: Life and Work*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 64-99), although much more work remains to be done on Swedenborg's particular contribution to Muir's environmental ethic, as the afterward and final chapter of this study will argue.

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as no matter what position taken, all examples of mimetic representation were wholly textual, the usual suspects drawn from the literary canon.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, as Alan Braddock notes, ecocriticism has remained virtually ignored as a viable methodology by art historians, a factor that has only just begun to change.<sup>73</sup> This present project strives to acknowledge “the iconic turn” of modernity, in W.J.T. Mitchell’s sense of the phrase, that if “the tensions between visual and verbal representations are inseparable from struggles in cultural politics and political culture,” a responsible ecocriticism cannot extricate the visual components that inhere to the political and social spheres of Romantic environmental representation.<sup>74</sup> While a fully thorough consideration of relevant visual works is beyond this project’s means, where appropriate and pertinent, I will occasionally make recourse to images that exemplify an ecocritical problem or visualize a particular Swedenborgian concept.

As Swedenborg’s impact on French Romanticism took a decidedly painterly turn with certain artists associated with Symbolism, the absence of a discussion of French aesthetics might seem a further conspicuous omission.<sup>75</sup> Generally, although Swedenborg had a marked impact on French literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as Lynn Wilkinson has demonstrated in her fine study), the effect of these ideas did not have the same environmental implications as it did for American,

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<sup>72</sup> See Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell, 2005), 140.

<sup>73</sup> Alan C. Braddock, “Ecocritical Art History,” *American Art* 23, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 24-28. See also Braddock and Christoph Irmscher’s edited collection, with an introduction by Lawrence Buell, Christoph Irmscher and Alan Braddock, eds., *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (University Alabama Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>75</sup> For Swedenborg’s influence on Symbolist works by Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, and Puves de Chavannes, see Martha Gyllenhaal, “Swedenborg’s Influence on the Painters of the French Symbolist Movement,” in *Faith and Learning at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church*, ed. Dan A. Synnestvedt (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Academy of the New Church Press, 2004), 85-102.

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British, or German Romantic movements, and the French 19<sup>th</sup> century has accordingly received scant attention from ecocritical scholarship.<sup>76</sup> Swedenborg's concept of correspondence was central to French Symbolist aesthetics after Baudelaire's poem, "Correspondance" (1857), did much to popularize the idea. However, the evolution of the concept of the aesthetic into later forms of French aestheticism and the so-called Decadent authors that rallied around the cry "*l'art pour l'art!*" is quite different from—if not fundamentally opposed to—ecocriticism's imperative to situate an ethical orientation towards representations of non-human nature. In Joris-Karl Huysman's Symbolist novel *Against Nature (A Rebours)* (1884), for example, the neurotic protagonist Des Esseintes (literally, "The Shingles") attempts to construct a sealed hermetic villa that completely occludes all natural influences, as "Nature has had her day," and only Des Esseintes' own "human ingenuity" can manufacture aesthetic perfection.<sup>77</sup> While Huysman's text is undercut by a rich irony—to block out the sunlight, Des Esseintes builds giant aquariums in front of all the villa's windows, and later enamels so many jewels onto the shell of his pet tortoise that the animal becomes crushed by the appliqué and dies—the novel's general tenor is symptomatic of much fin-de-siècle writing whereby the aesthetic becomes a space of intense anthropomorphic interiority, a willed artifice which fundamentally chafes against earlier Romantic aesthetics and the attendant idea of an "environment poem." Writes Karl Kroeber,

The Romantics tendency toward what might be called "experience," environmentally conceived, is important as the foundation of their resistance to aesthetic doctrines in the "art for art's sake mode." They did not wish to remove poetry into an "aesthetic " realm.

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<sup>76</sup> Lynn Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (A Rebours)*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Penguin, 2004), 35.

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They insisted on the efficacy and practical duties of art—not just to the social but also to the natural world.<sup>78</sup>

Earlier, Raymond Williams had also cautioned that the post-Symbolist aesthetic “is an element in the divided modern consciousness between *art* and *society*: a reference beyond social use and social valuation... [this] isolation can be damaging, for there is something irresistibly displaced and marginal about the now common and limiting phrase ‘aesthetic considerations’.”<sup>79</sup> The Symbolist hostility to the non-human, “natural” world characterized by Huysman’s *Des Esseintes* suggests how Williams’ words might further resonate ecocritically: that William’s cited disjuncture in modern consciousness is a basic perceptual problem underscoring our present environmental crisis, an inability to imagine larger wholes beyond our human selves.

The following two chapters attempt to account for Swedenborg’s life from an ecocritical perspective, beginning with his accomplishments in the nascent earth sciences and human physiology, before proceeding into the ways that several key concepts from his mature mystical theology lent themselves to the formation of Romantic environmental aesthetics. A consideration of Swedenborg’s nature-tinged theology also permits a view on the ways that his ideas, within his lifetime, began to color the transcendental philosophy of German Idealism. The first full book about Swedenborg and his visionary theology that was published in Germany, Christoph Oetinger’s *Swedenborg und anderer irdische und himmlische Philosophie* (1765), marks the start of a controversial reception that was framed by declamations of heresy from ecclesiastical

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<sup>78</sup> Kroeber, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 32.

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authorities that only made Swedenborg all the more tantalizing for young Romantics like Goethe, Schelling, and Novalis (not to mention Kant).

Chapter four will then turn to Blake's visual and textual productions and the problems these present for an ecocritical reading. Blake's complex and seemingly contradictory words about nature—"Everything that Lives is Holy," he jubilantly tells us on the one hand, but also that "Natural Objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me"—this apparent polarity can be usefully diagrammed within the background of Blake's ongoing dialogue with Swedenborgian theology. Furthermore, I will further argue that Swedenborg's apocalyptic vision of the New Jerusalem informed Blake's acute sense of London, and helped mold an ecopoetics unusual for its embrace of the chaotic dynamism of the modern city, and that this ultimately presents an opportunity to rectify ecocriticism's general anti-city bias, its problematic valorization of the rural pastoral in its canonical readings of Romantic poetry.

The final chapter will address Swedenborg's impact on Emerson and Transcendentalist aesthetics for obvious reasons, as Emerson's mediating influence on subsequent American aesthetics was substantial: be it on perception (the line into William James and pragmatism that Joan Richardson has traced), or on the visual artists already mentioned. This project's title, "Hieroglyphics of Nature," is paraphrased from Emerson's infrequent alignment of Swedenborgian correspondence with hieroglyphic theories—an alignment that Baudelaire and Balzac also made, and one that more recent poets like Ilya Kutik and Karen Weiser have also responded to.<sup>80</sup> I will argue that Swedenborg did not simply (and problematically) aid Emerson

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<sup>80</sup> "The warm, many weathered, passionate-peopled world," writes Emerson, "is to Swedenborg a grammar of hieroglyphics." Emerson, *Essays*, 687. For Kutik's poetic meditations on Swedenborg, hieroglyphics, and correspondence theory, see Ilya Kutik, *Hieroglyphs of Another*

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in transforming nature into an abstract, anthropocentric sign, but that Swedenborg's notion of correspondence, his idea of influx, and microcosmic analogies helped Emerson *feel* what he called a "ray of relation," that "shot from every other being to him."<sup>81</sup> Correspondence became to correspond, to commune with what was held in common.

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What kind of a view will emerge after going through this sequence of authors and their respective Romantic aesthetics inflected by Swedenborg? To return one last time to Swedenborg's garden: the grounds lay on a property that commanded a fantastic panorama, lying atop a cliff on the Sodermalm island, in the middle of a sea channel. To one side of the garden glittered the inland Lake Mallar, and to the other, the Baltic archipelago of Stockholm, with the spires of the cathedrals and churches, the Renaissance buildings of the Palace and House of Nobles, rising from the old city Gamla Stan. The garden in a very literal way thus lay on the border between culture and nature, the growing cosmopolitan districts of Stockholm on the one hand, and the more wild spaces of the outlying archipelago on the other. This geographic situation should not be lost on an ecocriticism increasingly aware of the cultural construction of the very idea of nature in itself, the myth that there is naturally something called "nature" which exists independently from, and even opposed to, human ideological constructions. The fact of the garden's height and expansive view might also be worthy of emphasis. Emerson once wrote that

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*World: On Poetry, Swedenborg, and Other Matters* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2000). More recently, Weiser also discusses Swedenborg's correspondences in terms of poetic communication in her introduction to *To Light Out* (New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Emerson, "Nature" in *Essays*, 21.

“the health of man demands a horizon.” Vincent Crapanzano has more recently demonstrated how horizons, both real and metaphorical, have been instrumental for how the human imagination constructs perceptual experience in a variety of different cultures—“horizons,” Crapanzano writes, “extend from the insistent reality of the here and now into that optative space or time—the space-time—of the imaginary. It is this realm that gives us an edge, at times wrenching and painful, at times relieving and pleasurable, on the here and now in all its viscous immediacy.”<sup>82</sup> From Swedenborg’s garden, one gained expansive horizons in almost all directions, the sky opening to a sea scudded with the masts of hundreds of sailing boats coming in from around the known world. Thus, Swedenborg’s garden contained horizons of contemplation that were available both internally—in the detailed layout of its botanical collections, in the garden seeds that made Swedenborg reflect inwards on eternity—and externally without, along the blurred line of sky and sea that circled the island property.

The comparative framework of this study ultimately hopes to provide an equally compelling perspective, both inwards and outwards, onto one of the most serious problems for ecocriticism, namely, its general omission of transnational and comparative concerns and a corresponding blindness to the affiliations between nature, national identities, and the formation of literary canons.<sup>83</sup> With the current intensification of various nationalisms ostensibly nullifying international environmental cooperation attempts (like the failed Kyoto protocols and collapse of the recent 2009 meetings in Copenhagen), it is timely to emphasize the transnational roots of Romantic ecology and the environmental imagination, and to present the green seeds of

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<sup>82</sup> Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 14.

<sup>83</sup> For ecocriticism’s lack of engagement with global and transnational concerns, see Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2006), 178-179.

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Swedenborgian aesthetics into a comparative dialogue. But first, we will need to proceed through the garden of Swedenborg's life, to understand better how an eighteenth century scientist-mystic might provoke insights into some of ecocriticism's disciplinary problems.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Visionary Science, 1688-1744*

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“The philosophy of Idealism, the Christianity of Mysticism, and the poetry of nature, have, in many respects, all the same end, and the same origin; these philosophers, these Christians, and these poets, all unite in one common desire. They would wish to substitute for the factitious system of society, not the ignorance of barbarous times, but an intellectual culture, which leads us back to simplicity by the very perfection of knowledge.” – Madame de Staël, *Germany* (1813)<sup>1</sup>

“[Swedenborg] exhibits an exotic culture as if he had had his education in another planet.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson (1846)<sup>2</sup>

In approaching the life of Swedenborg with an interest in his impact on later environmental aesthetics, it is striking to note how the shape of his life moves with, reflects, and chafes against the currents of modernization. Apart from the effects of his mystical theology, which largely concerns this present work, his contributions to mineralogy and the nascent earth sciences had a noticeable presence in Enlightenment conceptualizations of nature (as well as the development of technologies for the emergent idea of “natural resources”). Swedenborg was the first scientist, for example, to formulate the origins of the solar system in terms of an explosion of nebular matter, the so-called “nebular hypothesis” that is often (falsely) first attributed to Kant and LaPlace.<sup>3</sup> As emphasized in the last chapter, Swedenborg’s departure from a career as a civil

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<sup>1</sup> Madame de Stael, *Germany*, ed. O. W Wight, trans. F. Max Müller (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1887), Vol. II: 329.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. IX: 410.

<sup>3</sup> Swedenborg first published his nebular theory in his mineralogical magnum opus, the *Principia* (1734), which is discussed further in this chapter. Kant, who was familiar with Swedenborg’s work, refined the nebular hypothesis theory in his *General Natural History and Theory of the*

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servant, scientist and inventor and his shift into transcendental theology refracts larger metaphysical tensions within the Enlightenment and its empirical positivism, a change that mirrors the modern opposition pitted between scientific and religious claims to truth. The apparent dialectic between secularization and reenchancement in Swedenborg's life is precisely why he fascinated subsequent Romantics who gravitated towards idealist positions that placed the imaginative powers of the mind, instead of analytic reason, at the center of human consciousness. Subsequent Romantic assessments of Swedenborg's life, from Emerson's essay "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic" (1850) to Friedrich Schelling's scattered comments on his "northern visionary" in the early 1800's, all accordingly tend to emphasize a radical break in Swedenborg's life, an incommensurable gap between the earlier science and later transcendental mysticism. Yet ever since Martin Lamm's groundbreaking modern biography, *Swedenborg* (1915), historians have rather suggested a strong continuity in Swedenborg's life: that instead of a schizophrenic change of career, Swedenborg maintained the same basic set of questions which he correspondingly shifted from mathematics to mineralogy, then physiology, and finally, to the inner worlds of the soul. The religious historian Ernst Benz explains how "the inner link between Swedenborg's scientific and visionary way of looking at things is attested by the fact that a mystical image of humankind and a mystical theory of knowledge already underlay his scientific researches before conversion." Benz further explains that

Swedenborg was not alone in this respect. German and English science during the eighteenth century was imbued with the spirit of mysticism and emerged from a new

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*Heavens* (1755), while Pierre-Simon Laplace's further contributions were first published in 1796.

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view of humankind and the universe. The original form of this new view can be clearly seen in Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme, while its influence extended from the works of Boehme through the mediation of the English philosophers Robert Fludd and Henry More and led directly to the speculations of Newton.<sup>4</sup>

The cosmopolitan milieu of the European scientific conversation were far from Sweden, however, when Emanuel was born in Stockholm in 1688. The following decades were calamitous for Sweden, largely due to King Charles XII's constant wars and overstretched armies. Currency inflation and food shortages led to peasant riots as the century drew to a close. The all-powerful, highly dogmatic state Lutheran church had further inhibited Sweden from developing the same kinds of intellectual cultures and university societies that were flourishing in England and much of continental Europe. This is one reason why Swedenborg's frequent sojourns abroad became a constant current in his long life: the travels kept him abreast of the most recent scientific developments and mechanical inventions that were difficult to obtain in Sweden, and later provided opportunities to publish works that would have faced censure. If we follow Benz and stipulate that Swedenborg's theoretical preoccupations and questions remained the same during the decades of his life, concerns that took Swedenborg from the astronomical observatories of Greenwich and Rotterdam to the iron and coal mines of Prussia and Bohemia, from the Bibliothèque nationale of Paris to the Bodleian at Oxford, it is equally true that the scope of these questions were indubitably shaped by his early childhood and the powerful presence of his father, Jesper Swedberg, a Lutheran bishop who prominently resurfaces in the

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<sup>4</sup> Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*, Swedenborg studies no. 14 (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 138-139.

proto-Freudian dream diary that Swedenborg kept during his transformative crisis and mystical conversion. To understand Swedenborg's lifelong set of questions—what is nature, what is divinity? who is man, in relation to both? do transcendental categories of experience exist beyond the senses?—it is essential to begin there, in the Swedberg household at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **“A moody child and wildly wise”: 1688—1709**<sup>5</sup>

The Swedberg family did not acquire the name “Swedenborg” until 1719, when Queen Ulrike Eleonora ennobled Jesper Swedberg's family, a practice that was common for Lutheran clergymen who had attained the rank of bishop.<sup>6</sup> Well before, however, Swedberg had profited from the royal connections related to his role as Chaplain to the King, the position he held in December 1688 when his second son Emanuel was born. Swedberg was intellectually prolific as

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<sup>5</sup> The section title comes from the poem that opens Emerson's essay “The Poet,” which describes a figure of the poet as a perceptive child. This selection as section-header is not so arbitrary as it might seem; at a key point in that essay, Emerson claims “Swedenborg, of all men in the recent ages, stands eminently for the translator of nature into thought” (Essays 464). Emerson then proceeds, as he does elsewhere, to link the figure of the poet with the specific figure of Swedenborg as mystic. While the relationship will be fully explored in the subsequent chapter on Emerson, it is worth noting how a number of metaphors of vision and seeing collect around this moody child-poet in the opening poem— the “joyful eyes” that “rived the dark,” “saw the dance of nature forward far,” etc.—and the deliberate ways that optics frequently figure into Emerson's descriptive accounts of Swedenborg as well.

<sup>6</sup> Even before the family was ennobled to “Swedenborg,” Jesper Swedberg and his older brother were the first in the family to bear a family name instead of the traditional Swedish patronym (their father Daniel Isaacson, for example, was the son of an Isaac Nilsson, who was in turn the son of a Nils Ottesson). Daniel Isaacson, a wealthy mine owner, likely chose “Svedberg” after the ancestral estate near the Great Copper Mountain mine of Falun, which was called Sveden, or “*Svedens Gard*.” Literally “burned farm,” Sveden was named after the process where the mountain forest was burned away to make room for a farmstead. See George F. Dole and Robert H. Kirven, *A Scientist Explores Spirit: A Compact Biography of Emanuel Swedenborg with Key Concepts of Swedenborg's Theology* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992), 7.

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he was physically robust. Coming from a long line of miners and ministers who hailed from the remote Darlecarlian province northwest of Stockholm, Swedberg fathered nine children, married three times, and was the author of numerous pamphlets, tracts, a remarkable lengthy autobiography, as well as the first book of Swedish Lutheran hymns (1694), many of which are still sung today. Despite his proximity to the royal family and his high standing within the church, Swedberg was a fierce critic of several standard Lutheran orthodoxies and was not afraid to use his influential pulpit to chastise even the king. He nonetheless maintained royal favor, Swedberg writes in his autobiography, because King Charles the eleventh “liked to see when a serious, zealous servant of the Lord preached the truth in a pointed fashion and bravely stepped forward without reservations to prove everything clearly by the word of God and without doing any violence to the same.”<sup>7</sup>

Swedberg’s feisty independence and his particular lifelong critique of the Lutheran doctrine of *sole fide*—“faith alone,” that one was “saved” simply by virtue of belief, an intellectual position—were fueled by the popular waves of Pietism that had transformed continental Protestantism in the latter decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Pietist theologians like Johann Arndt and Cornelius Jansen had reacted against the dry scholastic tendencies of the era, emphasizing a need for a deeply individualized personal relationship to God that embraced an almost mystical empathetic communion with the wounds and sufferings of the Christ. Pietism preached living a life of simplicity, and favored the pragmatic doing of good works in contradistinction to Martin Luther’s emphasis on *sole fide*. Though the Swedish Lutheran church

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<sup>7</sup> Rudolph Tafel, *Bischof Jesper Swedberg : der Vater Emanuel Swedenborgs : eine Biographie*. (Frankfurt am Main: J.G. Mittnacht, 1880), 23..

tended to regard Pietistical writings as suspect, if not heretically dangerous to their organization's very structure, Swedberg reserved a special place for Pietist authors in his home. Swedberg would read excerpts from Arndt's popular *True Christianity* at the daily evening prayers, and further disrupted the strict service formalities that most families followed by including music and cello playing as accompaniments to the scriptural meditations. Furthermore, because Pietism encouraged a union between the self and the divine that was wholly private, and thus in a certain regard anti-ecclesiastical, it fostered a textual tradition of typological commentary that tended to regard nature as a second book of revelation, where God's constant love was to be ecstatically experienced by the individual. When Emanuel Swedenborg and his siblings heard and read their father's selections from Arndt and other German Pietists, they would have encountered older strands of unorthodox thought that hearkened back to Raimond von Sabunde and Jakob Boehme, who both believed the revelations of the Book of Nature would usher in "a new era of religious contemplation of nature," as Ernst Benz puts it. Benz writes further how this context likely shaped a hermeneutical model for the young Emanuel in which "the character of a 'private Christianity' gave priority to the Book of Nature for the time being."<sup>8</sup>

Like many of his continental Pietist counterparts, Swedberg believed that nature was the external manifestation of a supernatural struggle between heaven and hell. The creaking and

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<sup>8</sup> Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 108-109. There is, of course, an immediate parallel to be drawn here with the (almost simultaneous) childhood of the American theologian and philosopher Jonathan Edwards, particularly in the ways Edwards discusses his meditative experiences in the swamps of New England as a young boy. For more on the typological homologies between Edwards and Swedenborg, see Devin Zuber, "Edwards, Swedenborg, Emerson: From Typology to Correspondence," in *The Contributions of Jonathan Edwards to American Culture and Society: Tercentenary Essays on America's Spiritual Founding Father* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edward Mellen Press, 2008), 109-124.

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groaning of household wood furniture could be signs of divine favor or displeasure, he writes in his autobiography; the disastrous fires that destroyed Swedberg's homes on three separate occasions were forms of persecution and revenge by the Devil, who was angry with Swedberg for converting and saving so many Christian souls. Swedberg thus raised his children in an environment where angels and spirits were always on the watch, observing each action, and the miraculous import of dreams and visions was to be expected. The children were encouraged to cultivate habits of introspection and self-reflection—praying, meditating, keeping journals—where they could examine the state of their unregenerate souls and locate the divine signs of grace and salvation that lurked beneath the everyday. Ever since having a near-death experience as a boy, when his unconscious body had been dredged up out of a millpond, Swedberg professed a belief in personal guardian angels that watched and guided his every step. Later experiences detailed in his autobiography record indescribable visions and hearing disembodied angelic voices.<sup>9</sup>

Coupled with this supernatural intensity, Swedberg had a keen, voracious intellect, and in 1692 he was appointed to be professor of theology at Uppsala University. His reputation as a Pietist-reformer preceded him there, and Uppsala students worried in advance if Swedberg would be banning their belt-buckles, swords, and the wearing of certain hats—fashions that Swedberg viewed as frivolous and sinful. More serious was a smoldering intellectual debate affecting all departments and their faculties, a strident war of ideas between the Aristotelians, on the one hand, with their scholastic methods of syllogism and analogous reasoning, and a newer

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<sup>9</sup> Tafel, *Bischof Jesper Swedberg*, passim; Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret: The Meaning and Significance of the Word of God, the Life of the Angels and Service to God* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2005), 7-14.

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camp of thinking represented by the Cartesians, on the other, who championed various empirical models that were revolutionizing the sciences. Rene Descartes had been brought to Sweden as a personal instructor by Queen Christina in 1649, and his presence cast a long, controversial shadow in Sweden still felt at Uppsala fifty years later. While Swedberg favored the older forms of scholasticism, when his son Emanuel entered the university at age 11, Emanuel quickly gravitated towards the controversial Cartesians and their epistemological premise that thinking began with an intuition of the self: *cogito ergo sum*.

Unlike his father, Emanuel Swedborg never completed an autobiography or a memoir, and one of the sole surviving documents that contains a conscious recollection of his childhood years reflects the heady atmosphere of the Swedberg home in Uppsala, filled as it was with students and theologians from the university. Swedborg writes in a letter to a confidant how

From my 4<sup>th</sup> to my 10<sup>th</sup> year, I was constantly in thought concerning God, salvation, and the *spiritual sufferings* of men, and several times revealed that at which my mother and father wondered, saying that angels must be speaking through me. From my 6<sup>th</sup> to my 12<sup>th</sup> years, my delight was to discourse with clergymen concerning Faith—that the life thereof is love, and that the love which gives life is the love to one’s neighbor...<sup>10</sup>

It also seems that from a very young age, Swedborg began experimenting with hypoventilation as a meditational technique to train and focus his mind. Swedborg’s lifelong practice of shallow breathing to induce an altered state of consciousness, as many scholars have pointed out,

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<sup>10</sup> Emanuel Swedborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedborg*, ed. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Swedborg Scientific Association, 1955), 696. This letter is a private reply to Dr. Gabriel Beyer, a teacher and theologian in Gothenburg who faced charges of heresy for his public endorsement of Swedborgian doctrines in 1769. Beyer had noted in his previous letter that Swedborg had never published anything about his early life.

bear strong parallel to the central importance that yogic pranayama has played in eastern religious practices, and further distinguishes Swedenborg from western mystical traditions where such breathing has had a less prominent role, if at all.<sup>11</sup> From an early period it seems that Swedenborg was keenly aware of how deliberate breathing patterns could alter his thinking—he records in a later private diary how “when in childhood I wished to hold my breath purposely... I wished the times of respiration to agree with those of the heart, and so observed that then the understanding began to vanish as it were; then afterwards, when I wrote in imagination, that I had observed that I held my respiration as if tacit.”<sup>12</sup> This “writing in imagination,” connected to breathing patterns and a sense of liberation from his understanding, became the experiential platform for Swedenborg’s later visionary output.

But from where, we might further ask, did Swedenborg acquire this unusual breathing practice? Martha Keith Schuchard controversially contends that Swedenborg was intimately familiar with eastern religious traditions and practices, and even performed elaborate tantric sex rituals in both the privacy of his own bedchamber and with radical Moravians he sometimes associated with in London. Swedenborg’s (previously unknown) ability to sustain long erections without ejaculating, Schuchard claims, brought on “an orgasmic trance state that elevated him to

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<sup>11</sup> This was noted as early as 1913 by D.T. Suzuki in his Japanese essay on Swedenborg, “Suedenborugu,” which was republished and translated in Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Swedenborg: Buddha of the North* (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996). A similar early Hindu perspective is offered by D. Gopaul Chetty, “Was Swedenborg a Yogi?,” in *New Light upon Indian Philosophy, or Swedenborg and Saiva Siddhanta* (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), 125--146. More recent considerations are offered by Stephen Larsen, “Swedenborg and the Visionary Tradition,” *Studia Swedenborgiana* 3, no. 4 (1980), and Devin Zuber, “Buddha of the North: Swedenborg and Transpacific Zen,” *Religion and the Arts* 14, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-33.

<sup>12</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, 1st ed. (Bryn Athyn, Pa: General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1998), no. 3320.

the world of spirits and angels.”<sup>13</sup> Schuchard’s methodology to arrive at such a claim relies on a shaky structure of inference building on conjectures, and overlooks the historical problem that “tantric” and “Buddhist” had yet to even enter the European vocabulary as distinct religious traditions; Schuchard moreover blithely assumes that tantric sexuality easily equates into a method for inducing states of “ecstatic consciousness.” As Hugh Urban and David Gordon White demonstrate, this sort of assumption is largely a twentieth century projection, a modern fantasy spawned by New Age eclecticism that irresponsibly occludes its Orientalist roots.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it is striking to note that Swedenborg records a later spiritual experience in his diary where spirits from “the Indies” teach him divine breathing techniques.<sup>15</sup>

A mystique around India would have certainly been in London’s air during any of Swedenborg’s extended visits there, as British colonial contact with the Indies exponentially

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<sup>13</sup> Martha Keith Schuchard, “Why Mrs. Blake Cried: Swedenborg, Blake, and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision,” *Esoterica* 2 (2000): 53. Much of the material in Schuchard’s article appeared at greater length in her subsequent monograph Marsha Keith Schuchard, *William Blake's Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision* (Rochester, Vt: Inner Traditions, 2008); Schuchard promises to make further extensive claims for Swedenborg as a Kabbalist, Freemason, and secret government spy in her forthcoming *Emanuel Swedenborg: Secret Agent on Earth and in Heaven*. Schuchard’s scholarly errors and lapses are catalogued by Brian Talbot, “Schuchard's Swedenborg,” *The New Philosophy* (August 2007): 165-218.

<sup>14</sup> According to White, by “presenting the entire history of Tantra as a unified, monolithic ‘cult of ecstasy’ and assuming all that has smacked of eroticism in Indian culture is by definition Tantric,” western misperceptions have brought together “erotic art, techniques of massage, Ayurveda, and yoga into a single invented tradition... . New Age Tantra is to medieval Tantra what finger painting is to fine art.” David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xii-xiii. See also Hugh B. Urban, “The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism,” *History of Religions* 39, no. 3 (February 2000): 268-304.

<sup>15</sup> “[these spirits from the Indies] had been taught a way of bringing upon their magnate a kind of breathing. His spirits came also to me, and brought the same thing upon me so that I would know it from experience... their spiraling flow, characteristic of such spirits, proceeded with ease.” Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 402. See also no. 1747.

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increased throughout the eighteenth century and an oriental faddism for the exotic was taking shape in popular urban commodities like coffee, silk, and tea.<sup>16</sup> It would take William Jones's much later translations of the Bhagavad-Gita in 1783, however, before Vedic ideas entered the European conversation to any degree of depth and understanding.

Much more likely than Swedenborg having direct knowledge of yogic or tantric breathing techniques, he would have encountered alternative paradigms for consciousness in the general knowledge that had accrued about Lapland shamans who lived in Sweden's uncharted north. Swedenborg had close contact with the Rudbeck family of professors during his matriculation at Uppsala University, from 1703-1709.<sup>17</sup> Both the father, Oleus Rudbeck (the elder), and his son Olaf Rudbeck (the younger), were professors of medicine at the university. Besides living next door to the Swedberg family in Uppsala for a period of time, where Olaus Rudbeck maintained a noted scientific botanical garden, Olaf the Younger was an avid collector of materials related to the Sámi peoples in Lapland, a scholarly interest that Rudbeck passed onto his most famous

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<sup>16</sup> See Timothy Morton's smart discussion of how exotic cultural tropes and metaphors of spice refract the imperial logic of expanding capitalism in Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic*, Cambridge studies in Romanticism 42 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Though Morton's focus is on later, recognizably "Romantic" texts, his premise rests largely on the claims established in Neil McKendrick, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), which firmly sets the origin of a commodification of the East in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Olof Lagercrantz astutely notes, a moment in Swedenborg where the spirits of Chinese evoke images of "a woolly goat, a millet loaf, a spoon of ivory, and a city floating on glassy water," sounds like a list of materials and images from the East India Company. Olof Gustaf Hugo Lagercrantz, *Epic of the Afterlife: A Literary Approach to Swedenborg*, trans. Anders Hallengren (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 94.

<sup>17</sup> Swedenborg acquired further intimacy with the Rudbecks when Olaf the Younger married Swedenborg's cousin, Catharine Swedberg. Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 419.

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protégé, Carl von Linnaeus.<sup>18</sup> Rudbeck and Linnaeus viewed the Sámi and their pre-Christian traditions as being closer to an inherent truth in nature—a prelapsarian culture from ancient times that was to be valued, that could ameliorate the corrupting ills of modernity and industrialization. This stood in stark contrast to most of 18<sup>th</sup> century Swedes who viewed the Sámi as illiterate savages, a lesser race lacking the benefits of civilization and Christianity. Linnaeus writes in his journal during his seminal 1732 trip into Lapland, projecting his own kind of fantasy of the Enlightenment’s noble savage, how the “blithesome” Sámi

lives and prospers unnoticed but with the greatest content and innocence! You fear neither hunger nor the winds of war upon your villages - these which all too often lay waste to Europe's most prosperous nations and cities. Here under your reindeer-skin, you gently sleep, free of worry, strife and discord, without knowing what envy is... Easily surpassing one-hundred years, in old age, and in excellent health, you live without sorrow... You live in your forests as the birds, whom neither sow nor reap, but whom the Almighty God nonetheless supplies abundantly with sustenance.<sup>19</sup>

It is not known if Swedenborg responded to Rudbeck’s Sámi collections in this early period with the same enthusiasm that Linnaeus later exhibits, although Swedenborg did write a short descriptive poem in neo-Latin about the Sámi during these years. “A Description of the Most Distant Lapps” is somewhat flat – the critic and translator Hans Helander writes that it seems “strangely devoid of point and purpose”—although it is notably colored by a tone of realism,

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<sup>18</sup> Linnaeus, as mentioned in the previous chapter, married into the Swedenborg family, and there were several professional and personal overlaps between him and Swedenborg. See the earlier footnoted discussion on page 23-24.

<sup>19</sup> English translation provided by University Library of Tromsø, Norway; Northern Lights Route Project, Council of Europe Cultural Routes. <http://www.ub.uit.no/northernlights/eng/linne.htm>

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factually taking count of the ways the Laplander hunt wild animals, and wear the fur of the lynxes and bears they have killed far in the north of Sweden. The end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century had seen the publication of a number of works about the Laplanders, both in Sweden and abroad, that had exaggerated their purported magical abilities and powers. In Daniel Morhof's influential *Polyhistor* (1688), for example, the Laplanders sing songs that make the whole earth shake and tremble, and wild animals to become tame. By the time Swedenborg composed his poem, however, a number of Swedish authors were attempting to be more realistic—even systematically scientific, in the case of the Rudbecks—in their accounts of Lapland, as they felt the descriptions of Lapland sorcery and magic were a national disgrace, if not international embarrassment, impugning Sweden's Christian honor. There was even a popular rumor on continental Europe at the height of Sweden's imperial successes that Swedish military victories had been the results of black, satanic sorcery that was being practiced by Laplanders in the standing ranks of the Swedish army.<sup>20</sup> Swedenborg's poem negotiates this context by listing only objective, almost empirical, observations about the Laplanders, as it also seems to anticipate the Rousseauian attitude that subsequent authors, most notably Linnaeus, held about the Lapps as ethically superior, even antidotal, to the corrupting effects of the civilized modern world. But the Sámi reputation for the supernatural seems to return to haunt Swedenborg much later. During the midst of his crisis period, Swedenborg records in the pages of his so-called "diary of spiritual experiences" an interest in Lapland shaman techniques that purportedly separate the soul from

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<sup>20</sup> This is noted by Helander in the notes and commentary to Emanuel Swedenborg, *Ludus Heliconius: And Other Latin Poems*, trans. Hans Helander, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis 23 (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1995), 203-204.

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the body: a technique of “ecstasy energumen,” an ecstasy of the spirit-possessed.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the descriptive account of weather in his Lapland poem, that they live “where the evening star rises and the morning star itself goes down, / where often the sun hastens high in the sky, where the evening / mixes itself with the morning in the same place,” could be said to become the descriptive setting for the angels of Swedenborg’s later heavens, where the sun also never sets and there are only perpetual degrees of daylight (which is also a realistic description of Sweden’s diurnal rhythms in the summer).<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the Rudbecks at Uppsala, as a young student Swedenborg would have had contact with Johannes Kemper, a converted Jew who was brought to Uppsala to teach Hebrew, and it is very likely that Swedenborg could have received additional training in Hebrew from Kemper. Kemper’s conversion to Christianity would have been essential for any kind of mobility in 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran Sweden, although it seems his conversion stemmed more likely from personal disappointment with the messianic Judaism that Kemper had embraced during the first part of his life in Krakow (when he was still known as Moshe ben Aharon). Ben Aharon had been an enthusiastic and devoted Sabbatean, believing that the 17<sup>th</sup> century Sabbati Zevi was the long foretold Jewish Messiah. When Zevi failed to resurrect after his death, as various Kabbalistic prophecies had foretold, Kemper was one of several prominent Jews in the period who subsequently converted (and took a Christian name). Kemper’s life followed a diasporic course that was typical, yet still extraordinary, for educated Jews from Eastern Europe, going from

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<sup>21</sup> Dole and Kirven, *A Scientist Explores Spirit*, 4, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Swedenborg, *Ludus Heliconius*, 109; for Swedenborg on the light of heaven, see Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), nos. 126-140.

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Krakow to Catholic Bavaria, and ultimately ending up as an instructor of Hebrew in (the very Lutheran) Uppsala. Today, Kemper is regarded as one of the most significant figures for introducing kabalistic philosophy during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> But it remains debatable to what degree a young Swedenborg would have picked up on Kemper's kabalistic side, if at all.

Schuchard again cavalierly claims that Swedenborg was a multicultural "practicing Kabbalist" (in addition to his knack for Indian tantric sex), simply due to his proximity to Kemper. There certainly could have been a kind of osmosis of general ideas regarding the deep religious significance embedded in the material signs of language, the semiotic function of Hebrew characters on a page that was holy and symbolic—a particular emphasis that the later Swedenborg shares with the Kabala. Swedenborg's angels in heaven, too, speak a sweet language that, though far beyond mortal ears, is most closely approximated by the vowel sounds of spoken Hebrew.<sup>24</sup> Swedenborg and the Kabala further share parallels in their respective conceptualizations of the universe as a macrocosmic reflection of the human figure (and conversely, that man is a microcosm, a universe within himself). Jorge Luis Borges was perhaps the first modern critic to point out this affinity—he notes, in his 1975 "Prologo" on Swedenborg, how

as far as I know or remember, no one has investigated this intimate affinity...

Swedenborg and the Kabbalah both arrive at the concept of the microcosm: man as either

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<sup>23</sup> See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper," *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 1, no. 1 (August 2001), <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume1/number1/ssr01-01-a02.html>. as well as Hans-Joachim Schoeps, "Philosemitism in the Baroque Period," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 47, no. 2, New Series (October 1956): 139-144.

<sup>24</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard*, no. 241.

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the mirror or the compendium of the universe. According to Swedenborg, Hell and Heaven are in man, who equally contains plants, mountains, seas, continents, minerals, trees, herbs, flowers, thorns, animals, reptiles, birds, fish, tools, cities, and buildings.<sup>25</sup>

This aspect of Swedenborg's theology is one strand that William Blake later weaves into his eco-poetics, as we shall see in chapter four. Swedenborg's micro and macrocosms help contextualize Blake's statements such as "Man contained in his Limbs, all Animals," and his thorough deconstruction of anthropocentrism. But it is ultimately impossible to discern if Kemper left any kind of kabalistic impression on Swedenborg during his student days, however, as these elements are present only in the much later theology.

At Uppsala, Swedenborg ended his studies with a dissertation on the Stoic philosopher Publius Syrus. The Stoics' pragmatic emphasis on moral conduct, clarity of thought, and freewill are elements that lie at the core of Swedenborg's overall religious message, as Lars Bergquist points out.<sup>26</sup> Swedenborg defended his dissertation in the summer of 1709 when he was 21 years old and it is likely that this public oration was marred by Swedenborg's slight stutter, an awkwardness with spoken language that persisted throughout his life. This was perhaps one reason why Swedenborg never wholeheartedly pursued securing a professorship in Sweden.<sup>27</sup> Swedenborg's stutter and his often taciturn presence at social gatherings contrasts with his later

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<sup>25</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions* (New York: Viking, 1999), 457.

<sup>26</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> See Swedenborg to Benzeliuss, Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 334.

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self representations of encounters in the spiritual world, where Swedenborg eloquently debates and argues with the spirits of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Isaac Newton, among others.<sup>28</sup>

Of certain greater impact and influence than either Rudbeck or Kemper during Swedenborg's university years was Eric Benzelius, the university librarian who had married Swedenborg's older sister Anna, and with whom Swedenborg lived for several years during his years of study. Benzelius was at the center of the Cartesians and the new science then roiling through Uppsala. Highly cosmopolitan, he was friends with leading natural scientists and philosophers throughout Europe and was one of the major conduits for continental knowledge reaching Sweden during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sweden's first scientific society, the *Collegium Curiosorum*, and its first academic journal were both established under Benzelius' auspices. The brunt of Swedenborg's extant early letters are addressed to Benzelius and demonstrate how instrumental the learned librarian was in swaying Swedenborg to pursue a vocation in mathematics and science. Swedenborg writes to Benzelius, half-jokingly,

that my Brother encourages me to *Mathesin* is a matter I should rather be *discouragerad* in, since I have an *immoderate desire* thereto without this, and especially to *Astronomien* and *Mechaniken*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Three examples of encounters with Luther, Calvin, and Newton in the spiritual world are given in, respectively, Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, trans. John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1998), no. 796; Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 6041; and Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Last Judgment and Babylon Destroyed: Showing That All the Things Which Are Foretold in the Apocalypse, Are at This Day Fulfilled from Things Heard and Seen ; Also, A Continuation Concerning the Last Judgment and the Spiritual World* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1951), no. 291.

<sup>29</sup> Reflecting the learned conventions of the day, Swedenborg's private Swedish letters are often intermingled with Latin, English, and French phrases. The English translations of these letters

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Swedenborg's "immoderate desire" for math and science, and a corresponding guilt for pursuing them, fed Swedenborg's ego—his "pride and love of self"—that ultimately implode in the early 1740's. In addition to this thirst for science, Benzelius surely imparted Swedenborg with a hunger to travel to the continent and meet his illustrious circle of learned friends, and as soon as Swedenborg graduated, he promptly made plans to sail for London.

This, however, was simply impossible in 1709. Charles the XII's imperial adventures had brought Sweden to the brink of disaster. The army was overstretched, engaged on multiple fronts; currency inflation was rampant, and intense social unrest pervaded the countryside. Swedenborg ended up living at the family home in Skara in western Sweden (Västergötland), where Swedenborg had been appointed bishop, biding his time for a more propitious moment that would permit sea travel. The national crisis was never very far away. In a village only twenty miles from Skara, an attempt to conscript men into the army broke out into riots and lynching. A housewife and peasants were murdered by the mob; the town bailiff was shot a hundred times until "hardly anything whole was left of him," Swedenborg reported to Benzelius, "and they would have had the pigs eat him had not the pastor reprimanded them."<sup>30</sup> The clergy as representatives of the state church and its close proxy to the king were at great risk from such outbreaks. The sophisticated intellectual cultures of Paris and London that Swedenborg had heard about from Benzelius, that he longed to partake in himself, must have seemed quite distant from the threat of illiterate mobs breaking out in the Swedish countryside.

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attempt to retain the hybrid flavor of the originals by retaining the Latin. Swedenborg to Benzelius, Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Swedenborg to Benzelius, *ibid*, 8.

In spite of this indefinite suspension, Swedenborg used his time in Skara productively. He taught himself the art of bookbinding, and learned how to play the organ, so well that he often replaced the official organist in the Skara cathedral. This was to become habitual for Swedenborg in the forthcoming decades: he would study and learn technical crafts from whomever happened to be around him, quickly absorbing highly skilled practical knowledge. When abroad, he preferred to board with skilled laborers and craftsmen in order to learn their trades, and Swedenborg subsequently became highly adept at watch-making, cabinet-making, brass instrument making, engraving, and lens grinding. Swedenborg employed all of these crafts in the production of his works—at both the level of building microscopes, prisms and lenses for his empirical research, and also at a practical level for the texts themselves, learning how to draw and engrave illustrations and how to bind his thousands of manuscript pages into durable volumes.

While stuck in Skara, Swedenborg also visited with great interest a local site where enormous bones had been recently discovered, buried in the ground. Swedenborg later identified the remains as that of a whale, correcting the popular assumption that they were the skeleton of an ancient, massive Swedish giant, and Swedenborg's reflections on this discovery—the strange displaced presence of a giant sea creature hundreds of miles inland, far from any ocean—were subsequently published in 1719 as *The Height of Waters, and Strong Tides in the Primeval World*, which is regarded as the first geological description of Scandinavia.<sup>31</sup> The unearthed whale was eventually brought to the Skara cathedral and reassembled there, and it is tempting to imagine the large skeleton lying among the consecrated pillars and stained glass as a kind of

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<sup>31</sup>Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic: The Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 59.

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metaphor for the burgeoning intrusion of geology and earth sciences into the certitude of traditional religious belief.<sup>32</sup> The skeleton ended up at Uppsala university (where it presently lies on display in the Zoological Museum), and when the whale was subsequently categorized by paleontologists as a distinct, extinct species, it was named *Baleana swedenborgii* in honor of its namesake's earlier, pioneering research. The whale fossils are ultimately used by Swedenborg in *The Height of Waters* to argue how the levels of the ocean had once been much higher than was thought, and this could but indubitably confirm the teachings of the biblical flood from Genesis. For the time being, at least at this early period, Swedenborg perceived no conflict between the claims of science and a belief in the Bible as literal fact: empirical readings of the Book of Nature would only enhance and deepen human understanding of God's Word. The whale fossil presented no contradictions to the architecture of Christian hermeneutics.

Swedenborg eventually found passage to London on a schooner in 1710. The ship was shot at by the French navy, then attacked by privateers, and finally faced a plague quarantine at the London docks. Though Swedenborg was subsequently arrested and almost hung for breaking the quarantine, the young Swede finally found himself in London in early 1710, armed with a bevy of introduction letters from Benzelius.

#### **“Reading Newton daily”: London, 1710—1715**

Swedenborg was dazzled by the bustle and energy of 18<sup>th</sup> century metropolitan London. He climbed to the top of St. Paul's cathedral, experimented with the acoustic echoes in its whispering galleries, and reverently kissed the marble tomb of Isaac Casaubon below, a

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<sup>32</sup> Jan Bondeson, *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1997), 87-88.

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Huguenot scholar whose Latin stylistics Swedenborg much admired. He spent time in the coffeehouses that were the informal centers for the 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific conversation and seems to have been a reader of The Spectator, the liberal paper that professed “to bring philosophy out of the closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffeehouses.”<sup>33</sup> The Collegium Curiosorum had commissioned Swedenborg to be their special envoy, to establish contact with the leading British scientists of the day and carefully observe and take note of their scientific methods and laboratory instruments. “I visit daily the best *mathematicos* in the city here,” Swedenborg boasted to Benzelius, “I have been at Flamsted’s [sic] who is held to be the best *astronomus* in England, making continual observations which, together with the Parisienium Observat [Parisian Observatory] will in time give us a true motion of the moon and its approach to the fixed stars and, with the help of this, enable us to find at sea a definite longitude... .”<sup>34</sup>

Sir John Flamsteed’s Greenwich observatory was at that time one of the most advanced astronomical centers in the world. As the newly appointed *Astronomer Royal*, Flamsteed was in

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Addison, The Spectator 10. March 12, 1711. Much later in the *Spiritual Diary*, Swedenborg imagines the spirit of either Addison or Steele experiences the difficulty of expressing spiritual ideas in natural language – one who “was the London Spectator” travels to hear ineffable celestial thought, and reports that “things spoken were most replete with wisdom,” although he was “not able to express anything, not even by ideas of thought” when he returns to his companions in the lower heaven. Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 5565. As Lagercrantz notes, the liberal attitude of The Spectator “was Swedenborg’s own.” Lagercrantz, *Epic of the Afterlife*, 84. For more on the sort of scientific coffeehouse milieu that Swedenborg took part in, see Steven Johnson, *The Invention of Air: A Story Of Science, Faith, Revolution, And The Birth Of America* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), especially Johnson’s smart discussion how the informal lateral network structure of the coffeehouse (and internet) “is crucial to the structure of scientific innovation” (73).

<sup>34</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 21.

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the process of tallying thousands of precise telescopic observations to better chart the cycles of the moon and hopefully uncover a better means for determining longitude, one of the great puzzling chimeras of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and of utmost importance for a sea-faring nation with great colonial ambition such as England.<sup>35</sup> Flamsteed must have been duly impressed with the precocious young Swede, as he subsequently allowed Swedenborg to work as his assistant in Greenwich, and Swedenborg spent many night hours recording data and making telescopic observations in the observatory's Octagon Room. Seeing the planets, suns, and moons in precise detail strengthened Swedenborg's conviction that a similar astronomical infrastructure was necessary back in Sweden. Perhaps the late-night stargazing also brought an ambivalent combination of wonder and alienation, a marvel at the sheer expanding vastness of the universe coupled with the era's characteristic unease at realizing how miniscule the human-populated earth was in relation to the systems around it. This understanding was radically different from the not-too-distant medieval view of the earth as the center of a stable cosmos, and the tremors of the Copernican revolution continued to reverberate through the scientific discourse of Swedenborg's generation. Two subsequent works by Swedenborg would come to deal with the planets and the solar system in greater detail, and perhaps address this ambiguity. The first, the

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<sup>35</sup> England's desire to acquire accurate longitude measurement was so acute that in 1714 Parliament announced an unprecedented award amount of 20,000 pounds (around 2.77 million pounds in today's value, when the different prize categories were combined together) for anyone who could solve the problem. Swedenborg, residing in London and at the center of the circles around Halley and Flamsteed at the time of the award's promulgation, was enticed. Though he attempted to solve the problem (and claim the prize award for himself) at several points over the next two decades, Swedenborg's methods never proved wholly successful, and the award money was largely disbursed to clockmaker John Harrison for his maritime chronometers between 1737 and 1764. See Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

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*Principia* (1734), Swedenborg's scientific *magnum opus*, puts forth the original nebular hypothesis that all the solar bodies evolved out of the same spiraling clouds of matter. The second, *Concerning the Earths in our Solar System, which are called Planets; and concerning the Earths in the Starry Heaven* (1757), is perhaps the most exotic of all of Swedenborg's mystical treatises, detailing an astral voyage through the solar system (and beyond) where Swedenborg meets and converses with the spirits of planets both near and far.<sup>36</sup> As different as both works are--one based in speculative earth science, the other recording a spiritual voyage through space-- each could be read as an attempt to unify man's relationship to the universe. If we follow the implications of the nebular hypothesis in the *Principia*, for example, or, in the pages of *Concerning the Earths in our Solar System, which are called Planets; and concerning the Earths in the Starry Heaven in the Starry Heavens*, the assertion that the human form is replicated and familiar throughout the cosmos, we arrive at the same insight: that humans and the earth we inhabit are ultimately made of the stuff of exploding stars and the same originary matter that composes distant planets. Swedenborg's spirits on Mars and Jupiter imaginatively embody a physical truth that is intuited in the *Principia*.

Under instruction from the Collegium Curiosorum, Swedenborg purchased quadrants, prisms, microscopes, and a camera obscura as materials for building up a proper scientific society back in Sweden, something that could approximate the likes of what he was seeing at

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<sup>36</sup> Almost all the material from *Earths in the Universe*, like the *Heaven and Hell* published the same year, consists of reprinted and rearranged material drawn out of the earlier massive *Arcana Caelestia*. Lagercrantz usefully observes how Swedenborg's *Earths* participates in the 18<sup>th</sup> century utopian genre and shares the same critique of civilization and progress that marks Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, and Voltaire's *Candide*. Lagercrantz, *Epic of the Afterlife*, 82.

Greenwich and the Royal Society of London. Swedenborg further obtained delicate instruments for handling chemicals, and through a careful reading of Robert Boyle's various works and performing the elemental experiments detailed within, he taught himself the basics of modern chemistry. Swedenborg's letters to Benzelius concerning these pieces of scientific equipment and experiments underscore how clearly he and his Uppsala colleagues understood themselves as nation-building agents: that while early scientific development was partaking in cosmopolitan and humanist ideals of universal knowledge, it also was inextricable from specific nationalist projects—from colonial exploration to engineering machines of war—and was perforce a fiercely competitive field between emerging modern nation states. Sweden had entered a particularly dark period of political turmoil and uncertainty, and science seemed to promise one avenue for the nation to regain prominence on the European stage.

Though Swedenborg wrote that he was reading "Newton daily; I also wish to meet and hear him," it is not known if the two men ever made direct contact with each other. Swedenborg does seem to have attended several of Newton's lectures in London.<sup>37</sup> Swedenborg does, at any rate, record meeting Newton's spirit in later accounts of visionary experience, and watches Newton discussing vacuums with angels.<sup>38</sup> In addition to Flamsteed, Swedenborg also befriended Dr. John Woodward at the Royal Society, the leading natural geologist of the day and preeminent European authority on fossils. Perhaps Swedenborg discussed with Woodward the giant bones that had been unearthed back home near Skara. Woodward's *Essay toward a Natural*

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<sup>37</sup> Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought* (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2008), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003), no. 82.

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*History of the Earth and Terrestrial Bodies* (1695), much like Swedenborg's geological *Height of Waters*, attempts to use fossil records to prove the historical authenticity of the Biblical deluge. It is almost certain that Swedenborg would have seen Woodward's famous private collection of fossils and dinosaur skeletons that today forms the Woodwardian collection at Cambridge.

A little over a year after his arrival in London, a second allowance from his father permitted Swedenborg to travel to Oxford and spend a period of time living and studying there. Swedenborg met and conversed frequently with Edmund Halley and did his own reading and research in the Bodleian Library. Out of apparent professional rivalry, Halley attempted to dissuade Swedenborg from embracing Flamsteed's method of determining longitude with lunar observations, but Swedenborg remained unconvinced, and stuck with his moon calendars. Swedenborg did not limit his research interests at Oxford to science, and the extended stay seemed to strengthen and deepen his keen interest in the "grand English poets who are worth reading through on account of their *inventioner*," as he told Benzelius.<sup>39</sup> He recommended that Benzelius should purchase English poets for the Uppsala university library, and Swedenborg specifically mentions studying in-depth Shakespeare, Pope, Dryden, and Milton. Before reading further and more deeply in these authors at the Bodleian, Swedenborg probably first encountered his "grand English poets" in the monthly *History of the Works of the Learned*, a semi-regular periodical in circulation since 1609.<sup>40</sup> When Swedenborg returned to London, he took up regularly reading English poetry as a means of recreation, and also began crafting his own verse

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<sup>39</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

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as an outlet for his own feelings. Swedenborg's poetry, like almost all of his professional writings, was written in Neolatin, even as he continued reading his Milton and Shakespeare in English.<sup>41</sup> This reading and writing of poetry coincided not only with Swedenborg's increasing aspiration to become a great scientist and mathematician, but a conscious steering away from the Pietism and supernatural wonder that had permeated his childhood.

Beyond a few scattered references to English poets in the extant letters, however, it is difficult to chart which English poets had a particular influence on Swedenborg. His movement away from the city of London to Oxford's more bucolic "dreamy spires" (as Shelley would later famously describe them), seems to have instigated a general interest in pastoral poetry as a form. One of Swedenborg's earliest poems from this period, the "Ludus Extemporalis" ("Improvised Play"), describes a country walk through Oxford taken by Swedenborg, "Phoebus Apollo," and a gentleman designated as A., most likely Erik Alstrin, a Swedish theologian then studying at Oxford that Swedenborg had earlier befriended in London. "Ludus Extemporalis" is noteworthy for its strong eroticism, a sexual charge beneath the standard descriptions of experiencing pastoral landscape that possibly culminates with the speaker envisioning a kind of erotic dance between two women, a mother and her daughter. The poem is overtly scatological: it begins with the young men drinking a large quantity of wine, one of them needing to urinate because he drinks too quickly, and an intoxicated dreamy haze around the encountered women (who are implied to be prostitutes). Swedenborg further puns on how his "reed pen" that is recording the

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<sup>41</sup> According to Helander, although Neo-latin was already in steep decline as a lingua-franca across the European academic world by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden remained an exception, and well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century both written and spoken Latin were extensively used. Helander, "Introduction" to Swedenborg, *Ludus Heliconius*, 17-18.

poem is “girded by honey-dropping flowers” when it comes to describing the daughter’s seductive parts that are “pliant and moveable.”<sup>42</sup> As Bergquist writes, the poem demonstrates Swedenborg’s mastery of classical Latin as well as his strong interest in the power of sexual attraction, a theme that carries into the later *Dream Diary* and the theosophy of *Conjugial Love*, where sexual and spiritual union between loving partners is the heart of heavenly paradise.<sup>43</sup>

The way that “*Ludus Extemporalis*” uses the pastoral form to create a backdrop for other poetic energies, and is not in anyway interested in nature or the representation of landscape in itself, follows many examples of the pastoral that were popular in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, such as Milton’s elegiac “*Lycidas*.”<sup>44</sup> If the pastoral serves as a frame for youthful erotic sport in “*Ludus Extemporalis*,” it becomes filled with hidden political content in the slightly later *Camena Borea*, a larger work of poetic prose fully completed by Swedenborg later in the summer of 1714 when he was living in Rostock, Germany. The series of twenty-two imagistic fables, densely woven together, reflects the strong impression that Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* left on Swedenborg’s imagination. Swedenborg had begun the work as a poem; but in a scene that is set in the forest outside of Versailles (which Swedenborg had visited in May of 1713), and reading much like a

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>43</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> For the broad and deep ways in which the pastoral has played a decisive role in shaping western constructions of nature, see Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), which builds and expands on William Empson’s earlier claim for the pastoral’s pervasive form in English literature. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New Directions Publishing, 1974). Ecocriticism’s general approach to treating pastoral as decisive ideology also remains largely indebted to Raymond Williams’ influential discussion in Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Hogarth critics (London: Hogarth Press, 1985). As Greg Garrard observes, the pastoral did not acquire deliberate environmental overtones with political implications until the advent of Romanticism (Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2006), 39-47, long after Swedenborg’s “*Ludus*” poem and the death of neo-Latin as a viable contemporary poetic language.

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later “memorable relation” in the visionary theology, his written pages of poetry are torn out of his hand by a gust of wind and transformed into a flying bat. He interprets this as a sign, abandoning an openness with the lyric for more symbolically dense prose, something better suited for darkness that would “be silent in full daylight.”<sup>45</sup>

The *Camena Borea* was meant to be read as coded political allegory. It was thus a potentially dangerous and damaging text for a young Swede with ambitious hopes to advance under the absolute monarchy of Charles XII, as the king is symbolically presented in the text as being responsible for Sweden’s ruin. Swedenborg had the collection published only in a small quantity, later in 1715, and even then avoided putting his full name on the title page for many of the copies. Swedenborg wrote to Benzelius how the *Camena Borea* would conceal “all that has been going on in Europe during the past fourteen or fifteen years, so that we might be able to freely jest with serious matters, and to sport with the heroes and the men of our own country.”<sup>46</sup> The use of allegory to address contemporary political concerns is especially typical of the Augustan Age in English literature, although Swedenborg likely knew several late Renaissance Swedish examples of the genre, including Georg Stiernhielm’s *Discursus astro-poeticus*, as Hans Helander points out.<sup>47</sup> Helander postulates it quite likely that Swedenborg was familiar with Dryden’s *Absalom and Acitophel* (1681-82), as well as Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* (1704), which both use religious and classical figurations as frames for political allegory. The central concern in the

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<sup>45</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Camena Borea*, trans. Hans Helander (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1988), 41.

<sup>46</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 58. The poem’s focus is actually much narrower, largely limited to a veiled account of Sweden’s misfortunes between 1710 and 1714. Swedenborg might have been aware of others beyond Benzelius seeing this letter, and is thus purposively vague and slightly misleading.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Helander, “Introduction” in Swedenborg, *Camena Borea*, 18.

*Camena Borea* around questions of freedom—especially around the problem of freedom of speech and self-expression, given the poem’s necessary mythological obfuscation—might further suggest Swedenborg’s engagement with Milton. The most revered English poet of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a substantial republished presence in the pages of the *History of the Works of the Learned*, as well as The Spectator, and it is safe to assume that Swedenborg would have been familiar with Milton from those pages as both the epic poet of *Paradise Lost* and the radical Puritan who authored texts like the “Areopagitica” (1644) that fiercely condemned censorship. Swedenborg approvingly noted the great freedom of the press that London enjoyed during his first stay—in marked contrast to Sweden—and particularly the liberty of public speech in the coffeehouses on matters of religion and heresy.<sup>48</sup> In Swedenborg’s last major work, *The True Christian Religion*, Swedenborg writes that the British “enjoy interior intellectual light... they get this light from the freedom they have to speak and write, and by this means to think.” The exceptional spiritual quality of the British depends on their intellectual freedom, which is so great that Swedenborg describes their acuity of perception with a strangely beautiful, abstract metaphor—the spiritualized minds of the British “sparkle, so that they form beautiful pictures, as a crystal prism exposed to sunlight forms rainbows and tinges a screen placed behind it with glowing colors.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Swedenborg takes note of the debates concerning Dr. Henry Sacheverel. In 1710, Sacheverel had attacked the government for failing to protect the Anglican church from dissenters, which earned him three years suspension from public speaking. His controversial anti-government sermon was promptly reprinted in hundreds of pamphlets, and Swedenborg tells Benzelius how Sacheverel’s name “is heard from every lip, in all quarters, and his book is read in every coffeehouse.” Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 14..

<sup>49</sup> Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, no. 807, 808.

It is worth noting that though a large number of scientists, philosophers, theologians, and politicians who had been important for the development of Swedenborg's ideas in various ways often later appear as denizens of his spiritual world, the spaces of heaven and hell feature no notable poets or authors, and Swedenborg's only specific references to English authors appear in this early correspondence from his first excursion abroad. While this apparent omission is partially accounted for by the simple fact that Swedenborg was writing before Romanticism spawned the modern sense of the poetic genius, and the work of the writer or artist as distinctly separate kinds of visionary vocations, the lack is nonetheless striking in context of Swedenborg's strong investment in reading and writing poetry himself. That the later prose-poem *Worship and Love of God*, written at the height of Swedenborg's existential crisis, seems to nod explicitly towards the rewriting of Genesis in Milton's *Paradise Lost* further suggests that though Swedenborg appears to be silent for thirty-five years after first mentioning the "grand English poets," authors such as Milton nonetheless remained in Swedenborg's thoughts. When Swedenborg praises grand English poets "on account of their *inventionares* [inventions]," he may implicate Milton specifically, as out of all the poets mentioned by Swedenborg by name—Shakespeare, Pope, Dryden, and Milton—Milton was certainly held by many in the Augustan Period to be the most inventive and innovative in terms of form, particularly for his unprecedented use of blank-verse in *Paradise Lost*. As Swedenborg would have known, Milton's breaking of poetic convention was linked to an ethos that espoused freedom of expression, and was perforce a radical—even transgressive—literary aesthetic. While it can only be imagined how Swedenborg might have actually responded to the sense of revolutionary lines of *Paradise Lost*, one likely effect of their linguistic difficulty would have been to heighten the state of

Swedenborg's consciousness as he read. Research undertaken by cognitive linguists has long maintained that reading poetry induces an actual physiological change in the brain and in the sense of self, that the mind is "elevated" when it is forced to negotiate the defamiliarized language of poetry.<sup>50</sup> Swedenborg's dream and spiritual experience diaries further demonstrate a self-reflexive awareness of the interconnections between language, thought, and body; that by altering his breathing patterns he could bring on an altered state of consciousness, and ultimately write and record experiences differently. Reading Milton may have helped Swedenborg more fully grasp his own imaginative powers, and ultimately aid him in a search for finding the right words to convey the intense reality of spiritual experiences and inner worlds that are consistently set by Swedenborg as lying beyond the power of language's representation.<sup>51</sup> As Joan Richardson has further shown, the particular power and cadence of Milton's poetry has sustained an almost unique place for its power in stimulating the minds and imaginations of both Romantic scientists who were seeking new conceptual grammars for their research—such as Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell, and the physicist John Tyndall—as well as contemporary authors and poets reading and incorporating their groundbreaking work, like Emerson. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is Darwin avidly reading and re-reading *Paradise Lost* during his South American voyage on the *Beagle*, and finding Milton's dense language of aid in coping

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the discussion of literature on cognitive poetics Reuven Tsur, *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics: Second, Expanded and Updated Edition* (Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 2-5, as well as Ralph Yarrow, "The Potential of Consciousness: Towards a New Approach to States of Consciousness in Literature," *Journal of European Studies* 15, no. 1 (1985): 1-20.

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent consideration (and collation) of moments in Swedenborg where spiritual experience exceeds language's capability, see Kristin King, "The Power and Limitations of Language in Swedenborg, Shakespeare, and Frost," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 11, no. 3 (1999).

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with the vast biological implications in the teeming flora and fauna that lay before him.

Richardson also cites Tyndall's own telling confession how his breakthrough work on radiation "had been enabled by an unusually developed awareness in space trained by his reading of Milton's epic of cosmic and syntactic spaces in *Paradise Lost*."<sup>52</sup>

By suggesting a Miltonic influence on Swedenborg I am working against the claims of the Swedish literary critic Inge Jonsson, who contends that the case for Milton's presence in the *Worship and Love of God* has been overstated, and that the parallels between Swedenborg and Milton are rather best understood when both authors are seen as responding to a broader tradition of hexaemeron writing (literature that deals with the origin and creation of the world as told in Genesis). Jonsson's dissent against the scholarship on Swedenborg that has taken the Miltonic influence on Swedenborg largely for granted is deeply informed and not so easily dismissed, and will be more fully addressed in the longer discussion of the *Worship and Love of God* that appears in the next chapter. The *Worship and Love of God* is worth briefly pausing over here, however, for despite the thirty five years that separate its writing from Swedenborg's first London trip, the work seems to echo and comment on the earlier period in several notable ways. It opens with Swedenborg reflecting mournfully on the passage of time as he walks through a grove of trees, noting the autumn foliage. It is most likely, Jonsson stipulates, that this mise-en-

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<sup>52</sup> Richardson proceeds to quote Tyndall at length: "The piercing through the involved and inverted sentences of *Paradise Lost*, the linking of the verb to its often distant nominative, of the relative to its transitive verb, of the preposition to the noun or pronoun which it governed, the study of the variations in mood or tense, the transpositions often necessary to bring out the true grammatical structure of a sentence, all this was to my young mind a discipline of the highest value, and a source of unflagging delight." Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82.

scene was meant to evoke an actual London park that Swedenborg would have walked through during his time there in the 1740's. The elegiac mood of the preface as it reflects on the circular nature of the seasons in a London park, "the vicissitudes of the times," is an update to the light exuberance of the Oxford pastoral sketched earlier in the "Ludus Heliconis." With the *Worship and Love of God*, Swedenborg crucially shifts his *topoi* from the lush countryside to a garden in the city, walled and contained by the urbanity around it: a fitting context for the subsequent meditation on Paradise and the Garden of Eden that follows. That Swedenborg may have been reflecting on earlier London days is further suggested by the Dream Diary kept during these rocky years, which begins with Swedenborg taking note that he had "dreamed of his youth," and ends with a practical note that the *Worship and Love of God* was being written.<sup>53</sup> The lines that open and close the Dream Diary thus create a textual chiasmus of sorts, suggesting that not only does *The Worship and Love of God* seem to partially resolve the psychic crisis underlying the Dream Diary, but also that Swedenborg's "dreams of his youth" mirrored a literal return to the poetics of his London days and a corresponding attempt to rewrite the Creation story in the footsteps of Milton.

In addition to its mediation of Milton, the *Worship and Love of God* deliberately wrestles with the scientific hypotheses of Thomas Burnet, the author of *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681), an influential treatise that was much discussed in early 18<sup>th</sup> century London, and that

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<sup>53</sup> Jane Williams-Hogan has further usefully pointed out how Swedenborg's travel journals in the 1730's begin with a sharp recollection and memory of his first formative trip to London--including almost becoming executed for breaking quarantine--and that this evinces the "deep impression" that London left on his imagination Jane Williams-Hogan, "Stranger in a Foreign Land: Swedenborg, Traveler, Observer, Reporter, and Explorer," *The New Philosophy: Journal of the Swedenborg Scientific Association* 110, no. 1,2: 66.

Swedenborg likely first encountered there during this early period. As Kate Rigby writes, though Burnet ostensibly sets out to “square the new science with biblical revelation” in providing a theory for the genesis of the earth, his awed, ambivalent response to the Alps leads Burnet to anticipate the secular Romantic sublime (and it is no coincidence that Burnet had a long shelf life, lasting into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>54</sup> The mountains, writes Burnet, “fill and overbear the Mind with their Excess, and cast it into a kind of Stupor and Admiration.”<sup>55</sup> According to Jonsson, Swedenborg was reading Burnet as early as 1710, and though subsequent uses of Burnet often go unattributed by Swedenborg (and have been correspondingly overlooked by scholars), Burnet’s cosmology remained a consistent point of reference for Swedenborg’s conceptualizations of nature, if for purposes of nuanced differentiation. The poetic prose of *The Worship and Love of God* is thus as much a coming to terms with the import of Burnet’s sublime science as it is a refraction of Milton’s hexaemeron revision of sacred scripture. Jonsson writes how

it is a telling testimony both about Swedenborg’s need for a comprehensive view and his poetic imagination that the strongest impressions he gained from the visit to the English

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<sup>54</sup> Kate Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2004), 138. See also the extended discussion in Marjorie Hope Nicholson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959), 135.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Burnet, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth: Containing an Account of the Original of the Earth and of All the General Changes Which it Hath Already Undergone or Is to Undergo, till the Consumation of All Things*, vol. 1, 6th ed. (London: Hooke, 1726), 178-179.

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intellectual environment of the 1710's were not collected from the great Newton but from a scientifically obsolete yet stylistically elegant theory builder like Burnet.<sup>56</sup>

Burnet as both a systematic thinker and theoretical stylist was thus an early force shaping Swedenborg's sense of nature and his way of writing about it: his ecopoetics, if you will, that in a similar manner to *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* attempted to resolve systematically the growing chasm between science and the metaphysical needs of belief. The brunt of all these aspects of the *Worship and Love of God* will be more fully accounted for in the next chapter.

After several productive years in England, with the sound accomplishments of having been Flamsteed's observatory assistant and laying the essential theoretical and practical foundations for establishing a genuine scientific community back in Sweden, Swedenborg prepared to return home. He traveled through the continent, visiting the Royal Society in Paris where he befriended Abbe Jean Paul Bignon, the Dean of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and cultivated conversations with the astronomer Philippe de la Hire and the mathematician Paul Varignon. Perhaps due to the companionship of so many mathematical luminaries, Swedenborg began drafting a long treatise on Algebra which, when published in 1718, became the first book in Swedish (and in Sweden) on the subject. But already his interests and curiosity were leading Swedenborg towards thought-experiments whose implications lay outside the domain of traditional empirical science. Swedenborg believed that he was called to become a great inventor back in Sweden, along the likes of Christopher Polhelm, the greatest mechanical engineer in Scandinavia at that time. While resting in the Hanseatic port of Rostock, en-route to the Swedish

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<sup>56</sup> Inge Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation: Sources and Influences in Swedenborg's Worship and Love of God*, trans. Matilda McCarthy (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2004), 270.

coast, Swedenborg had several weeks to collect his thoughts together and write down his future plans. He wrote to Benzelius how he had sketches and plans for developing a submarine, a prototype for a machine gun, chambered barrels that would improve the fermentation process of beer, a “universal musical instrument” which even the uninstructed could play, and an elaborate flying machine. Lamm writes how this innovative “gadgetry” in Swedenborg shows “the inventive mania” of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, “of its incurably optimistic faith in the ability of science to perform the impossible.”<sup>57</sup> He also wrote how he wished to discover “a method of conjecturing the wills and affections of men’s minds by means of analysis.” Swedenborg would later take up the particular idea of a flying machine quite seriously, publishing more developed plans in the pages of the *Daedalus Hyperborealis* in 1716, which stand out as the first published description of a flying machine which treats the feasibility of human flight as a scientific possibility, rather than whimsical fantasy.<sup>58</sup> And though Swedenborg’s “method for conjecturing the wills and affections of men’s minds” never took a similar concrete and specific form in the pages of the *Daedalus* or elsewhere, the desire did have an afterlife of sorts in the surprising ways that Swedenborg’s concepts of symbol, language, and mind subsequently played a role in

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<sup>57</sup> Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 25.

<sup>58</sup> Swedenborg’s “Machine for Flying” was remarkably prescient, according to Henry Söderberg, although no attempts to build it were made until long after Swedenborg’s death (a life-size replica hangs today in the Air and Space Museum at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.). The machine was designed to have wheeled landing gear, a concave lifting surface, a kind of cockpit for a single person in the middle, and blades for propulsion that could be manipulated to steer and shift direction. See Henry Söderberg, *Swedenborg's 1714 Airplane: A Machine to Fly in the Air* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1988).

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the early development of psychology as a professional discipline and its interpretive methodologies.<sup>59</sup>

**Words as Wings and the World as Machine:  
the Daedalus of the North, 1715—1735**

Back in Sweden, abuzz with scientific ideas and unbridled ambition to become a Scandinavian Newton or Flamsteed, Swedenborg's hopes were thwarted by a number of obstacles. His youthful desire to become seated as a university professor became tangled up in university politics and Swedenborg's smug confidence at his own ingenuity. He proposed to Benzelius that Uppsala might establish a new chair in mechanics which he would then fill, and that the necessary salary and maintenance of the position would be best sponsored by reducing the pay of all other resident professors. When this didn't meet much enthusiasm, Swedenborg

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<sup>59</sup> Swedenborg and Johann Kaspar Lavater had planned to meet before Swedenborg died, and exchanged a series of letters where Lavater reverently praised Swedenborg's "wonderful gifts." Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 687. Benz argues that Lavater's influential treatise on physiognomy that went on to shape the pseudoscience of phrenology, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775, 1778), a manuscript that Goethe helped put together, adapts several Swedenborgian ideas about correspondence between the spiritual and facial expressions. Ernst Benz, *Vision Und Offenbarung: Gesammelte Swedenborg-Aufsätze* (Zürich: Swedenborg-Verlag, 1979), 207--267. See also the broader discussion of Swedenborg and 19<sup>th</sup> century pseudosciences of the mind, such as mesmerism and phrenology, in Gabay 2004 and Albanese 1990, *passim*. Furthermore, Swedenborg was a central figure in different various ways for both William James and Carl Gustav Jung; Jung relates in his autobiography, for example, that it was in Swedenborg that he first located some of the first objective accounts of inner psychological phenomena. In addition to Joan Richardson's discussion of James and Swedenborg in *Fact of Feeling*, see Eugene Taylor, "The Appearance of Swedenborg in the History of American Psychology," in *Swedenborg and His Influence*, ed. Erland Brock (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: The Academy of the New Church, 1988), 155-176, as well as Eugene Taylor, "Jung and His Intellectual Context: the Swedenborgian Connection," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 7, no. 2 (1991): 57--69. While this facet of Swedenborg's influence might seem twice removed from a concern with the environment, it underscores the way that Swedenborgian ideas became incorporated into modern observations on how the mind perceives space, constructing our sense of the outside phenomenological world.

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proposed completely reorganizing the university departments at Uppsala by shrinking the traditional humanities in order to create a new faculty of science--a proposal that anticipated the general reorganizing trends in European universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Benz notes, as it also shows Swedenborg's canny awareness of Cartesian science as the new locus for intellectual inquiry, rather than theology and rhetoric. The Uppsala university establishment increasingly saw the young upstart Emanuel--who had eschewed traditional patronage routes within the university—as a full frontal assault on their traditional divisions of learning and knowledge. The last straw must have been Swedenborg's final proposal in March of 1716 to fire “one of the lesser important professors of theology or medicine” in order to finance his own proposed work in the new field of mechanical engineering.<sup>60</sup> Benzelius advised Swedenborg to drop all such suggestions immediately, lest it permanently damage his reputation with the influential Uppsala faculty.

At home, Swedenborg seemed to face ongoing disapproval from his stern accomplished father. As Benz choicely puts it, Swedenborg had

returned from abroad with plans for airplanes, submarines, and automobiles, he wanted to found a learned society of physicists and mechanics, overturn all the old faculties and establish a new faculty of sorcerers at the expense of theologians and philosophers. Such a son must have appeared a decided fantasist in Swedberg's eyes. Had his son not squandered his good money on experiments and the arts, which might even be the work of the Devil?<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, I: 92-93.

<sup>61</sup> Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 71.

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The paternal displeasure that Swedenborg may have felt upon his return would have been cutting and sharp, as it seems to become a symbolic space of anxiety in the later journal of dreams.

Though written eight years after Swedenborg's death in 1735, Swedenborg recurs in these dreams as a figure arbitrating approval or disapproval for Swedenborg's intellectual pursuits.

Swedenborg nonetheless kept himself busy during the six months he spent under his father's roof after returning home. He kept up with his poetry writing, telling Benzelius how "literary occupations are my amusement every day."<sup>62</sup> Most of his time seems to have been occupied by preparing to publish what became Sweden's first scientific journal, the Daedalus Hyperboreus, "Inventor of the North," named after the Greek mythological father of inventions. The journal had a publication run of six volumes, from 1715--1718, with most of the contributions written by Swedenborg himself. The journal became a valuable outlet for his creative mind, and the journal increasingly featured detailed plans for the various machines and contraptions that he had begun sketching out at the end of his continental trip. Unlike the majority of scientific work being done in Sweden, and contrary to what one would assume from the Neolatin in all Swedenborg's other publications, a lot of the content in Daedalus Hyperboreus was written in Swedish, likely out of a desire for the contents to "elevate the common people," a concern that Benzelius and Swedenborg share in this period over the great backwardness and superstition that prevailed across Sweden. The decision to publish in Swedish was also deliberately following the example of the London Royal Society's Philosophical Transactions, which were published in English because, as Bergquist writes, "Latin did not fit

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<sup>62</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, I: 74.

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the needs of men focusing on the practical matters of life.”<sup>63</sup> The first issue of the Daedalus set forth its ambition to present experiments in physics and mechanics that would “now and for all time be given for general use.”

Daedalus Hyperboreus was published by the Collegium Curiosorum, and it was deliberately meant to showcase the inventions of Christopher Polhelm, then the greatest living mechanical engineer in Scandinavia. Polhem was 27 years Swedenborg’s senior, and though lacking a formal university education, he was widely regarded as a universal genius. Swedenborg had earlier contemplated attempting to become Polhelm’s amanuensis after receiving his degree from Uppsala; now, armed with five years of studying abroad in the company of luminaries such as Halley and Flamsteed, Swedenborg was more on Polhelm’s own level of knowledge as a peer. Polhem offered Swedenborg an apprenticeship to work with him on several engineering projects that were essential to Sweden’s industrial development and on-going war machine, and Swedenborg readily accepted, even though he was clearly suited for more independent kinds of work.

The Daedalus allusion of the journal soon became an apt metaphor for this period of Swedenborg’s life. In the Daedalus myth, the Greek inventor fashions a pair of wings for himself and his son in order to escape the prison of King Minos in Crete. Icarus ignored his father’s warnings and flew too close to the sun, melting the wax on his wings and plunging into the sea and becoming, centuries later, an iconic cultural metaphor, while his father went on to fly to safety. Swedenborg chafed under Polhelm’s thumb, feeling himself to be at least his equal. Though his words in correspondence at this time are cautious and guarded about Polhelm, the

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<sup>63</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 64.

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inventor becomes an unpleasant caricature in Swedenborg's later spiritual world, a skulking spirit who incredulously watches the burial of his own body, and is later fated to spend eternity in dark bony chambers where he constructs mechanical cats, birds, mice, and babies.<sup>64</sup> It appears Polhelm refused to allow Swedenborg to put his name on the title page of the Daedalus journal, which read instead that it was dedicated to "New Mathematical and Scientific Experiments and Observations, made by Assessor Polhelm and other Ingenious Men in Sweden," even though Swedenborg's contributions within were much more substantial than Polhelm's own.

Swedenborg's work with Polhelm attracted the attention of the king, Charles XII at this time, and Swedenborg became drawn into a complicated relationship with the capricious royal genius. Currying the king's favor was absolutely essential for any kind of upward professional mobility, be it in the university or within the state Lutheran church, and Swedenborg initially gained a favorable audience with the King thanks to Polhelm's recommendation that Swedenborg's mathematical genius warranted him a post on the Royal College of Mines, "a field in which Swedenborg is likely to be of greater service [to the nation] than at a University," as Polhelm wrote.<sup>65</sup> The King made the appointment immediately, a highly unusual move for someone as young as Swedenborg, perhaps on the strength of the issues of the Daedalus Hyperboreus which the king had eagerly read and appreciated. The appointment caused much envy and competition from fellow members who also sat on the "College," or advisory board for mining, as many of them had waited twenty years (or more) before receiving such an appointment themselves.

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<sup>64</sup> Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 4752, 4722.

<sup>65</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, I: 126.

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Besides his penchant for imperial wars, Charles XII was a gifted mathematical genius, and shared with Polhelm and Swedenborg a belief that the new wave of Newtonian science could help Sweden regain prominence as a major European nation-state. He put Swedenborg and Polhelm's engineering skills promptly to use, asking them to devise machines that could better extract iron and copper ore in mines that were central to Swedenborg's wealth, and to improve the production in Swedish salt works. For sundry reasons, it was strongly in Sweden's interest to build a canal that could connect the eastern waterways of Stockholm with the western port of Gothenburg, and thus bypass the problematic north sea waters adjacent to Denmark (against whom Sweden was recurrently at war). The most serious obstacle for such a plan--a nationalist dream for Swedes that was at least a century old before Swedenborg began applying his practical skills to it--lay in a series of steep vertical cliffs and elevation drops in the waterfalls at Trollhatten.

As Swedenborg applied himself to developing plans for canals, water locks, docks and dams, he was drawn into the king's more intimate circle. Charles XII believed the entire decimal system based on numbering by ten was primitive and flawed--that it stemmed from an earlier period where man had to rely on his hands to count. The new advancements in science and technology demanded a corresponding revolution in integers. He commissioned Swedenborg to develop a new numbering system to be instituted for all industry across Sweden that would be based on a number which contained both a square and a cube, and for several days and weeks, the king and Swedenborg worked on this elaborate project, despite Swedenborg's polite protestations that such a system would require incredibly complex tables of new characters and symbols, as the first number containing both square and cube was 64--the first place, then, where

the king's numbering system would be able to "turn" and start recounting itself. The intensity with which the war king personally applied his energy to this scheme--staying up all night working out tables and charts--seems to have surprised Swedenborg. When the king arbitrarily summoned Swedenborg after a short period, demanding to see progress, he proudly showed Swedenborg sheet after sheet written in his own hand that contained thousands of new characters and mathematical symbols and algebraic equations. Swedenborg responded that not only had he met a mathematical rival, but someone clearly his superior.<sup>66</sup> Although the project never came to fruition, the intense focus on mathematics as a kind of abstract, pure language, anticipates Swedenborg's later interest in systematic hieroglyphics and creating a "science of correspondence" that could semiotically account for the totality of nature as a text with spiritual signifiers.

The strangeness of this surviving anecdote, of Swedenborg being peremptorily summoned by the king for a project that must have seemed ostensibly fatuous, if not absurd, and then being bested by the excessive mathematical proofs written by the king himself, opens a small fissure in the otherwise smooth surface of Swedenborg's public relationship with the monarch. In 1714, for example, while en-route back to Sweden through northern Germany, Swedenborg had published a glowing panegyric on the king, the *Festivus Applausus* celebrating Charles XII's fabulous escape from imprisonment in Turkey. This would seem, on the one hand, to immediately conflict with the *Camena Borea*, which—as discussed in the previous section of this chapter—covertly critiques absolute monarchy and Sweden's disastrous imperial war politics. But on the other hand, such public obeisance was almost to be expected, and it stands as

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., I: 130.

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but one of many baroque works that mark Charles XII's remarkable return to the Swedish homeland. Published performances of fealty were more or less necessary under the king's autocratic control. Again, Swedenborg's careful, tactful manipulation of poetic genres within charged political contexts underwritten by an urgent questioning of absolute monarchy suggests how Milton and other English radical poets of the Puritan revolution would have had a natural resonance for the young Swede. Swedenborg strongly, if quietly, supported a parliamentary system that curtailed monarchical power, and for the remainder of his life during the so-called "Era of Peace" that followed Charles XII's death, Swedenborg tended to adhere to positions held by the "Caps" in the Swedish Parliament which favored cultural diplomacy over more hawkish positions on foreign policy. It is worth observing that despite these political principles, Swedenborg's later visionary writings laud praise on the French King Louis XV, who was almost universally regarded by Swedenborg's Enlightenment contemporaries as an embodiment of monarchical absolutism (and an infamously debilitating libertinism). But in Swedenborg's spiritual visions, Louis XV rules justly and wisely over a community of Frenchman, and in a particularly strange and precise description, Swedenborg watches the French King descend a grand staircase that reminds him of Versailles, which brings on a profound inner and outer silence on all the spirits present in the stair hall that lasts for approximately two hours.<sup>67</sup> Bergquist usefully suggests that Swedenborg's Protestant sympathies and his attendant antipathy towards Catholicism and the doctrine of papal infallibility would have made him appreciate the ways that Louis XV tolerated Jansenist sects, in open conflict with papal Bulls from Rome that

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<sup>67</sup> Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 5980. This particular section became reincorporated into the published text Swedenborg, *The Last Judgment and Babylon Destroyed*.

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had declared the movement (which shared many tendencies with the Pietism Swedenborg had been raised with) dangerous and heretical.<sup>68</sup>

By contrast, in Swedenborg's later spiritual visions, Charles XII (who died in 1718), who had been widely lionized as a national hero, becomes a monstrous demon who seeks to control and subdue everything around him. In his black pit of hell, Charles XII's spirit particularly craves, Swedenborg writes, raping young virgins "through methods of secret violence."<sup>69</sup>

Swedenborg also notes in these later texts, reflecting back on his younger days as an engineer for the king's war machine, how either he or Charles XII "would have surely perished" at the other's hands had not the forces of Providence removed Swedenborg from the king's wily grasp.<sup>70</sup> In his poems written during these years under the king, Swedenborg returned to the Daedalus myth and penned several short ekphrastic quatrains on the heroic inventor that are difficult to not interpret as refracting his struggle for autonomy in his working relationships with both the king and Christopher Polhelm. Swedenborg attached the following to the front of the 1716 edition of *Daedalus* that was dedicated to Charles XII:

Lo! Daedalus travels through the air, and he laughs from above

at the traps that King Minos has set for him on the earth.

My Daedalus! Travel in this way by your skill

and laugh at the traps that the multitude will set for you!<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 365-366.

<sup>69</sup> Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 4741.

<sup>70</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 200.

<sup>71</sup> Swedenborg, *Ludus Heliconius*, 135.

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Another version of these quatrains appeared slightly later in a collection of poetry that included the earlier *Ludus Heliconis*--although written before Swedenborg's relationship with the king became overtly problematic, they allude incisively into the unfolding situation, and give voice to Swedenborg's pent-up frustration:

Since Minos confines you by means of so many walls, and so many soldiers,  
and your workmanship is regarded as cheap in your own country,  
create wings for yourself, Daedalus! And make your way across the Ocean!  
There you shall not be confined, there you shall not be cheap.<sup>72</sup>

These last lines were prophetic, adumbrating the perennial journeys abroad for research and publication that Swedenborg was to undertake for the remainder of his life.<sup>73</sup> Already Swedenborg saw his means of escaping Sweden's provinciality, and perhaps even Charles XII's war projects ("so many walls, and so many soldiers"), to lie in the recognition of his scientific genius elsewhere: his words were to become wings to make "his way across the ocean."

Swedenborg's initial royal sinecure on the College of Mines as an Assessor Extraordinarius gave him both the means and the justification for traveling to the Continent to pursue geological, mineral, and engineering research that was of utmost importance to Sweden's economic health. The senior members on the College of Mines remained skeptical and leery at the outset of Swedenborg's commissioned work, and the prolific output of Swedenborg's

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<sup>72</sup> Swedenborg, *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> As Williams-Hogan points out, Swedenborg spent 40% of his adult life traveling in foreign lands--a fact of estrangement that surely contributed "to his ability to assume the role of a modern visionary." Williams-Hogan, "Stranger in a Foreign Land: Swedenborg, Traveler, Observer, Reporter, and Explorer." 114.

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engineering projects in this early period--many first appearing as schemes and ideas in the ongoing pages of *Daedalus*--were one way to prove to the College his own mettle.

Swedenborg received royal permission for extended stays in Europe from 1720-22, 1730-34, 1736-40, and 1743-1745 (there were subsequent trips, and more or less a self-imposed exile in London at the time of Swedenborg's death, but all these were made after Swedenborg had recused himself from the College of Mines, and needed no official permission to travel). The first of these stays were for the explicit purpose of observing mining and metallurgy operations and communicating with the leading natural scientists in northern Europe. A small but steady stream of works on topics ranging from earth sciences (such as the *Height of Waters*, 1719), to chemistry and physics (*Iron and Fire*, 1721; *Miscellaneous Observations*, 1722), to astronomy (*Rotation of the Earth*, 1719), and physiology (*Small Vibrations in the Body*, 1717), had gradually introduced Swedenborg as a name to scholars on the continent, especially in German speaking countries.<sup>74</sup> Swedenborg's largest critical reception, be it either for his science or his later supernatural claims, remained Germany throughout his life, beginning with a very favorable review of the *Height of Waters* that appeared in the *Neue Zeitung* in 1721, and reaching an acme of infamy with Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Sten Lindroth, a Swedish historian of science, states that Swedenborg's *Miscellaneous Observations* were particularly significant. His descriptions of marine sedimentation and analysis of fossil strata made significant contribution to nascent paleobiology, and the work reproduced several highly accurate illustrations of plant and dinosaur fossils, most likely drawn by Swedenborg himself. Sten Lindroth, *Swedish Men of Science, 1650-1950* (Stockholm: Swedish Institute, 1952), 53.

<sup>75</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, I:225. If this was the case for German-speaking Europe within Swedenborg's lifespan, this markedly shifts to England and America in the early Romantic period proceeding Swedenborg's death. Kant's polemic against Swedenborg, for one, cast a long shadow of ill-repute, while at the same time the peculiar ways

Swedenborg was no dilettante as he traversed the mines and mountains of Saxony, Bohemia, Franconia, and Hesse; he wasn't content merely to speculate on the "caverns fathomless to Man."<sup>76</sup> He crawled deep into mineshafts and took measurements, noted smelting processes in forges and foundries, and consulted the scientific libraries and famous collections of nobleman and universities. Despite the reigning empiricist paradigm of the day, this hands-on approach was highly unusual for scientists-philosophers of his similar noble class. "What a notable contrast," writes Benz,

to the philosophical attitude of a theoretician such as Descartes, who withdrew behind a stove in Germany one whole winter long, in order to conceive the nature of the universe. Swedenborg... measured ebb and tide, pounded rock fragments from shafts and quarries, collected drift stones in the valleys and gravel from the rivers, compared the metallic traces of various ore-containing rocks, calculated the movements of stars, and the changes of the horizon, and allowed things to lead him to their essence.<sup>77</sup>

Within the dazzling cabinets of minerals and gems collected by German noblemen, Swedenborg speculated on rock formations and the genesis of crystals, and the best methods for extracting and distilling precious metals. His surviving travel diaries during these journeys show a particular interest in museum collections that specialized in displays of fossils and geologic specimens--he carefully takes note of the order and method of presentation, the grouping and arrangements of materials, suggesting, for one, the ways his mind was stimulated to systematize

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that Swedenborgian ideas became enmeshed in cosmopolitan radical circles in London (and Paris) at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century made him a compellingly subversive figure for figures like Blake and Coleridge.

<sup>76</sup> Coleridge, "Kublai Kahn."

<sup>77</sup> Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 87-88.

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and arrange by the visual unity imposed by the space of the collections themselves--a point of visual interface which, as noted in the previous chapter, became a catalyzing experience for Ralph Waldo Emerson when he encountered the cabinets of natural history in the Parisian Jardin des Plantes. In Leipzig, Swedenborg visited the famous Museum of Natural History, and took note of the animal fossil collection which would later prompt Goethe to develop his own theory of evolution.<sup>78</sup> When Swedenborg visited Hermann Lang in 1734, professor of mathematics at Halle, Lang gave his renowned Swedish visitor a series of fossils from his private cabinet of curiosities.<sup>79</sup>

These years of poking and prodding in subterranean depths while keeping abreast of the latest turns in natural philosophy culminated in Swedenborg's great scientific epic on metallurgy, the three volume *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia* (1734). The first volume, entitled the *Principia; or, First Principles of Natural Things*, lays out an elaborate theory for the creation of the universe and subsequent formation of geological layers in the earth, as well as attempting to offer a thorough philosophical justification for the empirical method. The speculative material in the *Principia*, as Benz and Bergquist both note, was meant to be read as a counterpoint to Newton's own *Principia Mathematica*. Swedenborg had finally achieved a level of scientific training, proficiency, and critical renown that he was able to publish a work meant to publicly critique the Enlightenment's greatest scientist.

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<sup>78</sup> Rudolf L. Tafel, *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg* (London: Swedenborg Society British and Foreign, 1875), II: 1,37.

<sup>79</sup> Tafel, *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg.*, Vol. II. Part I: 73.

*The Principia* presents a wholly mechanistic view of the universe and man's mind. "The whole world itself," Swedenborg writes in the introduction,

is a pure system of mechanism; and so also is the soul's kingdom, as to its anatomical organization.... As therefore the science of mechanics is the law of elementary nature, it follows that the world itself is governed by suitable laws and rules, and that the whole is a grand piece of mechanism.<sup>80</sup>

To unlock the secrets of the machine of nature, man needed but three essential things: a strong foundation in empirical experiments, the science of mathematics (especially geometry), and above all the faculty of reason, "that oracle of the human mind," as the *Principia* puts it.

Swedenborg's conceptualization of reason and its faculty for synthesis was further shaped by his particular conversations and friendships with Christian Wolff and Andreas Rüdinger, two pupils of Gottfried Leibniz, a thinker who was particularly crucial for the development of Swedenborg's scientific thought. On his way back to Sweden after his first trip abroad, Swedenborg detoured through Hannover in the hopes of meeting the famous philosopher, but Leibniz was not there at the time, and when Swedenborg returned to Hannover six years later with again the same purpose, the philosopher had just died. The emphasis in *The Principia* on geometry as the only methodology capable of analyzing and integrating all phenomena is largely indebted to Leibniz's use of geometry as the philosophical model for arriving at a singular absolute reality (a point Leibniz picked up from Spinoza's *Ethica* [1677]). "Under the empire of geometry," echoes Swedenborg, the whole universe "is capable of being reduced to the laws of

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<sup>80</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Principia: Or, The First Principles of Natural Things, Being New Attempts Toward a Philosophical Explanation of the Elementary World* (London: W. Newbery [etc.], 1845), 15.

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geometry.” Wolff and Rüdinger, who continued to develop Leibnizian rationalism into science, theology, and cosmology after their teacher’s death, had become important points of contact for Swedenborg in the early 1730’s. Swedenborg closes the philosophical section of the *Principia* with a glowing tribute to Wolff, “who has bestowed so much attention to the cultivation of his intellectual powers, and who has so much contributed to the advance of true philosophy by his various scientific and experimental researches.” Swedenborg then ends his text by aphoristically quoting two striking sentences from Wolff’s work:

“Science can make no progress unless we allow of a liberty to philosophize.”

“Full liberty must be granted to all who philosophize in a philosophical manner, nor have we any reason to apprehend from such a liberty any danger either to religion, to virtue, or to the state.”<sup>81</sup>

The particular quotes arranged in this way would have carried a contextual charge immediately recognizable to anyone at the time. Wolff had been at the center of an infamous philosophical dispute in Halle that had become a political imbroglio in 1723. Conservative Pietist theologians at the university, disturbed by the rational mechanism implicit in Wolff’s philosophy and his un-Christian praise of Confucianism and eastern religions, reductively simplified Wolff’s worldviews in a report to the Prussian King, Frederick Wilhelm I, and intimated that should Wolff’s rationalist philosophy become popularized among the people, it would breed public insurrection and cause soldiers to desert the King’s army.<sup>82</sup> The king became convinced of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., II:366-367.

<sup>82</sup> Wolfgang Drechsler, “Christian Wolff (1679-1754) A Biographical Essay,” *European Journal of Law and Economics* 4, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 113.

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Wolff's impiety and promptly dismissed him from his post, ordering him to leave Halle within 48 hours or be hung.

Swedenborg's veiled allusion to the Wolff saga at the end of the *Principia* suggests how keenly aware he was of the damage that his "true philosophy" wrought on the traditional Pietistical strictures had been raised with, and even of the potential risk that the *Principia* could incur in Sweden, if it were ever read and fully understood by the theologians there. The *Principia* begins with the standard observation that modern man lives in a "fallen" state and condition, and our once perfect harmony and connection with nature now lies "distracted and broken." The way back to Paradise and the garden, though, is not through experiencing the love or saving grace of God and undergoing consequent conversion: it is rather only through "perpetual experiments and the practice of philosophizing, and by the faculty of reasoning thence acquired," that one can recover the original mental integrity that was once bestowed upon man by Deity.<sup>83</sup> In Swedenborg's view of the world as a machine-- *ipse mundus pure mechanicus est*, as he often wrote during the 1730's—by implication there is no practical need, let alone necessity, for the institution of religion.

In addition to the Leibnizian rationalism of Wolff, the physics in the *Principia* are modeled on earlier ideas articulated by Descartes and Swedenborg's erstwhile mentor, Christopher Polhelm. Two major points emerge out of the dense introductory chapters to the work that harken back to these earlier thinkers. First is the premise that movement itself characterizes the original and essential basis of matter. In contradistinction to Newton and his theory of vacuums and empty space between objects, Swedenborg wrote there is always a

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<sup>83</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*, I: 40.

substantial medium of concrete materiality that pervaded everything, so that when a force acts upon a body, the body pushes itself forward and through something. This comes very close to Polhelm's earlier claim that "everything in the material world could be explained mechanically as a result of pressure or impact."<sup>84</sup> This is a universal axiom from the smallest atoms to the largest formations of suns, planets, and solar systems.

Secondly, because of the inherent nature of this movement, the basic ordering form through which matter comes into being and materiality in the universe is the spiral, or vortex. Descartes' primary geometrical figure becomes adapted by Swedenborg in the *Principia* to illustrate a principle of return, how power, emanating from a center, revolves on an axis before spatially returning to its point of departure. One of the clearest examples the *Principia* offers of spiral and vortex power is in its extended discussion of magnetic poles. As the noted oceanographer Gustaf Arrhenius observes, Swedenborg's elaboration on magnetism as a force caused by "a cooperative effect of the motion of atomic particles with their spin axes aligned" was an intuition only more recently confirmed by science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>85</sup> Although Swedenborg would later abandon the whole mechanistic rationalism that the *Principia* embodies, he carried with him into the later visionary writing, transmuting the magnetic swirls into theological principles, both a notion of power attempting to ceaselessly return to itself as the basis for all movement in the universe, and a belief in the spiral and vortex as formative spiritual archetypes.

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<sup>84</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 78.

<sup>85</sup> Gustaf Arrhenius, "Swedenborg as Cosmologist:," in *Swedenborg and His Influence*, ed. Erland Brock (Academy of the New Church Press, 1988), 183.

The *Principia* broke truly new scientific ground when these two ideas were brought to bear on speculative cosmology, and the nebular hypothesis articulated by the *Principia* remains perhaps Swedenborg's most significant scientific contribution. In attempting to justify a conviction that the beginnings of the world and the universe were a state of energetic, unformed chaos "common to the sun and the planets," Swedenborg turns back to ancient Greek poetry, and quotes at length from Aristophanes and Ovid, arguing that these poetic voices evince a common truth that universal reason had once been capable of perceiving. Ovid is used to describe this primordial mass of energy:

Once was the face of nature, if a face,  
Rather a rude and undigested mass ;  
A lifeless lump, unfashioned and unframed,  
Of jarring seeds ; and justly Chaos named.<sup>86</sup>

Swedenborg's extensive use of classical poetry at this juncture in the *Principia* is striking in a 793 page work (in its English translation) that is otherwise preoccupied with geometrical formulas, tables, and precise proofs of Swedenborg's various experiments with magnetism. It illustrates and typifies, for one, Alfred North Whitehead's observation about the birth of modern science in the post-Renaissance period: namely, that it inherited from the revival of Greek traditions an anti-rationalist bias that insisted on viewing the cosmos in dramatic (or poetic) terms. The unfolding of nature's secrets proceeded within recognizable narrative and rhetorical

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<sup>86</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*, Vol II: 255. As Inge Jonsson has noted, Swedenborg was not necessarily reading Ovid in the original, and most of his Classical references seem to have come out of a miscellany compiled by Robert Baronius (a Scotsman), the *Metaphysica Generalis* (1654). Inge Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist: the Effects of Science and Philosophy on Swedenborg's Cosmography* (West Chester Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999), 75.

expectations; observing the phenomena of nature were shaped by precepts of plot and characterization.<sup>87</sup>

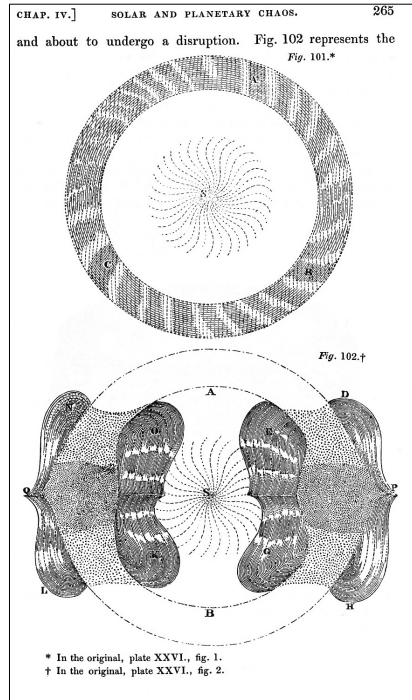
Swedenborg took the ancient view of the cosmos as a giant egg and refined it through his materialistic view of causal motion and spiraling matter. The result, graphically portrayed in a series of stunning plates that accompany the text, is the first scientific attempt to describe a solar formation whereby planets are created out of the whirling, circling chaos of an exploding star. The plates were not simply ancillary to Swedenborg's text; he was aware of the strange newness of his claims and the primordial universe he was attempting to imagine. He uncharacteristically explains to the reader that "a thousand words will not convey the idea which may be derived from a single representation... so that we shall now have recourse to figures to delineate this chaos or solar crust, and its state of separation."<sup>88</sup> As Swedenborg goes through a step-by-step account of planetary formation and gravitating vortexes and gyres, beneath the figures and images he again turns to Ovid and Aristophanes by repeating their words on chaos and the creation of the night. By contrast, "Mosaic Philosophy," as Swedenborg denotes the Judeo-Christian tradition, gets but a passing mention, and then only to note how the "chaos of Moses" described in the first book of Genesis rightfully accords with the older Abyss and Tartarus described by the more ancient Greeks.

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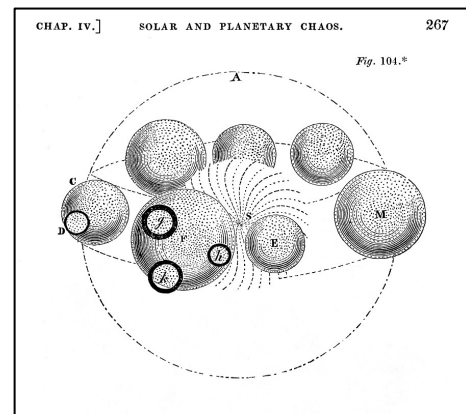
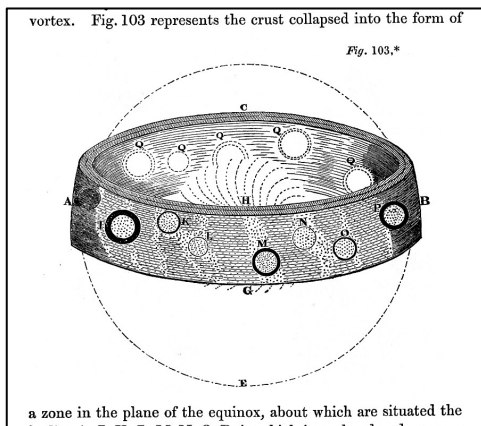
<sup>87</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 1st ed. (Free Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>88</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*, Vol. II: 263. It seems further relevant to recall here the emblematic tradition, which would have been part of Swedenborg's university training at Uppsala. In classical emblematic texts, the emblems were made of three elements: a short fable or allegory in Latin, a corresponding symbolic image, and at the end, a short epigrammatic motto. As Jonsson points out, this method of "combining words and images to form a concrete representation of a single idea" impinged on Swedenborg's theory of correspondence, but it also seems equally significant to what the *Principia* attempts to imagine through its figures. Jonsson, *Visionary scientist*, 13.





Illustrations showing the formation of the planets from the nebular chaos in Swedenborg's *Principia*<sup>89</sup>



<sup>89</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*, Vol. II: 265-267.

Swedenborg attempts to balance the poetic descriptions with a number of contemporary and modern astronomical observations of stars that seem to have either suddenly appeared out of nowhere or wavered and then permanently vanished: thus showing, Swedenborg claims, “the origin of the planets actually imaged forth to the eye” in the birth and death of various stars. Here, Swedenborg was not just touching on a revolution in cosmology, but broaching a radical new understanding of time, of the implied tenuousness of our own solar system. This moment of ongoing solar creation in the *Principia* is quantitatively far from the fixed Aristotelian Great Chain of Being which placed the earth firmly at the center of the universe, and stands somewhere between the upset of the earlier Copernican revolution and later attempts to comprehend a cosmological “deep time.”<sup>90</sup>

Even if, as Sten Lindroth writes, “Swedenborg’s cosmological theory was interwoven with wild speculation and partly characterized by poetic extravagances,”<sup>91</sup> its major tenet that the planets originated from a solar mass became the major starting point for all subsequent 18<sup>th</sup> century cosmologists who are credited with making significant advancements in the science, such as Buffon, La Place, and Kant. Eric Wilson eloquently writes how the ramifications of Swedenborg’s theory were far-reaching and five-fold:

One, Swedenborg rejects Newton’s atoms moving mechanically in a void and instead believes that the universe is comprised of motion organized in geometrical forms. Two, particles and elements, though organized by crusts of varying degrees of plasticity, are

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<sup>90</sup> The episteme of “deep time” emerged out of the growth of geology and earth sciences as pioneered by James Hutton and Charles Lyell, and later acquired an explicit environmental valence in the work of Arne Næss.

<sup>91</sup> Lindroth, *Swedish Men of Science, 1650-1950*, 55.

transparent in their pristine forms. They become opaque only when combined into irregular patterns. Three, events are polarized--distributed motion, and discrete pattern, centripetal and centrifugal forces. Four, the universe is analogical. The original infinity cohering into a primal point is homologous to the solar vortex condensing into a sun, the first chaos organizing into planets, mushy seeds pressing into leaves, and globes of water stiffening into crystals. Five, each part, properly seen, is a window to and a mirror of infinity: as geometrical patterns of spirit, both beholder and beheld refract and reflect the first light.<sup>92</sup>

Wilson makes these summary remarks in regard to how Henry David Thoreau reacted to Swedenborg's science later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and indeed, it was not until James John Garth Wilkinson's and Augustus Clissold's translations of Swedenborg's science in the 1840's that works like the *Principia* gained full recognition in the English speaking world.<sup>93</sup> At the time of its publication, it was largely across continental Europe, in countries that had strong mining

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<sup>92</sup> Eric Wilson, "Thoreau, Crystallography, and the Science of the Transparent," *Studies in Romanticism* 43, no. 1 (2004): 102.

<sup>93</sup> A key exception here was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who owned and extensively annotated a rare original Latin edition of the *Principia*. Coleridge's copy ended up in the possession of Charles Augustus Tulk after Coleridge's death, and the volume subsequently accrued symbolic value within Tulk's coterie. Elizabeth Barret Browning would spend hours seated in an armchair in Tulk's drawing room looking at Coleridge's "copy of Swedenborg," as she wrote. Later, James John Garth Wilkinson's transcriptions (and translations) of Coleridge's annotations appeared in an 1843 article in the *New Jerusalem Messenger*, an American Swedenborgian periodical. The article attracted the immediate attention of Henry James Sr. and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who both sought Wilkinson out and began long-term correspondence and relationships with him. For more on Wilkinson's impact on the ways that Emerson read and received Swedenborg as a scientist, see chapter three. Coleridge's copy of the *Principia* is now housed in the Swedenborg Society, London. On Coleridge's interest in Swedenborg as a philosopher, see Heather J. Jackson, "'Swedenborg's Meaning is the Truth': Coleridge, Tulk, and Swedenborg," in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), 1-13.

interests and concerns that the *Principia* initially met with acclaim. The volumes were almost immediately translated into German, French, and Spanish by virtue of their practical import for these rapidly industrializing economies. As Carl Odhner notes, the cosmological speculations and Wolffian philosophy may have baffled many reviewers, but the pragmatic compilations on mining and smelting methods in the second and third treatises on Iron and Copper were hailed as the most important and authoritative contributions on the topic since Georg Agricola's mineralogical *De Re Metallica* (1536). On the merits of its practical contribution to earth sciences, the Russian Royal Academy of Scientists sent Swedenborg an honorable acknowledgement.<sup>94</sup> A posthumous compilation of excerpts from the *Principia* entitled *Regnum Subterraneum* was republished numerous times during the Industrial Revolution, and James Watt is but one of many engineers and inventors who drew practical material from the work.<sup>95</sup>

The *Principia* must be thus further seen as an important text that contributed to the wholesale aesthetic revision of how Europeans were conceptualizing the potential of mine and mountain space and the raw materials that lay therein. If, as Marjorie Hope Nicholson argues, mountains were largely areas that were contemned or ignored up until the Romantic genesis of the sublime and the beautiful, and picturesque-seeking hordes took on a new mania for prospects and summits across Europe, this was more explicitly the case for the mine, the subterranean

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<sup>94</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, I: 465.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Kenneth Silver, "The Spiritual Kingdom in America: the Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on American Society and Culture, 1815-1860" (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1983), 307. Svante Lindqvist further situates Swedenborg's work on mechanics as central for instigating the Industrial Revolution in Sweden--it was Swedenborg's writings that constituted the first systematic assessments of technology in Scandinavia. See Svante Lindqvist, *Technology on Trial: the Introduction of Steam Power Technology into Sweden, 1715-1736*. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1984), 158-170.

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spaces under mountains and dale.<sup>96</sup> One of the earliest English poems to directly deal with mines, John Dalton's 1755 "A Descriptive Poem, Addressed to Two Ladies, at Their Return from Viewing the Mines" representatively characterizes mining space as "infernal darkness," and overlays the description of caverns with numerous classical allusions to Hades and Pluto. Due to the intense industrialization that Britain began undergoing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century--a process that was arguably more disruptive of agrarian patterns and traditional social structures than elsewhere in the world--there was an English "national predisposition against mining," according to Theodore Ziolkowski.<sup>97</sup> Swedenborg's praise in the *Principia* for the living, pulsing world of minerals and metals that flowed underground, in 1733, anticipates the positive symbolic appropriation of the mine undertaken by many continental Romantics by a good fifty years. Indeed, that the *Principia* was penned by a figure who was later renowned, if not infamous, for becoming a mystic may be a specific trajectory to situate behind the recurrent German Romantic accounts of the mine that usually feature a solitary figure in pursuit of alchemical lore or metallurgic secrets, who often ambivalently ends up either going insane or getting buried alive in the earth. The crazed, ghostly old miner who tells the protagonist of E.T.A. Hoffman's "Mines of Falun" that the "the eyes of man acquire more penetrating sight in the deepest depths of the earth, until they can recognize in the wonderful stones they find a reflection of that which is hidden above the clouds," comes very

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<sup>96</sup> Nicholson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*.

<sup>97</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 25.

close to moments in the *Principia* that look toward Swedenborg's later theory of spiritual correspondence.<sup>98</sup>

Hoffman's "Mines of Falun" (*Bergwerke zur Falun*, originally published 1819) was the most elaborate retelling and reworking of a famous anecdote about Sweden's most important mine to which Swedenborg himself was closely connected.<sup>99</sup> In 1719, when Swedenborg was 31 years old and hard at work on the first geological description of Sweden in his *Height of Waters*, miners at Falun uncovered the perfectly preserved corpse of a miner who had been buried earlier when the mine had experienced a major cave-in, 1670. The toxic byproducts of copper extraction and smelting had perfectly embalmed the corpse in its antiquated clothing, preventing it from decomposing.<sup>100</sup> The true account was well-known throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became a staple among later German Romantic authors who were interested in leitmotifs of postmortem returns and corporeal haunting. Swedenborg would surely have heard the remarkable account himself, as he had sat on the Board of Mines that oversaw Falun. But despite Swedenborg's further personal financial connections to Falun, there is no mention of this event in any of his extant private and public writings.

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<sup>98</sup> Ernst Theodor Hoffman, Stella Humphries, and Vernon Humphries, *Tales of Hoffmann* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1982), 316.

<sup>99</sup> As Ziolkowski points out, the tale was current and widespread throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hoffman built his short-story on a number of German Romantic precedents, including G. H. Schubert's *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (1808) and Johann Peter Hebel's "Inverhofftes Wiedersehen" (1811). Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions*, 53-54. Hoffman's rendition is certainly the best. Though it lies beyond the scope of this present project, it is worth noting that Hoffman held a marked interest in Swedenborg, and several of his other tales, such as "The Golden Bowl," betray his use of Swedenborgian themes and figures.

<sup>100</sup> The body was subsequently put on display in a glass case, where the miner's former fiancée--by this time a very old woman--recognized her former lover, identifying the corpse as that of Mats Israelsson.

Furthermore, if anything, the *Principia* tries to strongly distance itself from any associations with the supernatural or with alchemy, well aware of the ideological taint of usury and greed that stereotypically clung to perceptions of the mine in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (and even earlier--Agricola's *de Metallica* must devote lengthy pages at its introduction to debunking hostile stereotypes of the mine as a place suitable only for crazed alchemists pursuing silver and gold). The *Principia* condemns alchemy as a "farrago of fictions" and warns the reader to "believe nothing but palpable experience." There is nevertheless throughout the *Principia* a self-professed "feeling of wonder" at the sheer profligacy and growing energy of metals, crystals, and ores in the earth. As Bergquist puts it, Swedenborg was coming to see the mineral kingdom as but an extension of the same life force that governed the plants and animals he was simultaneously studying above ground: "minerals and philosophy were connected with each other... the principles governing the vegetable kingdom applied also to the realm of minerals."<sup>101</sup> The *Principia* praises the "rich veins of minerals that spring and grow," and metaphorizes underground spaces as "a general mother that yields and renovates the seeds of the vegetable kingdom, and as a nurse supplies all kinds of plants and trees with their peculiar juice."<sup>102</sup> The key words for Swedenborg's descriptions of minerals and metals at this point are "renovating" "metamorphosis" and "revolution," and one can locate here in the *Principia* the ancient belief in minerals as living, growing tissues feeding into a (pre)Romantic predilection for organic forms and process.

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<sup>101</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 116.

<sup>102</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*, II:375.

It made sense that a Swede would produce the 18<sup>th</sup> century's greatest treatise on mining and metals, as Swedish iron continued to dominate the European market, and Falun remained the largest single supply source of copper. Swedenborg's interest in mining operations was not only due to his professional responsibilities as a Royal Assessor on the Board of Mines. His family's fortunes, on both his father and mother's side, were almost wholly dependent on shares in mines throughout northern Sweden. As Swedenborg sat in his summer house and wrote prosaic descriptions of gardens in Heaven and the pastoral nomadic existence of celestial communities, his financing depended, literally, on an income derived from blast furnaces and open pit mining. The Swedenborg family's indebtedness to mining is suggested by the heraldry created for their coat of arms when they were ennobled by the Queen in 1719. Below a Bishop's miter—emblem of Jesper Swedberg's ecclesiastical status—the heraldic shield is divided into two sections. On the left are keys, again an episcopal symbol, surrounded by two thick gray lines that are meant to be bars of iron, as symbols of the family's mining ties. Even more clearly, in the right section of the shield stands a large burning mountain, most likely meant to evoke a foundry and its smoking chimney (although it also looks like a volcano). The smoking mountain might also allude to the etymology of the family patronym, Sveden, that refers to a method of clear-cut burning for farming.<sup>103</sup> The silver arrow at the base of the mountain was the emblem of the Darlecarlian province where the Swedberg family originated from and continued to hold the majority of their mining interests.

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<sup>103</sup> See the earlier footnoted discussion in this chapter on page 42.



The Swedenborg Coat of Arms  
Image courtesy of the Swedish House of Nobility (Riddarhuset), Stockholm  
Reproduction granted by Hon. Mr. Göran Mörner

Given this current project's interest in the ways that Swedenborg's theology subsequently affected a complex of environmental aesthetics that fed into concepts of preservation and nascent Romantic ecology, these formative family ties to foundries and clear-cut burning might seem jarringly incongruous for any attempt to "green" Swedenborg. It is interesting to note that after Swedenborg's visionary turn, he gradually recused himself from all professional relationships to the Swedish mining industry as such. Three years after buying a private property on Sodermalm and beginning to build the elaborate and extensive garden already discussed in the first chapter, Swedenborg turned down an offer for more money, prestige, and influence on the Board of Mines--a move that would have shocked his contemporaries as an extraordinary renunciation. There was no apparently good reason for Swedenborg to resign from the board and "go green," as it were, as it was not yet known that he was the anonymous author of the heterodox theological treatises that had begun appearing in print in 1749.

Nonetheless, mining and its metaphors flicker throughout Swedenborg's later writings on the spiritual world. The mine is also a recurring backdrop for the haunted spaces in the dream diary.<sup>104</sup> An extremely rare picture of Assessor Swedenborg at work in actual mines is offered in an early poem by Swedenborg that describes the descent into the main shaft at Falun. Like most accounts of mines in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Swedenborg's poem plays with the expected allegorical topos of Hades and the Underworld. What makes the poem strikingly different from other

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<sup>104</sup> For example, an entry from March 1744: "I boldly descended a huge stairway, which after a while turned into a ladder; below it, there was a hole that went down to quite a great depth; it was difficult to get to the other side without falling into the hole. On the other side, there were persons to whom I reached out my hand to help them cross over. I woke up. This is the danger in which I am: of falling into the abyss unless I receive help." Lars Bergquist, ed., *Swedenborg's Dream Diary* (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2001), 96-97.

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“mining” poems that emerged in the period, such as Dalton’s aforementioned “Descriptive Poem,” is its pragmatic focus on the ingenuity of man’s efforts underground. The poem opens with Swedenborg meditating on his mortality as he descends into the open pit, riding on a large bucket spooled from a winch:

Behold, a wonderful thing! I glide down from the upper world in a bucket,  
thus hanging, I am brought all the way to the dark shadows of death.

But, as I moved to and fro hanging in the middle of the air,  
it was pleasant for me to sing holy hymns.

It was pleasant thus to weigh this poor and fragile life,  
*which all depends on the power of a rope.*

The poem then proceeds to catalogue the workers in the mine below:

Behold--in the recesses of the mine the band of Hades hurriedly rushes along,  
with dark faces wondering at me and my followers.

Some of them roll rocks, some sweat in the dust,  
this one throws down wood, another brings torches.

Yet another enters the recesses, someone puts out from a hole  
a face that is so burnt, so that even dark Charon himself would laugh.

Another with great effort climbs quivering ladders, yet another is squatting in a vessel;  
the vessel only holds half his body.

This one is working himself through winding veins, another goes round,  
for he leads small horses around in a circle.

*What more shall I mention? All is full of hard work and skill.*

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*Skill is not inferior to the material, nor is the material inferior to the skill.*<sup>105</sup>

The poem's last two lines encase a curious double negative that equalizes the men and their work and the natural materials before them in the mine: a recursive gesture that could also be said to preoccupy the ambivalent moral at the end of Hoffman's "Mines of Falun." If Kate Rigby is correct to claim that Hoffman's tale "could also be read as disclosing the potential complicity of mine mysticism with the increasingly industrial exploitation of the natural world," the ambiguous tone of Swedenborg's poem and the particular ways his later mystical writings both depart from and recourse back to the space of the mine might be also read as an example of "the growing incompatibility of the romantic philosophy of nature with the constraints of bourgeois society, in which the technological mastery of nature was conjoined with a libinal repression of the embodied subject."<sup>106</sup>

When the *Principia* was published in 1733, however, Swedenborg was at the height of his scientific powers and self-assuredness. In the engraved portrait that accompanied the volumes--done from a live sitting with an artist in Dresden--Swedenborg looks almost smug. Within ten years, however, Swedenborg would be at the epicenter of his psychological crisis, deep in personal despair. The subsequent books concerning exegesis and angels, by contrast, largely feature no author's name on the title pages, and instead of a portrait, small graphic vignettes of gardens and floral designs (many likely drawn by Swedenborg himself) ornament the texts. When the proud mineralogist of 1734 is compared to the budding mystic of 1744, they seem wholly antithetical selves, two separate persons writing vastly different projects at

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<sup>105</sup> *Ludus Heliconius*, 124-125.

<sup>106</sup> Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism*, 153. See also Hartmut Böhme, *Natur und Subjekt* (Suhrkamp, 1996).

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fundamental odds with one another. In a way they certainly were--Swedenborg upholds and embodies the tradition within Christian mysticism that a self must die in order to be born again. But there is yet a certain continuity and way that even aspects of the mechanistic *Principia* foreshadow a turn towards an epistemology based on intuition, imagination, and inspiration, as we will discuss below in the next chapter.

The confident claims about rationality in the Preface of the *Principia*, for one, not only indicate Swedenborg's reading and study of John Locke, they also delineate his research project for the next decade: to study human anatomy and conclusively resolve the question of supersensory knowledge. "We can divine knowledge only through experience," the *Principia* asserts,

It is impossible to receive knowledge immediately from the soul; man attains it only through the medium of organs and senses... . Man is made and formed, and distinguished from the brutes, by education alone; in the process of which, the organs that mediate between the mind and the body, being brought into exercise, as it were cultivated and fashioned; and exercise so arranges the elements enclosed in small membranes and organs, as to enable the most subtile tremors and motions to pass and repass through them, and opens as it were those secret and intricate avenues which lead to the most subtile and active substances of our nature.<sup>107</sup>

The subsequent scientific works written by Swedenborg in late 1730's and early 1740's could be seen as expansions on this latter point. Instead of climbing and crawling through the mines of northern Europe, Swedenborg narrowed his research scope to the intimate labyrinths of the

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<sup>107</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*, I:8.

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human body, especially the brain, seeking to map and chart out its physiological contours with the same encyclopedic thoroughness that he had given to the mineral kingdoms of metal and stone. Swedenborg's turn to the body may have also had complex personal motivations. In 1735, Swedenborg's larger-than-life father died. Swedenborg traveled to Skara for the funeral, and almost immediately thereafter requested the king to grant him leave to travel to Paris, where he would be able to watch and take part in the dissection of human bodies. The immortality of the soul--a theme that was dear to his dead father--was to be found with knife and scalpel.

#### **Swedenborg's Brain: 1736-1744**

Swedenborg's work on the body gradually led him to reject the mechanism of Lockean epistemology that the *Principia* readily promulgates, and though he never satisfactorily arrived at a material proof of the soul's existence, Swedenborg's intense research endeavors and extensive anatomical readings, especially in the great 17<sup>th</sup> century work of the microscopists Marcello Malphigi and Jan Swammerdam, brought him to make several surprising discoveries in what would be classified today under cognitive neurophysiology. In addition to observing, if not taking part, in dissections in Paris 1736, and perhaps watching Pourfour du Petit conduct experiments on the lesions of cortexes in dogs, Swedenborg took up an expansive study of philosophers who dealt with the mind, filling hundreds of manuscript pages with notes and quotations from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Locke, and Malebranche. The pages of this so-called "Philosopher's Notebook," as the commonplace book has come to be called, evinces Swedenborg's growing distance from the rationalism of Leibniz and Wolff that had so

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energized him in the 1730's.<sup>108</sup> One can also trace distinct patterns of new readings, and a particular engagement with the philosophy of the French theologian Nicolas Malebranche. As Jonsson and Bergquist have both observed, the dynamic relationship between the body and soul that Malebranche established in *Recherche de la Vérite* (1674) becomes very instrumental for Swedenborg's subsequent development of a theory of correspondence.<sup>109</sup> Malebranche's equation that the psychophysical relationship between mind and body mirrored the cosmic relationship between God and creation strengthened Swedenborg's conviction that by exploring in microscopic detail the circulatory and lymphatic systems, or the structures of the brain, one could intuit larger truths about the universe as a whole.<sup>110</sup> Swedenborg's years of research culminated in what would be his final major scientific treatises, the *Biological Bases of the Soul* (*Oeconomia Regni Animalis*) in 1740, and *The Soul's Domain* (*Regnum Animale*) in 1744-45.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Philosopher's Notebook*, trans. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 2009).

<sup>109</sup> Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 38, 70; Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 134-135.

<sup>110</sup> Behind these ideas in Malebranche, Lamm points out, are strong vestiges of the French female mystics known as the Quietists, Mme. Guyon and Mme. Bourignan. Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 56. Swedenborg could have read either of these on their own, but their imprint on Malebranche's basic world-view was profound.

<sup>111</sup> There remains chronic translation confusion around both of these similar sounding Latin titles. When both were translated in their entirety into English for the first time in the 1840's by James John Garth Wilkinson and Augustus Clissold, they were given--for unclear reasons--the literally misconstrued titles of "the Economy of the Animal Kingdom" and the "Animal Kingdom," which belies each text's exclusive preoccupation with human physiology. There is nothing in either text that is remotely concerned with animal species. More recent reissues of these earlier translations have emended the titles to "Dynamics of the Soul's Domain" or "Soul's Domain," although this has added to the confusion as it was only as the "Animal Kingdom" that the 19<sup>th</sup> century knew these works by Swedenborg (see, for example, Emerson's references to both texts). Charles Gross usefully suggests "the Biological Bases of the Soul" for *Oeconomia Regnum Animale*, which hits much closer to the work's scope and content than the "Economy of the Animal Kingdom" and seems advantageous to adopt here. Charles G. Gross, *Brain, Vision, Memory: Tales in the History of Neuroscience* (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1998), 123.

There were additional numerous handwritten manuscripts, published only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the structure of the brain, psychology of the mind, and hieroglyphic writing.

According to the neuroscientist and historian Charles Gross, Swedenborg's work on the mind and brain anticipated the development of cognitive neurophysiology in three significant ways. First, Swedenborg posited the instrumental role of the cerebral cortex in sensory, motor, and cognitive functions, one hundred years before this became accepted scientific fact. Secondly, he articulated something akin to a neuron doctrine, even though neurons had yet to be scientifically described, primarily through his creative use of Malphigi's earlier descriptions of cortical glands in *De Cerebri*. Finally, and perhaps most astonishingly, Swedenborg mapped out the somatotopic organization of motor functions to different regions of the cerebral cortex, outlining pathways of communication between each sense organ to parts of the cortex itself. This view was "totally unprecedented and not to reappear until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century," writes Gross, and no other suggestion of somatotopic organization of cortical functions surfaces in scientific literature until the definitive experiments of Fritsch and Hitzig in 1870.<sup>112</sup> Even more particularly, as Stanley Finger further points out, Swedenborg seems to have inferred that the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 127. Additionally, Gross catalogues, "Swedenborg's view of the cerebrospinal fluid was not surpassed until the work of Magendie a 100 years later. [Swedenborg] was the first to implicate the colliculi in vision, and in fact the only one until Flourens in the nineteenth century. [Swedenborg] suggested that a function of the corpus callosum was for the hemispheres to intercommunicate with each other, [and that] a function of the corpus striatum was to take over motor control from the cortex when a movement became a familiar habit or second nature" (128).

frontal lobes of the cortex were involved in intellectual capacities of imagination, memory, and thought.<sup>113</sup>

This provokes two obvious questions. Firstly, how did Swedenborg arrive at such prescient insights, specifically on the cortex when most 18<sup>th</sup> century anatomists tended to regard the organ as an insensitive rind? And secondly, why did these important discoveries have no measurable impact of any sort on the development of neuroscience? Gross argues that Swedenborg's incisive work on the brain came about not only through his wide readings and habit of taking in detailed medical descriptions in textbooks while ignoring the author's own conclusions and prejudices, but also through his genius for synthesizing and integrating different bodies of knowledge. For example, the ways Swedenborg's "Brain" manuscript combined observations of the effects of brain injury with details from comparative neuroanatomy was highly unusual in its day. When this manuscript was finally translated and published in 1882 and 1887, the international medical community took due notice. One reviewer in the medical journal *Brain* hailed it as "one of the most remarkable books we have ever seen," and went on to say that Swedenborg's text

appears to have anticipated some of the most modern discoveries on the brain but that because of its metaphysical, ontological, theological phraseology, if it had not been that attention was arrested and enchanted by finding so many anticipations of scientific

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<sup>113</sup> See Emanuel Swedenborg, *Three Transactions on the Cerebrum; a Posthumous Work* (Philadelphia, Pa: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1938), 73; as well as Stanley Finger, *Origins of Neuroscience: A History of Explorations in Brain Function* (Oxford University Press US, 2001)., especially 29-31. Other historians of science with relevant commentary on Swedenborg's neurological theories include M. Ramstrom, "Emanuel Swedenborg as an Anatomist," *British Medical Journal* 2 (1910): 1153-1155., and T.H. Schwedenberg, "The Swedenborg Manuscripts," *Archives of Neurology* 2 (1960): 407-409.

discoveries by as much as 120 or 130 years, we should have been tempted to throw the book aside as beyond our province, if not hopelessly unintelligible.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, one clear reason why Swedenborg's work on the brain remained in obscurity is the very theosophical nature of his project--a transcendental drive that took him to the edge of physiology and beyond. It is striking to note the general drift of his published work in the 1740's and thereafter, their shift in epistemological foundations from anatomy into poetic imagination (in the unfinished *Worship and Love of God*), until finally resting within a visionary exegetical theology. The questions and problems remain more or less the same in each case--it is more that the rhetorical frames are successively altered until Swedenborg finally located a suitable language and writing style for articulating a kind of phenomenological knowledge and experience that--paradoxically--ultimately lies beyond language's descriptive capacities.

At any rate, even if it never became acknowledged by the wider scientific community, Swedenborg's 18<sup>th</sup> century work on the brain disturbs the positivistic assumption that science is an accretive discipline that inexorably progresses and builds upon itself, and suggests the ways that paradigm shifts have been more often triggered by discontinuous breaks with the rationalist tradition.<sup>115</sup> Considering the ways that Swedenborg's final theological vision ultimately rests on a concept of correspondence and symbolic perception that is essentially a process of metaphoric transference, be it between the natural and the spiritual, or the microcosm of the body and the

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<sup>114</sup> Qtd. in Gross, *Brain, Vision, Memory*, 130.

<sup>115</sup> I mean these terms in the sense that Thomas Kuhn first coined "paradigm shift" in Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University Of Chicago Press, 1996), as well as Gaston Bachelard's no less influential notion of "epistemological breaks" that tear open and chafe against empirical science's premise of continuity. Gaston Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit* (New York: Beacon Press, 1985).

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macrocosm of the universe, it is striking to note how Donna Haraway has built on Kuhnian notions of paradigm shift to situate the importance of metaphor as a catalyst for creative upheavals in scientific discourse. Haraway writes how metaphor

is the vital spirit of a paradigm (or perhaps its basic organizing relation)... a metaphor is important to the nature of explanation because it leads to the testing of the neutral parts of the analogy. It leads to a searching for the limits of the metaphoric system and thus generates the anomalies important in paradigm change. A metaphor is an image that gives coherence to even highly abstract thought. Metaphor is a property of language that gives boundaries to worlds and helps scientists using real languages to push against these bounds.<sup>116</sup>

One might thus say that the imaginative theosophical aspects of Swedenborg's physiological texts that bothered later scientists were precisely the grounds for his neurological innovations, and not simply unfortunate theological extravagances, as the reviewer from *Brain* found them to be. Without the striving to bridge a supersensory spiritual domain with the natural, "a searching for the limits of the metaphoric system," in Haraway's words, Swedenborg would not have arrived at his preternatural syntheses about cognitive brain functions. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that it is in a section on the function of the kidneys and their relation to the nervous system in *The Soul's Domain* that Swedenborg first publicly articulates his theory of correspondence,

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<sup>116</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors That Shape Embryos* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 9-10. See also Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, 68. In an extended discussion of Emerson's claim that "all thought analogizes," Laura Dassow Walls writes further how "discovery in science is fundamentally a metaphoric process." Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 201, 255.

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later the keystone for his visionary theology and ensuing Romantic approaches to nature-as-text. Here, at a microscopic level of considering the veins and circulatory patterns of blood, Swedenborg first grasps the metaphoric power of an “astonishing” symbolism that “pervades the living body,” and that “a spiritual truth or theological dogma” is concretized and embodied in every physical aspect of the world, even in the human body.<sup>117</sup> Anatomy suddenly becomes a sacred language in which Swedenborg can descry normally ineffable spiritual precepts. The microscope opens a hermeneutics by which Swedenborg enacts (in the Lakoffian sense) a metaphoric transfer from the body’s source into the target domain of the soul.

Swedenborg’s breakthroughs were encouraged by new research methodologies and deliberately cultivated new habits of thinking. Where the preface of the *Principia* exudes a tone of utmost confidence as it sets itself up as a counterpart to Newtonian physics, the introductions of both *Biological Bases of the Soul* and *The Soul’s Domain* are hesitant about their projected aims, and Swedenborg’s sense of self emerges as a limitation. “I found,” he writes in *Biological Bases of the Soul*,

that when intently occupied in exploring the secrets of the human body, that as soon as I discovered anything that had not been observed before, I began (probably seduced by self-love) to grow blind to the most acute lucubrations of others... and consequently to be

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<sup>117</sup> “In our Doctrine of Representations and Correspondences, we shall treat of both these symbolical and typical representations, and of the astonishing things which occur, I will not say in the living body only, but throughout nature, and which correspond so entirely to supreme and spiritual things, that one would swear that the physical world was purely symbolical of the spiritual world: insomuch that if we choose to express any natural truth in physical and definite vocalized terms, and to convert these terms only into the corresponding spiritual terms, we shall by this means elicit a spiritual truth or precept...” Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom, Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically* (London: Newbery, 1843), I: 451.

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incapacitated to view and comprehend the idea of universals in individuals, and or individuals under universals.<sup>118</sup>

To overcome himself and his immense blinding “self-love” required the “habit and cultivation” of a “tranquil state of mind,” achievable only through “extinguishing the fires of the body,” which in turn would allow his mind “to be illuminated with the rays of spiritual power.”<sup>119</sup> Swedenborg’s self-proscriptions sound like meditation instructions for pranayama yoga, and indeed, this period is paralleled by a recuperation of the hypoventilation techniques that Swedenborg had practiced as a child, as previously discussed in this chapter, as well as an interest in Lappland shaman techniques to separate the soul from the body. The “tranquil state of mind” Swedenborg aspires to in the *Soul’s Domain* is not simply a prosaic term: it entails a physiological process of altering consciousness, a willed reduction of the inner language of thought to a minimum (thus Swedenborg’s choice of Latin *tranquillitas* -- still, unmoving). The private diaries of the period also show a keen interest in the connections between thought, language, and breath. One somewhat bizarre entry from the journal of dreams is worth quoting at length here, for it dovetails with Swedenborg’s extensive research on the lungs and circulation of oxygen in the blood, and demonstrates how his anatomical research provided rich poetic fodder for his dreams:

I noticed it to be a fact--and indeed, I had been inspired to thinking during the day and as was also *represented to me by a kind of luminous writing*--that the will has the greatest

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<sup>118</sup> *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, trans. Augustus Clissold and James John Garth Wilkinson (London: W. Newbery [etc.], 1846), I: 8.

<sup>119</sup> Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom, Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically*, II: 359-360.

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influence on the understanding. When we inhale, the thoughts fly into the body, and when we exhale, the thoughts are in a peculiar way expelled and rectified; so the very thoughts possess their alternations of activity like the respiration of the lungs... that when in deep thought, the lungs are kept in a state of equilibrium and at rest, more according to nature, and that the inhalations are faster than the expirations, when at other times the reverse is the case; and, furthermore, that *a person in ecstasy holds the whole breath, and the thoughts then being as it were absent.*<sup>120</sup>

What seems worth extrapolating from this quote is that Swedenborg's deliberate use of breathing patterns to alter his thought is not only linked to the ecstasy of the mystic, but is equally relevant for honing a clarity of scientific perception that lies behind the remarkable discoveries in *Biological Bases of the Soul* and *The Soul's Domain*. To find the scientific universals in the individual cases, the scientist needs a tranquil mind that is ecstatically still, an absence of thought opening into a state of receptivity.

The centrality of the body in these final scientific epics becomes the measuring stick for Swedenborg's subsequent spiritual world, the proportional ratio by which all else is to be described. The body as the concrete site of the manifestation of higher spiritual truth also helps explain Swedenborg's gradual departure from his earlier intellectual heroes of Leibniz, Spinoza, Wolff, and Descartes--their frameworks for discussing the Divine in mathematical terms were ultimately too abstract and suprahuman.<sup>121</sup> Seen more broadly, Swedenborg's attempt to graft a

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<sup>120</sup> My emphases, Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Dream Diary*, 175.

<sup>121</sup> This admittedly over-generalizes Swedenborg's more complex relationship to Leibniz. As Jonsson and Benz have both amplified, Leibniz's concept of a pre-established harmony in the

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theosophy onto the biological basis of the human body is markedly characteristic of later Romantic science; Jonsson seems right to claim that “too little attention has been paid to Swedenborg as a link between seventeenth-century rationalism and the natural philosophy of Romanticism.”<sup>122</sup> As Whitehead further observes, the body as a unit of measurement in the perceptual field was one of the most important intellectual legacies bequeathed by the Romantic revolt against scientific paradigms of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Uprooting a priori mechanistic assumptions about the simple location of objects in time and space -- what Whitehead pungently calls “the fallacy of misplaced location”--Romantics drastically reorganized how humans apprehended the external world. Instead of simple location, “the body is the organism whose states regulate our cognizance of the world. The unity of the perceptual field must be a unity of bodily experience... this involves the entire abandonment of the notion that simple location is the primary way in which things are involved in space-time.”<sup>123</sup> This reorganization came to have significant ramifications both in more abstruse ways of organizing a structure of reality, such as Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, as well as in a more general approach to the environment and natural world. The anthropological center of Swedenborg’s vision, as will be taken up in the next chapter, is consequently fraught with ecological implications.

Swedenborg’s scholarly attention to the anatomy of the body, sharpened by self-reflexive meditative habits, overturned the mechanical epistemology of the *Principia*. The positivist assertions about the world being nothing but a machine, universally comprehensible through the

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universe and his monad have certain dynamic tendencies that were significant for both Swedenborg and subsequent models of organicism developed by the German Romantics.

<sup>122</sup> Jonsson, *Visionary scientist*, 63.

<sup>123</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 91.

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dry light of reason and understanding, ossifies into recurring nightmares of engines and wheels.

Swedenborg's first dated entry in the dream journal in 1744 is representative -- he writes of "standing by a machine which was moved by a wheel; its spokes entangled me more and more and carried me up so that I could not escape."<sup>124</sup> Instead of allying the search for ultimate truth with geometry and algebra, the *Biological Bases of the Soul* and *The Soul's Domain* present truth as a phenomenon that "spontaneously manifests itself" in feeling. The intuition of truths is

not only pleasing, but also ineffably delightful, containing in them, as it were, the charms of all the loves and graces. This they derive from their very form, that is, from the determination and consent of particular things or corresponding ideas; for *a truth is never absolutely single or simple*, although after its formation, and the coalescence of its parts, it may appear to be so: on the contrary, *a truth is the fitting combination of an infinity of truths, that is, of an infinity of discrete ideas and notions.*<sup>125</sup>

To use Whitehead's terminology, truths are never bound to simple locations, but are rather dynamic relationships in larger processes. The cognitive apprehension of these relationships between things takes on the physiological quality of photism. When we "make a discovery of truth," writes Swedenborg in *Biological Bases of the Soul*, "straightaway there is a certain cheering light, and joyful confirmatory brightness, that plays around the sphere of their mind; and a kind of mysterious radiation--I know not whence it proceeds--that darts through some

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<sup>124</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Dream Diary*, 92.

<sup>125</sup> Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom, Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically*, 2.; see also in volume II, where it is the pleasure of an idea perceived as an image that allows thought to insinuate itself into the mind and memory (II: 362). "Truth manifests itself spontaneously," Swedenborg writes further in *Biological Basis of the Soul*, "and assures us of its presence, without any help from far-fetched arguments." Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, II: 217.

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sacred temple in the brain.” Swedenborg situates the illuminating moment of truth perception at a level of feeling, of “joyful confirmatory brightness,” that occupies some flickering space on the fringe of the consciousness. Again, it might be instructive to read Swedenborg here via Whitehead, and see this complex statement about light in the mind as not an indication of an encroaching mysticism (as some scholars, such as Benz, have read Swedenborg’s matter-of-fact photism), but as typifying Whitehead’s complex notion of “prehension,” the ways the mind gathers discrete things into a single unit of uncognitive apprehension. For Whitehead, what is perceived by the conscious mind is this single “prehension” and not the discrete things themselves, which is somewhat akin to Swedenborg’s grasp of truth as an ineffable joyful light of dynamic relationships established between things, glimpsed as a whole, and not the things “absolutely single or simple” in themselves, to paraphrase the earlier quote from *Dynamics of the Soul*.<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps because of this new epistemology based on spontaneity and intuition, both *Biological Bases of the Soul* and *Dynamics of the Soul* take a surprising interest in artistic creation, and the philosophical pursuit of truth is often compared to the work of the artist. Like the sculptor or painter, the mind must image its abstract ideas in concrete material shapes and forms, creating a tangible representation of inner truth. Swedenborg’s extant travel diaries of this period come alive with observations of palaces, church interiors, and gardens. The season

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<sup>126</sup> I am drawing on Whitehead’s definition of prehension in Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 69.. For an interesting--if broad--speculation on Whitehead’s process philosophy and Swedenborg’s metaphysics, see Karl Birjukov, “Footnotes to Swedenborg,” *The New Philosophy* (June 2008): 321-358. Lamm convincingly argues that Swedenborg’s use of intuition came from a perceptive reading of Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*. Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 32-33.

Swedenborg spent in Italy between 1738-1739 is particularly noteworthy for its lists of paintings, sculptures by Bernini, frescos, as well as typically practical observations on manufacturing processes, such as how a workshop in Rome produced mosaic tile.<sup>127</sup> “Beautiful” and “magnificence” are repeated so often in these Italian sections that Swedenborg’s aesthetic appreciation distinctly looks toward the neoclassical flavor of the palaces and gardens that he later describes in celestial and spiritual heavens.

The interest in art stems from a deeper concern with the function of representation and language’s relationship to thought. The *Biological Bases of the Soul* articulates a frustration at language’s limitations--that “where the human soul is, there is no corporeal language which can adequately express its nature.”<sup>128</sup> Between the first volume of the *Biological Bases* and the last sections of *Dynamics of the Soul*, one can chart Swedenborg shifting away from a positive conviction that he would be able to locate a “mathematical philosophy of universals”--a dream he inherited from Wolff, Descartes, and Leibniz--that would be able to account for the soul by virtue of geometry’s abstract universality, and a growing new interest in the specific etymologies of words and the origins of hieroglyphics, and the way that ideas seemed to need a cognitive ground in the concreteness of a physical image. Images enter our eyes and gather themselves into series “like scenic shows” which immediately strike and fascinate the mind with their pleasure

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<sup>127</sup> Tafel, *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, I: 104-130.

<sup>128</sup> Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, II: 58. As Williams-Hogan points out, it isn’t wholly clear why Swedenborg went south to Italy. The lavish attention to beautiful objects in the travel journals, though, dovetails with his intense research on the body--“it is not surprising therefore,” Williams-Hogan concludes, “that Swedenborg’s travels took him southeast to Italy--a living museum of ancient opulence and sensuality.” Williams-Hogan, “Stranger in a Foreign Land: Swedenborg, Traveler, Observer, Reporter, and Explorer,” 96.

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and delight.<sup>129</sup> The world is an unceasing theatre, a playing spectacle, especially for the eyes of the child. These images

creep up to the sensorial of the cerebrum, which have been rendered accessible by conducting fibres, and produce changes of state therein, by which they teach them to receive, retain, and at last to perceive, that which comes up and penetrates through the external organic doors. Then, in the process of time, sensual images, adopted internally in the sensorium of the cerebrum, become ideas; at first analogous to sensual ideas; afterwards, disposed into forms and series, they become proximately higher, or imaginative ideas, these at length put on rational forms, and become intellectual ideas.<sup>130</sup>

Thus each idea, no matter how abstract or “spiritual,” has at its core a basic sensory perception of an image, or series of images, a mode of instinctive seeing that is inherently pleasurable.

Swedenborg’s mature model of organic consciousness can be glimpsed at work in these descriptions of how images build together to become composite ideas. The view of the mind presented not only in *Biological Bases of the Soul* and *Dynamics of the Soul’s Domain*, but also in the subsequent theology, is essentially fourfold. At the highest, or most interior level, is our *anima*, a space of the mind above and closed to our rational faculties, and more importantly, beyond the descriptive powers of language. The *anima* is the home of the soul and its divine function is to flow into the lower levels of the mind below and cause them to image and figure our perceptions as representations that make sense. The *anima* is ontological--it intuitively discerns purposes and ends, and gives cohesion to our sense of reality. Secondly, resting below

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<sup>129</sup> Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom, Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically*, II: 362.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 342-343.

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the *anima*, is our *mens*, our reason, over which we can exercise conscious control. Whereas we are all born with a functioning *anima*, the *mens* is a Lockean “tabula rasa,” and it is only through education and upbringing that it learns how to exercise properly its discriminating powers and ability to order sensory perception. Thirdly, the *mens* flows into what Swedenborg called the *animus*, our level of corporeal sensory input. Swedenborg plants desire and the bodily passions here, but also our awareness of our imagination and its constructive potential. As the seat of desire and reproduction, Swedenborg’s *animus* bears the obvious imprint of Aristotle’s nutritive (or vegetative) soul. It is also the site of great spiritual conflict, where the *mens* attempts to control earthly passion and desire. Finally, at the lowest or most external level of consciousness is our body itself and the organs of perception that transmit and convey impressions to the brain. According to Jonsson, the dynamic interactions between these four levels was “a compromise between the rationalistic belief in innate ideas in man and the empiricist theory that our consciousness is entirely formed by sensory experiences.”<sup>131</sup>

Swedenborg became intensely preoccupied with the role of spoken and written languages within this schema of perception. In 1741 or 1742, in between his anatomical studies, Swedenborg drafted a lengthy essay, “A Hieroglyphic Key to the Secrets of Material and Spiritual Things by Way of Representations and Correspondences,” that purported to recapture ancient wisdom that Swedenborg believed the Egyptians and other ancient peoples once used to express complex spiritual ideas in simple hieroglyphic characters. Although the draft was never published, and consists in large part of lists of various kinds of symbols and representations divided into different categories, it exhibits an interest in humankind’s “primeval” language, and

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<sup>131</sup> Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 77.

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builds itself on a belief that the earliest primitive humans--the so called "Golden Age" symbolized by the Garden of Eden, according to Swedenborgian hermeneutics--had a truer, more authentic relationship to nature and the Divine than modern Christianity in any of its forms. While this thought is not particularly original or unique in itself, it is provoking to encounter it in the 1740's amidst Swedenborg's physiological studies. Swedenborg's dream of a pure "hieroglyphic language" in which primitive words were one with the spiritual things they typified is an interest also found in the earlier work of Giambattista Vico, as well as later studies by Rousseau, Herder, and much subsequent literary Romanticism.<sup>132</sup>

The lost ancient language of hieroglyphic correspondence was, for Swedenborg, evidence of a way of thinking in images. When he later came to describe imaginatively these ancient people with their "science of correspondence" eternally living in their heavens, they prefer to communicate their ideas to Swedenborg's spirit by presenting images of things, and not through speaking words. The best of them, Swedenborg writes, were once the first humans on earth who apprehended all of reality "as a pictographic screen."<sup>133</sup> Whether or not Swedenborg's theory of correspondence presents a problematic abstraction of language from a kind of phenomenological contact and being with nature, or is rather an imaginative attempt to renegotiate the arbitrary contract between sign and signified and root words again to things, is a matter that will be taken up in the next chapter that delves more precisely into Swedenborg's post-visionary hermeneutic.

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<sup>132</sup> See Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 112. The "Hieroglyphic Key" is found in an English translation in Emanuel Swedenborg, *Psychological Transactions and other Posthumous Tracts, 1734-1744*, 2nd ed. (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1984).

<sup>133</sup> This idea is perhaps most often reiterated throughout the epic eight volumes of the *Arcana Caelestia* -- see, for example, Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven (Swedenborg, Emanuel, Works.)* (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2008), no. 66, 403. The phrase "pictographic screen" is taken from Lagercrantz, *Epic of the Afterlife*, 92.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### *Reading the Book of Nature, 1745-1772*

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“Swedenborg’s inner space and his way of describing its spiritual components can be classed among the more remarkable elements in Swedish literature, and in the literature of the world in general.” – Lars Bergquist<sup>1</sup>

“The tension between Swedenborg’s pedestrian style, stripped of poetic fancy, and the substance of his message conceals a richness difficult to name, before which we stand as before Escher’s geometric drawings exploiting the paradoxes of three-dimensional space.” – Czeslaw Milosz<sup>2</sup>

The previous chapter established Swedenborg’s central role in 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific currents, from his well-known contributions to nascent earth sciences and cosmology in works like the *Principia*, to his more obscure writings (largely unpublished in his lifetime) on physiology and the brain that anticipated later insights within cognitive neuroscience. From a historical-materialist perspective, the substantial impact that the *Principia* had on mining and industrial innovations on the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century situates Swedenborg within any account of the shifting relationships between nature and culture in the period, and the emergence of modern industrial capitalism. Yet, as this chapter will argue, it was Swedenborg’s post-scientific writings on God, angels, and exegesis that came to intrigue a later generation of Romantic authors and imbue the consequent emergence of an environmental imagination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These writings came to have a much wider impact on shaping various natural

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<sup>1</sup> Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret: The Meaning and Significance of the Word of God, the Life of the Angels and Service to God* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2005), 373.

<sup>2</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, *The Land of Ulro* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984), 147.

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ideologies than his earlier science. The ways in which key strands of Swedenborg's exegetical theology were engrafted onto Romantic aesthetic practices form a consistent, if heterogeneous, "green" thread that runs through a number of authors that have become important for ecocritical reappraisals of Romanticism, from Friedrich Schelling to Henry David Thoreau. As the first chapter laid out, this project has chosen to focus on William Blake and Ralph Waldo Emerson for the particularly productive sets of questions they pose to the ecocritical agenda: both Blake and Emerson's Idealist positions, inextricable from their readings in Swedenborg, I argue, chafe against the dominant models of ecocriticism that have tended to privilege—if not fetishize—a certain garden-variety of non-fiction prose that establishes a homology between mind, text, and place. That is to say, Swedenborg is not being proffered here as a way to synthetically "green" Blake and Emerson into the rote ecocritical canon, but to argue rather that the ways Blake and Emerson responded to Swedenborg's concepts of correspondence and influx provoke valuable questions about the core assumptions ecocriticism makes about Romanticism, its utility for an environmental politics, for one, that is often predicated on a moralistic critique of post-structuralism.<sup>3</sup>

Against the flattening interpretive reading strategies that ecocriticism sometimes foists on texts—that they must necessarily inform our practical knowledge about the "real" biological world and accordingly enrich our ecoliteracy--Swedenborg's presence in Romanticism by no

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<sup>3</sup> The environmental "dangers" of critical theory, especially deconstructionism, are castigated by Glen Love in *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment*, Under the sign of nature (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003). Though a bit dated by now, Michael Soule and Gary Lease's collection continues to attract attention for their contention that deconstructionist "intellectual relativism" can be faulted for a failure in scientific discourse to avert environmental catastrophe. See Michael E Soule and Gary Lease, eds., *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1995).

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means offers any pragmatic solutions to the present environmental crisis, or a way of addressing ecocriticism's oft-articulated angst over the disjuncture between theory and active, in-the-world praxis. Tracing the ways Swedenborgian thought informed Romantic nature aesthetics can, however, help us make sense of how we *got* here. Like it or hate it, the Romantic vision of nature remains a powerful ideological legacy, structuring everything from the visual logic of advertisements for Hummers and S.U.V.'s to the management and maintenance of the national park system in the United States (that has, quite problematically, been more recently exported—colonized?—as a model to national parks and game reserves in Asia and Africa).<sup>4</sup> The Friedrich paintings identified in the first chapter (see page 8) have become the very background of consumer schlock—the wild sunsets of calendars, postcards, and billboard advertisements for vodka. As Peter Otto succinctly writes, “it is in aesthetic experience, particularly as constructed by a certain kind of Romantic, that subjectivity comes to be divorced from temporal and everyday experience. It is because we still belong to the era opened by Romanticism that our modernity continues to reinvent and reshape itself in Romanticism's forms.”<sup>5</sup>

Instead of jettisoning the cultural baggage of such Romantic nature aesthetics, it may be worth our while to revisit their Platonic and Cartesian roots, despite the ongoing standard complaints about the speciesism and anthropocentrism that lurk there,<sup>6</sup> and locate those structures of aesthetic experience that continue to inform the efficacy of contemporary

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<sup>4</sup> American models of conservation based on a Romantic-derived conceptualization of wilderness have been particularly disastrous for indigenous groups in Africa. See Mark Dowie, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Otto, “Literary Theory,” in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 385.

<sup>6</sup> For current views on this debate, see the essays collected in *The Wilderness Debate Rages on: Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

conservation and preservationist movements.<sup>7</sup> If Swedenborg's theology enabled Romantic figures to translate an apprehension of nature into a workable network of hermeneutical signs, this might tell us something about the appearance of an environmental imaginary and the potential this still carries, in Lawrence Buell's words, "as a residual capacity (of individual humans, authors, texts, readers, communities) the ability to awaken to fuller apprehension of physical environment and one's interdependence with it."<sup>8</sup>

The last chapter concluded by looking at Swedenborg's later science that took a new interest in the imagination and intuition, and the ways that Swedenborg tried to develop more organic models of the mind and self—all elements that suggest the transcendental turn that was soon to emerge in the mystical theology. While the continuity between Swedenborg's science and the theology should not be lost, as the last chapter attempted to demonstrate—a point that has been particularly emphasized by Martin Lamm and Inge Jonsson—nor should the radical, transformative break in Swedenborg's textual corpus be too easily glossed over. After a nightmarish vision of frogs and snakes swarming over the tavern floor where he had just eaten, Swedenborg experienced what he held to be a Divine visitation from God, an otherworldly

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<sup>7</sup> Concerning the aesthetic's productive and positive effects on (mostly western) conservation and preservation efforts, see Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott, eds., *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Buell's words here actually entail what he calls the "environmental unconscious," an updated revision to the environmental imagination he established in the titular book that dealt (primarily) with Thoreau. The environmental unconscious is defined as a kind of negative capability, a cognitive process by which perception blocks out elements of an environment in order to sustain a suspended singular impression of it—Buell draws on architectural conceptualizations of foreshortening to describe how this works. It should be noted, though, that this foreshortening still depends on a model of the imagination to "achieve breakthroughs in grasping the significance of the unnoticed detail." Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 23.

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calling that connected him to a long tradition of Judeo-Christian prophets who felt commanded to speak and write His Word.<sup>9</sup> Swedenborg was convicted, in the older 18<sup>th</sup> century sense of that word, that God had providentially selected him “to explain to men the spiritual sense of Scripture, and that He Himself would explain to me what I should write on this subject.”<sup>10</sup> Swedenborg’s mysticism was not, thus, the rapture of the solitary devotee as it was for St. Theresa of Avila, nor the intense interiority of the soul, as it was for the imprisoned St. John of the Cross, but it turned from its inception outwards towards social contexts. This tendency has its roots both in the prophetic tradition of the Jeremiad that Swedenborg was well aware of, and the Jeremiad’s peculiar space of cultural critique, as well as the Enlightenment vision of universals and knowledge-distribution that his mature science was steeped in. Acknowledging the social dimension of Swedenborg’s religious view clarifies the seemingly-odd ways that his theology readily lent itself to 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian and socialist projects, especially American Fourierism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This account was reputedly told to Carl Robsahm by Swedenborg himself. However, several Swedenborg scholars have doubted the story’s authenticity (including Jane Williams-Hogan), and the Robsahm manuscript—the original of which is now lost—itself has a very dubious provenance. See Anders Hallengren, “In Search of Robsahm’s Memories” in *Gallery of Mirrors: Reflections of Swedenborgian Thought* (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf L. Tafel, *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg* (London: Swedenborg Society British and Foreign, 1875), Vol. I, Part 1: 36. The account of snakes and frogs swarming and crawling on the floor was told firsthand by Swedenborg to Carl Robsahm, who recorded it in a handwritten memoir. However, as Anders Hallengren has meticulously researched, the memoir has a problematic history and provenance (the original manuscript, for one, has vanished), and there is ultimately but an uncertain “haze of plausibilities” around the most graphic account of Swedenborg’s conversionary experience. Hallengren, *Gallery of Mirrors*, 79-88.

<sup>11</sup> This helps explain Henry James Sr.’s use of Swedenborg for more radical social and cultural critique in *Society the Redeemed Form of Man* (1879) and *The Secret of Swedenborg* (1869). For Swedenborg’s alignment with Fourierism, see Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 174-178, Robert Gladish, *Swedenborg, Fourier, and the America of the 1840’s* (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1982), Richard Kenneth Silver,

Swedenborg's post-visionary textual output has no established precedent in world literature: a systematic exegesis of Biblical texts that are periodically broken by lively narrative accounts of things "seen and heard in the spiritual world," clinically reported with methodical attention to physical details. This descriptive space has been compared to Dante's *Inferno* by several authors (including Czeslaw Milosz, Jose Luis Borges, and Ezra Pound),<sup>12</sup> although the parallel belies the varied style and manner of composition that runs through the 18 distinct theological works that were published during this final visionary period.

This chapter will proceed in two distinct sections. First, it will account for the two remarkable texts that emerged from the period of crisis and uncertainty that helped Swedenborg clarify the nature of his visionary project. Both the private, turmoiled spaces of his journal of dreams and the elegant baroque settings in the *Worship and Love of God* are essential for following Swedenborg's transformation from natural scientist into seer; in each work there is a further flowering of the pictorial imagination that the late physiological works and speculations on hieroglyphics respectively suggest, as reviewed in the last chapter. Secondly, the chapter will survey two aspects of Swedenborg's subsequent theological output that became patterned by later Romantics into lattices for aesthetic experience that bear specific environmental ramifications. Rather than attempting to cover the eighteen distinct theological titles Swedenborg

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"The Spiritual Kingdom in America: the Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on American Society and Culture, 1815-1860" (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Pound was particularly interested in the similarities of a kind of poetic space between Swedenborg and Dante. See Demetres Tryphonopoulos, "Ezra Pound and Emanuel Swedenborg," *Paideuma* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1991): 7-15. William Blake also told Crabb Robinson how he saw "the Vision of Swedenborg and Dante as of the same kind." G. E Bentley, *Blake Records: Documents (1714-1841) Concerning the Life of William Blake (1757-1827) and His Family, Incorporating Blake Records (1969), Blake Records Supplement (1988), and Extensive Discoveries Since 1988*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2004), 697.

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published in this period (not to mention the thousands of pages of further unpublished manuscripts), a corpus obviously too broad for the present work, the focus will hone in on the concepts of correspondence and influx, irrespective of chronology, as these two ideas are consistently reiterated so as to allow for a certain flexibility in moving around and through the range of the theology, from accounts of interplanetary astral voyages (*Concerning the Earths in our Solar System*, 1757) to full blown Christian apologetics (*Vera Christiana Religio*, 1771). Ultimately, projecting Swedenborg's theories of correspondence and influx onto the emergence of Romantic aesthetics may illuminate a radical potential within an Idealist approach to nature. Timothy Morton, in a broad but apt generalization, has argued that two opposed conceptualizations came to structure Romantic nature aesthetics: one based on an idea of nature-as-substance (following Edmund Burke), and another that was premised on nature-as-essence (following Kant and the early German Romantics). Of these two tendencies, according to Morton, ecocriticism has overwhelmingly—thanks to a strong dose of phenomenology via Heidegger and a general aversion to “theory”—favored a tradition of substantialist texts that “tend to promote a monarchist or authoritarian view that there is an external thing to which the subject should bow.”<sup>13</sup> By tracing Swedenborg's presence in Romanticism, I hope to work towards Morton's call for ecocritiques that “should delineate a republican, nonsubstantialist counter tradition running through writers such as Milton and Shelley, for whom nature did not stand in for an authority for which you sacrifice your autonomy and reason.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Such studies include James C. McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) and Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 16.

**“All was such that I cannot Describe”:  
the *Journal of Dreams*, 1744-45**

Unlike the published Neolatin of his science and theology, the pages that constitute Swedenborg’s dream diary are hastily jotted down in rough, colloquial Swedish, often in abbreviated form. The reversion to the mother-tongue suggests the intensity of the psychic crisis in the two years that the dream diary covers. Unmoored, the language of these dreams must have offered a linguistic home-coming of sorts as Swedenborg travelled through foreign lands on the Continent and in England, experiencing terrifyingly strange nightmares that alternated with exquisite moments of delight that transcended all language.<sup>15</sup> The interpretative passages that try to decipher the vivid, graphic imagery are remarkable in that rather than taking the substance of the dreams as coded messages from God or angels, and thus fall into accord with the Renaissance and medieval linking between dreams and prophecy as one might expect Swedenborg would, they instead more often evince a symbolic struggle to locate the self (or selves) and maintain control over various subconscious desires. The numerous female figures in the dreams who sexually excite Swedenborg (or terrify him with *vagina dentatas*) are not, for example, taken by the dreamer to be figures of actual persons or symptomatic of frustrated physical ardor, but become metaphors that represent the intensity of his attraction (or repulsion) to certain metaphysical ideas and concepts.

Strongly evoking his earlier Oxford poem “*Ludus Extemporalis*” (analyzed here on pages 69-70) that unscrolled an eroticized scene between the speaker and two women, one older and one younger, Swedenborg writes on the night of April 15<sup>th</sup> in 1744 how

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<sup>15</sup> Not all the dreams are wholly in Swedish, it should be noted. Those of a particularly erotic bent tend to resort to French terms (“I got off *en merveille*” for orgasm, etc.).

I seemed to be climbing a ladder from a great deep; after me followed other women, whom I knew. I stood still and willfully scared them, and then I went up. I reached green grounds and lay down; the others came after me. I saluted the women, and they lay down beside me. One was younger and the other a little older. I kissed the hands of both and did not know which one of them I should make love to. *It was my thoughts and my mental work, being of two kinds, which finally came up with me, and which I regained and saluted and reclaimed.*<sup>16</sup>

This method of charting out “thoughts and mental work” onto the images of the dreams is consistent across the 280 plus entries. Flying dragons and licking, fawning dogs are signs of Swedenborg’s battle with his selfish egotism, whereas beautiful women, flowers, and shining children represent his theosophical projects and the sweet fruits of spiritual suffering.

Swedenborg’s sense of a unified self was threatening to unravel, pulled between extremes of abjection and delight, and the dream analyses read as attempts to locate the self through an act of writing and recollection itself. This marks the journal as peculiarly modern. Inge Jonsson, for one, writes how Swedenborg’s self-interpretation of the sexualized passages as complex metaphors for conflicted intellectual pursuits constitutes a kind of “inverted Freudianism.”<sup>17</sup> A late 19<sup>th</sup> century topos of the subconscious is further made evident in the ways Swedenborg’s dream diary became, quite literally, a kind of therapeutic lifeline for August Strindberg during his suicidal period of depression in the late 1890’s. Swedenborg’s struggle to “come home to myself again,” as he wrote of the same night concerning the dream discussed above, helped

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<sup>16</sup> Lars Bergquist, ed., *Swedenborg's Dream Diary* (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2001), 186-187.

<sup>17</sup> Inge Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation: Sources and Influences in Swedenborg's Worship and Love of God*, trans. Matilda McCarthy (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2004), 206.

Strindberg work through his own personal demons while abroad in Paris. In Strindberg's subsequent *Inferno* (1897) and *Legender* (1898), Swedenborg is quoted on almost every page, and his presence is figured as a kind of literary Vergil who leads Strindberg out of the labyrinthine hell of his own mind.<sup>18</sup> The literary (and existential) debt that Strindberg evinced to Swedenborg and his journal of dreams cast a long shadow on Swedish modernism. The poet Gunnar Ekelöf, for example, beautifully writes how the pages of Swedenborg's diary are "wreckage on the beaches of sleep / dreams like the ringing of bells from the deep."<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the impression the diary immediately gives of an active consciousness turning itself inside and out should be situated within the physiological work on the brain that the last chapter discussed, and Swedenborg's groping for a more organic model of epistemology. The intense scrutiny Swedenborg gives himself is clinical, and slows down his observation of cognitive functions. He suddenly notices that he was able "to have two thoughts at one and the same time." Elsewhere, a certain thought becomes experienced as a place, with changing rosy colors; and on a particularly bad day, Swedenborg complains of his unruly ideas that flowed "involuntarily" for and against something, and of his frustrating lack of control over where they flew.<sup>20</sup> These moments look towards the concrete dynamics of Swedenborg's spiritual world in the later theology, where reality is not structured by space and time but differing degrees of

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<sup>18</sup> See Goran Stockenström, "Strindberg and Swedenborg," in *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1988), 137-158.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Dream Diary*, 142, 178, and 197.

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consciousness or feeling (“states” in Swedenborg’s terminology), and the habitual formation of certain ideas becomes actual places where the spirits of heaven and hell congregate and gather.<sup>21</sup>

One might also say that the systematic interpretation of dream imagery also looks backwards to Swedenborg’s reading and general interest in symbolic languages and hieroglyphics, and the related emergence of his own mature theory of correspondence: the diary functions as personal hieroglyphic key to the images of his psyche. However, the affective role that emotion plays in coloring Swedenborg’s ideas and perception here, and his physiological perception of thought as a tangible phenomena of place, color, or sound, also strongly suggests 20<sup>th</sup> century work on the psychology of emotion, both as it was pioneered by William James and as it remains an ongoing field of inquiry for neuroscientists like Antonio Damasio. Moreover, as Alan Richardson observes, it really wasn’t until the later period of Romantic biology (in the work of Erasmus Darwin and Pierre Cabanis) that a scientific belief emerged that cognition could actually occur during sleep, that the brain did not simply suspend all neural activity or something called consciousness as had been long assumed. This overturned the earlier premise that dreams were simply the result of external stimuli (be it from street noise, bad food, or the intervention of gods and angels).<sup>22</sup> When Swedenborg’s dream diary is paired with his prescient treatises on brain and nerve structures, it is not all that surprising to find in the diary his self-reflection on the active mental processes of the brain during sleep—that a hidden part of his self was working through, cognitively, through a complex tangle of images, memories and thoughts.

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<sup>21</sup> See Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Alan Richardson, “Romanticism, the Unconscious, and the Brain,” in *Nonfictional Romantic Prose* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2004), 359.

In spite of the journal's fragmentary nature and missing pages (it has been claimed that after his death, Swedenborg relatives expurgated many pages, although this has been disputed), there is a clear movement in the progression from nightmarish passages of "hideous specters" and the abyss of the mine into increasingly beautiful descriptions of winged floating palaces flying through the air, gardens, and feelings of intense ecstasy. Much of the imagery and language, especially in the earlier darker sections, seems tinged with elements of the Moravian Christianity that Swedenborg was associating with during the first part of his crisis period in London. "The blood and merit of Jesus," that Swedenborg makes recourse to in his anguished, written prayers in the dream diary stands in stark contrast to the later theology that eschewed Trinitarian doctrines of imputed salvation and grace through a crucified Christ.<sup>23</sup> Swedenborg attended religious services offered by followers of Count Nikolaus Zinzendorf in London at this time, and even considered joining their ranks as an official brother. The Moravian chapel Swedenborg visited at Fetter's Lane was also the same one that William Blake's mother later frequented. Although the early 20<sup>th</sup> century claims that Blake's family were all Swedenborgians, and even that the elderly Swedenborg used to walk with the young Blake hand-in-hand through the streets of London, have all been resoundingly routed out by David Erdman as distorted myths, the recent discovery of Blake's mother's Moravian fellowship at the Fetter's Lane Chapel nonetheless opens the possibility for Blake becoming familiar with Swedenborg much earlier than scholars had previously thought.<sup>24</sup> As Robert Rix also points out, one of Swedenborg's

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<sup>23</sup> See, especially, Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, trans. John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1998), nos. 626-650.

<sup>24</sup> David V. Erdman, "Blake's Early Swedenborgianism: A Twentieth-Century Legend," *Comparative Literature* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1953): 247-257. For the Blake family's Moravianism,

earliest and enthusiastic English readers was a Moravian preacher based in Bedford—Frances Oakley—who was referencing Swedenborg’s works as early as 1768.<sup>25</sup>

And yet, Swedenborg’s affiliation with the Moravians was very short-lived. Bergquist writes how the “emotionally-charged religiosity” of the Moravians ultimately failed to convince Swedenborg because they lacked a cohesive intellectual framework, something “unacceptable to the reserved and scientifically-trained Assessor.”<sup>26</sup> The emotional and aesthetic power of Moravian imagery that placed an almost ritualized focus on the gushing blood of Christ’s wounds and the ecstasy of deliverance, nonetheless left deep marks in the images of the dream diary and *Worship and Love of God*. Later visions in the theology are not positive or favorable to the Moravians and the mid-century Pietism of the period. In Swedenborg’s spiritual world, the radical Pietist preacher Conrad Dippel (who had come to Stockholm in 1726, and perhaps had direct contact with Swedenborg when he worked on the Board of Mines) ends up with a sooty black face, burned from the insanity of his rhetoric. Dippel tries to intoxicate Swedenborg with a flask of poisoned wine (a correspondence of his rapture-filled sermons), and later, he watches Zinzendorf trying to restrain Dippel on a leash. Dippel thrashes and bucks, looking like a wild stag—this was all because, Zinzendorf relates to Swedenborg, Dippel would “tear up and devour everything, which in fact he did, in hate-filled tracts.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, while in some ways Swedenborg’s shift into a theological enterprise can be read as a recuperation of the Pietist faith that had

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see Keri Davies, “The Lost Moravian History of William Blake’s Family: Snapshots from the Archive,” *Literature Compass* 3, no. 6 (2006): 1297-1319.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2007), 52.

<sup>26</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg’s Secret*, 205.

<sup>27</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg’s Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765* (Bryn Athyn, Pa: General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1998).

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colored his early childhood, a structure of felt belief that his endeavors in science had come to estrange, there is nonetheless a critical distinction and difference with both the form and content of mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Pietism. Indeed, the restrained and disciplined style of Swedenborg's theological writing—Milosz wryly writes how “as pedantic prose, it has soporific qualities”—should be seen as shaped by a partial aversion to the graphic and florid excesses of Pietism as much as it is indebted to the empirical and encyclopedic methodology of Swedenborg's earlier science.<sup>28</sup> The religious fervor of Pietism is nevertheless important to situate in a general way behind Swedenborg's incipient conversion into a mystic. As Martin Lamm writes,

Swedenborg's transition to mysticism took place precisely during the decade that marked the triumph of Swedish Pietism, that is, in a time when religiosity sought to manifest itself in Sweden in its most ecstatic forms and with an energy known neither before or later there, when miraculous conversions, inspired dreams, revelations, prophecies, the speaking in tongues, and other manifestations of the same order were daily occurrences; when the consistories and tribunals sat in judgment on heresy; when every week witnessed the establishment of new conventicles or of new sects, often with fantastic doctrines, and or more or less extravagant cults.<sup>29</sup>

Noting this background makes Swedenborg much more a man of his time than the extraordinary exception.

One theological concept emphasized by the Moravians and Pietists that Swedenborg did not later repudiate was a sense of the human self as needing to be abject before God. The dream

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<sup>28</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Milosz's ABC's*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 275.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought* (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2008), 58.

diary evinces not only a struggle to maintain a psychic integrity over disparate images and experiences, it shows Swedenborg wishing for a kind of absence of the self—that it was his sense of self which prevented the most serious obstacle towards a grasp of higher, stabilizing truth.<sup>30</sup> This feeling was foreshadowed in the *Biological Bases of the Soul* and *The Soul's Domain*, where Swedenborg experienced his sense of identity as a limitation to the goals of his research project to locate the human soul in the body.<sup>31</sup> Here, it takes on a more intense and personal dimension. After a dream of beautiful bread loaves laid out on a dinner plate, Swedenborg writes he has “finally come into such a state that I know nothing, and that all *preconcepta judicicia* [preconceived opinions, biases] have been taken away from me, which is the beginning of learning, namely, that one first must become a child, and then be nurtured into knowledge, as is now, I think, finally happening to me.”<sup>32</sup> For an accomplished fifty-seven year old scientist to write such extraordinary lines, that he is only now beginning to really *know*, in a manner like a child, suggests the internal revolution that Swedenborg was undergoing. The epistemological equation this dream commentary gives us between self (or lack thereof) and knowledge becomes more cogently postulated a few years later, where Swedenborg writes how a person “begins to become wise who knows little, virtually nothing from himself as the source. This is the same to say that he who is nothing is something.”<sup>33</sup> Here, the positive valuation of a

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<sup>30</sup> Swedenborg later used a specific term for this psychic sense of self – the *proprium*, from the Latin, literally “what is one’s own,” or property; it seems his particular choice of *proprium* was further determined by Aristotle’s use of the word. Kathleen Raine argues that it was Swedenborg’s *proprium* which drives Blake “to annihilate the Selfhood” in his *Milton*. Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), II: 214.

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion in the previous chapter, 107-108.

<sup>32</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Dream Diary*, 304.

<sup>33</sup> Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, no. 2060.

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state of nothingness comes closer to Buddhist notions of *sunyata* than it does to Pietism's state of child-like abjection (so often figured with weeping and tears) before the holy presence of God.<sup>34</sup>

The homologies between Buddhism and Swedenborg's theology have been substantially noted by scholars: foremost among the parallels, according to D.T. Suzuki and others, was this core identity-philosophy that turned upon a revelatory insight (the moment of *satori* in Zen epistemology) that abolished the defining boundaries between consciousness and the other.

Czeslaw Milosz writes how

it was the same [between Buddhism and Swedenborg] with this concept of the 'I.' For Buddhists, it is the chief obstacle on the path to true contemplation, in which 'I' should vanish so effectively that we become one with the entire world, with a mountain, a flower, a bird flying past. It is the opposite, then, of the Cartesian 'I', which is understood to be a given, whereas for the Buddhist, the self-awareness of the 'I' is a deception which one should get rid of. Now in Swedenborg, there is no 'I' as a center, a fortress against the world, which makes him an exception among western thinkers... ."<sup>35</sup>

This intimation of no-self in Swedenborg that first swims into focus in the dream diary holds unexplored potential for the ecocritic, a suggestion perhaps limned by Milosz's striking lines about Buddhist "true contemplation" that brings a sense of oneness with a mountain, a flower, a bird flying past. Several have identified this aspect of Buddhist thought as an inroad to environmentalism's general critique of Cartesian dualism, and more specifically as something

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<sup>34</sup> Suzuki writes how *sunyata* has too often been mistranslated as equivalent to the negative western sense of "nothing"—at least in the ways that Schopenhauer took it—and that it is better seen as a kind of empowering "zero of infinite possibilities." D.T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (London: Routledge, 2002), 23.

<sup>35</sup> Miłosz, *Milosz's ABC's*, 274.

worth grafting onto an approach towards literature and ecopoetics.<sup>36</sup> Mark Lussier, for example, finds Buddhism's aspiration to perceive "a deeper reality wherein mind and matter—always split within Enlightenment epistemologies defined by Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanics—find harmonious expression and experience cohesion," to aid the ecocritic in comprehending how natural worlds cannot exist outside our perception of them.<sup>37</sup> Lussier deftly uses Buddhist concepts to bridge a gap between his reading of Romantic poetry and contemporary quantum physics. As I have argued elsewhere, given that the majority of Romantics had little working knowledge of Buddhist traditions or texts, in the case of certain figures like Blake, Coleridge, and Emerson, it makes sense to juxtapose their respective historical engagements with Swedenborg's ideas with the deep synchronicities in Buddhism that scholars like Lussier and John Rudy continue to locate in their work.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Such comparisons particularly abound in American environmental thought (see, for example, Gary Snyder). A smart use of Buddhist perception is brought to bear on deep ecology in Louise Economides, "Blake, Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology: a Fourfold Perspective on Humanity's Relationship to Nature," *Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Romanticism and Buddhism*. (February 2007), <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/buddhism/economides/economides.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Lussier, *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality*, Romanticism in Perspective (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>38</sup> See Rudy's three books of literary criticism that locate Zen models in various Romantic figures: John G Rudy, *Wordsworth and the Zen Mind: The Poetry of Self-Emptying* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). John G Rudy, *Romanticism and Zen Buddhism* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004). and John G Rudy, *Emerson and Zen Buddhism* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001). A perspective incorporating Swedenborg's presence in Romantic Buddhism is offered in Devin Zuber, "Buddha of the North: Swedenborg and Transpacific Zen," *Religion and the Arts* 14, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-33. *Religion and the Arts* 14:1 (2010) 1-33.

The dream diary fittingly ends on a vision of wonder and beauty. “I saw a firework burst above me,” writes Swedenborg, “Shedding a shower of beautiful fire: love of the high, maybe.”<sup>39</sup> The image echoes the pyrotechnic displays that Swedenborg relished and noted in his travel diaries from the 1730’s. It also foreshadows the prose-poem he was working on, the *Worship and Love of God*, that meditates on love of the most high, and closes with an elaborate vision of glowing celestial lights that float in the air above Adam and Eve, forming a fiery, gem-like image of a heart in the sky. If the brethren of the Moravian Church constituted a kind of spiritual haven for Swedenborg during the crisis recorded in the dream diary, the *Worship and Love of God* concretely imagines the prose-poem’s inception beginning in the sanctity of a wooded grove, in the musing solitude of a London city park. The physicality of this topographical specificity should not be lost, and in regards to Swedenborg’s emerging sense of no-self, it is worth recalling the long-standing garden tradition that exists in Buddhism, particularly as developed in Zen, that saw the garden as a unique meditational space (and not simply as an area for recreation).

Though Swedenborg does not specify the “grove” mentioned at the introduction to the *Worship and Love of God*, it could have been Lincoln’s Inn Fields, which was quite close to where Swedenborg was lodging at Salisbury Court for at least parts of 1744. Wherever the location, it was a green area with trees that Swedenborg had often made recourse to for walking and thinking. As the autumn leaves fall in the first paragraph, Swedenborg is moved by the sight to dispel his sad and “disturbing thoughts,” while he “recollected the delights which that grove, from spring even to this season, had communicated, and so often diffused through my whole

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<sup>39</sup> Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Dream Diary*, 319. There is an additional entry in the dream diary after this, written in Latin, that appears to have been added at a later date.

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mind.”<sup>40</sup> This grove in the middle of a metropolis thus functioned as a kind of basis for the *Worship and Love of God*, a physical place in London that Swedenborg had returned to again and again throughout the seasons. It also mirrors on a metaphorical level the work’s recovery of *Paradise Lost* and Milton’s enclosed garden of Eden. The abyss and chasms of mining spaces that pock the earlier entries in the dream diary have been apparently overcome; Swedenborg transitions into being able to treat, this time poetically, the origins of the solar system and the birth of humans on earth in a cosmological paradise. His imaginative reworking of Genesis would lay the groundwork for the whole subsequent theosophy that hazarded more daring forms of biblical exegesis.

**Returning to the Garden:  
*The Worship and Love of God***

“...for how shall I relate  
To human sense th’ invisible exploits  
Of warring Spirits; how without remorse  
The ruin of so many glorious once  
And perfect while they stood; how last unfold  
The secrets of another world, perhaps  
Not lawful to reveal?”<sup>41</sup>

The *Worship and Love of God*, published in London in 1745, is a theodicy that participates in the hexaemeron tradition as it reworks Swedenborg’s scientific cosmology into literary terms. It is an imaginative rewriting and retelling of the first chapters of Genesis and a translation of the nebular hypothesis into a dramatic prose-poem. It accordingly stands as

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<sup>40</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God: In Three Parts*, 1st ed. (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996), 5.

<sup>41</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Penguin classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Book V, 564-570.

perhaps the most unusual and unique work in Swedenborg's corpus, bridging the breadth of the earth science and physiology that preceded it with the imaginative and visionary qualities of the exegetical theology that followed. As Jonsson writes, its "literary intensity reflects a restless intellectual profundity that Swedenborg had not achieved before and would never surpass," and that ultimately "anticipates the symbolic fairy tales of Romanticism."<sup>42</sup> The work consists of highly imagistic, dramatic dialogues that represent both biblical and scientific accounts of the creation and the appearance of Adam (referred to as "The First Born") and Eve, all written in an ornate Neolatin. It is ultimately a fragmentary text, unfinished (again an unintended nod towards the Romantics)—the final third section of the work, which survived only in manuscript form, literally ends midsentence. The dramatic and narrative energies of the text are undercut by a highly didactic web of elaborate footnotes that expound philosophical and scientific asides as well as explanations of the symbolism or sequence of events in the main creation narrative. This bifurcation requires a doubled reading strategy in order to unpack the layered, baroque symbolism and dense collation of ideas. Lamm laconically understates "it can happen that the reader can become bored in being obliged to decipher new enigmas on every page."<sup>43</sup>

There is ready agreement that the poem vividly displays the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy, and that the debt to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is particularly clear. The relationship between the work and Milton's *Paradise Lost* has proved to be more problematic. Lamm, Sigstedt, Benz, and Lagercrantz have all found Milton to be of decisive importance for the *Worship and Love of God*, arguing that the many structural and thematic parallels between the

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<sup>42</sup> Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*, xiii, 271. The Romantic elements of the work are also noted by Lamm, who writes how it "comes strangely close to the symbolic tales of Romanticism." Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 194.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

two make Milton's epic one of the most important templates that Swedenborg had in mind when he was drafting his experimental text. This strong claim cannot be supported by extra-textual evidence, however, such as definite proof of books by Milton in Swedenborg's extant library, or reference to *Paradise Lost* in Swedenborg's commonplace quotation books and journals. As previously mentioned, Swedenborg's single direct reference to Milton is made much earlier in a letter to Eric Benzelius during his first trip to London.<sup>44</sup> Inge Jonsson—one of the most esteemed Scandinavian literary critics of Swedenborg—strongly argues against the Swedenborg-Milton connection. "Swedenborg's work is completely different in its design," Jonsson claims, "it is acted out in the human mind to a far greater degree than Milton's heavenly epic and is a tapestry of symbols woven with much more delicate material."<sup>45</sup> Jonsson has tried to demonstrate, copiously, that the parallels can be easily teased out by examining the common sources in the hexaemeron traditions and classical antiquity that Swedenborg and Milton shared, from Aristophanes to Augustine to the Cambridge Platonists Ralph Cudworth and Henry More. Jonsson is correct to stress this mutual background, and Swedenborg's resort to Neo-Platonism in response to theological anxieties that were being provoked by his mechanistic science certainly mirrors, in many ways, the tensions and adjustments between Hobbesian materialism and Platonic dualism that Milton explicitly wrestles with in *De Doctrina*.<sup>46</sup> Johnson also usefully corrects several of Lamm's generalizations about parallels with *Paradise Lost*, drawing out key

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<sup>44</sup> Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 30. See the discussion here on pages 61-62.

<sup>45</sup> Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*, 232.

<sup>46</sup> A point expanded upon by both Stephen M Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). and Phillip J. Donnelly, "Matter vs. Body: the Character of Milton's Monism," *Milton Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1999): 79-85.

distinctions between the two when it comes to describing the battle between Satan and Jehovah.<sup>47</sup> Still, it should not be lost that many of the hexaemeron sources that Jonsson discusses are, just like *Paradise Lost*, not represented in Swedenborg's surviving library nor directly referenced in his published work, and must therefore remain at a certain level of conjecture as mutual sources of reading and adaptation.

Additionally, Jonsson ignores another potential conduit through which Swedenborg would have encountered Milton: the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century London stage. As his travel diaries from the 1730's and 40's clearly show, Swedenborg acquired a taste for the opera and theater, especially after his stay in Italy between 1738 and 1739.<sup>48</sup> While full-blown theatrical adaptations of *Paradise Lost* did not begin appearing until the success of Alexandre Tanevot's *The Tragedy of Adam and Eve* in 1765, during Swedenborg's earlier period of crisis and composition of the *Worship and Love of God* there had been several popular adaptations of Milton's Ludlow "Maske," including an opera by Paolo Rolli and a spoken play by John Dalton (with music supplemented by Thomas Arne), performed on London stages.<sup>49</sup> It would have been highly likely for Swedenborg to have heard Miltonic dialogue as performed by actors on a stage.

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<sup>47</sup> Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*.

<sup>48</sup> Jane Williams-Hogan, "Stranger in a Foreign Land: Swedenborg, Traveler, Observer, Reporter, and Explorer," *The New Philosophy: Journal of the Swedenborg Scientific Association* 110, no. 1,2: 55-114.

<sup>49</sup> See John T Shawcross, *Milton, 1732-1801: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972), 9-11. Dalton's "Comus, A Mask: (Now adapted to the Stage) was wildly popular, building on the success of the earlier opera *Sabrina* by Rolli that had come to London the previous year. See Don John Dugas, "'Such Heavn' taught numbers should be more than read": Comus and Milton's Reputation in mid-eighteenth century England," *Milton Studies* 37 (1996): 137-157. Some Milton scholars regard the Dalton play as a fairly serious bastardization and misreading of Milton. See, for example, Margaret Kean, "Waiting for God: John Milton's Poems of 1671," in *Proceedings of the British Academy: 2000 Lectures and Memoirs* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174.

This might seem trivial and incidental to the present study were it not for the specific and repetitive ways that the *Worship and Love of God* deliberately presents itself as a kind of baroque theater piece. The end of the first section of the text calls attention to “its scene of the theatre of the world,” and other sections refer to curtains that sweep across and “close the scene.” The elaborate didactic dialogues that unfold between Adam and his heavenly “intelligences” in Paradise (mirroring Milton’s Adam’s conversations with Raphael, as will be treated below) have a deliberate forcedness and stiffness of diction that vaguely recalls – even through the thicket of the translated Neolatin—the campy dialogue of Augustan drama. Given the substantial growth of mechanized spectacle and lighting tricks on the 18<sup>th</sup> century stage, it is striking to note how in an otherwise extremely sparse text short on descriptive prose and detail about setting, the *Worship and Love of God* seems unusually preoccupied with optics and artificial lighting, and extreme contrasts between light and darkness. When a group of personified evil, falsified ideas suddenly encounter the clarifying light of heaven in Adam’s mind, they

are suffused with blushes, begin to be tormented, and to beat their bosoms through inward grief, and to suffer extreme pangs, and thus excite disturbances; and to turn the openings of their minds upwards, that something of heavenly light might burst in upon their companions, in consequence of which the terrified crew fly away to their murky caves and dark-hiding places, not being able to endure the rays of that light... [this light] penetrates like lightening into their cells, not through chinks, but through the gates themselves, which stand open day and night; hence come deep and mournful sighs, which are called remorse of conscience.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 73.

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Elsewhere, lamps are thrown on floors, flooding interiors with sudden brightness, and there is a vacillation between gloom and clarifying light. Such specific elements, I would argue, suggest the increasingly spectacular effects of an eighteenth century stage culture that Swedenborg was familiar with, in addition to the more overt cues in the *Worship and Love of God* that point in this direction (and moreover, as Margaret Kean notes, the “Comus” adaptation by Dalton was “a highly ornate and spectacular production, reveling in its machinery and musical ornament”).<sup>51</sup> Jonsson dismisses, perhaps too easily, any direct link between contemporary theater and the metaphorical stages in Swedenborg’s baroque text, pointing out how the analogy of the world as a theater is an old rhetorical trope derived from Classical sources.<sup>52</sup> I am not convinced that these two points must be seen as mutually exclusive: Swedenborg’s theater habits could have reinforced a classical device that he was originally attracted to for *The Worship and Love of God*. As Jonsson himself notes, there was a well-established hexaameron tradition of staging the Creation story that dated back to medieval mystery plays, and persisted as a popular device up into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which establishes a strong cultural precedent for visualizing the hexaameron in explicitly dramatic and performative forms. Thus, even while the Miltonic echoes in Swedenborg’s *Worship and Love of God* go back to *Paradise Lost* and not the Covent Garden staged adaptation of “A Mask,” it is striking to situate the then-relatively novel adaptation of Milton to music and performance as a background for Swedenborg’s theater-going and experimental writing, as it is all the more tempting to speculate on the emotional effect that entering Milton’s words, sung or spoken, in the intimacy of a darkened theater would have had

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<sup>51</sup> Kean, “Waiting for God: John Milton's Poems of 1671,” 174.

<sup>52</sup> Inge Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist: the Effects of Science and Philosophy on Swedenborg's Cosmography* (West Chester Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999), 273.

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on Swedenborg during his existential crisis. Contra-Jonsson, one of the few reviews that noted the appearance of Swedenborg's strange little work when it appeared in 1745 mistook it for a piece of closet-drama, and duly criticized its extravagant philosophical asides as a hindrance to its dramatic potential. As strange as this response might seem, it suggests how much more evident the theatrical and performative aspects of *The Worship and Love of God* must have been to the educated 18<sup>th</sup> century reader.

Despite substantial scrutiny devoted by scholarship to the problem of Milton's presence in Swedenborg, with responses ranging from Jonsson's rebuttal and negation to Lamm's claim that Milton's influence carries itself into the subsequent theology, Swedenborg's *Worship and Love of God* has rarely, if at all, been given attention by Milton scholars specifically, and literary criticism in general (an exception being perhaps in Scandinavia, where the *Worship and Love of God* left a deep mark on Romantics such as Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom). A renewed attention to the *Worship and Love of God* from these perspectives (and not just the history of ideas or religion) seems necessary, all the more so as the text is one that William Blake likely responded to, as the next chapter will argue, and this might help criticism begin to unravel the complex web of associations between Swedenborg and Milton that Blake repeatedly draws. Such work might answer Joseph Wittreich's more recent call for directing our attention away from the "paucity of a reception for Milton's poetry" and rather "towards receptions hitherto neglected, even suppressed, hence unstudied, yet to be decoded."<sup>53</sup>

Unearthing more precisely a Miltonic presence in the *Worship and Love of God* thus works towards recovering the radical potential of *Paradise Lost* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By 1750,

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Wittreich, *Why Milton Matters: A New Preface to His Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xx.

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*Paradise Lost* had largely been defanged of its politics, and was even being read by certain authors as a “classic” defense of orthodox Christianity.<sup>54</sup> If Lamm is correct in arguing that Swedenborg ultimately “learned from Milton to transform and modernize the biblical text, making the most of its poetic content while giving entry to his own conceptions,”<sup>55</sup> reinserting this history of reception and refraction in a seemingly obscure Neolatin work reveals Milton’s unorthodox energies bristling under the surface of a conformist appropriation and reinterpretation of his most famous work in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Swedenborg’s use of Milton was thus unconventional, against the grain of his time. Furthermore, if Blake’s later turn to Milton stands as a landmark in the Romantic recovery of Milton, this might hinge in part on Blake’s sensitivity to what Milton had unleashed, or made possible, for Swedenborg in the *Worship and Love of God*, particularly in terms of how Swedenborg approached the biblical tradition and underwent a transformation from exegete into prophetic author. In *Milton*, Blake laments “O Swedenborg! Strongest of men, the Samson shorn by the Churches!”—a complex statement that opens a field of metaphorical chains between Swedenborg, the wounded blindness of Samson (and *Samson Agonistes*), the latter’s synecdoche as a tragic iconoclast, and the blindness of Milton as seer and prophet.

A full treatment of this transmission of a coded kind of poetic hermeneutics that we might trace from Milton into Swedenborg into Blake lies beyond the scope of the present project. The problem can be usefully narrowed by a question of ecopoetics (or eco-hermeneutics?) and

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<sup>54</sup> See Wittreich: “...by 1749 *Paradise Lost* has been so completely aestheticized, and its politics anesthetized, that the poem’s title can finally receive the primary accent mark. Indeed, over time *Paradise Lost* was shown to be ‘more than a classic, a scripture,’ and, once achieving ‘scriptural status,’ was used by Richard Bentley and later Thomas Newton as a defense for ‘orthodox Christianity.’” *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>55</sup> Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 192.

the adumbration of an environmental imagination that Swedenborg's work lent itself to in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Given the increased scrutiny that ecocritics have given to Milton and *Paradise Lost* over the last decade, primarily as developed in major studies by Diane McColley and Ken Hiltner, we might ask if these attempts to green Milton bear any ramifications for an ecocritical appraisal of Swedenborg. If Milton presents us with a profound message about how humans are to dwell (in the Heideggerean sense) on the earth, as Hiltner argues, does this come to enframe the structure of Swedenborg's garden in *The Worship and Love of God*?<sup>56</sup> Before moving into such considerations, though, it behooves us to first survey the strong echoes that the *Worship and Love of God* strike with *Paradise Lost*. When catalogued and amassed together, the evidence is strong enough to agree with Sigstedt's contention that "the similarity of ideas is so striking as to be hardly explainable by both authors having had access to common medieval sources."<sup>57</sup>

Structurally, as noted, the bulk of the *Worship and Love of God* is composed of conversations between Adam and the heavenly intelligences who explain and explicate various matters to the First Born as he wanders and wonders through Paradise. Like Adam's lengthy question and answer sessions with Raphael in *Paradise Lost*, these are often used to deliberate contemporary scientific and philosophical debates. Furthermore, in one of the most direct and obvious borrowings, Swedenborg expands on the story of Eve's creation (which gets scant

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<sup>56</sup> Ken Hiltner, Ken Hiltner, *Renaissance Ecology: Imagining Eden in Milton's England* (Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 2008). See especially Chapter Five, "The New Testament's Call to Place: Paul and Luther's Deconstructions." Besides Hiltner and McColley's work (discussed at greater length below), earlier—and weaker—ecocritical appraisals of Milton are offered by Nick Pici, "Milton's 'Eco-Eden': Place and Notions of the 'Green' in 'Paradise Lost'," *College Literature* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 33-50. Christopher Hitt, "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century," *College Literature* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 123-147.

<sup>57</sup> Cyriel Sigrid Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic; the Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 202.

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treatment in Genesis) in explicitly Miltonic ways: Adam's dream of a female figure is fully eroticized, and closes with an aching absence for the beautiful figure that had appeared in its midst (in Swedenborg's account, it is even more graphic—Adam inseminates the tree that will later give birth to Eve with a part of his soul). Like Milton, Swedenborg writes of Adam perceiving with grief “that she was only the apparition of a dream,” as in *Paradise Lost*, Adam mourns--“She disappeared, and left me dark, I waked / To find her, or forever to deplore / Her loss, and other pleasures abjure.”<sup>58</sup> Precisely following another detail in Milton, Swedenborg has Eve see her reflection in the water of a fountain, and mistake her image for that of another beautiful self. As in *Paradise Lost*, heavenly voices must intervene and correct her misperception.

Lamm finds further echoes in the description of Adam and Eve's first night together. While Milton's words on Adam's joy at the “transported touch” in the “commotion strange, in all other enjoyments” of the two bodies that come together belies Lamm's assertion that Milton's “chaste nudity” finds a tasteful corollary in Swedenborg, there is a general bower mise-en-scene in the *Worship and Love of God* that occasionally evokes the lush natural descriptions of the marriage bed in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>59</sup> There do seem to be several key modulations to Milton that Swedenborg intended here: instead of Adam leading Eve into his nuptial bower (*Paradise Lost*), Swedenborg rather has Adam come into Eve's “natal grove,” and it is Eve who leads her lover around by the hand showing off the “magnificent palestra and scenes, for it was like the most pleasant theater of the orb... all things were in vernal flower.”<sup>60</sup> The scene ends with an elaborate

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<sup>58</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 87. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VIII: 478-480.

<sup>59</sup> Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 187.

<sup>60</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 111.

baroque vision in the sky above Adam and Eve that symbolizes their physical and spiritual conjunction that takes, at one point in its convoluted evolving shape, the form of a single gushing heart encircled by flames, representative of their unity.<sup>61</sup> Is this difference, where Eve seems to take a more active, equalizing role, a response to Milton's perceived misogyny, the "masculinist" bias in *Paradise Lost* that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar first attempted to chart? Swedenborg seems to have been too perceptive a reader of Milton's complexities and provoking antagonisms to articulate anything approaching this kind of critique. Rather, Adam's presence in Eve's natal grove, and Eve leading Adam around by the hand in a kind of light erotic play, synecdotally maps out an elaborate correspondence of human epistemology that Swedenborg was laboring to articulate in the *Worship and Love of God*—namely, that the rational faculties of understanding in the human mind (typified by Adam) were beholden to higher powers of love and will (typified by Eve). Love (and feeling) came first, providing the shape for the content of a subsequent thought. By this point in the *Worship and Love of God*, it becomes clear just how far Swedenborg has travelled from his earlier embrace of Aristotelian deduction and Lockean epistemology that had marked the *Principia*, where geometrical and algebraic reason was

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<sup>61</sup> Given its ornate and changing structure and elaborate flowery syntax in the original Latin, the vision section here is difficult to follow, although Jonsson claims it constitutes the "peak" for early Swedish literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to its elaborate symbolism. Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*, 242. A short example from the section with the flaming heart image: "When both had fixed their gaze with unspeakable delight upon all these images of themselves, this lovely border was surrounded by a circle which presently changed into a brazen and iron color and turned and wreathed itself like a heart. That fiery river, like a vortex, establishing perpetual orbits and continually progressing and rolling itself about in similar orbits enclosed the interior border in a surrounding wall. But as in the hollow of the heart, there appeared a twofold way, one for the influx and circumgyration of the flame of the interior border, the other for this black and arid encircling fiery vortex." Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 112.

proclaimed as “the oracle of the rational mind.”<sup>62</sup> This moment in the natal grove also looks towards descriptions Swedenborg later gives in his *Conjugal Love* where the innermost secrets of heavenly wisdom are specifically imparted to him by angelic women in gardens, and not men.<sup>63</sup> It also recalls the ways that wisdom in *Paradise Lost* is located in and centered on Eve; that by the end of the poem, she is given the last words as Adam falls silent.

The cognitive mapping undertaken in the arena of Adam’s mind in the *Worship and Love of God*, where Milton’s satanic rebellion becomes an enacted epistemological struggle between sense-derived knowledge and higher forms of intuited truth, might have been strengthened by the ways *Paradise Lost* can be read as a drama of unfolding consciousness, an epic of the mind (“Adam more and more perceiving his fallen condition,” as Milton puts it in the Argument to Book 10). Wittreich writes how Milton took the competing biblical variations of the Creation story and used them as “indicators of different states and stages of consciousness—fallen and unfallen, villainous and visionary.” The poem presents, in the end, “a poetry of consciousness, of

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<sup>62</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Principia: Or, The First Principles of Natural Things, Being New Attempts Toward a Philosophical Explanation of the Elementary World* (London: W. Newbery [etc.], 1845), Vol. I: 2-3.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love: Delights of Wisdom Relating to Conjugal Love Followed by Pleasures of Insanity Relating to Licentious Love* (Bryn Athyn, Pa: General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1995), no. 293-294. Swedenborg would surely fare worse than Milton were his writings submitted to the kind of reading that Gilbar and Gubar give *Paradise Lost* in their *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). More recently, David Worrall makes the interesting argument that William Blake offers a feminist-critique of Swedenborg’s conjugal doctrines in the *Book of Thel*, a point the next chapter will recourse back to, as it has formed the basis for an important ecocritical reading of Blake by Kevin Hutchings. See David Worrall, “Thel in Africa: William Blake and the Post-Colonial, Post-Swedenborgian Female Subject,” in *The Reception of William Blake in the Orient*, ed. Steven H. Clark (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 17-28. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, feminists such as Lydia Maria Child and Margaret Fuller viewed Swedenborg’s ideas as liberating, and often allied them with the utopian theories of Fourier—Fuller writes, for example, how “Swedenborg’s idea of woman is sufficiently large and noble to interpose no obstacle to her progress.” Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 1999), 66.

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process, of mind-shattering, mind-transforming, mind-expanding drama... ”<sup>64</sup> Steeped in his anatomical research on the structure of the brain, Swedenborg has the various heavenly intelligences in *The Worship and Love of God* take Adam on a veritable medical tour of the human nervous system, pointing out the various nerve and fiber structures that convey sensations into his thinking brain. *The Worship and Love of God* is explicitly interested in the creative formation of ideas and thoughts, “the mimic worlds constructed by minds,” as one intelligence puts it to Adam. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton famously has Satan transform the mournful gloom of hell into his new abode through the sheer autonomous power of the mind (which becomes figured as a political force):

The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.  
What matter where, if I be still the same,  
And what should I be, all but less than he  
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least  
We shall be free... .<sup>65</sup>

There are several moments in the *Worship and Love of God* that come very close to this—albeit without Milton’s rhetorical elegance and style—where Swedenborg has his wicked intelligences

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<sup>64</sup> Wittreich, *Why Milton Matters*, 57, 75. Alan Richardson also argues that the Romantic presentation of unfolding consciousness took on unique dramaturgic qualities that are inextricable from early 19<sup>th</sup> century stage and theater spaces. In Richardson’s view, Milton was essential for Romantics in recovering a model of “psychodrama” that hearkened back to Shakespeare. Milton’s representation of an “intensified and critically isolated consciousness” in *Paradise Lost* strengthened a pattern to represent this in explicitly dramatic terms. This, again, presents another strong reason for locating a certain theatricality into the *Worship and Love of God* beyond the level of classical allusion. Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 6.

<sup>65</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

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(metaphors for sense-based knowledge or ideas) similarly fashion alternative, infernal Satanic worlds where “light is converted into shade, heat into cold, and all things are so turned upside down, that those which ought to look upwards look downwards; not unlike the trunk of a body without the head, which is beaten and bruised, inverted to the earth.”<sup>66</sup> This infernal topsy-turvy mirroring goes beyond the ostensible Neoplatonic correspondence between heaven and earth (or in this case, between heaven and hell) that both Milton and Swedenborg work with,<sup>67</sup> and suggests a further intersection within the cracked symmetry of Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a work that deliberately draws Swedenborg and Milton into a hermeneutic constellation that then charges the moment of Blake’s own prophetic writing.

The similarity between the correspondence theories in both *Paradise Lost* and *The Worship and Love of God* can be directly linked to Milton and Swedenborg’s mutual readings and modulations of the Cambridge Platonists Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, and their respective emanation theories about matter and creation.<sup>68</sup> When Adam asks Raphael about the qualitative differences between spiritual and natural food, Raphael replies with a disquisition that articulates the basic tenet underlying emanationism: that all reality proceeds from an original Divine point that will one day, circularly, return to its source:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom

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<sup>66</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, 75.

<sup>67</sup> c.f. Milton in *Paradise Lost*: “What if earth be but the shadow of heaven / And things therein each to the other like / More than on earth is thought?” V: 574-575.

<sup>68</sup> For a concise synopsis of Milton’s engagement with the Cambridge Platonists (and his key points of difference), see Stephen M Fallon, “*Paradise Lost* in Intellectual History,” in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (London: Blackwell, 2003), 329-347. Benz situates Swedenborg’s engagement with Cambridge Platonism as part of Swedenborg’s *Naturphilosophie*. Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*, Swedenborg studies no. 14 (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 126-131.

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All things proceed, and up to him return,  
If not depraved from good, created all  
Such to perfection, one first matter all,  
Endued with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;  
But more refined, more spirituous, and pure,  
As nearer to him placed or nearer tending  
Each in their several active spheres assigned,  
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
Proportioned to each kind.<sup>69</sup>

The flow of “various degrees of substance” here that radiate downwards from “one Almighty” into various forms is particularly close to Swedenborg’s own doctrine of “series and degrees,” a dynamic principle in nature whereby all things are connected by gradated degrees of relationships, and no thing (or nothing) can ever exist in isolation by itself.<sup>70</sup> This had been articulated already earlier in the science of *Biological Basis of the Soul*, but here in the *Worship and Love of God* it becomes a matter of perception of utmost importance for Adam, a question of seeing the emanation of higher spiritual behind the natural, just as it is articulated as a problem of

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<sup>69</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V: 469-479. As has been noted by many, Milton skirts several major theological dilemmas with these lines. They refute the traditional antimony between soul and body, for one (thus deviating from the Cambridge Neo-Platonist position about incorporeality of substances), while implicitly rejecting the doctrine that the world was created *ex-nihilo*. See Fallon.

<sup>70</sup> This suggests, again, the ways that Swedenborg’s science contributed to the Romantic critique of what Whitehead terms “the fallacy of misplaced location.” See the previous discussion on pages 109-110.

perception (and epistemology) for Adam at this juncture in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>71</sup> The heavenly intelligences tell Swedenborg's Adam about this emanating "influx of nature," that he is to perceive how

...all these things [in nature] are derivative veins from that one single Fountain. Supreme things therefore, or things superior in order, inflow into inferior things, and these into ultimate things, but not vice versa... By this order follies themselves are reformed into intelligences, and insanities into wisdoms; slime is changed into the brightest gem, and dust into shining gold; the innate darkness of nature becomes resplendent as light; our acts become pieties and virtues; and moreover all things succeed according to our wish and demand.<sup>72</sup>

A concern with seeing from an internal light in contradistinction to the "natural" light of the world, and the transformative, visionary possibilities this enabled, is a binary, of course, that underlies the treatment of blindness in *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.<sup>73</sup> Swedenborg seems to gesture towards Milton's blindness in an extended footnote of the *Worship and Love of God*, where he mentions the ancient tradition of wise men ("Sophi") who "purposely made themselves blind, so as to extinguish the light of the eye, in order that they might be more at liberty to cultivate spiritual light." The political valence that inheres to Swedenborg's choice of

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<sup>71</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, trans. Augustus Clissold and James John Garth Wilkinson (London: W. Newbery [etc.], 1846), Vol II: 9-24.

<sup>72</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 66. This power of this transcendental perception to transform "slime into the brightest gem," is remarkably close to the apocalyptic moment of vision that closes Emerson's 1836 *Nature*, where the idealist's eye causes "disagreeable disappearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, madhouses, prisons, enemies, [to] vanish; they are temporary and shall be no more seen." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 48.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 186.

the word “liberty” here is noteworthy (it becomes especially evident if we recall the passages on the necessary liberty of free thought in religious matters that ends of the second volume of the *Principia*) and underscores the agency that both Swedenborg and Milton ascribed to an idealist vision which juxtaposes a freeing, interior spiritual light against the blindness of a substantialist approach to nature.

The majority of the ecocritical recoveries of Milton have by-and-large ignored such Neoplatonic elements, choosing instead to emphasize how Milton’s “materialist monism” espouses a non-transcendental view of immanent nature.<sup>74</sup> Both Ken Hiltner and Diane McColley have presented convincing arguments on the lush materiality of Milton’s rhetoric about nature, especially those passages that occupy the symbolic centre of the garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost*, where they respectively locate a proto-ecological ethos in the first human’s “stewardship”-like relationships to the numinous nature around them. McColley contextualizes Milton’s nature within a background of 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophical concerns, contending that Milton deliberately attempts to correct a damaging Cartesian split between mind and body, man vs. nature, that was “thoroughly opposed to Milton’s sense of the original integrity of body and soul and the original harmony of heaven and earth.”<sup>75</sup> Hiltner, building on McColley’s work, has focused on the notion of place in Milton’s theology with a sophisticated approach that draws on Derrida, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, particularly the latter’s concept of dwelling, while

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<sup>74</sup> Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*, Literary and scientific cultures of early modernity (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Diane Kelsey McColley, “Eve’s Dream,” *Milton Studies* 12 (1978): 40.

illuminating the drastic shifts in forestry and land management practices that characterized Milton's age.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, valuing placed-based dwelling and ecological rootedness will not grant much leeway into the *Worship and Love of God*. Swedenborg's prose is barren of the tangible, poetic descriptions that make Milton's Eden topographically dense and visually rich. There are general descriptions of bowers, groves, and the London garden with its falling leaves alluded to at the work's introduction, but the brunt of the text's energy is devoted to the cerebral conversations (and extensive footnotes) between Adam and the Heavenly Intelligences. If Milton stimulated the generation of Swedenborg's foray into a prose-poem, it was certainly not to write a text that can be read as amenable to Deep Ecology's commitment to place-based ethics and the deconstructions of the human self, as Hiltner reads *Paradise Lost*.<sup>77</sup> As Martin Lamm puts it-- despite his obvious admiration for Swedenborg's literary achievement--"Swedenborg is far from having the extraordinary sentiment of nature that Milton has, and his description seems devoid of color when compared to that of the English poet."<sup>78</sup>

A different kind of green politics in *Paradise Lost*, one not predicated on place but critical of its very conceptual underpinnings and the gesture it makes to authenticity, might provide more leverage into *The Worship and Love of God* and the emergence of an ecopoiesis in Swedenborg's writing and work. Morton seems right to critique the predominance of place-based ecocriticism, not only for its naive collapse of distinctions between self and other (or text and world), but also for its ongoing obfuscation of the ideological slipperiness between the

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<sup>76</sup> Hiltner, *Renaissance Ecology*.

<sup>77</sup> See Hiltner's use of Naess, *ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>78</sup> Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 187.

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rootedness of place and more regressive forms of blood-and-soil nationalism, even fascism, that so often accrue around kernels of the local.<sup>79</sup> The paradise of Swedenborg's Eden in *The Worship and Love of God* is further delocalized—beyond the rhetorical effect of its hyperbolic abstractions—by placing the germ of the text's inception in a foreign land, in a garden in London. Swedenborg, a foreigner in a city of immigrants, finds his consolation in the solitude of an urban grove far from home. The falling of the leaves in the grove become a correspondential spiral that veers away from immediate locality into ever-wider fields of symbolic reference that refract from microcosm into macrocosm: the seasonal cycles make Swedenborg recall the cyclical nature of the histories of man, of society, then of the creation of the planets in the solar system, until he concludes, at the end of the Introduction, that the whole universe can become correspondentially “mirrored” in the singularity of an experience.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, as someone who spent the majority of his life abroad circulating through the cosmopolitan milieus of Enlightenment science, or, during his crisis period, involved in the transnational currents of Continental Pietism (vis-à-vis the Moravian Brotherhood in London), Swedenborg was constantly “un-homed” and finding himself a stranger in a strange land. In a very un-Romantic

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Luc Ferry's standard indictment of the Romantic “ecofascism” that lingers in deep ecology. Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Morton argues: “We must put the idea of place into question; hence an ecological criticism that resists the idea that there is a solid physical bedrock (Nature or Life, for instance) beneath which thinking cannot or should not delve. In the rush to embrace an expanded view, the plangent, intense rhetoric of localism, the form of ecological thinking that seems most opposed to globalization and most resistant to modern and postmodern decenterings and deconstructions, must not be allowed to fall into the hands of reactionaries.” Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 171.

<sup>80</sup> “...for particular representations are so many mirrors of things in general, and general representations are so many mirrors of things in particular, which have their allotted places... Let us also contemplate the face of the universe in the mirrors presented by the singulars of which it is composed, and from them let us evolve the fates of times and of ages.” Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 1.

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way, there is no clear nostalgia for place in Swedenborg's writings. This alienation from the local registers on the level of the imaginary, finding an analogue in the visionary theology where spirits and angels often take note that Swedenborg is a stranger from another world, that he doesn't belong among them.<sup>81</sup>

If Swedenborg derived anything overt in terms of an environmental politics from Milton, it seems safe to hazard that the Idealist and Platonic modulations in *Paradise Lost* would have reinforced Swedenborg's interest in theories of the emanation of matter that could better account for the creation of the world than what the doctrinal principle of *ex-nihilo* technically permitted, as this remained a major problem for biblical hermeneutics in both Swedenborg and Milton's days.<sup>82</sup> As Milton's tendency towards monism somewhat modulated the standard neoplatonic view of matter in itself as dead and inert (or debased and evil, in more gnostic forms), so, too, in Swedenborg does the perpetual inflow of emanations come to vivify all of nature and infuse it with a "soul," as it is put in the *Worship and Love of God*.<sup>83</sup> Here, Swedenborg is moving towards his mature theory of influx that structures the perpetual relationship between heaven and earth. This relationship might be best characterized as a compromise between the flattening effects of pantheism (the material of nature is synonymous with God) and the static deadness of neoplatonic dualism (nature is but the shadow of higher, fixed spiritual reality): something that might be best characterized as panentheistic (God is known through a process of becoming, of

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, no. 281, section 1.

<sup>82</sup> For Milton's move away from orthodox perspectives on *ex-nihilo* creation, see George Newton Conklin, *Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972). Jonsson notes how scholars on Swedenborg like Lamm have located a direct line between Swedenborg and Milton's implicit refutation of *ex-nihilo*, but argues it likely comes more out of Swedenborg's familiarity with Cabbalistic emanation theories than anything latent in *Paradise Lost*. Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*, 113.

<sup>83</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 28.

immanence, in phenomenal nature). “Pantheistic” is a term that emerges from the immanent theology of German Romantic philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause with specifically Swedenborgian overtones. Kate Rigby’s resurrection of this somewhat archaic term in her ecocritical approach to transnational Romanticism suggests its relevance for application here, especially given Krause’s deep immersion in Swedenborgian theology.<sup>84</sup>

The pantheism of *The Worship and Love of God* takes most cogent form in the generating, “plastic” power that gyrates behind all forms of life, a “seminal force,” in Swedenborg’s words, that pushes life forms to replicate themselves and strive beyond their shapes. In the creation of the universe—poetically revising his earlier nebular hypothesis—the pregnant sun bursts forth his brood of planets, who circle “scattered like suckling masses near the burning bosom of their father and, as it were, at his teats” as they spiral outward into their respective orbits.<sup>85</sup> The planet earth produces seeds and eggs of its own across its cooling surface that microcosmically mirror the egg of the sun and the production of planets. The animistic view of the earth as a mother is concretized by Swedenborg—the earth’s eggs hatch various animals

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<sup>84</sup> Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred*, 48. Though Friedemann Horn observed thirty years ago that “the traces of Swedenborg in Krause’s writings are striking and would in themselves justify a book,” there has yet to be a substantial body of work on Swedenborg’s influence on Krause (who ended up writing a monograph on Swedenborg -- *Geist der Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs*, published in 1836), especially in English-language literary criticism. See Friedemann Horn, *Schelling und Swedenborg: ein Beitrag zur Problemgeschichte des deutschen Idealismus und zur Geschichte Swedenborgs in Deutschland. Nebst einem Anhang über K. C. F. Krause und Swedenborg*. (Zürich: Swedenborg Verlag, 1954). Wolfgang Forster argues that Horn overstates the case, and that Krause’s stance towards Swedenborg was actually much more distanced and critical in Wolfgang Forster, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krauses frühe Rechtsphilosophie und ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Hintergrund*. (Ebelsbach: Aktiv Druck & Verlag, 2000). A survey of Krause’s reading of Swedenborg is thoroughly covered in Enrique M Ureña, *K. C. F. Krause : Philosoph, Freimaurer, Weltbürger: eine Biographie* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991).

<sup>85</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 10.

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who are “unfolded from their first wombs and eggs, and afterwards nourished as from a breast with the sweetest milk emanating from the florid bosom of her who gave them birth, and were brought even to that age when they were able to provide for themselves.” Later, quadrupeds appear on earth who sprout antlers as a sign of their arboreal descent from tree branches.

When it comes to the birth of Adam, Swedenborg deviates from Genesis. Like the animals, Adam also grows out of a jewel-like vegetable egg hanging from the Tree of Life that is impregnated with the spirit of the Supreme Mind, and gestated with the dripping sap and juices of that tree.<sup>86</sup> Whereas Milton adheres fairly closely to the account in Genesis as for why God created man, thus replicating the hierarchical theology that man must govern and rule (and name) the beasts of creation—a point in the translation of Genesis that ecocritics have always found problematic—Swedenborg departs from Biblical precedent and accounts for man’s creation as one of aesthetic appreciation. Man is made because there was no sentient being that could reflect, perceive, and synthesize sensations into thoughts about the wonder of the world.<sup>87</sup> This wonder is described as a “sacred astonishment” when Adam and Eve perceive the spirals, vortexes, and gyres as archetypal forms flowing beneath creation and its processes.<sup>88</sup> The wonder also brings active enjoyment, and pleasure – the “very goal itself” of all life forms is to come in contact with feeling this (Divine) creative love as its point of origin: “to enjoy our Love is the veriest of life,” an Intelligence tells Adam, “what is everything else but flying feathers, trifles, and dung! For

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., no. 32-33.

<sup>87</sup> “But there was still wanting a being who could refer these pleasures of the senses to a sort of proper mind (mentem), or to his own consciousness and perception, and who, from the faculty of intellect, might decide upon the beauty resulting from all these harmonies, and might from beauties perceive joys... there was wanting, I say, that son of earth, or that mind under a human form, which from the paradise of earth might look into the paradise of heaven... .” Swedenborg, *Worship and Love of God*, no. 29.

<sup>88</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*.

into us He has transcribed Himself and His universal heaven... .”<sup>89</sup> Here, God becomes a kind of inscription, an internalized language that is to be ecstatically apprehended. This aesthetic capacity of human consciousness thus becomes the primary means for the Divine Mind to return to itself (again revealing Swedenborg’s debt to Neoplatonic emanationism). From the moment of his emergence from the egg on the tree of life, Swedenborg makes Adam into a mini-Creator, an artist endowed with an inherent mimetic capacity: “our first-born, from the first time of his birth into the light of his world, acted like a delightful imitator, under the view and full control of the soul itself from which he was formed, and although ignorant of it as to the body, he nevertheless effigied and gesticulated... .” There are “mimic worlds constructed by minds” that have an organic rhythm and cycle, just like “those of the year and of the day.” “Every mind constructs in effigy,” an intelligence tells Adam, “and as it were, builds some orb and world, in like manner as the Supreme Mind.”<sup>90</sup> Here, as Jonsson has demonstrated, Swedenborg is invested in the hexaameron tradition’s use of Stoic notions of the *spermatikos logos*, where the mimetic power of the spoken (or written) word becomes a force generating matter, a law of evolution—human and Divine speech are active, creating principles in the universe.<sup>91</sup>

The animate earth in the *Worship and Love of God* that generates Adam and Eve is interconnected through this common, seminal force that establishes sets of relationships between all beings.<sup>92</sup> Man is linked to creation via interlocking uses of an emanating nature, and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., no. 95.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., nos. 94, 43, 75.

<sup>91</sup> The most well-known example of the *spermatikos logos* is, of course, the opening of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” See also Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> The seminal force also builds on Swedenborg’s earlier scientific formulation of something he called the *archeus* in the *Domain of the Soul*. The term, as Benz points out, is not original to

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Swedenborg's teleology comes close to sounding like a more modern notion of the ecosystem.

This generative vitalism “completes a chain of ends, in which every link, and every ligament of a link, may perform its gyre for the whole, and moreover that this concatenation may flow from perpetual uses... and thus may never cease.”<sup>93</sup> The “flow” of forms here adumbrates Swedenborg's theory of influx that constitutes a theological reconciliation with both contemporary biological speculations on the originating principles of life (especially epigenesis) and more ancient Stoic notions of mystical forces that animate matter. According to Jonsson, the resulting organic kinship between animate beings and humans in the *Worship and Love of God* recuperates “primitive examples of a belief in the deep affinity of organisms, and in that respect as distant relatives.”<sup>94</sup> The overall spiritualization in the *Worship and Love of God* thus carries direct environmental import. Jonsson continues: Swedenborg's ultimately presents “a religious reverence for the life of nature. The human species is not allowed to ruthlessly tread down animals and vegetation or to look upon other organisms as machines.”<sup>95</sup> There may be a dark side to this holism, however, as the next chapter will take up, where I argue Blake's *Book of Thel* can be read as a deeply ambivalent response to this totalizing idea in Swedenborg, in general, and perhaps to *The Worship and Love of God* in particular.

In the end, *The Worship and Love of God* gives the impression that it peters out, abruptly trailing off mid-sentence, collapsing under the heavy baroque symbolism of its language and its

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Swedenborg, and is freely drawn from Cambridge Neo-Platonism and German thinkers in the *Naturphilosophie* tradition. The archeus is a dynamic primal power—a perpetual flow of energy—that determines the forms of nature. Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 131-132. In *The Worship and Love of God* the archeus becomes more spiritualized, moving towards Swedenborg's theory of influx.

<sup>93</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 33.

<sup>94</sup> Jonsson, *A Drama of Creation*, 103.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

increasingly elaborate system of footnotes. The final vision of the burning lights and united heart is followed by a lengthy didactic explication from Adam, who interprets every line of its densely woven symbolism (again with intervening footnotes), thus, tautologically, presenting an exegetical commentary on an exegesis that is an imaginative revising of Genesis's creation story. This tactic, of a visionary scene followed by an explanation, becomes a major structuring trope in the subsequent theology. The dual structure of the *Worship and Love of God* itself, with its footnotes that mine below the passages, also foreshadows the specific dialectics that Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia* would take with Genesis and Exodus. The eight original Neolatin volumes of the *Arcana* (between twelve and fifteen volumes in the standard, modern English translations), Swedenborg's definitive magnum opus consists of thousands and thousands of pages of detailed exegetical footnotes to Genesis and Exodus, line-by-line, often word-by-word. What pushes the *Arcana* beyond the boundaries of normal hermeneutics is not only the regular inclusion of Swedenborg's accounts of things "seen and heard" – *ex auditis et visis* - in heaven and hell, but his implicit suggestions that his revelation of the true internal sense of Judeo-Christian scriptures constituted in itself an addition to God's Holy Word. Swedenborg's Divinely commissioned theological writings, in other words, were not supplemental, but made a claim to be holy revelation in and for themselves.<sup>96</sup> This was a line that even Milton dared not cross, although it is certainly a transgressive posture that Blake self-consciously adopts, in no small part contingent on his reading of Swedenborg. Nevertheless, the Miltonic echoes in the *Worship and Love of God* suggest ways that *Paradise Lost* may have been instrumental for

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<sup>96</sup> While this may not be explicitly laid out by Swedenborg's writings themselves, it was a doctrinal point that Swedenborgians as early as 1790 began propounding. See Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity*, 122, as well as Alfred Acton, "The Writings as the Word: A Study in the History of Doctrine," *New Church Life* 77: 282-91.

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unleashing this turn in Swedenborg, and that Milton might even be seen as a key liberating figure for invigorating Swedenborg's final creative stage as a mystic.

### **From Exegesis to Ecopoiesis: 1746-1772**

Though a series of strong dreams and visions of Christ in 1745 had confirmed Swedenborg's sense that he was being commanded to *do* something, the precise nature of his holy commission remained obscure. It wasn't until the appearance of the first volume of the *Arcana* in 1749, four years after the *Worship and Love of God* and the period of turmoil in the journal of dreams, that Swedenborg finally seems to locate a writing and exegetical style in which he was confident. During the three year interim, his reading and writing patterns underwent significant alteration. He forsook his close readings in philosophy and biblical commentary, turning to the original Hebrew and Greek Judeo-Christian biblical texts in an attempt to unearth their correspondential structures and original spiritual internal sense.<sup>97</sup> His painstaking etymologies of Hebrew words in Genesis as he searched for an authentic bedrock of celestial meaning were shaped by, on the one hand, his research and interest in hieroglyphics and the materiality of a visual representation of thought, and on the other, his probable knowledge of

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<sup>97</sup> Swedenborg also made frequent recourse to the Sabastiano Schmidt Latin Bible during this period. After the appearance of his theological volumes in the 1750's and 1760's, several figures (including Christoph Friedrich Oetinger) noted the strong parallels between Swedenborg and Jakob Boehme, and wrote to Swedenborg asking if he was familiar with the earlier German mystic. Swedenborg responded "I have never read [the books of Boehme], and it was forbidden me to read dogmatic and systematic books in theology before heaven was opened to me, and this for the reason that thereby unfounded opinions and novelties might find occasion to insinuate themselves, which afterwards could be removed with difficulty. Therefore, when heaven was opened to me, I had to first learn the Hebrew language, and also correspondences, of which the whole Bible is composed, and this led me reread the whole of God's Word many times." Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, ed. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955), Vol II: 630.

Cabbalistic traditions that had highly developed esoteric theories on the relationship between the form and sound of Hebrew characters and the content of secret spiritual wisdom that lay in their combination into various compounds and words.<sup>98</sup> He created a massive personal index of symbols and themes he was unearthing in the Bible as he read the texts again and again, as he simultaneously documented in private journals his ongoing mystical experiences (a body of manuscripts that posthumously came to be called either the “Spiritual Diary” or “Spiritual Experiences”). He began to index his indexes, and drew increasingly more complex intratextual references and patterns between the biblical exegesis and spiritual diaries. Shuttling back and forth through this dense web, one can watch the private interior drama of Swedenborg’s spiritual vision intersect with his hermeneutics of the Bible, and an inchoate realization that informs the basic claim made by the *Arcana* take shape: that God’s Holy Word is not a literal account of historical or genealogical events, but a deeper spiritual record of psychic (or conscious) growth in the human mind. The seven days of Creation become symbolic correspondences of stages in the soul’s spiritual maturation, a flow and process of regeneration that is eternal. Swedenborg’s efforts to arrive at this allegorical interpretation—sharply against the orthodox grain of contemporary Protestant hermeneutics that privileged the *sensus literarius historicus*—required an arduous kind of mining through biblical texts and close observation of his own mind.<sup>99</sup> The

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<sup>98</sup> See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Emanuel Swedenborg, the Jews, and Jewish Traditions,” in *Reuchlin und seine Erben: Forscher, Denker, Ideologen, und Spinner*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2004), 135-154.

<sup>99</sup> Traditional biblical hermeneutics marked a distinction between the Bible’s *sensus literalis historicus* (the literal-historical sense) and the *sensus spiritualis* or *mysticus* (spiritual or mystical sense). In medieval hermeneutics, the *sensus spiritualis* was often further subdivided into the anagogical and the allegorical. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1998). Post-Reformation theology, however, especially after Martin Luther and John Calvin, tended only to accept the *sensus*

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resulting vast indexes and systematic references draw an unexpected circle back to the Pietism of his childhood. Jesper Swedberg had once exhorted students at Uppsala university (including his then fifteen year old son Emanuel), that they were not to rely on themselves to find and do good in the world, but to keep the fear of God with them at all times. “The Bible must be your handbook,” Swedberg told them, “you must be at home in it.”<sup>100</sup> Years later, Swedenborg was doing his utmost to make a home in the Bible, creating a dazzling system of words and correspondences through an exegetical method that had been sharpened by decades of scientific training. He was hewing for himself (and for his readers that would come after) complex “pattern recognitions” in the language of the Bible. A single correspondence selected from one of Swedenborg’s index radiates off into multiple directions for interpretation and meaning. It is this liberating possibility, away from the singularity of a literalist approach to Biblical texts, that lets Joan Richardson write of Swedenborg’s world of words as a “linguistic cosmology.”<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, in regard to Swedenborg’s deliberate, slowed down approach to reading, repetitively, Biblical texts, especially the Hebrew book of Genesis, we should recall the thin line that exists between the physiological disassociation that the self experiences while reading and the transcendent experience of the mystic who encounters a liberating sense of no-self. As Ralph Yarow writes, immersing ourselves in written language, especially that of a literary kind, has a

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*literalis historicus*. It is perhaps ironic that Swedenborg, raised in a Lutheran household, ends up proposing a radical *sensus spiritualis* in line with medieval allegory and the symbolism of Philo of Alexandria and Origen. See Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought*, 231-232.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 157.

<sup>101</sup> Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 169; see also her discussion of Emerson reading Swedenborg, 89. Swedenborg despised the “thick darkness” of Biblical literalists; see Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven* (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2008), no. 6221.

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specific cognitive dimension in its capacity to stimulate alternating states of consciousness.

Becoming aware of ourselves

as a point in language, we are both the accretion of past codes and the potential of those to come: the now of our reading is also a junction of many readings. As the physical sensations that mediate reading and writing, we are similarly an extension of present moments in time; and similarly too we are, as well as specific individuals reading a text, activating levels of language and behavior which are communal rather than limited to any one individual... Perhaps it is fundamentally for this kind of development that we read, as a reaching-out beyond the skin-or-word-encapsulated ego: as a sensing of our organic being in the world grasped in the increasingly complex span of consciousness activated in and through the work.<sup>102</sup>

Yarrow further argues that this loss of the individual into a community of other words and beings is often brought about in literary language by causing the reader to momentarily experience language's insufficiency as a system of representation. Reading can thus induce a kind of phenomenological *via-negativa*: "it is essentially an attempt to do the impossible, to indicate in language everything that language cannot say. This perennial problem for writers is also that of mystics who experience the absence of any object or limitation to consciousness as precisely the plenitude of potentiality which may equate with divine creativity."<sup>103</sup> This failure of language to represent higher "spiritual" states is a strong leitmotif in Swedenborg's final writings, from the

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<sup>102</sup> Ralph Yarrow, "The Potential of Consciousness: Towards a New Approach to States of Consciousness in Literature," *Journal of European Studies* 15, no. 1 (1985): 10.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

journal of dreams to the *Arcana Caelestia*, as the preceding chapter intimated in its discussion of Swedenborg's turn to hieroglyphics and emblematics traditions.

The particular phenomenology that Yarrow brings in from a cognitive perspective to this process of reading carries an ecological vector in its potential to activate, in Yarrow's words, an awareness of "levels of language and behavior which are communal rather than limited to any one individual." This potential, however, is quite different from the models of ecoliteracy that vaunt a seamless connection between particular places and texts. According to its more reductive and didactic formulations, when we read a text like *Walden* and witness Thoreau's attention to New England biota, we consequently learn how to approach our own places and homes wherever we might be, and enhance our "land ethic" when we turn to our world off the page. This usually leads, according to Dominic Head, into "the ghetto of environmental nonfiction" and a critical neglect for more imaginative forms of writing.<sup>104</sup> It also rarely acknowledges the physiological dimensions of language-immersion that Yarrow delineates. In fact, as Morton points out, much place-based environmental writing championed by ecocriticism is structured around a claim that the phenomenal nature outside of the book (or poem) offers a more authentic contact with the Real than the words on the page, thus opening up an aporia where the text can work to deconstruct its own rhetorical authority, speciously deflecting attention away from language.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Here, Head is specifically challenging Buell's call (in *The Environmental Imagination*) for kinds of writing that avoid homocentric perspectives which are dependent on plot, characterization, and dialogue. Dominic Head, "The (Im)possibility of Ecocriticism," in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge (London: Zed Books, 1998), 27.

<sup>105</sup> Writes Morton, "this rhetorical strategy appears with astounding frequency in a variety of ecological texts. In trying to evoke a sense of the reality of nature, many texts suggest, often explicitly, that (1) this reality is solid, veridical, and independent (notably of the writing process itself) and that (2) it would be much better for the reader to experience it directly rather than just

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This kind of writing wholly misses the intense aesthetic pleasure, a euphoric “privileged moment” (in Yarrow’s words) that reading in and for itself brings, and how this might further inhere to an ecological praxis as it derives from our imaginative encounter with others (the other of nature, the other of animals, of other make-believe people). Morton has further blogged how this physiological dynamic makes

reading fundamentally coexistence with others. To read a poem is a political act, a nonviolent one. At the very least, there is an appreciation, with no particular reason, of another's enjoyment... I would argue that (at least closely analytical) reading goes beyond mere toleration, towards a more difficult, disturbing, and potentially traumatic encounter with enjoyment—which is always ‘of the other,’ even when it's your own. Reading a text is a profoundly ecological act, because ecology, at bottom, is coexistence (with others, of course), which implies interdependence. What I call the ecological thought is the thinking of this coexistence and interdependence to the fullest possible extent of which we are capable.<sup>106</sup>

These points have been inadvertently echoed more recently on another blogspace in a commissioned post by Laura Dassow Walls, who argues there is a moral imperative for what she calls “deliberate reading” in light of our “deepening ecological crisis.” Walls’ “deliberate reading” is not a rebranding of earlier forms of ecoliteracy that elide text into place, but an

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read about it... [this] device—I call it *ecomimesis*—wants to go beyond the aesthetic dimension altogether. It wants to break out of the normative aesthetic frame, go beyond art.” Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 30-31.

<sup>106</sup> Timothy Morton, “Reading is Ecological,” *Ecology without Nature*, July 24, 2008, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2008/07/reading-is-ecological.html>.

attention to the physical effects of literary language informed by a sophisticated deconstructionist ethic. She makes it sound like a literary version of “slow-eating.” Walls writes:

The deliberate reader interrupts, slows down, the quick current that would speed us all into becoming cooperative agents of the larger forces of the panarchy we inhabit. It takes freedom to slow down, and time, care, thought, a recursive imagination, to weigh one's perceptions and choices. Deliberate reading means weighing the words one hears, against themselves, against the world, against the words of others. This puts us back in the realm of the literary, where words are not transport mechanisms that work the better as they "represent" more efficiently, but opaque presences in themselves, requiring attention and reflection for what they do on, and off, the page.<sup>107</sup>

The elaborate correspondential links in Swedenborg's theology, his “linguistic cosmology,” unfolds an ecosystem of relationships as one reads their way into its inter- and extratextual spaces. Engaging Swedenborg's dense textual webs demands a kind of deliberate reading, in Walls' sense, and this may explain in the end Emerson's seemingly strange comment, to quote once again, that when we read Swedenborg, “we enter a world that is a living poem.”

Swedenborg's theological matrix of correspondential signs reinforced the Romantic tendency to encounter the otherness of nature as a sacred text, a hermeneutical network that was living scripture, and that the necessary decoding of these natural signs became the point of conversionary experience for the poetic self.

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<sup>107</sup> Laura Dassow Walls, “Beyond Representation: Deliberate Reading in a Panarchic World,” *Electronic Book Review: Critical Ecologies*, July 29, 2009, <http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/criticalecologies/deliberative>.

Though Swedenborg's correspondence theory was first articulated in his scientific work on the human body, it acquires a central, much more expansive role in the theology, of structural importance to his hermeneutics and the operative dynamics of his spiritual world. Its dualistic structure, the basic contention that the physical material world reflects an elevated, more interior spiritual reality, has its obvious origins in Neo-Platonism. In a crucial deviation from Neoplatonic tradition, however, Swedenborg does not adopt an Idealist position that views nature as simply the inferior shadows of a higher world of fixed, static forms. In its more occult and gnostic variations, this kind of Neo-Platonism viewed the phenomenal world as inherently wicked and evil (or in the later Christian permutations, as fallen and corrupt). In an analogy that becomes repeated at several points in the theology, Swedenborg compares our interior or spiritual reality to our internal organs and viscera, and the natural world to the skin that holds these organs together and protects the body. As a body needs and depends on its skin, so, too, does the spiritual critically depend on the material to clothe itself in form and beauty—"the spiritual is within the natural as the fibre is within the muscle, as the blood is within the arteries; or as the thought is within the speech, and the affection in sounds... from these things, but still as if through a lattice, it is evident that the spiritual clothes itself with the natural, as a man clothes himself with a garment."<sup>108</sup> Or as Emerson puts it in *Nature*, reworking this specific passage in Swedenborg, "a material image, more or less luminous... [is] contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, "Intercourse between the Soul and the Body," in *Miscellaneous Theological Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1970), no. 11.

<sup>109</sup> Emerson, *Essays & Poems*, 23.

A Swedenborgian correspondence is thus a clarifying moment of perception that sees the true relationship between the intangibility of an idea and its manifestation in the visibly concrete—two discreet terms in a relationship that do not collapse into each other and become the same thing. To put it in Saussurian terms, a correspondence keeps wedged open a differential space between the material signifier and the signified. A correspondence is not only a mirroring of the Neoplatonic vertical axis “as above, so below,” but also refracts a horizontal equalization between the interior and exteriority of the self. This chiasmus of subjectivity made Swedenborg’s “correspondence” especially attractive for poets like Christopher Pearse Cranch, Walt Whitman, and later Charles Baudelaire. There is a particular “rhetoric of internalization” operating in these poets’ work to which Swedenborg’s correspondence contributed, a modality often configured into accounts of Romanticism.<sup>110</sup> As a figure of internalization, Swedenborg’s correspondence can be further read as a specific kind of negotiation with Cartesian dualism (long the bugaboo of

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<sup>110</sup> The phrase is Joshua Wilner’s. While it might seem that Swedenborg’s correspondence theory would lend itself to Abrams’ general reading of Romanticism as “displaced and reconstituted theology,” the strikingly different ways that Cranch, Whitman, and Baudelaire put Swedenborgian correspondence to use suggests Wilner’s point that Abrams’ schema problematically “presupposes a certain temporalizing of spatial oppositions.” See Joshua Wilner, *Feeding on Infinity: Readings in the Romantic Rhetoric of Internalization* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000). Baudelaire’s use of Swedenborgian correspondence is covered thoroughly by Wilkinson in *Dream of an Absolute Language*; for Whitman’s play with the concept, see Anders Hallengren, “A Hermeneutic Key to the Leaves of Grass,” in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), 45-59. But Whitman’s debt to Swedenborg was more than just a symbolic theory derived from correspondence; David Reynolds discusses the importance of Swedenborgian influx and his micro-macrocosmic analogies in David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93-100.

ecocriticism).<sup>111</sup> As Wouter Hanegraaf puts it, Swedenborg was pushed to develop his theory of correspondence

*not* because it unites mind and nature, but for precisely the *contrary* reason: because it solved (for him) the Cartesian dilemma. It enabled him to retain a fundamental distinction between spirit and nature (modeled on the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*); to continue seeing spirit as the active cause and nature as the passive substance “acted upon” by spirit; but to explain that relationship *without* having to assume the existence of mechanisms of instrumental causality.<sup>112</sup>

As correspondences lay behind every facet of nature, and all the natural facts of science were translatable into spiritual truths, nature becomes electrified with revelatory potential.<sup>113</sup> While Swedenborg confidently rested in contained notions of revealed sacred scriptures that stay within the Christian pale, his correspondences of nature proved to be catalytic for Emerson (among others) who displaced the dynamics of conversion into a natural (and thus un-ecclesiastical) space.<sup>114</sup> The dual nature of Swedenborg’s correspondences opens a further avenue towards

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<sup>111</sup> Cartesian critiques have been especially strong within ecofeminism. See, for example, Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Opening out (London: Routledge, 1993).and Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>112</sup> Wouter J Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 428.

<sup>113</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard*, no. 106.

<sup>114</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90.

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repositioning Cartesian thought within Romantic poetics, a challenge for ecocriticism that Morton has most provocatively articulated.<sup>115</sup>

The dual nature of correspondence also reinforced Swedenborg's conceptualization of the micro-and macrocosmic structure of the universe. The smallest particles and dynamics of the human body mirrored the orbits and rotations of the planets and stars. All the souls of the universe, when viewed from afar, took on the shape of an enormous human being, a *Magnus Homo*, or Grand Man (as it was translated in the nineteenth century). This bears obvious parallels to the macrocosm of Adam Caedmon in Cabbalistic traditions, even if Swedenborg's relationship to Cabbala remains murky at best, as chapter one discussed. What further distinguishes the correspondential macrocosm of Swedenborg's Grand Man from Cabbala is the ways it came to be informed by his scientific cosmogony. The Grand Man becomes a figure for the entire universe, containing millions of individuals from different planets within its shape, and—in a further ramification of the Copernican revolution—the earth loses its vaunted place as not only the center of the earthly cosmos, but also in the spiritual and heavenly worlds as well.

Swedenborg explains in his account of interplanetary travel (culled largely from previously published material in the *Arcana Caelestia*), the delightfully titled *Concerning the Earths in our Solar System, which are called Planets; and concerning the Earths in the Starry Heaven*:

To constitute the Greatest Man, there is need of spirits from many earths, those who come from our earth into heaven not being sufficient for this purpose, being respectively

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<sup>115</sup> “I venture the provocative, probably heretical and certainly, to many ecological ears, blasphemous, idea that Descartes, the whipping boy of ecological discourse, may have something to tell us about place... . Ultimately, ecological politics should not be about dissolving the dualism of subject and object. It should be about conquering aggression and violence.” Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 178-179.

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few; and it is provided by the Lord, that whenever there is a deficiency in any place as to the quality or quantity of correspondency, immediately those are summoned from another earth who can fill up the deficiency, that the proportion may be preserved...<sup>116</sup>

The subsequent account of the lives of spirits on other planets (and in other solar systems) is almost sociological, with the eating habits and houses of the inhabitants of Jupiter and Mercury (among other planets) meticulously described. As Olof Lagercrantz ingeniously points out, Swedenborg's idylls on the other planets share many similarities with 18<sup>th</sup> century utopian literature, and the harmony of life on these other planets might be a general response to the Enlightenment pessimism that followed the 1755 Lisbon earthquake.<sup>117</sup> Lest Swedenborg's planetary speculations seem too outlandish, we might also recall the arguments that William Herschel made before the Royal Society in the 1780's that, according to his telescopic observations, the craters in the moon were actually artificially constructed cities (he called them "Circuses") for extraterrestrial lunar inhabitants.<sup>118</sup> Herschel's mania for proving moon-life led to him developing better telescopes that then led to him discovering, more or less accidentally, the seventh planet (Uranus) in 1781: it was a landmark in astronomy, the first new planet to be located since Ptolemy, over a thousand years earlier. However, as Emerson was one of the first to widely broadcast, Swedenborg's visionary account of the planets, both here in *Concerning the Earths in our Solar System* but also in earlier works like the *Worship and Love of God* and the

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<sup>116</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Earths in our Solar System, which are called Planets and the Earths in the Starry Heaven, and Their Inhabitants* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1970), no. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Olof Gustaf Hugo Lagercrantz, *Epic of the Afterlife: A Literary Approach to Swedenborg*, trans. Anders Hallengren (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 82-83.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), 94.

*Principia*, specifically suggest seven planets were in orbit in the solar system at a time when the scientific community held there to be only six (a number that does not include our earth's moon).<sup>119</sup> Swedenborg, in Emerson's words, "anticipated the discovery of the seventh planet" and Herschel's incredible breakthrough by a good forty years.<sup>120</sup>

While it is tempting to try and ground this in speculation that Swedenborg somehow became aware of the observations that Flamsteed had made of Uranus in the late 1680's (when Flamsteed mistook it for a new star in the Sirius cluster), during the time that Swedenborg spent time at Greenwich under Flamsteed's tutelage in 1710, it is more likely that this kind of intimation stems from Swedenborg's ability to synthesize preternatural imagination with scientific insight, and a theosophical conviction that the human soul was correspondentially mirrored through the entire structure of the cosmos. In a way, Herschel's incredible discovery was premised on a similar constellation of convictions and abilities: a strong, even fervent belief in life on the other planets, and, if we follow Richard Holmes, an aesthetic capability of reading the constellations in the sky as a kind of sheet music: the stars corresponded to the beauty of musical structures in such a way that Herschel—a classically trained organist—could

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<sup>119</sup> In the *Worship and Love of God*, for example, Swedenborg writes of seven brotherly planets bursting forth as the brood of the sun. The number clearly does not include the terrestrial moon, as Swedenborg also writes about how the "foetuses" of the planets "brought along with them from the palace of their parent little orbs, some more and some fewer, like servants and satellites... ." Swedenborg, *Worship and Love of God*, no. 11. Emerson was not the first to note this in Swedenborg, however; Clarence Hotson suggests Emerson derived this from reading Nathaniel Hobart's *Life of Swedenborg* that had been serialized in the *New Jerusalem Messenger* in the 1830's. Clarence Paul Hotson, "Emerson's Biographical Sources for "Swedenborg"," *Studies in Philology* 26, no. 1 (January 1929): 25-26. It is also a point that J. J. G. Wilkinson makes at several points, and would have likely been a part of conversations that Wilkinson and Emerson had between 1847 and 1848, during Emerson's stay in England.

<sup>120</sup> Emerson, *Essays & Poems*, 666.

synthetically “build up an extraordinary, instinctive familiarity with the patterning of the night sky, which gradually enabled him to ‘sight-read’ it as a musician reads a score.”<sup>121</sup>

For Swedenborg, the structure of a correspondence is determined by an emanation of Divine energy (or love) that Swedenborg called influx. Nature appears dead and lifeless apart from this perpetually animating force.<sup>122</sup> In a vividly described memorable relation, Swedenborg watches the spirits of two former deceased presidents of the British Royal Society, Sir Hans Sloane and Martin Folkes, debating the origin of seeds and eggs, echoing the great debates about the generation of matter that occupied natural philosophy in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sloane ends up being convinced that the propagation of all animals and plants is “a flow” of constant spirit into nature.<sup>123</sup> Though there are vestiges of the *spermatikos logos* and *archeus* that drove the emanation theories behind concepts of nature in earlier works, now, like certain schools of Sufi mysticism or the Cabbala, Swedenborg elects to place at the center of this emanating universe a concept of Divine Love, a love that is perpetually seeking to reunite with itself: the world is but a continual dynamic force whose goal is a striving and a return to seed.<sup>124</sup> This influx of Divine Love into the created material world causes, in Swedenborg’s cosmos, an accordant propelling of forms and species upwards into each other. Minerals aspire to be plants, and in all plant life “there is an energy towards movement” that approximates animal life.<sup>125</sup> “There is a ladder of all created things,” writes Swedenborg, an interconnectedness that should

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<sup>121</sup> Holmes, *The Age of Wonder*, 95.

<sup>122</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003), no. 157.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 344.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 311, 314.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 73.

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“stun” the mind with wonder.<sup>126</sup> Putting Swedenborg’s theism aside, as well as the more extravagant visualizations of this interconnectedness from the *Worship and Love of God* that featured antlered deer as signs of arboreal descent, this permeability between species and forms looks towards the maturation of 19<sup>th</sup> century theories on evolution and natural matter, especially Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s pioneering work on the transmutation of species. These intimations in Swedenborg’s doctrine of influx might have remained within the orthodoxy of Christian Neoplatonic beliefs in a gradated scale of Being, were they not so thoroughly informed by a lifetime spent studying scientific phenomena. Years earlier, Swedenborg had offered the astonishing speculation in the *Principia* that the beginnings of forests had their origin in the accidental flaking off of minerals from rocks onto beds of lichen and moss—a union of active and passive substances that began to produce new life forms, the trees.<sup>127</sup>

Against the predominant Enlightenment episteme of a mechanistic universe, this further recuperates ancient notions on vital life forces and “essences” that hearken back to Aristotle that were slowly but surely beginning to seep into the biological debates on the origins of matter that were forming between those who supported epigenesis, versus those who believed in biological preformation. Swedenborg was likely aware of the well-known Renaissance accounts of how Scottish barnacles purportedly spawned small ducklings when heavy mist blew their spermatid seed into receptive branches and leaves of trees along the shore of lakes. There are even older precedents going back to Paracelsus, as Lamm points out, for connecting Adam’s origin to a

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<sup>126</sup> These very lines (from *Divine Love and Wisdom* again, no. 66) seem to ricochet against Emerson’s famous question and lines that opens “Experience”: “Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight.” Emerson, *Essays*, 471.

<sup>127</sup> Swedenborg, *The Principia*.

generative tree. Swedenborg was well aware of the high metaphysical stakes at play in the arguments between the epigenesists and the preformationists. At this point in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Enlightenment science tended to favor preformationist models of generation that correspondingly regarded permutation between the species as a ridiculous fable, a superstitious remnant of medieval transformative magic like alchemy: rather, in their view, each embryo in an egg or seed contained within itself all its parts, already preformed, and in its most reductive formulations, growth was not an organic process but simply an expansion in size, according to the preformed designs of Deity. Thus Albrecht von Haller, the Swiss anatomist, could make the outlandish claim that the first human mother, Eve, contained two hundred million tiny human beings in her ovaries, all preformed at the moment of her creation—the future posterity of human kind simply needed to one day get bigger over generations and time.<sup>128</sup> But, as Denise Gigante writes, “such a scenario included no room for unexpected change or invention. Regardless of whether what preexisted in the egg was design or an actual miniature of the animal, advocates of preformation considered generation a mechanical realization, by way of nutrition, of already articulated parts.”<sup>129</sup>

The gradual reemergence of organic epigenesist theories in the 1740’s challenged these precepts, and allowed for variation, change, and—perhaps most crucially—a way of acknowledging external factors that affected embryonic development and species growth, an acknowledgement that opens an intellectual space for later work on natural selection. While there is not sufficient space here to catalogue the rich diversity of perspectives that were unfolding

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<sup>128</sup> L. Premuda, “[Albrecht von Haller and Padua. The effect of his medical thoughts at the end of the 18th century],” *Gesnerus* 33, no. 1-2 (1976): 65-78.

<sup>129</sup> Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

along epigenesist lines in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Swedenborg's work clearly and unequivocally supported the epigenesist position. His material on ovum and egg development in the *Principia*, where he compares the inception of the egg's matter to a formless, Ovidian chaos, places him in the camp of epigenesist embryologists. Later, in the theology, the organic flow of influx that causes in all species "a constant striving for the human form, a form that it gradually takes on," explicitly refutes preformation theories (which at that time, pre-Darwin, were confusingly—for our present ears—called "evolutionary theories," even though they were in principle quite the opposite of our modern sense of that word).<sup>130</sup> In a wonderful moment of spiritual vision, Swedenborg is led by angels to watch the growth of an embryo inside the human womb—a projection of accelerated sight that reads like a spiritualized endoscopic camera—and the unfolding description makes humans clearly formed by epigenesis.<sup>131</sup>

It is still quite a leap from this moment to the Darwinian breakthrough of the next century, and if there is a kind of "epigenesist poetics" (to borrow Gigante's useful phrase) within Swedenborg, it remains within a telos of providential structure and Divine plan. Nevertheless, as Robert Richards has demonstrated, the connection between Darwinian evolution and earlier epigenesis forms a vital link in intellectual genealogy that descends from 18<sup>th</sup> century biology into the organicism of German Idealism and beyond.<sup>132</sup> There remains an unexplored rich body of material to be mined here in Swedenborg's role within the *Naturphilosophie* of Friedrich Schelling and the specific ways that Swedenborgian influx becomes rearticulated in Schelling's concept of vital forces in nature. Positioning Swedenborg's proto-vitalist theology as a template

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<sup>130</sup> Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, no. 432.

<sup>131</sup> Swedenborg, *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

for subsequent Romantic natural philosophy also serves to underscore the importance that the imagination came to play in Romanticism's negotiation between the scientific and the poetic, and the specific conceptualizations of form that were transferring back and forth between aesthetics and the natural sciences in the period: re-examining Swedenborg's influence is one way of detailing how closely intertwined these two fields were.<sup>133</sup>

Given their respective commitments to a model of the poetic imagination that would lead scientific inquiry, both Blake and Emerson present useful case studies for regarding this question from an ecocritical perspective. Swedenborg's correspondence and influx theories are immediately recognizable as operative in their work. "Every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause," writes Blake in *Milton*, "and Not / a Natural, for a Natural Cause only seems, it is a Delusion / Of Ulro: & a ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory."<sup>134</sup> For his reprint of *Nature* in 1849, at the same time that he was immersing himself in Swedenborg's science and befriending the great Swedenborg translator James John Garth Wilkinson, Emerson drafted a new epigraph for his inaugural philosophical debut that had first appeared in 1836. The six line poem concisely epitomizes both a correspondential view of nature and the evolutionary echoes in the transmutation of forms. The poem even, I argue, paraphrases and reworks the last line from Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom* quoted above, that nature has a "constant striving for the human form, a form that it gradually takes on." Emerson writes:

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<sup>133</sup> c.f. Gigante: "...once life was viewed vitalistically as power, science and aesthetics confronted the same formal problems. ...As the concept of vital power sparked a preoccupation with self-generating and self-maintaining form, it quickened the category of the aesthetic, elevating natural researchers into natural philosophers attempting to account for a mysterious power buried deep within the structures of nature." Gigante, *Life*. 3-5.

<sup>134</sup> William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 124.

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A subtle chain of countless rings  
The next unto the farthest brings;  
The eye reads omens where it goes  
And speaks all languages the rose;  
And, striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form.<sup>135</sup>

To avoid eliding the crucial distinctions and differences between Emerson and Blake's respective projects, the present study will proceed with situating each of these figures in their sociocultural contexts and measuring the more exact ways they responded to such ideas in Swedenborg. The basic set of questions remains the same. If we are to read Blake and Emerson from an ecocritical perspective and attempt to locate in their work textual models of ecopoiesis, a human way of speaking/writing about the world that might somehow also save it,<sup>136</sup> how do Swedenborgian models of influx and correspondence pattern Blake and Emerson's response to nature as a script, and/or their own writing as naturalized forms in themselves? What might this tell us about the appearance of an environmental imagination in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century—a problem that is certainly bound up in the larger problem of the heterogeneous emergence of something like Romanticism itself, on either side of the Atlantic?

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<sup>135</sup> My emphasis; Emerson, *Essays & Poems*, 5.

<sup>136</sup> Kate Rigby, "Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis," *New Literary History* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 437.

CHAPTER FOUR:

***“every thing that lives is holy!”:  
Locating Swedenborg in Blake’s Environmental Poetics***

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La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laisent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.  
-- Charles Baudelaire, “Correspondances”

William Blake’s relationship to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg has produced a veritable subgenre of Blake scholarship. In Blake’s extant library are more books by the Swedish mystic than any other author; Swedenborg entered early the orbit of Blake’s thinking and remained a habitual point of reflection and reference into the years right before Blake’s death.<sup>1</sup> Though a number of important dissertations have tackled Blake’s engagement with Swedenborg,<sup>2</sup> and though it is impossible to read through almost any critical work on Blake without coming across Swedenborg’s name at least in a footnote, there has yet to be a consistent and schematic attention to Blake’s reading of the mystic that satisfactorily carries itself through Blake’s corpus. Morton Paley’s final assessment in 1979 would seem to still hold true today: that

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<sup>1</sup> Crabb Robinson’s notes on his 1825 conversation with Blake constitute the last sustained words that Blake gives about Swedenborg. G. E. Bentley, *Blake Records: Documents (1714-1841) Concerning the Life of William Blake (1757-1827) and His Family, Incorporating Blake Records (1969), Blake Records Supplement (1988), and Extensive Discoveries Since 1988*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 309-318; 536-549.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best dissertations on Blake and Swedenborg remains Raymond Deck, “Blake and Swedenborg” (PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1978). Other valuable unpublished studies include Alexander John Morley, “The Politics of Prophecy: William Blake’s Early Swedenborgianism, 1757-1794.” (M.A. Thesis, Queens University, Kingston Ontario, 1991).

“though much has been written about Swedenborg’s influence on Blake, Blake’s complex and shifting attitude towards Swedenborg has not yet been adequately described.”<sup>3</sup>

Within green Romantic studies, ecocriticism has tended to steer completely clear of Blake in favor of more recognizable nature poets like William Wordsworth and John Clare.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, regarding Blake as a “green” Romantic in any capacity might initially seem anathema, if not an outright paradox, if we designate ecopoesis as a certain kind of poetic writing that is fundamentally invested in an ethical orientation towards the phenomenological world. Jonathan Bate has claimed, drawing on Martin Heidegger, that if ecopoetic writing “is the original admission of dwelling, then poetry is the place where we save the earth.”<sup>5</sup> Many of Blake’s statements about nature and the earth appear to move precisely in the opposite direction, towards a position of willful destruction, and lend support to Northrop Frye’s firm conclusion that nature in Blake “is miserably cruel, wasteful, purposeless, chaotic and half dead.”<sup>6</sup> “The Natural World is nothing real, but a mere illusion produced by Satan,” as Blake told Henry Crabb Robinson towards the end of his life.<sup>7</sup> Earlier, while Blake read the nature poetry of William Wordsworth, Blake scrawled angrily in the margins, retorting to the Lakeside poet that “Natural Objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me Wordsworth must know that what he writes Valuable is Not to be found in Nature” (665). As he later admitted to

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<sup>3</sup> Morton Paley, “‘A New Heaven is Begun’: Blake and Swedenborgianism,” *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1979): 64.

<sup>4</sup> This exclusion is especially true within the canonical texts by Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber that essentially inaugurate the discipline of Romantic ecocriticism. See Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991). and Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism*.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry; a Study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Bentley, *Blake Records*, 324.

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Robinson, “I fear Wordsworth loves Nature—and Nature is the work of the Devil—the Devil is in us, as far as we are Nature.”<sup>8</sup> It is with good reason, it would seem, that most recent “greenings” of Romanticism have by and large left Blake out of their re-canonizations, focusing instead on the ethics of place and virtues of embodiment to which Wordsworth, especially John Clare, and even Coleridge more readily lend themselves. If Blake is included in such green regroupings, it is most often for how poems like “London” from the *Songs of Experience* present the horrific degradation of modern industrialization, or the ways that the “Auguries of Innocence” might relate to a contemporaneous discourse over animal rights--Blake is emphatically not incorporated into such considerations based on the merit of his ecopoesis. The recent turn to more urban-based forms of ecocriticism that are more critical of the nature-vs.-culture dialectic has begun to renew an interest in Blake’s situatedness in the city, and the according metropolitan and cosmopolitan dimensions to his writing. Blake’s keen sensitivity to the suffering of animals, most cogent in the “Auguries,” has also received newer readings from animal studies and post-humanist forms of ecocritique.<sup>9</sup> Mark Lussier has made further valuable inroads for ecocritics in his exploration of Blake’s imagination and how it “can shape a viable cosmological frame... by acknowledging the interpenetration of one with another and all with the world.”<sup>10</sup> Kevin Hutchings has most comprehensively mapped out the potential for an environmental reading of the Blakean canon, and his sophisticated approach has significantly worked towards undoing Frye’s codification of Blake’s hostility to nature. This chapter is much

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<sup>8</sup> Bentley, *Blake Records*, 318.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 148-150.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Lussier, *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality*, Romanticism in Perspective (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 61.

indebted to Hutchings' recovery of Blake for ecocriticism, even as it proceeds on the claim that Hutchings—like other ecocritics—has substantially ignored the importance of Swedenborg for shaping Blake's idiosyncratic approach to nature.

This lack is partially due to a longstanding rift between historicist-based studies on Blake that have emphasized his radical politics—a line of scholarship that arcs from David Erdman and E.P. Thompson into more recent work from Jon Mee and Saree Makdisi—and another body of scholarship that has been more preoccupied with the hermeneutic problems that are posed by Blake's challenging texts, with proliferating interpretive strategies that range from Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* to Kathleen Raine's focus on Gnostic and esoteric elements, to W. J. T. Mitchell's influential theorizations about the fraught relationship between image and text that make up Blake's "composite art."<sup>11</sup> As Arthur Versluis has observed, these two strands of scholarship, one proposing Blake the radical, the other Blake's discursive relationships to various interpretive methods, have tended to evolve independently from each another, and that this has been acutely the case when it comes to situating Blake's reading of Swedenborg.<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Raine's extensive work on Swedenborgian ideas in Blake, for example, more or less ignores the millennial stew of radical politics and revolutionary aesthetics that swept through the

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991); E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York: New Press, 1993); Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1994); Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002); Frye, *Fearful Symmetry; a Study of William Blake*; Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968). W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Versluis, "Blake's Place in the Esoteric Tradition," in (presented at the Blake in Contexts: William Blake, His Life and Times, Goldsmith's, University of London, 2007).

early London Swedenborgian circles in the 1780's and 1790's that Paley, Thompson, and Erdman have all respectively illuminated. Raine's version of Blake reading Swedenborg is hermetic, in the full sense of the word, isolated from any socio-cultural contexts. On the other hand, more historically-grounded studies such as Jon Mee's *Dangerous Enthusiasm* (1994), while acknowledging the importance of Blake's reading of Swedenborg in the early 1790's, have continued to replicate Harold Bloom's erroneous contention that Blake permanently "moved away and beyond" Swedenborg after *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and that Blake's "feeling of affinity [for Swedenborg] did not survive his 1790 reading of Swedenborg's *Divine Providence*."<sup>13</sup> A rare exception to this is Robert Rix's *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (2007), a powerful study that builds on Mee and Thompson's resituation of the rhetorical traditions of demotic prophecy that Blake absorbed and refracted. Rix's book convincingly demonstrates Blake's sustained interest in and adaptation of Swedenborgian ideas for his own iconoclastic and antinomian forms of art.

There is, of course, nothing in Rix's version of Blake that provides any leeway towards an ecocritical reading. Rix's interest is not the environment, nor any other locus of representation that has an identity politics at stake for possible modes of interpretation (such as gender, postcoloniality, or sexuality—all angles that have been quite productively used to read Blakean poetics). This chapter, then, proceeds as a conscious attempt to inform the interpretive strategies that ecocriticism has brought to bear on Blake with the historically-inflected work of Rix and others who have maintained that Swedenborg was central for Blake's aesthetics. This is not to

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<sup>13</sup> See Harold Bloom, *William Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Modern critical interpretations (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 35, and William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 897.

fall victim to a kind of Swedenborgian monomania as Kathleen Raine occasionally did, who once claimed that “it is, in essence, the doctrines of Swedenborg that Blake’s works embody and to which they lend poetry and eloquence.”<sup>14</sup> Blake’s reading of Swedenborg was not isolated, but took place within a noisy, contentious milieu of other critical voices and competing prophetic, visionary traditions that were agitated by the prospects of revolution. Mee convincingly argues for a need to get beyond looking at Blake’s texts from a perspective concerned with the linear influence of ideas, and that it might be more useful if we regarded Blake’s texts as a confluence, an intersection of heterogeneous discourses, rather than simply the receptacles of singular ideas from this or that figure. Mee’s model of Blake as bricoleur—in Claude Levi-Strauss’s complex sense of this word—has consequently become an alternative figuration for questions of influence on Blake.<sup>15</sup> This chapter tries to add depth and complexity to Blake’s bricolage when it comes to questions of nature and natural history, and reinsert Swedenborg as a catalyzing figure alongside Blake’s simultaneous reactions to Newton (a response Donald Ault has charted), Erasmus Darwin, and continental theories of biology (as Denise Gigante does).<sup>16</sup>

It is striking to note immediately how it is within Blake’s annotations to and comments about Swedenborg that we find Blake’s most troubling statements about the environment. In Blake’s copy of Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, for example, we find Blake making the following remarks:

“Observe the distinction here between Natural & Spiritual as seen by Man”

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<sup>14</sup> Kathleen Raine, “The Human Face of God,” in *Blake and Swedenborg: Opposition is True Friendship*, ed. Harvey Bellin (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985), 35.

<sup>15</sup> Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Donald D Ault, *Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

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“the dead Sun is only a Phantasy of evil Man”

“This assertion that the spiritual Sun is not Life explains how the natural Sun is dead”

“Therefore the Natural Earth & Atmosphere is a Phantasy.”<sup>17</sup>

Similar sentiments in connection to Swedenborg were articulated years later to Robinson, who wrote about their conversation in his journal:

Among the more unexplainable unintelligible sentims [sic] which [Blake] was continually expressing is his distinction between the natural & the spiritual world—The natural world must be consumed—Incidentally Swedenborg was spoken of—‘He was a divine teacher—he has done much & will do much good; he has correctd [sic] many errors of Popery and also of Luther & Calvin.’ ... Every thing is *Atheism* which assumes the reality of the natural & unspiritual world.<sup>18</sup>

These moments suggest the ways that Swedenborg acted as a sounding board for Blake’s ideas about nature. The space in the margins of Swedenborg’s pages aided Blake in developing his own distinctions between a natural and a spiritual world, or, to put it differently, a world perceived through the organs of sense versus a world apprehended through the mind and the imagination.

If closer attention is paid to the ways that Swedenborg affected Blake’s ideas about perception and the process of interpretation, it becomes more difficult to categorize Blake’s ideas about the natural world as simply a problem of gnostic dualism. Many have convincingly argued, among them A.D. Nuttal, that Blake’s hostility to “the natural” stems from his familiarity with

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<sup>17</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 603-606.

<sup>18</sup> Bentley, *Blake Records*, 312.

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gnostic traditions, especially as gnostic thought was represented in the works of Jakob Boehme.<sup>19</sup> When Swedenborg's concepts of influx and correspondence are situated in conjunction with Blake's reading of Boehme, however, a more complicated sense of the natural begins to unfold. Nature becomes the site of embodiment of the spiritual sense of the Holy Letter of God's Word, an emblematic shell that contains a sacred, immanent message needing to be described and decoded by the perceiver. Blake's joyful declaration in several prophetic works from the 1790's, that "every thing that lives is Holy!," is a sentiment fundamentally at variance with Gnosticism's repudiation of all living matter and the earth as fallen and sinful. In the longer epics of *Jerusalem* and *Milton: A Poem*, despite Blake's implosion of narrative devices and deliberate distortions of mimetic language, there are occasional descriptions of diurnal nature that come close to the aesthetic parameters Lawrence Buell originally gave for qualifying environmental literature.<sup>20</sup> In *Milton*, for example, Plate 31 describes a spring dawn at Blake's cottage in Felpham:

Thou hearest the Nightingale being the Song of Spring  
The Lark sitting upon his earthy bed: just as the morn  
Appears; listens silent; then springing from the waving Corn-field! loud  
He leads the Choir of Day! trill, trill, trill, trill  
Mounting upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse:

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<sup>19</sup> See, in toto, A. D Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford [United Kingdom]: Clarendon Press, 1998). Raine also thoroughly covers Gnosticism in *Blake and Tradition*.

<sup>20</sup> According to Buell, literature becomes environmental when it 1) presents the nonhuman elements as more than a framing device; 2) shows the human interest to be not the only legitimate interest; 3) makes human accountability, or response, to environment part of an ethic in the text; and 4) it demonstrates a sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given. See Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 1995), 6-7.

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Reechoing against the lovely blue & shining heavenly Shell:  
His little throat labours with inspiration; every feather  
On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine  
All Nature listens silent to him & the awful Sun  
Stands still upon the Mountain looking at this little Bird  
With eyes of soft humility, & wonder love & awe.<sup>21</sup>

The first section of Blake's descriptive words here operate according to what Angus Fletcher has called an environment poem, where the poetic seeks not only to be about the surrounding world, or to represent it mimetically, but to create an actual environmental surround in the reading and experience of the words themselves.<sup>22</sup> The lark's onomatopoeic call, "trill, trill, trill, trill," for example, creates a preverbal effect where we hear the unmediated and repeating sound of a lark's monosyllabic song. There is a shift into the transcendental where the speaker sees this singing lark as "vibrating with the effluence Divine"—a distinctly Swedenborgian phrase, connected to concepts of influx, as David Reynolds has observed in regards to Whitman's use of these terms in early versions of *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>23</sup> The "effluence Divine" marks the transition from natural description into the spiritual and symbolic. It also demarks a movement from the auditory into the visual, leaving the space of the environment poem behind.

It would thus appear that Blake's view of nature is deliberately inconsistent, ranging from gnostic repudiation to a pantheistic celebration of everything that is alive as holy. If we include Swedenborg as an important component of Blake's hermeneutics, however, a more cohesive and

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<sup>21</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 130.

<sup>22</sup> Angus Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9, 136.

<sup>23</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75.

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unified picture of Blakean nature emerges, one that is based on principles of immanence and pan-entheism that the last chapter elaborated. In Plate 31 from *Milton*, the singing lark *corresponds*, in Swedenborg's terminology, into spiritual wonder, love, and awe. The bird is crucially not just a static, dead type in the neoplatonic tradition of symbols, however, but rather a living, sensing being—"every feather On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine." The problem of interpreting, perceiving, and seeing such epiphanic moments in Blake is inextricable from the prophetic traditions that he inherited and wrote himself into. His books repeatedly attempt to "rouse" the readers' faculties, to wake us to join the fight to build "a Jerusalem / in England's green and pleasant land." This exhortation is where we can locate a potential ecopoiesis in Blake: an agency where the burden of interpretation is foisted onto our shoulders, and we are asked to ponder the ways that speaking, and text-making, relate to the actual physical places around us.

This chapter will focus primarily on the ecopoetic potential in *The Book of Thel* (1789) and *Jerusalem* (1804–1820). Despite the broad lack of critical consensus over just what kind of a work *Thel* might be, it certainly stages, at a fundamental level, a series of dialogic encounters between a human voice and non-human nature, where ontological questions about being are successively posed. Or, to describe the work's structure in terms of ecopoiesis: the female figure of Thel is continually un-homed, and her uneasy wandering from the Lily to the Cloud to the Clod, and ultimately back to the Vales of Har, represents a crisis of not being able to  *dwell*  on the earth, in the Heideggerean sense. In her dialogues, Thel's "dis-ease" is framed as an inability to accept the physical facts of mortality--that she will become, as Thel complains to the Cloud, but the food of worms in the grave. Moreover, in terms of form and style, the *Book of Thel* critically

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anticipates Blake's later prophetic books, and there is thus an implicit concern with prophetic modes of writing and hermeneutic discourse that intersects with environmental concerns. *The Book of Thel* is the first occasion where Blake uses his iambic septenary line, deliberately echoing the cadence and style of Biblical prophecy. Thel, I claim, can be read as an exploration as well as a modulating critique of Swedenborg's nature, testing out his models of pan-entheistic holism as it questions the very discursivity of reading nature as a kind of speaking, sacred script.

Secondly, I will turn to *Jerusalem* to address how Swedenborg may have affected Blake's peculiar sense of the city as a sacred space. Ecocriticism has been rigorously critiqued for its problematic relationship to the city. In the inaugural studies by Lawrence Buell and Jonathan Bate a certain kind of idyllic pastoralism was often held up as exemplary, a model of environmental agency that valued Wordsworth at home in the Lake District, or Henry David Thoreau musing in his solitude at Walden Pond. In such canonical configurations, the city is often cast in negative terms—an area contaminated by capital and pollution, a “blank confusion,” as Wordsworth famously describes London in the *Prelude*, that was “Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound.”<sup>24</sup> Blake, on the other hand, can be viewed as articulating specific environmental sensibilities within the chaotic dynamism of the modern city, which offers us an opportunity to begin undoing ecocriticism's flawed dialectic of city and country (a construct that, ever since Raymond Williams, we know is overloaded with ideological maskings and implications). To understand Blake's innovative recovery of urban space, it is useful to turn to the figure of the flâneur as it has been mobilized by ecocriticism. It has often gone unremarked how Swedenborg was a part of the formation of this metropolitan type, where dilatory seeing

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<sup>24</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 2008), 485.

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becomes a kind of political act, and the meandering observer finds in the urban environment “a colportage of space,” in Walter Benjamin’s words—an unraveling and distribution of social secrets paved over by time. “Space winks at the flâneur,” writes Benjamin, “What do you think may have gone on here?”<sup>25</sup> Keeping Blake in mind as a kind of proto-flâneur, I will turn to the representation of the city in *Jerusalem*, and consider how Swedenborg is part of the construction of what we might call an urban environmental poetic. If Blake can be read as engaging ecological flânerie—as Buell was one of the first to argue—this opens a new way of “seeing” the presence of London in *Jerusalem*. Ultimately, Blake’s vision of London as the New Jerusalem hinges on an expansion and creative adaptation of Swedenborg’s *Magnus Homo*, the macrocosmic figure of the universe.

But first, it is necessary to sketch the convoluted and contentious course of Blake’s engagement with Swedenborg. This provides a necessary historical template that will ground the narrowing of focus on *Thel* and *Jerusalem*. A key text in charting this relationship will be *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), as this represents Blake’s most comprehensive and systematic critique of Swedenborgian ideas. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is also pertinent for its fusion of environmental and political concerns into a kind of continuum. The closing lines of the liberating “Song of Liberty” at the text’s end, after declaring in well-known lines how “Empire is no more!”, Blake informs the reader: “For every thing that lives is Holy.” As Hutchings has written, Blake’s holiness “might be conceived... as an affirmation of a vast (w)holism which sees all entities as vitally interconnected and interdependent.”<sup>26</sup> If anything, this

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<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), 418-419.

<sup>26</sup> Kevin Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake’s Environmental Poetics* (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 66.

chapter contends Swedenborg must be reckoned as part of Blake's blending of the holy into the holistic.

### **Foundations for Grand Things: Blake Reading Swedenborg**

What was it that originally drew Blake to read Swedenborg? Given the scarcity of sources connected to Blake's early years, several generations of bad scholarship have fostered astonishing inaccuracies on this question. Alexander Gilchrist's important early biography, *The Life of William Blake* (1863), claimed that "of all modern men, the engraver's apprentice [Blake] was to grow up likeliest to Emanuel Swedenborg."<sup>27</sup> While perhaps true in certain respects, this encouraged a wild rumor mill about Swedenborg and Blake's early years. Later criticism claimed that Blake's entire family were Swedenborgians, and that they had read the twelve volume *Arcana Caelestia* in its original Latin. Some went further and ventured that the fourteen year old Blake had met the eighty-four year old Swedenborg when he was living in London as an old man, and that Blake and Swedenborg would often walk down the streets talking together.<sup>28</sup> David Erdman's scrupulous archival work debunked most of these legends, and at most, we can know with certainty that Blake's first surviving annotations to Swedenborg cannot be earlier than

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<sup>27</sup> Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, with Selections from His Poems and Other Writings* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Edwin Ellis pushed the Blake family reading the *Arcana* legend in his mis-titled Edwin John Ellis, *The Real Blake; a Portrait Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907), which perhaps fed off of William Butler Yeats inaccurate assertion in 1893 that "Blake was brought up under the influence of Swedenborgian ideas," in William Butler Yeats and Edwin John Ellis, "Memoir of William Blake," in *The Works of William Blake* (New York, 1893), 1. Shortly after Ellis, H.N. Morris made the more extravagant claim that Blake "often met or walked beside the great Emmanuel [sic] Swedenborg, then an old man at eighty-four." Herbert Newall Morris, *Flaxman, Blake, Coleridge, and Other Men of Genius Influenced by Swedenborg: Together with Flaxman's Allegory of the "Knight of the Blazing Cross"* (Philadelphia: R. West, 1976), 32.

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1787, as they reference another Swedenborg text—*The Earths in the Starry Heavens*—that was translated into English for the first time that year. Even earlier, though, Blake had been a subscriber to Reverend Jacob Duché’s *Discourses on Several Subjects* (1779), which indirectly articulated Swedenborgian doctrines without revealing their source. Blake’s friend and fellow engraver, the radical William Sharp, had made the frontispiece for Duché’s book, which featured fully gendered male and female angels (a hallmark of Swedenborg’s angelology).<sup>29</sup> Both Sharp and John Flaxman regularly attended weekly Sunday evening salons about Swedenborg at Duché’s cosmopolitan apartment in Lambeth. Some have speculated it more than likely that either Sharp or Flaxman would have brought Blake along with them, as the circle’s liberal interest in alchemy, mesmerism, and Cabala, as well as its involvement in liberal political projects like the French revolution and abolitionism, would have greatly appealed to Blake.<sup>30</sup> If the majority of scholarship is correct in postulating it was Flaxman who first introduced Swedenborg to Blake, this adds another layer to the story, as Flaxman himself was first encouraged to read the mystic by William Hayley (who, of course, became one of Blake’s most important patrons during the *Milton* years at Felpham). Hayley’s son, Thomas, studied art with Flaxman in Italy, and Flaxman records how Thomas would read Swedenborg aloud to him while they worked together in the studio.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For an account of how Swedenborg impacted the iconography of angels in western art, see H.S. Jansen, “Psyche in Stone: the Influence of Swedenborg on Funerary Art,” in *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision* (West Chester Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 1988), 115-126.

<sup>30</sup> See Alfred J. Gabay, *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2005), 67, as well as Rix, *William Blake*, especially 47-104.

<sup>31</sup> Martha Gyllenhaal, “John Flaxman's Illustrations to Emanuel Swedenborg's Arcana Caelestia.” *Studia Swedenborgiana* 9, no. 4: 1-75.

Whatever the original impetus, Swedenborg surely reinforced Blake's conviction in the absolute power of mind, in the imagination's constructive role in perception. For Swedenborg, heaven was not an otherworldly transcendent realm, but a state of being *within* the self. "Since a human being is a heaven and a world in least form in the image of the greatest," he writes in *Heaven and Hell*, "there is a spiritual world and a natural world within each of us."<sup>32</sup> Echoing this sentiment, Blake similarly tells the reader in *Jerusalem* that "in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven / And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within / In your Imagination."<sup>33</sup>

In 1789, Blake's embrace of Swedenborg culminated in his signing his name to a registry at the First General Conference of the New Church (as the Swedenborgian separatists who broke away from other denominations preferred to call themselves). The registry contained forty-two theological propositions espousing Swedenborgian doctrine, followed by a group of thirty-two resolutions that the attendees of the December 7<sup>th</sup> Conference—William Blake and Catherine Blake included—appended and unanimously assented to.<sup>34</sup> It is the only (surviving) corporate document that Blake is known to have signed.

In addition to the early political radicalism of the Swedenborgians that were gathered at the conference, Blake may have found some particular points in the registry propositions of interest. There was a general concern for the spiritual education of children at the meeting,

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<sup>32</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), no. 90.

<sup>33</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 225.

<sup>34</sup> Though the "W. Blake" is certainly Blake's signature on the Conference roster, some have sloppily assumed that the "C. Blake" was Blake's wife (Peter Akroyd included). David Erdman more discriminatingly points out that "C. Blake could be his mother, his sister or his wife (all Catherines)." Erdman, *Blake*, 253.

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underwritten by a complaint that the present Anglican church was corrupting the minds of the young. Blake, to recall, was keenly involved in the nascent area of children's literature. This is both evident in the ways that his *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *For Children* (1793) dialogue with chapbooks and hymn traditions, as well as in his commissioned illustrations for a collection of children's stories by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1791. Notably, several later visual works by Blake depict moments drawn from Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations" where angels teach children spiritual truths.

The now-lost experimental painting from Blake's 1809 exhibition—"The Spiritual Preceptor," as Blake titled it—illustrated a strange moment from Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* (no. 623), a title which Blake knew as *the Universal Theology*. In Swedenborg's vision, a heavenly teacher and his class of young students in the spiritual world watch three hundred evil, hypocritical clergymen tumble headlong from heaven. As they fall, the clergymen seem to look like dead horses, raining from the sky. The mass of these falling corpses terrifies the little angels, but their instructor calmly assures them that they are simply "correspondences" that symbolize the dead materialism of the ministers which had killed the inner truth of the words of the Bible, and made their "meditations look from a distance like a dead horse."<sup>35</sup> A further (also lost) graphic work by Blake, a drawing alluded to in the memoirs of Caroline Tulk, also depicted a scene of heavenly instruction. Tulk writes how Blake "often made drawings from Swedenborg's Memorable Relations, one of them of a female angel instructing a number of children in the spiritual world."<sup>36</sup> We don't know which memorable relations Tulk might be

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<sup>35</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, trans. John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1998), no. 623.

<sup>36</sup> Bentley, *Blake Records*, 250.

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referring to here; Blake would have certainly read passages in *Heaven and Hell* where the constantly changing plants and flower gardens of heaven become modes of instruction for the angels, rather than simply books or rote methods of memorization.<sup>37</sup> Swedenborg's angels thus live out Blake's sentiment in "The Auguries of Innocence"—that heaven really was in a wild flower, and holding it could teach you "Infinity / And Eternity in an Hour."<sup>38</sup>

These lines strike modern ears as cloying and saccharine. Yet, for the ecocritic, they retain an interest for their figuration of Nature as an active, poetic metaphor for truth. In Swedenborg, landscape is dynamic, wholly responsive to the minds of the perceptive observers. Foul theological perversion becomes dead horseflesh, in this moment from the memorable relation that Blake chose to paint, or the glory of God becomes a flower-garden. In a corrupt and fallen world that was destroying the minds of children, locking them into the "mind forged manacles" of repressive institutions, as Blake's poem "London" puts it, Swedenborg's presentation of heavenly instruction must have seemed an enchanting alternative. Blake later grumbled to Henry Crabb Robinson that "there is no use in education—I hold it wrong.—It is the great Sin," and that no "education should be attempted except that of cultivation of the imagination and fine arts."<sup>39</sup> These unorthodox sentiments, in context of the explicit pedagogical themes that the lost Swedenborg painting and drawing exhibit, accorded well with the General Conference document that Blake was willing to sign in 1789, and its fear that doctrinaire systems of belief would mean "spiritual death" for children.

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<sup>37</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, no. 489. See the previous discussion regarding this passage on pgs. 24-25.

<sup>38</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 490.

<sup>39</sup> Bentley, *Blake Records*, 540, 316.

1789 also saw the production of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *The Book of Thel*, which some have read as Blake's most overt use of Swedenborgian themes.<sup>40</sup> Yet, within three years Blake would be fiercely repudiating and attacking Swedenborg. He energetically and repeatedly scrawled "Cursed Folly!" into the margins of his copy of Swedenborg's *Divine Providence* (1790), and with the creation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), Blake unleashed a savagely funny satire of the Swedenborgian reform impulse that he was earlier willing to sign his name to at the General Conference. Mimicking Swedenborg's claim that the Apocalypse had occurred in 1757, ushering in a new spiritual era to which Swedenborg's writings had been the primary witness, Blake jauntily crows in the *Marriage*: "As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And Lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up."<sup>41</sup>

What happened? Why this "divorce" from Swedenborg with the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, as some have termed this jeering break? The late 1780's and early 1790's were a turbulent period for the young New Church, riven by internal political struggles and sex scandals—perhaps the perennial problems for any organized religion. In 1790, in a series of bizarre events, Swedenborg's tomb in London had been opened and his body exhumed, twice, to see what had happened to his remains. The first disinterment was undertaken by an eccentric American doctor who was convinced that Swedenborg was not really in his coffin at all because he had drunk a

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<sup>40</sup> Although the title page to *Thel* is dated 1789, there has been critical debate about its probable completion later. See Morris Eaves, et al, "The Book of Thel" in *William Blake: the Early Illuminated Books* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 71. For Swedenborg in the *Songs*, see Kathleen Raine, "The Swedenborgian Songs" in *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), vol. 1. Swedenborg's impact on *Thel* is analyzed by Robert Carr, "Divine Construct and Individual Will: Swedenborgian Theology in *The Book of Thel*," *Colby Library Quarterly* 23(1987): 77-88.

<sup>41</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 34.

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magical elixir of longevity (the doctor was wrong, the body was there, and it smelled awful). The second unearthing was done by members of the founding members of the New Church, who found Swedenborg's body crumbling into ash (which makes the above line from the *Marriage* about Swedenborg at a tomb both biblical and also highly topical).<sup>42</sup> In the *Marriage*, Blake also seems to be responding to the ways that the New Church theologians from the Jacob Duché circle were reading Swedenborg's liberal attitude about sex, and deriving from it a social sanctification for what they called "concubinage"—that it was in God's order, as Augustus Nordenskjöld wrote, if "men are driven so strongly by inborn *amor sexus* that they cannot control themselves, it is inevitable, for the sake of order, that they take a mistress... ."<sup>43</sup> The growing New Church congregation was shocked at what seemed to be an ecclesiastical endorsement of fornication, and in 1790, it promptly withdrew its support from the six leading members who were advocating "concubinage" derived from untranslated portions of Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love*. In the libidinal, bursting energy and erotic mysticism of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's choice of title thus carries a stinging irony, an insider's joke on the contemporary crisis that had shaken and shamed the fledgling New Church, besides its obvious meshing of two Swedenborg titles (*Conjugal Love*—"Marriage Love," as it was often called—with Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*). Paley, among others, has argued that Blake's apparent celebrations of free-love in poems like *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), clearly demonstrate where he would have placed himself in the concubinage debacle, and

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<sup>42</sup> See Paley, "A New Heaven Is Begun'," 64-90.

<sup>43</sup> For half a century, this scandal lay hidden—literally torn out and erased from the record books of the early New Church. For a partial translation of a rare Swedish text on "concubinage" by Augustus Nordenskjöld (one of the ostracized six), see Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Robert Hindmarsh: A Biography* (Philadelphia, Pa: Academy Book Room, 1895).29-30; as well as the excellent analysis in Paley, "A New Heaven Is Begun,'" 78-80.

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shows his growing distance from the official stance of the ever-more conservative Swedenborgians.<sup>44</sup>

The *Marriage* flaunts Blake's deep knowledge of Swedenborg's rhetorical style with a pitch-perfect mimicry of the cadence and rhythm of Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations." Morris Eaves, Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi appropriately note that Blake "mastered Swedenborg's repertory of discourses, narrative strategies, and nuances of tone and mood... he was prepared to compile, compress, and exaggerate them, but also to generate at a deeper level, beyond pastiche, a mock-Swedenborgianism that resists one-to-one comparisons with the source."<sup>45</sup> By the end of Blake's converse "memorable fancies" in the *Marriage*, Swedenborg's volumes have been purged by the corroding fires of hell and revealed to be nothing more than Aristotle's *Analytics*, and the reader is told how "any man of mechanical talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Boehme, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value [to Swedenborg]."<sup>46</sup> All the same, it is a mistake to take the *Marriage* as a wholly derivative parody, as has been the de rigueur position for assuming the text marks Blake's split with Swedenborg. Close attention to Blake's specific sources in Swedenborg greatly complicate reading the *Marriage* as unidirectional satire. For example, Plate 12 of the *Marriage*, where "The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me," loosely reworks a memorable relation that Blake would have read in the *True Christian Religion*. Swedenborg describes recently deceased people who are convinced that the joys of heaven are "feast games and entertainments, followed by more feasts, and so on forever." The spirits are taken to a place where ceaseless dinner parties and erudite

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<sup>44</sup> Paley, "A New Heaven Is Begun," 81.

<sup>45</sup> William Blake, *The Early Illuminated Books*, ed. Morris Eaves, Robert N Essick, and Joseph Viscomi (Princeton, N.J: William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>46</sup> Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 42.

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conversations unfold with Biblical patriarchs. Swedenborg observes people interacting with venerable old people who seem to come from the Old Testament—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—thereby gratifying their conviction that Paradise consisted of an eternal feast with the learned prophets.

This memorable relation provides the immediate specific context for plate 12 of the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In plate 12, the poem's "I" voice meets with Ezekiel and Isaiah, and has their conversation undo the established reading of Hebraic scripture by restoring their prophetic voices to the power of a universal poetic genius. "I saw no God," says Isaiah to the speaker, "but my senses discovered the infinite in everything, and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirmed; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God." Misperception about the nature of revelation is clarified, correcting the problem outlined in the previous plate, that the institution of the "Priesthood" has caused all men to forget that "All deities reside in the human breast." Many—such as Bloom—have taken the sensible step to affirm that this satire correspondingly corrects Swedenborg's own error, his own forgetting that "all deities reside in the human breast." But this assumption must ignore that Swedenborg's memorable relation is itself a parody, and preoccupied with rectifying problems of misperception through the use of irony. The people at Swedenborg's dinner party—and the feast table, we should note, is standard mis-en-scene for the genre of Menippian satire, as Swedenborg would have known—the party attendees are all deluded, and by the end of the narrative, they are groaning for relief from their false fantasies, begging the angels to let them go, farcically clutching at their overstuffed bellies. Swedenborg's respectable Biblical patriarchs at the feast tables turn out to be, he writes, "old men portrayed by actors, many of them country folk who had beards." For parody and satire to

work effectively, it requires an understanding of the textual precedent that the parodic form is operating out of and against. The particularities of Blake's "memorable fancy" suggest a need to look back towards this moment in Swedenborg's *Memorable Relation*—all the more so if, as Joseph Viscomi argues, key portions of the *Marriage* (including this plate) originally composed an anti-Swedenborgian pamphlet deliberately aimed at a New Church audience who would appreciate the subtle finesse of the jokes.<sup>47</sup> When one comes to Swedenborg's original text, it flips into a similar scene of parody, of whimsical delusion. Thus, if Blake has embedded a Swedenborgian parody in plate 12 of *Marriage*, it becomes a parody mirroring a parody.

This recursive doubling productively destabilizes the voices and centers of meaning in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and further shifts the burden of interpretation onto the reader's shoulders. Are we to trust the assertions of the devil in the *Marriage*, if, as many argue, these are carefully distanced from Blake himself? What of the opinions of Ezekiel and Isaiah in plates 12 and 13 (are they, too, as in Swedenborg, disguised simpletons?) Is the "I" voice that talks with the prophets espousing Blake's personal beliefs? Going to the pretext of the banquet scene in *True Christian Religion* complicates matters, as those who converse with the Old Testament patriarchs do turn out to be deluded: Moses and Aaron are really foolish country bumpkins with beards, as Swedenborg dryly observes, as he keeps his detached distance in the background. Swedenborg's dinner party attendees have forgotten the real pleasures of heaven, to be of "use" and put others before the self, as an angel at the end of the memorable relation explains.<sup>48</sup> Within these proliferating, crisscrossing voices, it is wise to recall how Blake responded to a quote on

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Viscomi, "In the Caves of Heaven and Hell: Swedenborg and Printmaking in Blake's *Marriage*," in *Blake in the Nineties*, ed. David Worrall and Steven H. Clark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 28.

<sup>48</sup> Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 36.

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the title page of his copy of *Heaven and Hell*. There, a previous reader had inscribed a short quote from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Blake retorted, "Thus Fools quote Shakespeare The Above is Theseus's opinion Not Shakespeares You might as well quote Satans blasphemies from Milton and give them as Miltons Opinions."<sup>49</sup> Parsing through the voices of the *Marriage* should be done with according caution, and to take account of all the different registers and the problems they pose makes the *Marriage* as a whole perform an important aspect of the prophetic text in that the words are meant to transform its readers into interpreters, and generate new reflexive values rather than confirming ones which already exist.<sup>50</sup> As Rix points out, Swedenborg's exegetical strategies themselves invited differing competing interpretations and were inherently "active forums for debate" for the London reading circles in the 1790's. Before Blake's *Marriage*, then, there was a precedent for critically receiving Swedenborg in a hermeneutical community of dissent.<sup>51</sup>

Blake's active reinscription of Swedenborg's memorable relation into the memorable fancy on plate 11 of the *Marriage* further illustrates his proclamation in the 1809 Descriptive Catalogue that Swedenborg's writings were to be "foundations for Grand Things" created by Painters and Poets. The memorable relation, literally, becomes the ground for Blake's prophetic writing in the *Marriage*. It is a kind of recycling, or composting, of Swedenborg's words into new forms. That Blake implied something almost architectural in Swedenborg as a "foundation" is further suggested by the lines in *Jerusalem* on how the English language is "the rough

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 601.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Anthony Wittreich, *Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 183.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2007), 83.

basement,” out of which “Los built the stubborn structure of the Language, acting against / Albions melancholy, who must else have been a dumb despair.”<sup>52</sup> Language becomes the foundation for a house, a bulwark against the crippling despair of the sick nation-state Albion. Tinged with Swedenborg’s correspondence theory and its evocation of hieroglyphics, words in Blake’s illuminated printings verge on becoming physical things. On the two title pages for *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience*, which Raine has read as refracting a specifically Swedenborgian correspondential color scheme, the words veer away from their literary, semiotic effect into being sheer physical objects, the green limbs of trees where tiny figures are intertwined among their boughs.<sup>53</sup> The words thus embody the tension between text and image so characteristic of Blake: the language has become a physical, graphic thing in itself, apart from abstract signification. Blake’s composite art, in Mitchell’s phrase, becomes most acute in *Jerusalem*, where letters are constantly rooting and spiraling away into vegetative and animal forms of life. As Gigante has forcefully shown, these are not mere doodles or moments of scribal excess, but intrinsic to a larger goal in *Jerusalem* to implode Linnaean systems of static species categorization.<sup>54</sup> The blurring of the boundary between human words and organic things mirrors

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<sup>52</sup> Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 183.

<sup>53</sup> Raine writes of the frontispiece pages for the Songs how “it is not possible to generalize absolutely about Blake’s use of symbolic color, for every copy of his illuminated books is different; but the Piper of *Innocence* is rosy-clad in many copies; and the similar figure of the *Experience* wears blue. Wicksteed makes much of the advancing of the right or left foot of the figures of the Job illustrations and other works; but this, also, certainly derives from Swedenborg, for whom whatever is on the right pertains to wisdom, on the left to love. So we find the rose-clad figure Piper of *Innocence* advancing his left foot and the blue-clad figure of *Experience* his right, for the first is guided by affection, the second by reason.” Kathleen Raine, “The Swedenborgian Songs,” in *Blake and Swedenborg: Opposition is True Friendship* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985), 71-72.

<sup>54</sup> Gigante, *Life*, 114.

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an epigenesist dissolution of life forms themselves. This intention, however, is already evident in *Thel*.

**“A going forth and returning”:** *The Book of Thel*

*THEL'S Motto*

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?  
Or wilt thou go and ask the Mole:  
Can Wisdom be put into a silver rod?  
Or Love in a golden bowl?<sup>55</sup>

The strange questioning motto that opens the *Book of Thel* has generated an astounding number of conflicting answers.<sup>56</sup> The motto, inked in dark green colors in all extant copies (two copies have the additional embellishment of grape vines or touches of blue sky to the lettering) is certainly, if anything, preoccupied with questions of representation and knowing between human and non-human entities. As many further note, the emphasis here on “Love” and “Wisdom” surely reflects Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Wisdom*, which Blake was reading during the creation of *Thel*. Christoph Heppner and Robert Carr have gone further to claim that *Thel* should be read as an exclusive engagement with Swedenborgian theology.<sup>57</sup> David Worrall has ingeniously argued that behind *Thel*’s negative denials lies a complex refutation of a Swedenborgian project to colonize west Africa that Blake would have been aware of in the late

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<sup>55</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Lynn Johnson writes how “almost every conceivable combination of yes and no answers has been attributed to Blake or *Thel* or both” in response to the Motto’s question. Mary Lynn Johnson, “Beulah, 'Mne Seraphim,' and Blake's *Thel*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 69 (1970): 263.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Carr, “Divine Construct and Individual Will: Swedenborgian Theology in *The Book of Thel*,” *Colby Library Quarterly* 23 (1987): 77-88. Christopher Heppner, “A Desire of Being: Identity and *The Book of Thel*,” *Colby Library Quarterly* 13 (1977): 79-98.

1780's.<sup>58</sup> According to Worrall, Thel's shriek that closes the book is specifically a rejection of Swedenborg's doctrine of conjugal love. Worrall builds his case by paying meticulous attention to the historical record of alternative spiritualities that swirled through London in the 1780's, and by basing his argument on the large body of feminist readings of Thel that see her as a willed refusal to take part in patriarchal social hierarchies. Worrall largely relies on a negative reading of gender roles in Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love*, setting this against the cosmopolitan Swedenborgians who wanted to make Swedenborg's conjugal doctrine a constitutional component of a new Abolitionist utopia they dreamed of establishing in Sierra Leone. Even as Thel might operate as a critique of Swedenborgian gender roles, making Thel, in Worrall's words, "Blake's first post-Swedenborgian, post-colonial female," the *Book of Thel* might also embrace certain aspects of Swedenborg's concepts of nature as it explores the problem of dwelling on the earth within an idealist framework that ostensibly pertains to transcend the material.<sup>59</sup>

"Observe the distinction here between Natural & Spiritual as seen by Man." So wrote Blake early on in his annotations to Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*, in a section where Swedenborg emphasized the need to think beyond ideas that are bound by notions of time and space.<sup>60</sup> Nature is dead to the eye, writes Swedenborg, until it is seen as a perpetual emanation of spirit. In his further annotations, Blake positively responds to Swedenborg's theistic epigenesis

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the Swedenborgian abolitionist colony, see Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, Cambridge studies in Romanticism 61 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> David Worrall, "Thel in Africa: William Blake and the Post-Colonial, Post-Swedenborgian Female Subject," in *The Reception of William Blake in the Orient*, ed. Steven H. Clark (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 17-28.

<sup>60</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003), no. 8.

in the sections that present Divine Love as a creationary, circular force that desires to return to itself. “A going forth & a returning,” Blake bracketed in the margins besides this passage. This propelling, vitalistic force creates a ubiquitous link between all beings, sentient and non-sentient, a “ladder of all created things,” as Swedenborg put it.<sup>61</sup> In *Thel*, this becomes re-articulated in Thel’s successive dialogues with the non-human elements of nature around her, where the Lily, Cloud, and Clod consistently place themselves into larger natural networks of exchange and purpose. In plates four and five, the lily that is eaten by the lamb, and its fragrant pollen that is embedded as perfume in honey—a human food—shadows the flow of a simple food chain, from plant to animal to human. Similarly, the symbolic language of the Cloud in plate 5 that describes the cloud’s “unseen descending” onto balmy flowers, followed by the gathering of dews and arising in a golden band, roughly entails a natural cycle of condensation and precipitation. At a literal level, metaphoric language aside, Blake’s Cloud accounts for its ontological purpose within the natural processes that made it. In an echo of “every thing that lives is holy!” that would soon appear in the *Marriage and Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, the Cloud sermonizes to Thel how “Everything that lives, Lives not alone, nor for itself, ” and that “we live not for ourselves.”<sup>62</sup> Each nonhuman voice in the poem finds itself subordinate to larger, interconnected wholes.

Some scholars—Worrall among them—have pinpointed Swedenborg’s doctrine of use behind these pithy platitudes, and in Thel’s rejection of the Cloud’s words, an implicit critique from Blake that differed with Swedenborg’s claim that the goal of nature and creation was a series of interlocking purposes and useful functions. “Nothing can be created,” wrote

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., no. 66.

<sup>62</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 5.

Swedenborg, “that is not useful. If it is to be useful, it must be for the sake of others.”<sup>63</sup>

Swedenborg’s principle of creation is thus essentially self-sacrificing, *agape*-love. I am not so sure we can stabilize a criticism of this ethos in the figure of Thel and her reactions, however, given the ways that Blake assigns positive value to similar statements about “annihilating Selfhood” in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Most of the feminist accounts of the *Book of Thel* have also relied on a positive identification with Thel as a young woman who discovers the power and predilection of her sexualized body within patriarchy.<sup>64</sup> Her negations are affirmative refusals to participate in gendered hierarchies, a resistance that opens up space for agency and subjectivity. Such an identification would moreover seem to be the case if Thel constitutes Blake’s earliest reworking of a Miltonic Eve figure, a reading that Robert Waxler has hazarded.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Thel might not just be a reworking of Milton’s Eve, but Swedenborg’s as well. Blake’s descriptions of Thel, that she is “like a parting cloud,” and “like a faint cloud” have their closest affinity, word for word, in Swedenborg’s descriptions of Eve in the *Worship and Love of God*. In Swedenborg’s prose poem, where Adam erotically dreams of his beautiful, future spouse, Eve is “like a bright cloud” who “fled from him, seeming to elude his touch and endeavor.” Later, Eve’s perceptual uncertainty is described by an angelic intelligence as “a kind of little cloud floating in light.”<sup>66</sup> Thel’s enigmatic name further suggests Swedenborg, as one of its possible

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<sup>63</sup> Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, no. 308.

<sup>64</sup> For a very smart reading against this grain of *Thel* as “an allegory of psychosexual development,” see Marjorie Levinson, ““The Book of Thel” by William Blake: A Critical Reading,” *ELH* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 287-303.

<sup>65</sup> Robert P. Waxler, “The Virgin Mantle Displaced: Blake’s Early Attempt,” *Modern Language Studies* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 45-53.

<sup>66</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God: In Three Parts*, 1st ed. (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996), no. 87, 93.

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valences opens up from the Greek word for “will,” “wish” or “desire.”<sup>67</sup> In Swedenborg’s theology, the human will, or selfhood, is the source of evil and our suffering, as it stands at an opposite to the universality of Divine Love (indeed, there could even be a further twist of meaning here and intentional pun on “Will” as the short nickname for William Blake: TheL literally names his own selfish self). As Swedenborg writes in *Heaven and Hell*

We are actually born into total evil as far as our wills our concerned, wishing well but no one but ourselves; if we wish well to ourselves alone, we are delighted when harm comes to others, especially when it is to our advantage... . To correct and reform this kind of intent, we are given the ability to understand things that are true and to use them to control the evil urges that well up from the will.<sup>68</sup>

Blake was particularly struck by this passage, and he wrote in response inside the flyleaf of his copy of *Heaven and Hell*:

There can be no Good-Will. Will is always Evil It is pernicious to others or selfish If God is any thing he is understanding He is the Influx from that into the Will Thus Good to others or benevolent Understanding can [?&?does] Work [?harm] ignorantly but can ?the Truth [be ?evil] because Man is only Evil [when he wills untruth]. H[eaven] & Hell Chapter 425.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Φελω. However, “thel” refuses to remain as a one-to-one correlation to this word for desire in Greek, and invokes a host of other associations, including “female,” “nipple” “flesh” and “gentle.” It could also relate to Thalia (Φαλλειν), a muse of pastoral poetry and a guide to alchemical secrets who appears in Renaissance esoteric texts. See the discussion by Eaves, Essick and Viscomi in Blake, *The Early Illuminated Books*, 79.

<sup>68</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard*, no. 424.

<sup>69</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 602.

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These annotations are significant for demonstrating that via his reading in Swedenborg, Blake was already working through a critique of the self, long in advance of its fuller articulations in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. If Thel stands as a figure of these limiting and negative aspects of human will, caution should thus be taken in projecting her as the locus and voice for Blake's own criticisms (of Swedenborg, of Neoplatonism, of patriarchy). From an ecocritical perspective, Thel could be read as a figure of anthropomorphic arrogance that comes about when the human will refuses to take part in larger systemic exchanges between the earth and its creatures, and thinks—selfishly—only about itself. As Thel complains in the text, "I fade away, And all shall say, without a use this shining woman liv'd." Thel fails precisely where Blake's Milton triumphs in glory. In Blake's poem, Milton loses his selfhood and literally dissolves into the autographic figure of Blake writing the poem, so that the two poets become merged as one within the text. In the *Book of Thel*, by contrast, the title character finds herself replicated and redoubled in a multiple of proliferating Thels. She often refers to herself in the third person—"But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun," and in the strangest final part of the poem, Thel visits her own grave, and listens to her own disembodied cry "voicing sorrow from the hollow pit." The end of the *Book of Thel* is a moment of self-haunting—and indeed, the last lines where "The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek" has an almost campy tone to it, as if Blake were cribbing lines from a stereotypical Gothic novel. The end is also fully anticipated by the title page of the poem, where the bending of a tree (a willow?) that encases the words evokes the shape and form of a gravestone.

If this title page foreshadows Thel's selfish dead-end, it is interesting to juxtapose its imagery with the large title-page ornament that appeared in Swedenborg's *Divine Love and*

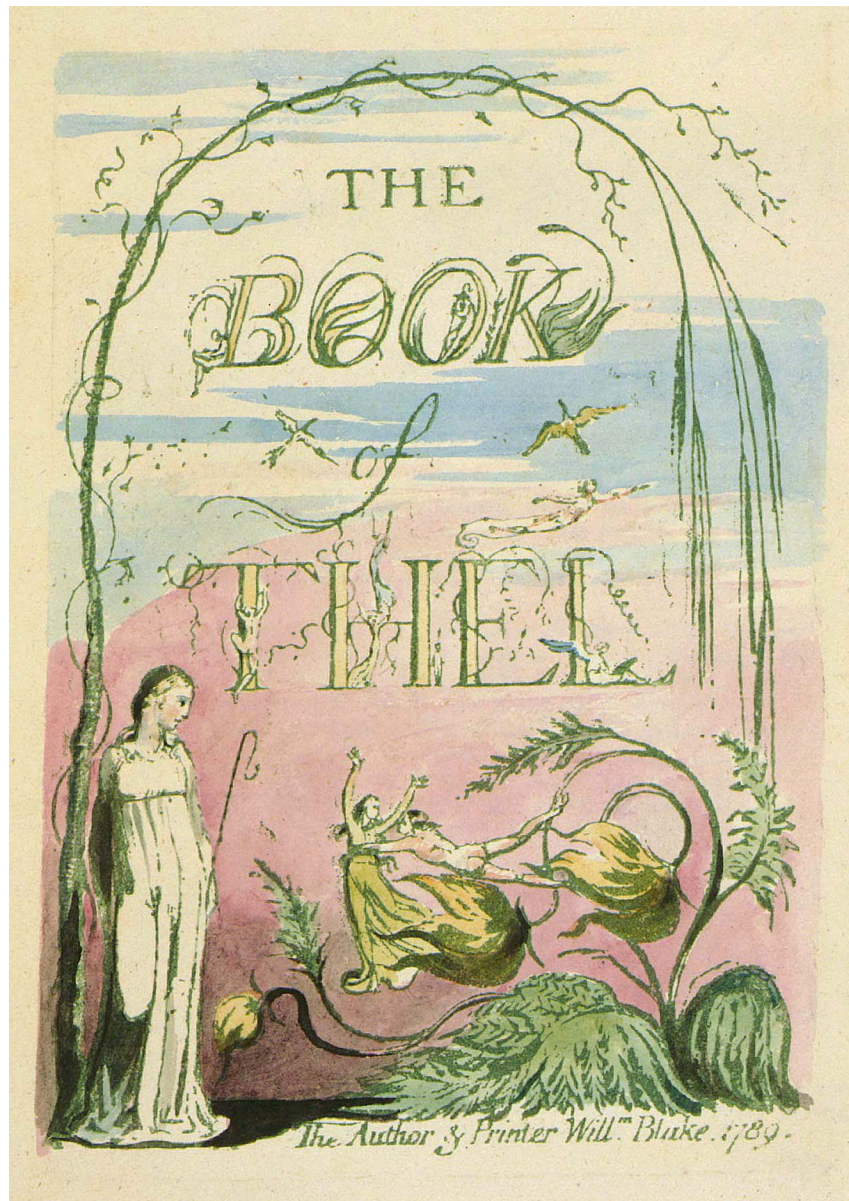
*Wisdom* when it was first published in Latin in 1763. The large ornamental engraving was almost certainly drawn and designed by Swedenborg himself, as Blake may have known through hearsay (an aspect that would have surely appealed to Blake as an engraver himself). It was apparently one of Swedenborg's favorite typographical ornaments as it serially recurs on the title-pages of seven other theological works, thus increasing the great likelihood that Blake would have seen it at one point or another.<sup>70</sup> The frontispiece seems, at first glance, to be standard Baroque iconography. An ordered garden proceeds along an avenue of trees with a spurting fountain at the center, and a Renaissance style palace sits in the background. In the fore, a male cherub waters and tends to a profusion of growing, blooming flowers, thus embodying the Latin motto that scrolls over the decorative foliage: *CURA ET LABORE*, "with care and work."

The specific images of the frontispiece accrue deeper relevance to Swedenborg's philosophical and theological preoccupations when they are situated in a broader iconographic tradition of fountains and depictions of garden waterworks in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Swedenborg's ornament, the fountain is the main structural organizing unit of the composition, occupying the center of the image. It is a focal point to which the eye is naturally drawn by the symmetrical geometry of the avenue of trees and the palace in the back. As Simon Schama has brilliantly demonstrated, the symbolic tradition of the *fons sapientiae*, or fountain of wisdom, acquired a unique cultural status in the late Renaissance, becoming a site where esoteric wisdom "was conceived, visualized, and eventually, in the gardens and parks of Renaissance villas, actually designed as a basin of moving water."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Jonathan Rose, "The Ornaments in Swedenborg's Theological First Editions," *Covenant: A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Five Churches* 1 (1998): 293-363.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995), 267.



William Blake, *The Book of Thel* (Copy H, 1789), Plate 2  
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, William Blake Archive



Titlepage ornament that appeared in Swedenborg's first editions of *Doctrina Novae Hierosolymae de Domino* (1763); *Doctrina Novae Hierosolymae de Scriptura Sacra* (1763); *Doctrina Novae Hierosolymae de Fide* (1763); *Continuatio de Ultimo Judicio* (1763); *Sapientia Angelica de Divino Amore et de Divina Sapientia* (1763); *Sapientia Angelica de Divina Providentia* (1764); and *Apocalypsis Revelata* (1766).

Image reproduced by kind courtesy of the New Church History Project,  
Glencairn Museum, Bryn Athyn, PA.

Much more than simply a garden folly of leisure for the rich or royal, the programmatic landscaping and structure of late-Renaissance waterworks reflected symbolic programs about “the deep and occult principles of creation” that often carried, just below their surface, much older “ancient associations of life, death, and transcendental wisdom [about water] that the Egyptian myths had passed to the West.”<sup>72</sup> Particularly in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Schama notes, the emergent mystique of Egyptian hieroglyphics became entwined around a discourse of fountains and sacred rivers that hearkened back to the ancient symbolism of the Nile and Jordan rivers. Swedenborg was very likely aware of the popular *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (The Dream of Poliphilus), written by Francesco Colonna in 1499, that had ignited the Renaissance garden craze for fountains. The *Hypnerotomachia* also featured a series of reflections on the occult power of hieroglyphic images that were occasionally portrayed in woodcut images accompanying the text.<sup>73</sup>

Rather than arguing for any kind of visual symmetry or lateral lines of influence between the iconography of Swedenborg’s ornament and the *Book of Thel*, there is nonetheless a piquant contrast when Swedenborg and Blake’s title pages are placed side-by-side. *Divine Love and Wisdom* displays a kind of work ethic and subordination of the self: it is only through *cura et labore* that the garden of the mind can be grown, and we find paradise blooming within. The *fons sapientiae* is not an actual fountain, but Swedenborg’s text itself that offers the reader its heavenly secrets about creation. Like Swedenborg’s garden, the iconography of Thel’s title page

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>73</sup> The authorship of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* has been debated, as there were two Francesco Colonnas who could have been the writer mentioned on the title page. Confusingly, a third Francesco Colonna does indeed appear in Swedenborg’s library as the author of *Histoire naturelle de l’univers* (1734), but he seems to have no direct connection to the earlier Renaissance Colonnas, one of whom wrote the *Hypernerotmachia*.

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also evokes the Baroque and the pastoral. Thel is holding a shepherd's crook among the greenery, for example—although there is also a dark hint of violence, if not sexual violation, in the naked figure who flies out of the pasque flower to grab at a clothed woman.

If we submit the figure of Thel to a kind of negative critical reading (rather than reading her as the locus of positive political critique) what then happens to the other voices she encounters in the poem, the actual Worm, Lily, Cloud and Clod? Morris Eaves, Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi have written how Swedenborg's correspondence theory that finds symmetry between the spiritual and natural is highly "relevant to Thel's attempts to learn transcendent truths from natural creatures."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Swedenborg's correspondences that transformed nature into a sacred text seem further implied by the graphics on the title page of *Thel*, where the letters are naturalized into organic, twisting forms. The tiny figures that twine and wrap themselves around the typography and greenery are sometimes indistinguishable from either, underscoring the text's preoccupation with questions about the human and the non-human and the role that language plays in mediating between the two. Are we part of nature, the ambiguity foregrounds, or distinct from it? This ambivalence further plays itself out in the text where nonhuman entities are often given human visages, such as the worm lying on the ground in plate 6.

Despite the strong visual cues on the title page that suggest a correspondential structure, a sacred language of nature to learn wisdom from, Thel fails in her interpretive task and remains stuck within a hermeneutics of suspicion that keeps her bound to the limits of herself. Her flight at the end back to the vales of Har draws a regressive looping circuit around the narrative, and forecloses an acceptance of her body's own mortality—and capacity for pleasure—upon the

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<sup>74</sup> Blake, *The Early Illuminated Books*, 78.

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earth. This return to Har might also be a pointed reflection on the pastoral genre as a whole if, as Hutchings writes, Blake “suspected the pastoral ideal, regarding it as a political fiction subserving and perpetuating an oppressive hegemonic order.”<sup>75</sup>

But this claustrophobic hermeneutic circle might be, paradoxically, where *The Book of Thel* has its most potent power for ecocriticism. Kate Rigby has recently revisited Heidegger’s influential claims for poetry, and his specific argument for how the poetic relates to both dwelling and *poiesis*, or making in the world. Rigby argues that for anyone seriously interested in an environmental mode of criticism, these issues in Heidegger remain central and unavoidable, even as the heritage of his conceptual toolbox is problematic (notwithstanding, of course, the other problem about the links that exist between Heidegger’s *Heimat*, nature aesthetics, and fascist blood-and-soil ideology). In particular, Rigby claims, Heidegger’s emphasis on human language’s salvatory potential, his belief that the poetic offers us the highest, purest kind of subjective agency, is ultimately an anthropocentric and over-determined position to assume. Rigby argues that our critical discourse about ecopoiesis needs a new kind of “negative poetics” as a corrective: one that begins by first acknowledging the representational failure of word and thing, text and place. The work of art can only begin to help us save the earth by ultimately disclosing the earth as un-sayable, and by the artwork signaling its own status as a text which enframes the natural world as a representation. Rigby takes pains to clarify that her negative poetics is not another variation on deconstruction, or reflecting a typical post-structuralist skepticism towards language as a system of representation. It’s rather about an

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<sup>75</sup> Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake’s Environmental Poetics*, 84.

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excess of beauty and phenomenological plenitude that opens up an aesthetic gap. Rigby writes in a particularly eloquent passage,

For Heidegger, we are called to respond to the call of the other; yet, it is only in the noncorrespondence of response to that call that we remain open to that which addresses us in an other, who or which is, as such, irreducible to the self. [The aesthetic object's] failing is thus neither a contingent deficit nor a regrettable imperfection. It is the very event of a wound by which our existence is altered and opened, and becomes itself the site of the manifestation of what it responds to. It is this very woundedness of our song, our recognition of its inadequacy, which necessitates and affirms a plurality of voices. For if no one can say it all, then we are all called upon to participate in our own way, in the chorus and polyphony of responses...<sup>76</sup>

Thel's failure to read correspondentially the book of nature would seem to enforce precisely this kind of disjuncture. Because she doesn't listen and see, and never takes to heart the morals of the story about dwelling and the usefulness of biological place within larger systems of natural uses, the nonhuman voices in the story resist becoming simply emblems or preaching allegories. The *Book of Thel* is not transparent, but becomes progressively more opaque. The unspeaking materiality of the Lily, Clod, Cloud, and Worm, as actual discrete objects and embodied things is suggested, and Thel's dissatisfaction at the end is precisely the point: it raises a question about Thel's projection of her conscious state onto the world around her, the way the natural world is made to reflect and represent her subjectivity. It is striking that the one personified aspect of nature that doesn't speak in the poem, the human-headed worm pictured on plate 6, provokes a

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<sup>76</sup> Kate Rigby, "Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis," *New Literary History* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 437.

kind of perceptual bafflement from Thel. We can hear her waver, undecided, about how to apprehend this non-human thing lying before her that she immediately seeks to turn into a more abstract image or representation. “Art thou a Worm?” she asks, “image of weakness, art thou but a worm? I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lily’s leaf. Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked: weeping.”<sup>77</sup> Thel’s uncertainty in the relation between seeing and knowing lays bare a basic perceptual problem regarding the relationship of mind to matter, the excess of materiality for the words that try to capture and re-present nature. Just like little worms, clods of clay, clouds and lilies can’t *really* speak to humans, unless our minds and imaginations will them to speak. To return to the beginning of the *Book of Thel*, the motto that opens the text—Does the Eagle know what is in the pit? Or wilt thou go ask the Mole: Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod, and Love in a Golden Bowl?—might propose by its very unanswered, open formulation, a kind of negative poetics that refuses to equate animals with our ideas that are made-up of words. Eagles and moles are not analogous to questions of wisdom and love except, perhaps, when the metaphor-making power of art is able to enclose them within the same frame, even as it suggests their ultimate incommensurability.

Thel’s circular journey from the lily to the cloud, from the worm to the clod of clay, to the grove and then back to the Vales of Har also repeat the movements of a pilgrimage, as Kathryn Barush has brilliantly pointed out.<sup>78</sup> The tightly structured route of a pilgrimage where one moves from station to station, gathering accretive spiritual credit and wisdom, evokes a further iconographic echo from Swedenborg’s frontispiece to the *Divine Love and Wisdom*, as the

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<sup>77</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Kathryn Barush, “Upon the Spanish Mountains, Jerusalem’: the Role of St. Teresa of Avila in William Blake’s Visual Pilgrimage Narratives” (presented at the Romantic Realignments, Oxford University, 2009).

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spatial phenomenology of the Renaissance garden fountain was specifically designed to function as a kind of pilgrimage. As Schama further discusses, walkers would progress from fountain-to-fountain, or fountain-to-grotto, in a didactic scheme that illustrated Renaissance natural philosophy and Classical concepts about the creation of the world. “As in [Colonna’s] *Hypnerotomachia*, fountains were conceived as stations en route to illumination, often connected by lines of water that mapped the progress of a visitor along a strictly predetermined and allegorically saturated path.”<sup>79</sup> If Thel’s negative poetics are a partial refusal to endorse a Swedenborgian view of nature where all beings are patterned into overlapping systems of mutual use and utility, this defeated loop of her pilgrimage—she returns, after all, to Har not having learned anything transformative from her peregrinations—stands in sharp contrast to the open, free movement of the poetic body in *Jerusalem*, where the chants and calls of Los as he winds through the streets of London are the redemptive means for founding the Holy City in England’s Green and Pleasant Land. The poetic activity becomes the beginning of a new urban space. The circumference of this holy city is determined by the movements of the flâneur, the wandering voice that maps out London, giving us a cartography of the chartered streets.

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<sup>79</sup> Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 275.

**Walking the Streets of Woe:  
Blake and the New Jerusalem**

Lawrence Buell was one of the first to note the environmental implications of the flâneur in his 2001 book, *Writing for an Endangered World*. While Buell stipulates that the first systematic treatments of the city as a biosystem using the flâneur are found in the very different projects of Walt Whitman and Charles Dickens, he argues that Blake critically anticipates these later writings. Before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Buell writes, “perhaps only in Blake’s *Jerusalem* does a major work of Anglophone literature attend to the minutiae of city life, and then only at intervals, with anything like an ‘ecological’ sense of interconnectedness between observer and observed, people and landscape.”<sup>80</sup> Buell’s model of the flâneur is largely informed by, unsurprisingly, the monumental work of Walter Benjamin in the *Arcades Project*.

Benjamin also underlies the more recent accounts of the Romantic metropolis in James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin’s eponymous collection. Chandler and Gilmartin argue, rather convincingly, that the specificities of 19<sup>th</sup> century London life played a far greater role in forming a typology of the flâneur than Benjamin’s francophilic focus on Paris allows for.<sup>81</sup> It is worth also noting that some of the flâneur’s roots lie in several Swedenborgian concepts buried beneath the tangled forest of quotations that forms the bulk of the *Arcades Project*. There, a number of Benjamin’s key flâneur quotations revolve around passages culled from Honore Balzac and Charles Baudelaire that contain overt Swedenborgian themes: namely, in the case of Balzac,

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<sup>80</sup> Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>81</sup> James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, “Introduction: Engaging the Eidometropolis,” in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6-7.

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excerpts and commentary on the novels *Louis Lambert* and *Seraphita*, and Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences," from the *Flowers of Evil*. Lynn Wilkinson has written extensively on the ways that Swedenborg's theory of correspondence became adapted and transformed by these French authors into a specifically urban form of literary language and poetics. These readings and misreadings of Swedenborg's correspondence theory caused, Wilkinson writes, "the interiority of the visionary individual to be associated with the hidden places and interiors of the city, and the unknowable God with the mysterious resonance of objects in the city, a resonance which suggests a lost experience of unity and wholeness."<sup>82</sup> Further, Wilkinson astutely notes that Swedenborg's writings themselves are filled with references to cities and urban spaces, and in context of the spiritual visions that surround these descriptions, this constitutes an important if overlooked component of what Wilkinson calls "the representation of the city as psychological." According to Wilkinson, this use of Swedenborg reached an acme with Honoré de Balzac's Paris in *La comédie humaine*, where Swedenborg's concept of correspondence and hieroglyph

is closely related to the novelist's representation of the city in terms of an organism which preserves the myths and life forms of different epochs in its strata...

Swedenborgian doctrines form an important part of the novelist's attempt to endow the disparate objects of city life with a sense of a sacred wholeness, or what Walter Benjamin has called an *aura*.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, there might be something akin to *flânerie* in Swedenborg's work itself. The complex inter- and intratextuality that forms a dense inferential web demands a deliberate "slow-

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<sup>82</sup> Lynn Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 151.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

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reading,” as the last chapter took up. The reading effect can be as dizzying as it is exhausting, and requires a reading strategy that cuts across time and place—something that, we might note, Blake’s work also enforces, with its serial repetition of certain phrases, mythical characters, and even stock images that reappear at different locations, often with radically different valences and meanings accrued (not to mention the proliferation of differing copies of the same work that demands simultaneous comparisons). Both Blake and Swedenborg created complex textual corpuses that are uniquely exploitable in a digital age where negotiating thick textual spaces is greatly aided by the simultaneity of digital editions with hypertext and other features.<sup>84</sup>

Paul Valery, another Parisian writer with a marked influence on Benjamin, found reading Swedenborg to be a vertiginous experience. Although Valery does not directly use the word “flâneur,” his description of reading Swedenborg comes close to Benjamin’s description of flânerie in the *Arcades Project* as something hallucinatory and maze-like, with a particular emphasis on the faculty of vision (and vision as visionary). Valery writes

I approached [Swedenborg] without knowing that I was pushing on into an enchanted forest where every step stirred up ideas that flew up like unexpected birds, where shimmering hypotheses, echoes, and psychological chases ran together at every crossroad, and where the eye glimpses mysteriously renewed vistas, in the midst of which the hunter seeking rational answers gets encouraged, lost, and then finds the tracks again,

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example, the special volume of Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Digital Designs on Blake: <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/designsonblake/about.html>.

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only to lose it from sight... I love [this] hunt for its own sake, and there are few hunts so captivating and changing as the hunt for the Mystery of Swedenborg.<sup>85</sup>

Although as stated in the opening chapter, the old myth about Swedenborg walking through London streets with a young Blake thus contains a kernel of symbolic truth to it, suggesting the labyrinthine attributes Blake would have read in Swedenborg's Dante-esque wanderings through heaven and hell. The actual shape of London city streets often ghosts Swedenborg's descriptions in the spiritual world with an unusual topographical specificity. He writes, for example, how

London [in the spiritual world] appears similar to London in the world in its streets and districts, but not similar as regards its houses and dwellings. The dissimilarity is not apparent, however, because everyone there dwells in a section of it and in a house corresponding to his affection and consequent thought. The center of the city is where the Exchange is. To the right, there, lives the governor, and in the surrounding area his officials. The central thoroughfare of the city is Holborn. Ahead, there, is the east; behind, extending in the direction of Wapping, is the west. The south lies to the right of that street, and the north to its left. In the eastern section, which stretches far and extends for a considerable distance outside the city, live the best of the inhabitants. They worship the Lord there... to the south of them in and around the piece of ground where Moorfields is located is a dissolute throng. All who incline to evils are banished from the city to that

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<sup>85</sup> This is from Valery's 1936 introduction to Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: the Development of His Thought* (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2008), xi. Valery's "enchanted forest" in Swedenborg moreover seems to evoke deliberately the first stanza of Baudelaire's famous "Correspondance": "Nature is a temple where living pillars / Let sometimes emerge confused words; / Man crosses it through forests of symbols / Which watch him with intimate eyes." Charles Baudelaire, Geoffrey Wagner, *Charles Baudelaire Selected Poems* (Falcon Press, 1947).

locale, and therefore those people are from time to time cast out, and this continually. By that process the city is constantly purged, and those who are led away from there are never seen again.<sup>86</sup>

As Swedenborg's translators and commentators have pointed out, the above description inverts, as if it was a cartographical mirror, the real geography of London. Moorfields is actually to the north of the city, not to the south, and so on. Other descriptions of cities in Swedenborg's spiritual world are rarely given this kind of specificity. Further suggesting that London left a unique imprint on Swedenborg, sections of his spiritual diary attempt to sketch out a psychic geography of urban space in small maps. This spatial sense, I would argue, was distinctly shaped by a habit of wandering and meandering akin to *flânerie*. Swedenborg figures his presence as much in a long vision of London where he "wanders" and "rambles" around London districts, watching several buildings "sink into the ground" like "a flood subsiding" due to their evil inhabitants.<sup>87</sup>

When we turn to the figure of the *flâneur* in Blake's epics that anticipates the modern metropolis, and consider the role that Swedenborg may have played in forming an ecopoetics, the *flâneur* is thus more than an appropriate coincidence. Its very ideological formations were partially shaped by the maze of Swedenborgian texts that Blake had also read.

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<sup>86</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, "The Last Judgment," in *Posthumous Theological Works*, vol. 1, Standard ed. (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 1996), no. 292.

<sup>87</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Diary, Recounting Spiritual Experiences During the Years 1745 to 1765*, 1st ed. (Bryn Athyn, Pa: General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1998), no. 5016.



Swedenborg's diagram of the city of Babylon in the spiritual world.  
Swedenborg's *Experientiae Spirituales* manuscript, Royal Academy of Sciences, Stockholm  
Photograph by Devin Zuber

Moreover, the flâneur emerges from a 19<sup>th</sup> century habit of reading and transposing the mystic's visionary theology that inhered to French authors associated with Symbolism, that subsequently becomes transmitted by Benjamin into the *Arcades Project*.

The long lists of London place names in *Jerusalem* carefully map out Blake's own movements as an inveterate London walker. The freedom and mobility of Blake's body is a potential vector for political agency against the "chartered streets" bemoaned in "London," a poem that registers the pressures of privatization (the "charter'd Thames" and "charter'd street") and repressive law that threatened the fragile public sphere of late 18<sup>th</sup> century British culture. As Rebecca Solnit reminds us, "the word citizen has to do with cities, and the ideal city is organized around citizenship—around participation in public life."<sup>88</sup> Solnit further claims that the freedom of movement in cities, especially London, gave birth "in the eighteenth-century city to a new image of what it means to be human... an image of one possessed of the freedom and isolation of the traveler, and travelers, however wide or narrow their scope, became emblematic figures."<sup>89</sup> This is a spirit we can readily locate in Blake, not only in his texts' intimations of flânerie but visually, in Blake's repeating images of travelers and walking figures, from the old man with the walking stick that appears in "London" and the "Death's Door" series, to the elaborate picture of Los that opens *Jerusalem*, where his broad hat and clothes indicate he is a rambling London night watchman. But Blake's lists of London place-names in *Jerusalem*, however, is immediately complicated by the ways they become overlaid with references to Biblical place-names. Blake's "Highgate Heights and Hampsteads" fluidly slips into the geography of Canaan and Jerusalem, as if Blake were mashing a cartography of the Holy Land onto England. If we bear in mind

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<sup>88</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000), 176.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

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Blake's internalization of Swedenborgian hermeneutics, and that for Swedenborg, these Biblical names are not just words, but deep spiritual correspondences that opened channels of communication to heaven, the walking and place-naming functions as a kind of re-enchantment of place, a transformative sacrilization of the city of London into the New Jerusalem through the activity of walking, speaking, and writing. Here is the figure of Los in the second chapter, in plate 45, engaged in a kind of flânerie as he searches for the human form in the streets of London:

But Los searched in vain: clos'd from the minutia he walked, difficult.  
He came down from Highgate thro Hackney & Holloway towards London  
Till he came to old Stratford & thence to Stepney & the Isle  
Of Leuthas Dogs, thence thro the narrows of the Rivers side  
And saw every minute particular, the jewels of Albion, running down  
The kennels of the streets & lanes as if they were abhorred.  
[...] Among the winding places of deep contemplation intricate  
To where the Tower of London frownd dreadful over Jerusalem:  
A building of Luvah builded in Jerusalems eastern gate to be  
His secluded Court: thence to Bethlehem where was builded  
Dens of despair in the house of bread: enquiring in vain  
Of stones and rocks he took his way, for human form was none:  
And thus he spoke, looking on Albion's City with many tears.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 194.

The enjambment in these last lines is deliciously ambiguous: “Enquiring in vain // Of Stones and rocks he took his way, for human form was none.” It could be a literal description of Los moving his way among stones and rocks below the ominous silhouette of the Tower of London, symbol of state oppression, but it equally implies that Los directly addresses the stones and rocks with his question, asking them for a human form.

The latter is keeping with the poem’s overall deconstruction of the very terms of what it is to be human. When London is ultimately redeemed at the end of *Jerusalem*, the last page of the poem tells us that in the new holy city, “All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all // Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied.”<sup>91</sup> The transformation of London into Jerusalem requires an ethical identification with non-human nature: a caring for trees, the metal, the earth, and the stone, as if they were part of a human family. This becomes cosmically configured in the preface to Chapter two in *Jerusalem*, in one of Blake’s only overt references to the Kabbalah. “You have a tradition,” he writes ostensibly “To the Jews,” “that Man anciently containd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth: this you received from the Druids. But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion.”<sup>92</sup> Blake’s capitalization of Man also suggests Swedenborg’s *Magnus homo*, or Grand Man, that itself could have derived from Kabbalistic lore about the Primal Man (or Adam Kadmon) who once contained all human souls within its frame.<sup>93</sup> *Jerusalem* proceeds as an

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<sup>91</sup> Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 258.

<sup>92</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 171.

<sup>93</sup> Schuchard’s claim that Swedenborg was deeply familiar with the Kabbalah should be regarded cautiously for reasons outlined earlier (see pgs. 49-51). See Marsha Keith Schuchard, “Leibniz, Benzelius, and the Kabbalistic Roots of Swedish Illuminism,” in *Leibniz, Mysticism, and Religion*, ed. Allison P. Coudert (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 84-106. More balanced perspectives are offered by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Emanuel Swedenborg, the Jews,

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attempt to unite this shattered holistic vision of the universe as a micro-macrocosmic analogy. What distinguishes Blake's project further from both Kabbalah's Adam Caedmon and Swedenborg's *Magnus homo* is both its inclusion of creatures and animals into this singular, spiritual body, and the deliberately urban overtones *Jerusalem* gives to the body's (re)composition. The "All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone" that triumphantly closes chapter four is preceded by a page with creatures that creep and crawl around the margins and borders of the text. These creatures partially illustrate a line in the plate where Blake describes witnessing a panoply of starry, flaming creatures, especially "a wonderous Serpent clothed in gems & rich array" that is "humanized" by Jehovah's forgiveness of sins. Here, the pictured snail, frog, worm, spider, and serpent are all creatures that normally carry negative symbolism, and Blake's "wonderous Serpent" that sprawls across the top of the page bears a parallel with the sea serpents in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which the Mariner mistakenly curses and then must learn to bless. Blake, like Coleridge, deliberately undoes Jehovah's cursing of the serpent that occurs in the second chapter of Genesis.

But Blake's creaturely inclusion is not only theological. If we follow Gigante's claims, the impulse to identify with non-human beings evinces Blake's use of epigenesis and vitalist ideas that dissolved the divisions between life forms.

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and Jewish Traditions," in *Reuchlin und seine Erben: Forscher, Denker, Ideologen, und Spinner*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2004), 135-154. and Williams-Hogan, "Emanuel Swedenborg and the Jewish Kabbalah: Organic or Syncretic Relationship?," in (presented at the 18th Quinquennial Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Durban, South Africa, 2000).



William Blake, *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (Copy E), Plate 98  
 Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, William Blake Archive

Gigante stipulates that Blake may have encountered such theories in the writings of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach or Christian Wolff—authors who do not appear anywhere in either Blake’s library nor are they mentioned in his corpus.<sup>94</sup> This may be true, that Blake could have read these authors, but Gigante nevertheless neglects the certain conduit to epigenesis models that Swedenborg would have provided for Blake (indeed, perhaps Swedenborg’s epigenesis would have been all the more attractive for Blake because it came in a theosophical wrapping that the continental scientists eschewed). Whatever the source, Blake’s inversion of the standard symbolic order of Judeo-Christianity to recover snail, frog, worm, spider and snake also recalls the passage in Swedenborg’s *Worship and Love of God* where the regeneration of vision makes “slime change into the brightest gem, and dust into shining gold; the innate darkness of nature as resplendent as in light.”<sup>95</sup>

By overturning the symbolic order, Blake also demonstrates a highly sophisticated awareness of how the mind shapes the external nature that it wants to see, and that he had intuited how the idea of “nature” is perhaps more of an arbitrary signifier than a bedrock of authenticity upon which to make larger philosophical claims. The engravings for “There is No Natural Religion,” Blake’s rebuttal to the French Deists, inaugurated his artist career and remained an unchanging sentiment over the next twenty-five years. As Hutchings puts it, Blake “perhaps more profoundly than any other poet in English literature was aware of the violence and ideological complexity of nature as a cultural concept.”<sup>96</sup> In Blake’s cosmos, there is no independent reality outside the agency of thinking and imagining—or, if you will, outside the

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<sup>94</sup> Gigante, *Life*, 111.

<sup>95</sup> Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, no. 66.

<sup>96</sup> Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake’s Environmental Poetics*, 4.

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reality of a higher “spiritual world,” as Swedenborg terms the realm of inner thought and feeling. Blake’s complaint against Enlightenment Deism is precisely the same as Swedenborg’s: it emptied a transcendental framework and turned nature into a dead, lifeless object—a vast machine, or a “vegetated Polypus,” as *Jerusalem* puts it. “Suppose a doctrine were hatched from nothing but this enlightenment of Reason,” wrote Swedenborg, “Would it not proscribe the worship of oneself?”<sup>97</sup>

The trajectory of Enlightenment luminaries in *Jerusalem* seems a response to this question, as Locke, Rousseau, and Voltaire are all described falling into “Selfish Delusion.” By contrast, the primary task for the poem’s hero, Los, is to annihilate his selfhood and become nothing. Blake graphically pictures the effects of the Deist’s mechanistic view in the first chapter:

I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe  
And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire  
Washed by the Water-wheels of Newton, black the cloth  
On heavy wreathes folds over every nation: Cruel Works  
Of Many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, cogs tyrannic  
Moving by Compulsion each other.<sup>98</sup>

At this point in *Jerusalem* the actual city space impinges on the page, marking the accompanying text with the very real cogs of industrial labor and production, as suggested by Plate 22. The looms and wheels of *Jerusalem* frequently evoke a shattering of traditional agrarian patterns, and allude to the rural dislocations and flows of people to urban centers that

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<sup>97</sup> Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, no. 316.

<sup>98</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 159.

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Wordsworth also addressed in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. When Blake writes how “Scotland pours out his Sons to labour at the Furnaces / Wales gives his Daughters to the Looms,” he is being quite literal about the socio-cultural ramifications of the Enclosure Acts.<sup>99</sup> Another scene of spinning women on plate 59 illustrates the wheels of harsh factory looms – the words below the image describe endless “labour, with bitter food. void of sleep, / Tho hungry they labor: they rouze themselves anxious / Hour after hour laboring at the whirling Wheel / Many Wheels & as many lovely Daughters sit weeping.”<sup>100</sup> This portrays not only a key moment in Blake’s mythology with his Daughters of Los, it also suggests the Royal Asylum for Female Orphans in Lambeth, quite near to where Blake lived between 1790 and 1800. Though operating under the sign of Christian benevolence and state auspices, the orphanage functioned as a factory fuelled by child-labour, where girls were forced to spin and weave at whirling wheels for their daily bread. Far from being an imaginative escape into ideality from London’s horrors, as some scholars like Kathleen Raine have read *Jerusalem*, the poem thus makes the mimetic representation of such corruption intrinsic to its ethics. It is truly apocalyptic, in the sense that it aspires to reveal what is hidden. One net effect of these images is to link the cosmopolitan figures of the Enlightenment to the dark-side of modernity and its faith in technological progress. In a disenchanted world, *Jerusalem* seems to suggest, when people and things are nothing but gears and grist in the mill of a giant machine, nature and humans are equally exploitable. The poems ultimate recovery of wholeness—a move from the holy into the holistic—is partially Blake’s indignant response to industrial degradation and what we would call today urban blight.

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<sup>99</sup> Blake 160.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid* 209.



William Blake, detail of *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (Copy E), Plate 22  
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, William Blake Archive



William Blake, detail of *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (Copy E), Plate 59  
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, William Blake Archive

Zuber: Hieroglyphics of Nature

*Jerusalem* is, after all, a poem meant to transform its readers through enacting an apocalypse of the mind. It is acutely exhortatory -- “Awake! Awake!” it often shouts. The ultimate message of *Jerusalem*, though, is not one of despair or pessimism, but of acute hope. The spectacular title page of the work could be said more or less to encapsulate a progression of states into this final tone of hope, diagramming a regenerative metamorphosis of self, city, and reader. Most scholars concur that the various personages on the plate are a composite image of Jerusalem’s progress from a “vegetated” materialistic sleep, pictured at the bottom, a sleep where nature is pure dead matter, to the liberated freedom at the top, where Jerusalem flies as a strange animal-human hybrid with gold-green wings, yet again another instance of Blake’s distortion of the human figure into the animal. We might also note how a particularly rich green halo surrounds the “i” of the word Albion in the title (and notably only this letter in the word). This might connect the green of England’s pleasant land to a perceiving “I”, the self of Blake’s person and also, I would argue, ourselves, the “eyes” of the readers that the poem seeks to transform. Blake’s most strident appeal to the reader in *Jerusalem* comes at the start of the final chapter, in the short song that comes after the Introduction. The exhortation is notable because of its claims for London as the urban base for the holy city, as it figures a collapse of the pastoral into the urban. Blake writes

England! awake! awake! awake!

Jerusalem thy Sister calls!

Why wilt thou sleep the sleep of death?

And close her from thy ancient walls.



William Blake, *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (Copy E), Plate 2  
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, William Blake Archive

Zuber: Hieroglyphics of Nature

Thy hills & valleys felt her feet,  
Gently upon their bosoms move:  
Thy gates beheld sweet Zions ways;  
Then was a time of joy and love.

And now the time returns again:  
Our souls exult & Londons towers  
Receive the Lamb of God to dwell  
In Englands green and pleasant bowers.<sup>101</sup>

Here, the towers of London are placed in the same pastoral location as green and pleasant bowers, as a kind of idyllic time returns again, a revolution perhaps now modified by the facts of city space. These lines seem deliberately to echo the famous (occasional) introduction to *Milton*, where Blake wonders if the holy city was “builded here, Among these dark Satanic Mills?”—a reference to the corruptive industrialization Blake saw around him, but its locus nonetheless for utopian renewal.<sup>102</sup> This fearful wonder in *Milton* is replaced by a pragmatic call a few lines later, in perhaps Blake’s most famous and oft-quoted words: “I will not cease from Mental Fight / Nor shall sword sleep in my hand / Till we have built Jerusalem, / In Englands green and pleasant land.”

Green and pleasant are placed in these lines at the center of Blake’s holy city. Hutchings writes that with these words, Blake “brings Jerusalem home to his nation, (and) articulates a kind of bioregionalism, an environmentalist philosophy advocating the need for human society to be

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<sup>101</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 233.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Zuber: Hieroglyphics of Nature

more conscious of its locale, or regions, or lifelace.”<sup>103</sup> The contours of this urban “bioregionalism” absolutely depended on Blake’s literal and metaphorical flânerie through London streets and places, as well as Blake’s syncretic readings in Swedenborg that allowed for a particular (re)spiritualization of this space as a post-Apocalyptic New Jerusalem.

In the end, Blake was not the only 19<sup>th</sup> century artist to respond to a kind of green visionary potential that was latent in Swedenborg’s postmillennial writings. Although separated by an ocean, a cultural divide, and several decades of difference, it is striking to turn from the hopeful redemption that closes Blake’s *Jerusalem* to the large *New Jerusalem* painted by the American artist George Inness in 1867. Inness, steeped in the writings of Swedenborg, had taken it upon himself to depict what he held to be the spiritual reality of nature, to show with paint how our perception was “organic but non-spatial.”<sup>104</sup> *The New Jerusalem* was part of a larger cycle of landscapes based loosely on John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* that were expressly designed by Inness “to illustrate Swedenborg’s theories,” as his friend James Pattison later remembered.<sup>105</sup> Although the *New Jerusalem* was badly damaged by a fire, and long assumed vanished, the recently discovered fragments of the painting show a unique vision of a diaphanous, futuristic architectural space that rises out of a wild area. The city is distinctly a green one: portions of the canvas blur the foliage and leaves of the trees into the buildings in such a way that the divide between nature and culture, pastoral and urban, is effaced.

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<sup>103</sup> Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake’s Environmental Poetics*, 60.

<sup>104</sup> Adrienne Baxter Bell, *George Inness and the Visionary Landscape*, 1st ed. (New York: National Academy of Design, 2003), 78.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Rachel Ziady Delue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 147.

Zuber: Hieroglyphics of Nature



George Inness, *The New Jerusalem* (1867), also known as *Visionary Landscape*  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. James Meyers

Zuber: Hieroglyphics of Nature

In another surviving fragment (not reproduced here) figures blend and blur into the landscape, merging with it as they merge with each other, perhaps refracting Swedenborg's statements about conjugal pairs appearing as one figure in the paradises of heaven. While there is of course no direct line of influence to draw from Blake to Inness, both *Jerusalem* and a *New Jerusalem* stand as testaments to a certain urban resonance Romantics were capable of locating in Swedenborg's visionary writings. Given that Inness's approach to painting as a form of experimental philosophy was also uniquely shaped by his response to Emerson, the *New Jerusalem* provides an appropriate segue way into the next chapter's turn towards American Romantic aesthetics.

CHAPTER FIVE

***Radical Correspondence:  
Swedenborg and the Emersonian Ray of Relation***

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“There is one man of genius, who has done much for this philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly estimated;--I mean Emanuel Swedenborg.”  
--Emerson, “The American Scholar” (1837)

“One of the missouriums and mastodons of literature, [Swedenborg] is not to be measured by whole colleges of ordinary scholars. His stalwart presence would flutter the gowns of an university.” -- Emerson, “Representative Men” (1850)<sup>1</sup>

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As the introductory chapter of this study suggested, Swedenborg’s centrality to American Transcendentalism—the movement that is “what became of Romanticism in America,” in Stanley Cavell’s words—was suggested by both Perry Miller and F.O. Matthiessen at the onset of American Studies as a discipline and its attendant canonization of various 19<sup>th</sup> century literary texts.<sup>2</sup> To reiterate, Miller acknowledged Swedenborg was as “fundamental as Coleridge or Carlyle” for Emerson and his circle (and fundamental in the Biblical sense, as Miller surely meant, as of a textual grounding foundation), and Matthiessen quipped that his *American Renaissance* could have born under different circumstances and inflections the “Age of Swedenborg” as an alternative title.<sup>3</sup> These somewhat castaway comments form twin axes for this chapter’s attempt to recover a lost strand in the history of American ideas. While there have

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Perry Miller, ed., *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), viii.

been solid ecocritical assessments of American Transcendentalism that have built on Miller's historiography to incorporate both earlier American writers, such as Jonathan Edwards, as well as critical European predecessors like Coleridge, with very rare exception Swedenborg's centrality to American Transcendentalism remains wholly neglected by literary critics, especially those taking an ecocritical approach. Lawrence Buell briefly notes in his *Environmental Imagination* how Swedenborg "validated the authority of the inspired creative imagination as the means by which nature's meaning were to be read" in the work of Emerson, but that Emerson's "religiophilosophical mode of reflecting on nature" detrimentally kept Thoreau at "a more ideational level of contemplation than he would have been drawn to if left to his own devices."<sup>4</sup> In John Gatta's book-length study of the numinous in American nature writing, while going so far as to acknowledge the importance of panentheistic models for Transcendentalists, and that Emerson even adopted "Swedenborg's theory of correspondences" in order to see "natural facts connected to the invisible domains of language and spirit,"<sup>5</sup> there is no sustained exploration as to why or how Swedenborg became such a prominent figure within American religious cultures. By 1854, Emerson was marveling in his journal how "this age is Swedenborg's."<sup>6</sup>

In this remark, Emerson is referring to the popular tidal wave of Spiritualism that was then sweeping through the north-eastern United States, where Swedenborg's name was frequently invoked as an authenticator of paranormal phenomenon. As Catherine Albanese has shown, Swedenborg became constituted in this period as "one of the guiding intellectual lights"

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press 1995), 117-118.

<sup>5</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. XIII: 335-336. Hereafter *JMN*.

for an emergent spiritualized pseudoscience that encompassed healing fads like mind cure and homeopathy; Swedenborg also contributed, according to Albanese, to a general symbolic approach to natural space that Albanese has called a “nature religion,” a kind of symbolic center for 19<sup>th</sup> century ritual, action and social cohesion.<sup>7</sup> Emerson’s remark that the “age is Swedenborg’s” is not sarcastic, however, but suggestive of the ways that Emerson understood how truth and attendant models of reality were conditioned by the relationships that came out of a shared culture of values that was shaped by communication practices. He continues to say about Swedenborg’s age, that

I have said the ideas of the age so shine that even the nightmares, as they go, can see them. It is notable that all the Rappers and Mesmerists agree in a subjective religion; all agree that the departing human soul finds such a world as it left; sees and associates and acts according to what it is educated to be: repudiate the Hebrew ideas, and embrace the subjective philosophy of the Saxons, that the soul makes its own world.<sup>8</sup>

Emerson’s interest in Swedenborg was not because he appeared to verify psychic experience in these popular groundswells (as Andrew Jackson Davis, and later Arthur Conan Doyle, respectively claimed).<sup>9</sup> Rather, Swedenborg typified and lent himself to a truth about perception, that “the soul makes its own world.” The eye sees what the mind desires.

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonquin Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 80; 7. Albanese’s designation of a flexible concept of nature as the core of a symbolic religious practice builds on Mircea Eliade’s model of the sacred as a hierophanic “center beyond.”

<sup>8</sup> Emerson, *JMN XIII*: 335-336.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Jackson Davis claimed to continue Swedenborg's correspondence with the spiritual world after alleging that Swedenborg had come to him in vision with a commission to prophecy for the enlightenment of the human race in 1843. Over the next two years in New York City he gave popular séance-like lectures (attended regularly by one Edgar Allan Poe), where his cryptic

Emerson's interest in Swedenborg remained consistently epistemological in this regard. He claimed early on as an Idealist ally, a "metaphysical looking inwards," as he writes in one of his first journal entries referring to Swedenborg, what was part of a "mystic night of Germany" that could aid his struggle to shake off the dead-weight yoke of Lockean Unitarianism and restore the poetic imagination to a primary place in consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Quite different, then, from Blake, who may have been initially attracted to Swedenborg for how he could legitimate Blake's own visionary posture, Emerson had little patience for the more paranormal aspects of Swedenborg's records of spiritual experience. His visions of heaven were written "in a Goody-Two-Shoes taste," Emerson complained after his wife had spent the morning reading aloud to him from Swedenborg's *Conjugial Love*. "The description of gold houses, & Sinbad Sailor fruit trees—all tinsel & gingerbread. Mr. Cushing's Watertown garden would b. out-paradise his

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pronouncements while under trance were painstakingly written down by a team of assistants. The rambling results were collectively published as *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (1847), which became a smash best-seller despite its daunting Swedenborg-sounding jargon, selling out some 34 different editions over the next thirty years. See the discussion in Alfred Gabay, *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2005), 219, as well as Richard Kenneth Silver, "The Spiritual Kingdom in America: the Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on American Society and Culture, 1815-1860" (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1983), 177-209. Arthur Conan Doyle claimed Swedenborg as the progenitor of modern spiritualism in his introduction to *The History of Spiritualism* (1926); see the reprint in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Story of Swedenborg," in *Between Method and Madness: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2005), 95-108.

<sup>10</sup> While in Florida in 1828, Emerson made a list on the "Peculiarities of the Present Age." Number four reads "Transcendentalism. Metaphysics and ethics looks inwards - and France produces Mad. de Staël; England, Wordsworth; America, Sampson Reed; as well as Germany, Swedenborg." This was also one of the first occasions where Emerson uses the word "Transcendentalism." Emerson, *JMN* III: 70. Emerson's early confusion about reading Swedenborg as part of a "mystic night of Germany" may have come from de Staël.

French Eden. What to do with the stupendous old prig?”<sup>11</sup> Rather, Emerson turned to Swedenborg because his hermeneutical model of correspondence enabled a transplanting of a system of belief (of morals and ethics) out of the church and into nature, a nature that was both phenomenal (Emerson glad to the brink of fear, crossing the twilight commons in *Nature* [1836]) and an object of philosophical and scientific inquiry. If we follow the large number of Emerson scholars who chart Emerson’s engagement with science as a serious enterprise, “not an escape into complacent certainty or unthinking optimism,” in the words of Laura Dassow Walls, “but a fiercely sustained campaign to read order into a universe that persistently threatened to fly apart,” Swedenborg emerges for Emerson as a central unifying figure because his double-helixed life as both natural scientist and a poetic mystic embodies the two intersecting arcs that Emerson’s own work so rigorously attempted to fuse together.<sup>12</sup> “Who reads Swedenborg will be struck by its true science,” wrote Emerson in his journal in a seemingly strange claim, given that Swedenborg’s scientific work had long since lapsed into complete obscurity. In approaching the use and adaptation of Swedenborg in Emerson’s texts, it is important to situate this integrative role that Swedenborg played in constellation with Emerson’s own approach to science, and that for Emerson, Swedenborg was not only his token mystic. Emerson’s later readings of Swedenborg in the 1840’s and 1850’s go deep into Swedenborg’s earlier philosophical and scientific texts, many of which were then being published in their entirety in English for the first time by Emerson’s London correspondent, John James Garth Wilkinson. Thus, if we are to turn to Emerson as an American intellectual who speaks to contemporary cultural debates about

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<sup>11</sup> Emerson, *JMN* XI: 133.

<sup>12</sup> Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003), 13.

conflicts between metaphysical belief and the truth claims of science, Emerson's adaptation and response to Swedenborg is a crucial, consistent pattern in his writing to negotiate.<sup>13</sup>

If one roughly surveys the hundreds of remarks and comments about Swedenborg that Emerson left behind in the essays, lectures, poems, journals and letters, it would first seem that Swedenborg corroborated Emerson's notorious anthropomorphism, an aspect of his Transcendentalism that continues to make Emerson a *bête noir* for most ecocritics and environmental historians. The hierarchy implicit in the poem that opens *Nature* (1836), where the worm, striving to be man, mounts through the spires of form, was read in the last chapter as possibly refracting Swedenborg's immanent models of creation and a spiritualized epigenesis. The chapters that follow in *Nature* are arranged by Emerson according to their "uses" which "Nature subserves to man," a sentiment that chimes with Swedenborg's sweeping view that "all things which have been created reflect the human in some respect."<sup>14</sup> In both of these moments in Swedenborg and Emerson, there is no room for nature as an independent "other," as an autonomous agent outside of being made "subservient" to the spiritual and moral needs of man. It would seem, *redivivus*, that despite all their theological reform and radicalism, Emerson and Swedenborg arrive back at the Christian roots that have been squarely blamed for the modern

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<sup>13</sup> For a provoking meditation on Emerson's legacy for American scientific scholarship and religious belief, see the essay by the physicist Steven Weinberg, "Without God," *The New York Review of Books* 55, no. 14 (September 25, 2008), <http://www.nybooks.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/articles/21800>.

<sup>14</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003), no. 61.

environmental crisis.<sup>15</sup> In his important account of wilderness, Max Oelschlaeger has soundly critiqued Emerson precisely on the grounds of these purported theological positions:

[Emerson's] *Nature* is not a philosophical inquiry but a literary exercise designed to rest a pre-established belief in God on rational, rather than scriptural, footing. For Emerson a wilderness odyssey is an occasion for the individual mind first to discover a reflection of itself (nature as a system of laws, concepts, and commodities) and then to confirm God's existence... The position is conventionally anthropocentric and androcentric, enframed by a Baconian-Cartesian perspective: nature is mere putty in human hands, bestowed by God upon his most favored creation, *man*.<sup>16</sup>

This conclusion has been echoed by numerous others. Fredrik Brøgger writes, for example, that Emerson's *Nature* is the most "arch-villainous text" in the history of an anthropocentric arrogance that characterizes American Romanticism—the "Language" chapter of *Nature*, Brøgger claims (a chapter we might note that is most overtly indebted to Swedenborgian correspondence), "is an illustration of direct ideological appropriation and cultural colonization of the environment."<sup>17</sup> Brøgger, like Lawrence Buell, prefers to juxtapose Thoreau's writings against those of Emerson's, finding in Thoreau a much more amenable form of

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<sup>15</sup> An angle of ecocritique against Judeo-Christianity that perhaps began with Lynn White's influential (and reductive) essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1205.

<sup>16</sup> Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 135.

<sup>17</sup> Fredrik Brøgger, "The Conception of Nature in the American Romantic Age is Anthropomorphic? Anthropocentric? Other? Excursions into Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville," in *"Nature's Nation" Revisited: American Conceptions of Nature from Wonder to Ecological Crisis*, ed. Hans Bak and Walter W. Hölbling (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2003), 96, 97.

Transcendentalism that accords well with biocentric ethics and values of place and locality, areas that are ultimately untenable for Emerson's abstract Idealism.

There is certainly some truth in this juxtaposition. Thoreau was more acquainted with emergent ecological sciences than Emerson was, at least in terms of practicing an environmental approach to place that was genuinely proto-ecological (though Ernst Haeckel gets due credit for coining the term "ecology" as a scientific model in 1866, Thoreau invents the word as a creative neologism in his journals six years earlier).<sup>18</sup> And yet, Emerson was much more systematic in his attempt to create a natural philosophy that could account for, theorize, and explain all discrete phenomena of nature. Walls writes how "whereas Thoreau's vision opened out to chance and contingency, Emerson's began with the basic premise that the universe was one because it had been designed and ordered by a single governing intelligence; even pitching pennies was not a random act."<sup>19</sup> There are further limitations in the ongoing tendency within ecocriticism to contrast a greener Thoreau against a more environmentally-austere Emerson, however, and use Emerson's essays as simply foils for Thoreau's more authentic forms of nature writing. This presupposes a reductive kind of literary Darwinism (in the bastardized, social sense of this term), as if Thoreau were an advancement in the formation of ideas, one step nearer and closer to our

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<sup>18</sup> Just how prescient Thoreau's work was of later 20<sup>th</sup> century ecology has been made clear by an ongoing climate-change research project undertaken by Harvard and Boston University. Thoreau's careful measurements of seasonal flora and fauna were so exceptionally thorough for his day that they can be reliably used to gauge global warming in the Concord area, and how much (and how fast) has subsequently changed since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Common species are now flowering six days earlier than they did in Thoreau's time, and 27% of the biota Thoreau catalogued has since completely vanished, with another 36% present in such small numbers they will not survive much longer. Cornelia Dean, "Thoreau Is Rediscovered as a Climatologist," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2008, section "Science / Environment," [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/28/science/earth/28wald.html?\\_r=1&ref=earth](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/28/science/earth/28wald.html?_r=1&ref=earth).

<sup>19</sup> Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science*, 1.

own modern, secular environmental ethics. This does injustice to both Emerson and Thoreau's deep skepticism of narratives of linear teleology, be they national, cultural, or scientific.

More recently, reading against the grain, James McKusick, Andrew McCurry and John Gatta have all undertaken valuable recoveries of Emerson for ecocriticism. McMurray innovatively draws on systems-theory by Nikolaus Luhmann to (re)frame Emerson's environmental politics—a move that Stephen Dougherty claims is a groundbreaking “reorientation from a Thoreauvian to an Emersonian perspective.”<sup>20</sup> Gatta, while agreeing with some critics that aspects of Emerson may encourage “self-worshipping solipsism,” nonetheless situates Emerson's resacrilization of nature as a critically important contribution to an American tradition of writing about numinous natural experience that carries broad environmental potential.<sup>21</sup> McKusick's attention to Emerson's idealism and its roots in Europe, on the other hand, instead of being read as part of a theological dynamic, is part of McKusick's larger project to recover the transatlantic foundations of American Romantic nature writing. Many American Romantic authors such as Emerson and Thoreau, McKusick claims, deliberately suppressed their intellectual indebtedness to European Romantics, turning instead to an idea of nature and wilderness as a kind of pure, unmediated text that would authorize and authenticate their own literary responses to it. The consequent “self-begotten” myth of American literature has long persisted as a critical construct, reinforced by a nationalist tendency to read America as

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Dougherty, “Systems Theory for Ecocriticism,” *Electronic Book Review* (December 4, 2006), <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/criticalecologies/connected>. Andrew McCurry, *Environmental Renaissance: Emerson, Thoreau, and the American System of Nature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred*, 89.

“Nature’s Nation,” in Miller’s memorable phrase.<sup>22</sup> While the more recent spate of transatlantic studies has thoroughly interrogated and dismantled this standing shibboleth that drove the so-called “myth and symbol” school of American literary criticism,<sup>23</sup> still, as McKusick points out, discipline policing between English literature and American Studies departments has often discouraged “thoughtful scrutiny between British and American nature writers.”<sup>24</sup>

This chapter premises at its outset that Swedenborg’s concept of correspondence was an indispensable component enabling Emerson’s willful suppression of European Romantic forbearers and his subsequent turn to nature as legitimizing authority for the newness of the new world. Correspondence not only facilitated a foundational shift out of ecclesiastical structures into natural phenomena, it reinforced the tendency to inscribe the apparently wild blankness of American nature along specifically nationalist contours. McKusick particularly attempts to restore the vital importance of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in shaping Emerson’s approach to language and nature, arguing that Coleridge’s well-known distinctions between symbol and analogy must be resituated behind those portions of Emerson’s *Nature* that display a kind of ecolinguistics: a reflexive awareness for how the historical development and evolution of language is “conditioned by our terrestrial environment.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, this chapter maintains that ever since Kenneth Walter Cameron’s epic and exhaustive scholarship on the sources and influences behind *Nature*, the centrality of Swedenborg for the “Language” chapter in particular cannot be overlooked. Portions of Emerson’s essay, as Cameron was one of the first to bring to

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<sup>22</sup> Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> James C. McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

light, copy almost word-for-word a text on correspondences by the French Swedenborgian Guillaume Oegger.<sup>26</sup> Emerson's debt here, in other words, is much more clearly Swedenborgian than it is Coleridgean. Thus, as much as this chapter builds on McKusick's recovery of Emerson and his expansion on the latent ecolinguistics in *Nature*, it aims to rectify a significant lacuna in McKusick's account of transatlantic Romanticism.

Following the structure of the previous chapter that concerned itself with Blake, the study will proceed with a survey of Emerson's life-long engagement with Swedenborg's writings. Emerson maintained consistent and steady interest in Swedenborg from his first encounters with the mystic via Sampson Reed in 1821, when Emerson was eighteen years old and graduating from Harvard, and continued as points of reflection and reading into his final journals of the 1870's. Emerson owned and annotated at least fifteen titles of Swedenborg's science and theology (a total of twenty-one separate volumes) in the extant library that survives to the present day, and his frequent reference to additional works, such as the *Arcana Caelestia*, suggest a familiarity with additional volumes not present in the collection. Emerson subscribed for over two decades to the monthly magazine published by the Boston Swedenborgians, the *New Jerusalem Messenger*, where he closely followed—among other articles—a long multi-issue scientific review of William Kirby and William Spence's *Introduction to Entomology* (1826), written by Sampson Reed. Emerson collected works about Swedenborg written by other Transcendentalists (such as Henry Hedge), and owned a further four volumes related to Swedenborg by Sampson Reed, at least six other volumes on Swedenborgian topics by James

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<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Walter Cameron, *Emerson the Essayist; an Outline of His Philosophical Development Through 1836, with Special Emphasis on the Sources and Interpretation of Nature* (Raleigh, N.C: The Thistle press, 1945), Vol. I: 302.

John Garth Wilkinson, as well as several commentaries by Henry James Sr. The sheer bulk of all these thousands and thousands of pages (some thirty-two plus volumes) stands as a significant contribution to Emerson's intellectual digest—the surviving annotations in the books and reading notes in the journals moreover demonstrate how these texts were not empty shelf-fillers, but actively made part of Emerson's habitus of thinking, reading, and writing over a span of some fifty years.

Two longer academic studies have attempted to map out this vast terrain of readings in Swedenborg. Although Clarence Hotson's sprawling dissertation from 1929 (just shy of seven hundred pages) still receives due citation for its careful examination of Emerson's likely biographical sources for his Representative Men lectures and essay, it nonetheless suffers from an infrequent attempt to defend Swedenborg from some of Emerson's critiques, and a contention that Emerson established such critical distance from Swedenborg simply because he owed him so much.<sup>27</sup> According to Hotson, Emerson wanted to express his uniqueness and originality of his thoughts, and not cede ground to one from whom he borrowed so much. Such a claim is disingenuous. Emerson expressed irritation in his journals at conversations he held with Swedenborgians who, like "insane persons" were fixated on one idea, "with a continual tenderness & special reference in every remark & action to their known states... become embarrassing & tedious,"<sup>28</sup> and there is a certain irony in Hotson—who was a member of the Swedenborgian New Church—repeatedly asserting that "Swedenborg had more influence on

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<sup>27</sup> Clarence Paul Hotson, "Emerson and Swedenborg" (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 1929). Hotson's work on the sources for Emerson's "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic" subsequently appeared as "Emerson's Biographical Sources for "Swedenborg"," *Studies in Philology* 26, no. 1 (January 1929): 23-46.

<sup>28</sup> Emerson, *JMN* VII: 30.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, directly and indirectly, than any other single author.”<sup>29</sup> A more balanced and nuanced account is offered in Anders Hallengren’s *Code of Concord* (1994), a rich and deep study that remains unfortunately neglected by most Anglo-American scholarship. Hallengren contextualizes Emerson’s reading of Swedenborg with his other scientific and esoteric interests, and, noting Emerson’s interest in Swedenborg as a scientist and his frequent aligning of Swedenborg with Francis Bacon, Hallengren makes the arresting claim that Emerson’s approach to Swedenborg was ultimately “Baconian,” deeply invested in the ways Swedenborg enforced a chiasmus between moral ethics and the laws of science.<sup>30</sup> Hallengren’s attention to the scientific matrix that overlay Emerson’s appropriation of Swedenborg’s concepts of influx and correspondence can provide useful coordinates for mapping out the place of Swedenborg in Emerson’s environmental poetics.

Three aspects of Emerson’s work will be examined for how Swedenborgian thought become refracted by the Emersonian prism. First, the bundle of ideas around Swedenborg’s concept of correspondence will be situated within the ecolinguistics of Emerson’s language that McKusick has fleshed out. Secondly, Swedenborg’s correspondence theory can be seen as inextricably woven to his panentheistic models of an emanating creation, and as was the case with Blake, Emerson’s resort to words like “influx” and “efflux” stem from his encounter with Swedenborg’s own attempts to adapt a more dynamic variation of Neo-Platonism for the generation of natural forms. “Influx” in Emerson, I argue, ultimately leads him to adopt a surprising approach to the phenomenology of space. Finally, I will claim that several of the

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<sup>29</sup> Hotson, “Emerson and Swedenborg,” 671.

<sup>30</sup> Anders Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson’s Search for Universal Laws* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksel, 1994), 107.

distinctive “posthuman” moments in Emerson’s corpus, moments where he grants an autonomy to nonhuman nature that cannot be described or decoded by the transcendental eyeball, can be partially made sense of as the inevitable ramifications of Swedenborgian aesthetic theory as it was being propounded by Reed, Oegger, and Wilkinson. Care will be taken as one enters Emerson’s writings, however, not to presume that a stable concept of “nature” subsists beneath his thinking over a seventy year period. “This surface on which we now stand is not fixed, but sliding,” as Emerson wrote about the natural world in “Circles.”<sup>31</sup> Emerson as much as Thoreau aggressively kept himself abreast of the latest turns in natural philosophy, from Humboldt’s *Cosmos* and Lyell’s *Geology* to (later) Darwinian evolution and the statistical proto-sociology of Quetelet and Lamarck. Emerson never forsake adjusting the swerve of his own ideas to adequately meet the implications of a rapidly expanding scientific field of inquiry. Buell and others are certainly correct in generalizing that Emerson increasingly lost the idealistic tenor of his inaugural *Nature*, and tacked uneasy settlements with a nature increasingly “red in tooth and claw,” to quote the famous lines from Tennyson. It is thus all the more striking that Emerson’s readings in Swedenborg remained a consistent point of engagement through these tumultuous reconceptualizations that required his refitting, again and again, his axis of vision to coincide with the axis of things as science was revealing them to really be.<sup>32</sup> While Hotson distorts the importance of Swedenborg to Emerson, I would concur that he was one of a select few of Emerson’s authors that became a veritable second-nature for Emerson’s thought, entering the

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<sup>31</sup> Emerson, *Essays & Poems*, 409.

<sup>32</sup> “The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty, is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank, that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque.” Emerson, *Essays*, 47.

circumference of Emerson's ideas early in the 1820's and persisting long into the twilight of Emerson's decline into aphasia. Other authors that accompany Swedenborg in this regard are certainly Plato, Madame de Staël, and the treasured letters written by his own Aunt Mary Moody. Swedenborg was one of an exceptional few, wrote Emerson, who was "to be read in long thousands of years by some stream in Paradise."<sup>33</sup>

While Emerson's attraction to authors like Plato or de Staël may stand as self-understood or easy to explain, it is still less clear how a figure on the fringe of the Enlightenment, one doubly-removed, in a sense, by virtue of his Scandinavian provinciality and his writing in Neolatin, could end up occupying such a prominent place in the Emersonian (and consequently American) imaginary: a figure who was moreover detrimentally associated with popular occult trends that Emerson stayed aloof from, such as mesmerism and phrenology, and whose philosophical credibility had been so thoroughly demolished by the weighty authority of no less than Immanuel Kant.<sup>34</sup> As Robert Richardson puts it, "we follow Emerson's interest in Plato, Kant, Goethe, Plutarch, or Montaigne without surprise. But his fascination with Swedenborg, [Sampson] Reed, and Oegger is another matter. It is easy to turn to the certified great for inspiration, but it requires originality to be able to see in the work of a minor or marginal or

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<sup>33</sup> "Every book serves us at last only by adding some one word to our vocabulary, or perhaps two or three. And perhaps that word shall not be in the volume or shall only be the author's name. And yet there are books <so>of no vulgar origin but the work & the proof of faculties <&>so comprehensive[,] so nearly equal to the universe which they paint, that although one shuts them also with meaner ones, yet he says with a sigh the while, this were to be read in long thousands of years by some stream in Paradise. Swedenborg, Behmen, Plato, Proclus, Rabelais, & Greaves." Emerson, *JMN* VIII: 254-255.

<sup>34</sup> c.f. Immanuel Kant, *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory R. Johnson (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002).

flawed figure what no one has seen before.”<sup>35</sup> This enigma is partially solved, I argue, by looking at Emerson’s distinct emergence from an intellectual culture that had been shaped by Puritan typological traditions, a deeply ingrained hermeneutics that shaped the mind’s approach to nature through language. As Miller succinctly puts it, “it is truly strange that the generation of Emerson and Alcott should have had to go to Emanuel Swedenborg for a doctrine of ‘correspondence,’ since something remarkable like it had been embedded in their own tradition for two hundred years.”<sup>36</sup> Although Miller’s line “From Edwards to Emerson” has since become a productive point of debate among Emerson scholars, the startling echoes between Swedenborg and Edwards, who were writing more or less simultaneously on very similar topics that were ostensibly bound by the same set of Protestant exegetical strictures, still suggests how Edwards’s approach to the Book of Nature as Revelation manifests a unique aspect of the “New England Mind” (to paraphrase Miller again) that particularly primed Emerson for receiving ideas from Swedenborg in ways that were unimaginable in European contexts which lacked the same kinds of cultural (and even geographical) conditions that unfolded for Puritan thought in the new world. Without Edwards, perhaps, Swedenborg may have not come to carry the place of the mystic in *Representative Men*. Or conversely, if Edwards had only gone further into more innovative kinds of theology and mystical experience, perhaps Emerson’s generation would have had their own home-grown American mystic to found themselves upon. Before parsing the environmental inflections of Emerson’s use of Swedenborg, then, it is worth deliberating at

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<sup>35</sup> Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 197.

<sup>36</sup> Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 213.

greater length on this vestige of Puritan thought and the New England cultural conditions that underlie Emerson's later receptivity to ideas like correspondence and influx.

**“The Book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature”<sup>37</sup>:  
From Edwards to Emerson, via Swedenborg**

The parallels between Swedenborg and Edwards are striking enough to almost warrant a case for claiming a kind of synchronicity, or at the least a transnational religious current, peculiar to 18<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism, that bore mystical proclivities within itself despite the dominant Locke-derived paradigms of rational and natural theology that dominated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Johan Georg Hamann would also fit in here). Both Edwards and Swedenborg attempted to maintain a deep piety even as they embraced the philosophies of Locke and the science of Newton. Edwards radically expanded Puritan typology beyond the Bible to include in its purvey daily occurrences and the book of nature; nature in particular was approached as a kind of sacred text that could authoritatively speak on matters of grace and redemption, and was to be ecstatically apprehended by the beholder. As Edwards wrote in his manuscript on “Types,”

I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of Holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, as full as a language is of words; and that the multitude of those things that I have mentioned are but a very small part of what is really intended to be signified and typified by these things: but that there is room for persons to be learning more and more

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977), 106.

of this language and seeing more of that which is declared in it to the end of the world without discovering all.<sup>38</sup>

Here, away from the public eye of Puritan convention in the privacy of his journals, Edwards takes the freedom to place Scripture on the same interpretative level as the material phenomena of nature—Scripture operates equivalently on the same signifying plane as the air, sea, and earth, conveying a plenitude of higher meaning that exceeds the representational capacity of the symbol (and this sense of an excess-of-sense, an overflow of meaning, is a defining hallmark of mystical experience, as William James was to later claim).<sup>39</sup> The pictorial density that Edwards grants his types as images—Janice Knight goes so far as to call their descriptive thickness “almost pictographs”—bears an obvious homology to the structure of Swedenborg’s correspondences, and their roots in early theories about hieroglyphics and the symbolic origins of language.

Typology was a tradition that both Swedenborg and Edwards shared, of course (in addition to their mutual training in Ramian logic), and was a representational system well in place long before the Mayflower wound its way to Plymouth rock. As chapter two took due note, the Emblematics tradition left a strong impression on Swedenborg (at least according to Inge Jonsson), and one could further situate this as a branch of Renaissance typology.<sup>40</sup> One could argue, as has been suggested since Perry Miller’s work, that the Puritan intellectual traditions were immediately challenged by the vast space and “howling wilderness” of the new world and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>39</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 295-296.

<sup>40</sup> Inge Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist: the Effects of Science and Philosophy on Swedenborg's Cosmography* (West Chester Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999), 113-114.

that this caused an inevitable displacement of hermeneutical frames into natural space as a necessary means of coping with and adapting to the radical newness of the land they found themselves in, and the incapacity of a European language to translate experience into adequate words. As Leo Marx writes about this early period in America, “whether nature was conceived as an object of veneration or of conquest, its illusory status as a separate, distinctly non-human entity made it an invaluable receptor of meaning.”<sup>41</sup> The old Testament crises endured by the Israelites not only foreshadowed Christ’s ordeals but came to prefigure the happenings and events within New England, a New Canaan whose cities on hills would literally become the New Jerusalem of Revelation. Typology permeated not only the religious rhetoric of sermons and essays, as Sacvan Bercovitch has further definitively shown, but formed the structural backbone for a host of Puritan secular writings, including politics, poetry and personal narratives (such as the captivity narrative, perhaps the first distinctly American literary genre).<sup>42</sup>

Edwards’ ambitious typological projects might be read as the pinnacle of the Puritan tradition, or at least certainly the most extreme, as Edwards pushes his typologies to the very boundaries of Christian strictures and beyond, thereby making evident a fissure that lurks beneath the surface of Puritan theology. On the one hand, Puritan rhetoric exhibits an almost pantheistic regard for the Divine’s immanence in nature (exemplified so beautifully in Edward Taylor’s various “Meditations”), but on the other, it also articulates, often anxiously, a concomitant pressure for social conformity according to the strict laws of the Decalogue and

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<sup>41</sup> Leo Marx, “The Pandering Landscape,” in *Nature's Nation" Revisited: American Conceptions of Nature from Wonder to Ecological Crisis*, ed. Hans Bak and Walter W. Hölbling (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2003), 39.

<sup>42</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, “Typology in Puritan New England: the Williams-Cotton Controversy Reassessed,” *American Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1967): 169. See also Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

biblical covenant. Detecting this tension within Edwards, Miller writes how “Edwards was particularly careful to hold in check the mystical and pantheistical tendencies of his teaching because he himself was so apt to become a mystic and a pantheist.”<sup>43</sup> Still, Edwards confidently maintained that “Wherever we are and whatever we are about, we may see divine things excellently represented and held forth, and it will abundantly tend to confirm the Scriptures, for there is an excellent agreement between these things and the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>44</sup>

The similarities between Edwardsian types and Swedenborgian correspondence can be further illuminated by drawing out not only their respective incorporations of Locke and Newton, but also their readings in Cabalistic traditions and the Cambridge Platonism of Henry More. The constant “great showing forth & resembling spiritual things” Edwards locates in nature, and Swedenborg’s premonition of a universal kind of sacred language that had a creative force latent within it (the *spermatikos logos* discussed in the third chapter) are both vivified by More’s *vis plastica*, a perpetual “elastic force” that coursed through nature, giving it shape and form. Furthermore, in both Edwards and Swedenborg, I would argue that the perception of this energy that a type or correspondence manifests is articulated as a kind of embodied knowledge: it is a truth that is felt within a concrete and particular phenomenological moment in nature, and not a dry fact assented to and confirmed by the understanding. Thus the angels in Swedenborg’s heavens learn theology by responding to the beauty of changing plants and flowers in their celestial gardens; or, to return to the memorable relation from Swedenborg discussed in the last chapter in regards to Blake, an idea about dangerous theology is concretized by an image of dead

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<sup>43</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 195.

<sup>44</sup> Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 74.

horses falling from the sky that properly appalls and instructs the watching school children. In a particularly vivid, ecstatic description, Edwards writes of retiring to his father's farm pasture:

And as I was walking there, and looked up on the sky and clouds; there came into my mind, a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express... The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used to greatly fix my mind.<sup>45</sup>

This was not rationalized theology, but lived and felt experience that “fixes” Edwards's mind. The importance of this natural space has been emphasized by Joan Richardson and others as a catalyst for Edwards's naturalization of the Puritan concept of election, and Swedenborg's similar key withdrawals into nature should not be lost.<sup>46</sup> Not only might we emphasize his habit of meditational breathing, but the figurative and literal gardens of his later work certainly perform a similar function as Edwards's swampy retreats and meditative walks in cow pastures did. The garden of Swedenborg's *Worship and Love of God* provides a relief from his “sad thoughts” in the city of London, for example, as has been discussed in the third chapter, and many of the later theological works were penned in Swedenborg's summer house that lay in his large Södermalm garden. This transcends being a banal parallel if we further situate the movement of Swedenborg and Edwards's bodies within these natural spaces—that Edwards's

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 285.

<sup>46</sup> Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25.

“walking abroad alone” precipitated an experience of ecstasy that harvests a theological truth. Similarly, Swedenborg worked his garden, planting and weeding regularly, getting his hands grubby (if certain surviving anecdotes are to be trusted), and his correspondent words about green space, seeds, and organic forms were patterned and conditioned by his hours of labor there.<sup>47</sup>

What grounds the poetic of both Edwards and Swedenborg’s correspondences and types is a sharp scientific attention to the natural basis of the symbolic form: there is no discord between empirical fact and divine truth. In a particularly indicative typological entry, Edwards translates Newtonian gravity into a cosmological metaphor that, if we follow Gatta’s reading, “envisions [typology] as a universally comprehensive ecology.”<sup>48</sup> Edwards writes:

The whole material universe is preserved by gravity, or attraction, or the mutual tendency of all bodies to each other. One part of the universe is thereby made beneficial to another. The beauty, harmony and order, regular progress, life and motion, and in short, all the well-being of the whole frame, depends on it. This is a type of love or charity in the spiritual world.<sup>49</sup>

Similar remarks could be extended to the cosmos presented in Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Wisdom*; indeed, there remains a fruitful project to explore in teasing out how Swedenborg’s so-called “law of association,” a law of attraction that like-attracts-like, is a theological reworking of Newtonian principles of gravity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See the previous discussion about seeds on pgs. 22-27.

<sup>48</sup> Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred*, 64.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 79.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, *Heaven and Hell*: “Kindred souls gravitate towards each other spontaneously, as it were, for with each other they feel as though they are with their own family,

More echoes between Edwards and Swedenborg could be noted, though at a risk of stalling this chapter's progression and pushing it into a kind of fruitless parallelism.<sup>51</sup> Given Swedenborg's prescient work on brain physiology that located motor functions and different channels of feeling within specific regions of the cerebral cortex—quite in contrast to the medical paradigms of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as the second chapter has discussed, that incorrectly regarded the cortex as insensitive rind that played no role in higher cognitive functions—so, too, does Edwards's work display some of the earliest instances of conceptualizing the mind as an organ with its own set of biological appetites.<sup>52</sup> There is thus a physiological knife-edge between spirit and body that cuts through both Edwards's and Swedenborg's integrations of natural science into their embodied and experienced theological world-views.

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at home, while with others they feel like foreigners, as though they were abroad. When they are with kindred souls, they enjoy the fullest freedom and find life totally delightful. We can see from this that the good gathers everyone together in the heavens, and that angels are differentiated by what good they do..." Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard* (West Chester, Pa.: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), nos. 44, 45. Emerson is paraphrasing Swedenborg on association when he writes in the "Divinity School Address" that "As we are, so we associate. The good, by affinity, seek the good; the vile, by affinity, the vile. Thus of their own volition, souls proceed into heaven, into hell." Emerson, *Essays* (77). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the spiritualized gravitation of Swedenborg's "law of association" became part of the philosophical underpinnings for utopian Associationism movements, especially in their Fourierist and Owenite forms, as the various essays by James Sr. and Wilkinson (and transatlantic correspondence between the two) amply manifests.

<sup>51</sup> For a more detailed exposition of such parallels, see Devin Zuber, "Edwards, Swedenborg, Emerson: From Typology to Correspondence," in *The Contributions of Jonathan Edwards to American Culture and Society: Tercentenary Essays on America's Spiritual Founding Father* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edward Mellen Press, 2008), 109-124.

<sup>52</sup> Joan Richardson writes how "Edwards's conception of the 'Appetite of the mind,' intrinsic to accessing the 'sensible knowledge' that converts 'speculative knowledge' into 'actual ideas,' is, in so far as I have been able to determine, the original instance of thinking the mind an active organ, seeking nutriment for survival, in [Edwards's] terms variously 'panting,' 'thirsting,' 'hungering' for the words that will satisfy, catalyze the raw materials of experience into necessary spiritual and intellectual nourishment." Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, 56.

Setting this continuity of mind and body into the evolution of a culture's ideas and habits of thinking might help resolve the knotty problem of a specific Edwards-Emerson link that still vexes scholarship. Edwards's expansion of typology beyond its scriptural frame and Emerson's finding "radical correspondence" between visible things and human thoughts should be seen as indicative of a broader consistent reaction to the "bareness" of America, its mythological void of culture and tradition that became in itself, by its very negation, a pragmatic opportunity to develop new tropes and kinds of linguistic performances.<sup>53</sup> In absence of a philosophical tradition, American nature came to perform an authoritative function for thinkers like Edwards and Emerson, a mode whereby writing not just about but *through* nature (with an understanding, I mean, of language as a natural process in itself) pressured rhetoric to self-consciously assume a scriptural dimension.<sup>54</sup> There was "a struggle for each word to keep its moral urgency," to paraphrase Stanley Cavell.<sup>55</sup> Noting this struggle as a wider tendency embedded within New England literary culture, Emerson's admittedly scanty reading of Edwards may have become naturally amplified. Emerson had certainly read Edwards's "On the Freedom of the Will," and was aware of the favorable European reception of Edwards's compiled sermons when they were republished in the 1820's and 30's. But the majority of Edwards's typological treatises, it is true, were simply unavailable in Emerson's time, largely remaining unpublished in manuscript form. This lack of a clear textual trail from Edwards to Emerson has led to several contortions of scholarship. Mason Lowance writes, for example, how "Edwards posited new conclusions about

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<sup>53</sup> This is Richard Poirier's main argument in *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> For more on the development of this sense of language as a natural, evolving organic form in itself within the field of American aesthetics, see Richardson, *Natural History of Pragmatism*, 6, 90-93, 129.

<sup>55</sup> Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 6.

the divine source and its manifestations to the elect perception. Emerson and Thoreau owe much to this transformation, though many of their own beliefs *came from Edwards through Scotland and Germany* where Enlightenment idealism was an avenue for Emerson's understanding of the English poets Coleridge and Wordsworth."<sup>56</sup> To claim that Emerson and Thoreau derived ideas from Edwards through Scottish and English philosophy suggests, at best, a very diffuse flow of influence, as if Edwards' thought first impacted Scotland and Germany and then re-circulated back into America when Thoreau and Emerson read Edwards in digested, second-hand forms. By contrast, Donald Weber claims that it was only until Perry Miller's post-WWII scholarship that Edwards was fully incorporated into a national literary canon whose lineage clearly descended down to Thoreau and Emerson.<sup>57</sup>

Whatever the nature of the reading relationship, one could also hypothesize that even if Emerson had access to Edwards's typological writings, their strong Calvinist flavor might have repelled Emerson more resolutely towards the more open system of Swedenborgian correspondence. Edwards's *Images and Shadows of Divine Things* are much more Christological than anything in Swedenborg, constantly referring the discrete phenomena of nature to the passion and resurrection of Christ (there is also deeper antinomy, no doubt, between Edwards and Emerson on matters of free will—Edwards's predestination chafes against the ideas in Emerson's "Fate," for example). The fading of stars at morning typifies the "gradual vanishing" of Jewish law under the dispensation of the Gospels, for example, or the propagation of trees are

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<sup>56</sup> My emphasis; Mason I. Lowance, *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Donald Weber, "Perry Miller and the Recovery of Jonathan Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards*, by Perry Miller (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1981), vi.

“dispensations of Providence since the coming of Christ.”<sup>58</sup> As one of Emerson’s strongest rebukes of Swedenborg is that his “theological bias fatally narrowed his interpretation of nature” and his correspondences too often fail “by attaching themselves to the Christian symbol,” it is easy to imagine a sterner judgment forming around Edwards’s narrower typology.<sup>59</sup>

A fuller exposition that could do justice to not only the complexity of this line that runs from Edwards to Emerson perhaps via Swedenborg, but also the simultaneity of other Protestant figures like Hamann, must duly wait for another time. Such a study might begin with the year 1757, as this was a watershed date for each of these respective authors. For Swedenborg, the year announces his vision of the apocalyptic last Judgment that would bring spiritual renewal to Christianity, as the last chapter discussed in the ways that Blake uses this date (also the year of his birth) as a touchstone for the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. For Edwards, 1757 marks the beginning of his unfulfilled magnum opus, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, a “great work” that was to provide histories of “all three worlds: heaven, earth and hell.”<sup>60</sup> As Edwards was writing these very words, Swedenborg was preparing his *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard* which was published the following summer in London. Also in London in 1757 was Hamann, who underwent his great transformative spiritual crisis after becoming dissolute and destitute. Hamann began in this year, like all good recovering Pietists (Swedenborg included), to read anew the Bible from cover to cover, arriving at his mystical intuition that “beneath the letter that is the flesh there is also an immortal soul, the breath of God, of light and life, a light burning in the darkness, which one must have eyes to

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<sup>58</sup> Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 60, 80.

<sup>59</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 676, 683.

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 322-323.

see.”<sup>61</sup> The web of these parallels demand closer attention to what was happening to a certain kind of Protestant hermeneutics in a particular apogee within cosmopolitan Enlightenment milieus—Swedenborg, Edwards, and Hamann all shared a biblical tradition that they each, in their own unique ways, came to challenge and revise substantially under the pressures of new scientific claims. As Hamann and Edwards have each been read as central vectors in the formulations of subsequent Romantic canons, adding Swedenborg to their number evinces his centrality for the unfolding of Romanticism out of the Enlightenment littoral. Such a comparative study would embrace the scope of Emerson’s own unfinished aim to complete a “natural history of the intellect” that was global and transnational in its scope. For the time being, it has been worthwhile underscoring the cultural pretext that shaped the later conditions for Swedenborg’s absorption within Transcendentalism, if only to support Miller’s contention about New England, that “certain basic continuities persist in a culture.”<sup>62</sup> Edwards set the stage for Swedenborg’s subsequent arrival.

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<sup>61</sup> As paraphrased by Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994), 14. Hamann became seriously interested in Swedenborg himself (he was instrumental in procuring rare volumes of Swedenborg’s *Arcana* for Johann Scheffner and Johann Hartknoch); see Ernst Benz, *Vision Und Offenbarung: Gesammelte Swedenborg-Aufsätze* (Zürich: Swedenborg-Verlag, 1979), especially chapter six.

<sup>62</sup> Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 184-185.

**“to be the bard of nature to these Times / With words like things”<sup>63</sup>:  
Oegger, Reed, and the Natural Vestments of Thought**

Swedenborg first arrived, for Emerson, on a presumably hot and muggy August day in 1821 when Emerson heard Sampson Reed give a valedictory address at Harvard. Though Emerson was but 18, he later recalled that it was as if “an oracle” were speaking, whose sybilic lips “showered words of fire” onto Emerson. The experience was catalytic—perhaps as singularly transformative as the later moment of *aha!* Insight that Emerson experienced in 1833 at the Jardin des Plantes, where the ordering of the specimens in the cabinets crystallized an insight into the compositional creative power of the mind and its relation to “the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient in the very rock aping organized life forms.” As soon as the talk was over, Emerson sought the speaker out, obtained a copy of the address through his older brother (who was in Reed’s class) and transcribed word-for-word a copy for himself. The pungency of this first encounter with Reed (and Reed’s articulation of key Swedenborgian concepts like correspondence) is suggested by Emerson’s sharp recollection of the day fifty years later, and also in how Reed’s work weathered Emerson’s falling out with Reed, and a mutual disenchantment between Emerson and his “Swedenborgian druggist,” as he came to refer to Reed (who practiced as an apothecary, becoming quite wealthy in the process, as Emerson derisively notes).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The quote is taken from Emerson’s longer manuscript poem (never published) about Sampson Reed. The poem laments how the “demure apothecary” became a “Sleek deacon of the New Jerusalem,” a “blind man’s blind man.” Emerson, *Essays* 1291-1292.

<sup>64</sup> In a telling recollection from 1870, Emerson notes in his journal: “I heard on the day when I graduated at Cambridge, in 1821, Sampson Reed, who on that day took his Master’s degree, delivered his oration on Genius. It was poorly spoken, as A. Adams said, “in a meeching way,”

What originally electrified Emerson in Reed's valedictory "Oration" was its clear articulation of an epistemology based on intuition that flagrantly challenged the Lockean models that had desiccated Unitarian theology in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Locke's mind will not always be the standard of metaphysics," Reed challenged at the end of his talk.<sup>65</sup> Sylvia Shaw seems correct in claiming that we might pursue Reed's "Oration" as one of the first overtly Romantic manifestos in American letters.<sup>66</sup> The Transcendentalists, at any rate, more or less thought so, as Elizabeth Palmer Peabody placed the speech prominently in a reprint in her later *Aesthetic Papers* (1849). As intuition was a cognitive faculty everyone was capable of accessing, Reed democratizes an idea of genius, turning it into an innate potential for perception of Divine Power, open to all. Great men like Luther, Shakespeare and Milton refract aspects of Divine Light we all carry within ourselves.<sup>67</sup> Reed's contention here is one thread that informs Emerson's later *Representative Men* and its deliberately anti-Carlylean leveling of "great" men into "lenses through which we read our own mind."

There is no distinct reference to Swedenborg in the "Oration," although Swedenborg's correspondence theory clearly lies behind Reed's unusual pronouncements about language and nature. He calls for a new history of poetry that would make evident where "words make one

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& the audience found it very dull & tiresome... But I was much interested in it, &, at my request, my brother William, of Reed's class, borrowed afterwards the manuscript (of him for me), & I copied the whole of it, & kept it as a treasure... In 1851, after Webster's Fugitive Slave Law, I met Reed in the Boston Atheneum, & deplored to him this downfall [sic] of our great man, &c. He replied, that "he thought it his best speech, & the greatest action of his life." So there were my two greatest men both down in the Pit together." Emerson, *JMN* XVI: 184.

<sup>65</sup> Sampson Reed, "Oration on Genius," in *Sampson Reed: Primary Source Material for Emerson Studies*, ed. Sylvia D. Shaw, and George F. Dole, (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992), 16.

<sup>66</sup> Sylvia D. Shaw, "Sampson Reed: Swedenborgian Pioneer in American Literature" (M.A. Thesis, Worcester, Mass.: Clark University, 1986), 48, 68.

<sup>67</sup> Reed, "Oration on Genius," 13.

with things, and language is lost in nature.” There is the implicit suggestion in the “Oration,” made more overt in Reed’s subsequent *Growth of the Mind* (1826), that language is not just shaped by natural processes and environment, but operates as a natural environment in and of itself. Though Reed would have likely had no access to it, this comes close to Johann Gottfried Herder’s speculations on the origins of language, that it stemmed from a reflective capacity humans had to perceive sound in animate nature, and to repeat mimetically that sound as a signifier for other things.<sup>68</sup> “Thoughts fall to the earth with power,” Reed writes elliptically, “and make a language out of nature.” He continues this proto-etymological interest about the origins of words into a revealing commentary about the Genesis story of Creation:

Adam and Eve knew no language but their garden. They had nothing to communicate by words, for they had not yet the power of concealment. The sun of the spiritual world shone bright on their hearts, and their senses were open with delight to natural objects. In the eye were the beauties of paradise; in the ear was the music of birds; in the nose was the fragrance of the freshness of nature; in the taste was the fruit of the garden; in the touch, the seal of their eternal union. What had they to say?<sup>69</sup>

In contrast to this picturesque, preverbal state of Eden, where gardening was a kind of language, Reed lashes out in a critique of contemporary ecclesiology that Emerson would have surely resonated with, as it anticipates the caustic sting of Emerson’s own “Divinity School Address.” “The churchyard is a graveyard,” writes Reed, “The bell which calls men to worship is to toll at

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<sup>68</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *On the Origin of Language*, ed. Alexander Gode, trans. John H Moran (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). On the scarcity of texts by Herder in America in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Stanley M. Vogel, *German Literary Influences on the American Transcendentalists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

<sup>69</sup> Reed, “Oration on Genius,” 15.

their funerals, and the garments of the priests are of the color of the hearse and the coffin. Whether we view [the church] in the strange melancholy that sits on her face, in her mad reasonings about truth, or in the occasional convulsions that agitate her limbs, these are symptoms, not of life, but of death.”<sup>70</sup> According to Walls, Reed here “effectively gave Emerson permission to cut loose, as he did, immediately,” from the scriptural Gospels as the sole source of spiritual authority.<sup>71</sup>

The gist of Reed’s ideas in the short “Oration” appear more fully developed five years later in a longer treatise entitled *Growth of the Mind*. This, too, became a text that Emerson continually revolved around, and it even could be said that this little book by Reed came to fascinate Emerson more than any work by Swedenborg ever did. As the title suggests, *Growth of the Mind* presents an organic theory of consciousness and language development. Instead of a blank *tabula rasa*, Reed writes, “the mind is originally a most delicate germ, whose husk is the body... The process of learning is not by synthesis, or analysis. It is the most perfect illustration of both. As subjects are present to the operations of the mind, they are decomposed and reorganized in a manner peculiar to itself, not easily explained.”<sup>72</sup> Reed reiterates the claim that primeval man had “a language not of words, but of things.” Reed roots the origins of words to the physical impression left by the nonverbal image—the pictographic quality of language means that for modern man, in our fallen state, the poet plays a unique role in illustrating Divine Truth

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>71</sup> Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science*, 75.

<sup>72</sup> Sampson Reed, “Observations on the Growth of the Mind,” in *Sampson Reed: Primary Source Material for Emerson Studies*, ed. George F. Dole and Sylvia D. Shaw (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992), 24.

through a recovery of original natural imagery.<sup>73</sup> Drawing on Swedenborg's correspondences, Reed charges the figure of the poet with a new vocation to restore our lost integrity to nature, foremostly by emphatically grounding this "language of things" in observed scientific fact. Echoing Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1803), a Romantic manifesto Reed was likely familiar with, Reed proclaims poetry to be "the bulwark of science," a moral litmus test that should indicate the true state of science and religion.

These sentiments find their analogues in Emerson, particularly the alignment of poetic language with scientific truth. As Walls writes about this kind of synthesis at work in Emerson, "since nature is a hieroglyphic language, it is natural history that can provide the 'key' or 'dictionary': since nature is a language, the natural historian must be a poet as much as a scientist, even as the poet must also study natural history."<sup>74</sup> There are also several key environmental implications in Reed's poetics that we might further see as contributing to an ecolinguistics in Emerson's *Nature*, "The Poet," and other essays. The poet's revelatory recovery of the thingness of words (a restoration of the word to hieroglyphic correspondence, to put it in Swedenborgian terms) was wholly dependent on an internal revolution of spirit that altered how the poet perceived and observed phenomenal nature. Reed describes the need for a kind of active reciprocity with the voices of non-human nature that firstly demands a stillness of the mind in order to listen (perhaps, thus, reformulating the charming image from the "Oration" of a silent Adam and Eve, with gardening as their lingua franca). "The very stones cry out," Reed writes, "and we would do well to listen to them."<sup>75</sup> In a similar manner,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>74</sup> Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> Reed, "Observations on the Growth of the Mind," 35.

because we are unwilling to hear, we find it necessary to say so much; and we drown the voice of nature with the discordant jargon of ten thousand dialects. Let man's language be confined to the expression of that which actually belongs to his own mind; and let him respect the smallest blade which grows and permit it to speak for itself. Then may there be poetry, which may not be written perhaps, but which may be felt as part of our being. Everything which surrounds us is full of the utterance of one word, completely expressive of its nature.<sup>76</sup>

Reed's transformation of nature into a speaking text that "permits it to speak for itself" leads to the most innovative and surprising argument made in the whole text. Because our language is to accord and correspond with nature, and one finds in the natural world nowhere perfect symmetry and exact repetition, but only endless variety, thus do "rhymes add nothing to poetry, but rather detract from its beauty." Reed proceeds to formulate what is likely the earliest and clearest exposition for a free-verse poetics:

"In the natural world we find nothing which answers to [rhyme and meter], or feels like them, but a happy assemblage of living objects springing up, not in straight lines and at fixed distance, but in God's own order, which by its apparent want of design, conveys the impression of perfect innocence and humility... The poet should be free and unshackled as the eagle; whose wings, as he soars in the air, seem merely to serve the office of a helm, while he moves on simply by the agency of the will."<sup>77</sup>

As Cameron, Shaw, and Hallengren have respectively demonstrated, Reed's thesis here had a marked impact on Emerson, pushing him to experiment (however unsuccessfully) with free verse

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 34.

and non-rhyming poems in his journals.<sup>78</sup> The step further to Whitman is obvious, or at least clarifies Emerson's immediate appreciation for understanding what Whitman was trying to do with language. While a specific correlation between Reed's *Growth of the Mind* and Whitman has, to my knowledge, never been precisely located, both David Reynolds and Hallengren have read Whitman's general immersion in Swedenborgian theology as centrally important to his mature poetics.<sup>79</sup> It is all the more tempting to hazard such a connection given the specificity of Reed's words about poetic language allowing the smallest blades of grass to speak for themselves. At any rate, as a number of ecocritics have located a deliberate environmental potential in the structure of Whitman's rhizomatic free verse, we might see this as inchoate and emergent in Reed's earlier work.<sup>80</sup>

Because organic nature thus determined the form of language, and nature was an ongoing process of constant animation, in Reed's schema humans perpetually needed to take account of the changing phenomena before them. Reed writes that if the mind undertakes "the habitual observation of the relationship between things," while respecting the inherent "order in the Cabinet of Creation," the mind is able to dissolve objects and their relationality in order to

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<sup>78</sup> See Cameron, *Emerson the Essayist*, 289; Shaw, "Sampson Reed: Swedenborgian Pioneer in American Literature," 86-87.

<sup>79</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 94-100. Anders Hallengren, "A Hermeneutic Key to the Leaves of Grass," in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), 45-59.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Angus Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004), chapters six and seven, and Christine Gerhardt, "Managing the Wilderness: Walt Whitman's Southern Landscapes," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 225-235. Gerhardt's forthcoming monograph (developed out of her *Habilitationschrift* at the Technische Universität Dortmund), *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World*, also promises to offer more in this direction.

rearrange them into new harmonies “with all the precision of crystallization.”<sup>81</sup> The metaphor of thinking that Reed deploys here is striking: it concretely anticipates Emerson’s insight into the mind’s organizational powers that was stimulated by the cabinets of natural history in Paris, as the choice of the word “crystallization” also suggests Swedenborg’s known work as a crystallographer, a dimension of his writing that Eric Wilson has usefully situated behind American Transcendentalism, and a specific word and process that Emerson often resorts to for describing Swedenborg and his “shooting spiculas of thought.”<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Reed’s intimation of perception as a dynamic process, of allowing the “the stones to speak” and subordinating human language to “respect the smallest blade which grows,” comes close to certain environmental phenomenologists who have also emphasized an active interplay between “the perceiving body and that which it perceives.”<sup>83</sup>

Reed’s *Growth of the Mind* was not the only Swedenborgian text that left an early and strong impression on Emerson at the outset of his career. Guillaume Oegger’s *Le Vrai Messie* (1829) and *Essai d’un Dictionnaire de la Langue de la Nature* (1831) were also both read by Emerson in the 1830’s. The colorful Oegger, a royally-appointed Catholic priest who had been Confessor to the Queen, had been sent by the Catholic church in the 1820’s to spy on what were

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<sup>81</sup> Reed, “Observations on the Growth of the Mind,” 41.

<sup>82</sup> Two such examples of Emerson’s use of the metaphor of crystallization (and there are a good many more) for Swedenborg: “Swedenborg’s universe is a gigantic crystal, all whose atoms and laminae lie in uninterrupted order, and with unbroken unity, but cold and still,” and “his varied and solid knowledge makes his style lustrous with points and shooting spicula of thought, and resembling one of those winter mornings when the air sparkles with crystals.” *Essays*, 682, 668. See also Eric Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), as well as Joan Richardson’s discussion of Swedenborg and crystal form in *Natural History of Pragmatism*, 75-76.

<sup>83</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), 52. See also Abram’s discussion of Husserl’s intersubjectivity, 38.

held to be dangerously radical mesmerist and spiritualist circles that various Swedenborgians in Paris had been hosting. Instead of reporting back his findings, Oegger became convinced that Swedenborg was a genuine seer, and after undergoing a secondary kind of conversion experience himself in London, he felt he had been called by the messiah “to reacquaint the world with the language of nature to which Swedenborg’s doctrine of correspondence provided a key.”<sup>84</sup>

Oegger left the Catholic church, and went onto become a controversial proselytizer of Swedenborg’s doctrines. Emerson avidly read Oegger’s *Le Vrai Messie* in 1833 in a manuscript translation that Elizabeth Peabody had undertaken, and subsequently copied extensive sections of the manuscript into his journal.<sup>85</sup> As with Reed (and it seems that Reed and Oegger wrote independently of one another, and were not aware of each other’s respective investigations), Oegger used Swedenborg’s writings on correspondence and hieroglyphics to conclude that nature was the original source of all language, the quarry from which words were originally hewn, in his memorable phrase. In the “Language” chapter of *Nature*, Emerson repeats Oegger’s idea that “primitive man” had a closer relationship with nature, and that words were once one with things: “Because of this radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts,

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<sup>84</sup> Lynn Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 127. Wilkinson argues that Oegger’s texts were instrumental in shifting Swedenborgian correspondence theory into an “urban aesthetic” that later culminates in Baudelaire.

<sup>85</sup> Emerson, *JMN V*: 60-70. As Philip Gura observes, Peabody was an essential, seminal “purveyor of philological theories in New England and was instrumental in bringing to contemporary theological and philosophical debates the best of recent European criticism.” Philip F. Gura, *The Wisdom of Words: Language, Theology, and Literature in the New England Renaissance* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 124. Little has been done on how Peabody was a further essential conduit for Swedenborg’s ideas for Transcendentalism in the 1730’s and 1740’s, first bringing Oegger and William Blake to Emerson’s attention, for example, and subsequently commissioning important contributions from Sampson Reed and Wilkinson for *Aesthetic Papers*.

savages, who have only what is necessary, converse in figures. As we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when all is poetry; or all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols.”<sup>86</sup>

McKusick claims that despite its anthropocentric vaunting of human language, such moments in Emerson’s *Nature* “make a fundamental advance in the domain of ecolinguistics by [Emerson’s] acknowledgement of the fact that human language has evolved in a world of natural phenomena.”<sup>87</sup> Emerson, McKusick writes, explores in a new way “the significance of the fact that there exists a virtually exact correspondence between natural phenomena (mountains, waves, and skies) and the cognitive repertoire that is mapped out in human language.”<sup>88</sup> McKusick’s overarching argument, however, that Emerson arrived at this correspondence theory primarily through his reading of Coleridge—a line of reading that abets McKusick’s major claim about the American Romantics’ suppressed transatlanticism—completely bypasses the clear and direct ways that Oegger and Reed were prompting Emerson to approach language in this way that looks towards ecolinguistics.

Reed, Oegger, and Emerson’s own readings in Swedenborg were not only causing Emerson to reflect on the external problem regarding the historicity of language and man’s relationship to nature, the readings also occasioned introspective reflections on perception, and the interconnections between thought, image, and word. After reading further in Oegger, Emerson wrote in his journal how:

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<sup>86</sup> Emerson, *Essays* 22.

<sup>87</sup> McKusick, *Green Writing*, 127.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

“Charles [Emerson’s brother] wonders that I don’t become sick at the stomach over my poor journal yet is obdurate habit callous even to contempt. I must scribble on if it were only to say in confirmation of Oegger that I believe I never take a step in thought when engaged in conversation without having some material symbol of my proposition figuring itself incipiently at the same time.

My sentence ends in babble from a vain effort to represent that picture in words... While I thus talked I saw some crude symbols of the thought with the mind’s eye, as it were, a mass of grass or weeds in a stream of which the spears or blades shot our from the mass in every which direction but were then curved round to float all in one direction. When presently the conversation changed... then saw I as soon as I spoke the old pail in the Summer street kitchen with potatoes swimming in it, some at the top, some in the midst, some at bottom, and I spoiled my fine thought by saying books take their place according to specific gravity ‘as surely as potatoes in a tub.’ I suppose that any man who will watch his intellectual process will find an image, a material image, contemporaneous with his every thought and furnishing the garment of his thought.<sup>89</sup>

This remarkable account of thinking adumbrates an almost surrealist approach towards the unconscious that values the spontaneous and irrational. Or more precisely, we might say it foreshadows William James and Gertrude Stein’s interest in automatic writing techniques for

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<sup>89</sup> Emerson, *JMN V*: 77-78.

how the margins of language reveal consciousness at work.<sup>90</sup> Emerson's interest in the materiality of an image that precedes verbalization of a thought into words also comes quite near Gaston Bachelard's notion of the poetic image—that the kernel of good poetry is a concentration of our conscious dreaming—that although “everything that is specifically human in man is logos” and “one would not be able to meditate in a zone that preceded language,” as Bachelard writes, good poetry nevertheless shows us “a poetic image” that emerges “always a little above the language of signification.”<sup>91</sup>

Swedenborg's correspondence theory can be thus seen as an agent that honed Emerson's observations of himself, his “obdurate habit callous to contempt” of diurnal journaling and mining the subsequent record of thought for patterns contained in the collated stream of images. His pungent phrase in the journal quoted above, his search for a material image to “furnish the garment of thought,” is a direct reechoing of an idea in Swedenborg's *Intercourse between the Body and the Soul*. Cameron traces Emerson rereading this smaller treatise several times in the 1830's; Emerson could have had access to it even earlier, as his father owned a very rare English version of the work entitled *A Treatise on the Nature of Influx*.<sup>92</sup> The *Intercourse or Influx* contains Swedenborg's most concise and clearest exposition of the influx doctrine. Laying out Swedenborg's model of an emanating creation, it contains numerous metaphors to illustrate the dynamic relationship between the spiritual and the natural, including an exposition as to how “the spiritual clothes itself with the natural, as a man clothes himself with a garment. The organic

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<sup>90</sup> The line from Emerson here into James and Stein is treated by Steven Meyer in *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>91</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Revised. (Beacon Press, 1994), xxvi.

<sup>92</sup> Cameron, *Emerson the Essayist* I: 230-231.

body which the soul clothes itself is here likened to a garment, because it clothes the soul, and the soul also puts off the body, and casts it away as exuviae when by death it emigrates from the natural world into its own spiritual world.”<sup>93</sup> This was Swedenborg’s so-called “Doctrine of Affections Clothed” that Emerson makes recourse to in his journals throughout the 1830’s.<sup>94</sup>

Emerson’s attraction to Swedenborg’s influx theory is worth emphasizing because it became part of Emerson’s conceptual vocabulary about nature. It is present in the “furnishing the vestment of thought” from *Nature*, but one also finds it repeated in later essays that display Emerson’s shifts from his earlier optimistic idealism. Though the words “influx” and “efflux” carry a particular Swedenborgian valence, Emerson was deriving such panentheistic ideas from multiple sources. The first edition of *Nature*, for example, contained an epigraph from Robert Cudworth (mistakenly attributed by Emerson to Plotinus) that read “Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know.”<sup>95</sup> As Walls writes about this quotation, “what Cudworth sought to establish, and what Emerson presumably approves, is the doctrine that nature in and of itself is essentially dead. It has no self-subsisting or self-organizing powers; all activity in nature is directly or indirectly generated by God.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, the same strands of immanent theology that Blake had responded

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<sup>93</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, “Intercourse between the Soul and the Body,” in *Miscellaneous Theological Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1970), no. 11.

<sup>94</sup> As noted by Cameron, *Emerson the Essayist* I: 230, 236, 239, and 250. See also Emerson, *JMN* IV: 288, 342. Clothing as a metaphor for spirit, of course, is one of the guiding symbols in Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1831)—Emerson makes occasional reference to “affections clothed” (and Sampson Reed terminology, wishing Carlyle would “make his words one with things), in his letters to Carlyle in this period. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 99.

<sup>95</sup> Joel Myerson, ed., *Transcendentalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125.

<sup>96</sup> Walls, *Emerson’s Life in Science*, 99.

to in Swedenborg—that “nature is dead,” as Swedenborg wrote, “except as an emanation of spirit”—came to corroborate Emerson’s multiple readings in Neoplatonic authors like Cudworth.<sup>97</sup> There is a further overlap to tease out here given that Cudworth and More’s Cambridge Platonism left an equally strong impression on Swedenborg, as chapter three has already discussed. “There is no pure originality,” as Emerson wrote in a late essay. “Swedenborg, Behmen, Spinoza, will appear original to uninstructed and to thoughtless persons: their originality will disappear to such as are either well read or thoughtful; for scholars will recognize their dogmas as reappearing in men of a similar intellectual elevation throughout history.”<sup>98</sup>

Hallengren has demonstrated how “influx” first enters Emerson’s journals in 1836, specifically in context of his (re)reading of Sampson Reed.<sup>99</sup> Emerson subsequently made the concept central to his definition of Transcendentalism: “the Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine. He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, in ecstasy.”<sup>100</sup> Here, Emerson seems to have absorbed how Swedenborg’s influx doctrine not only entailed a panentheistic flow of vitalist power, from inner to outer, that animated all of nature—“all nature is the rapid efflux of goodness executing and organizing itself,” as Emerson puts in “Circles”—but was also suggestive of new modes of cognition, a “new influx of light and power” in the brain. The more the mind naturally opens itself to acknowledging, a priori, the reality of a “spiritual world” that maps out and shapes perceptions of phenomenal nature (and here, Swedenborg is close to Kant’s

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<sup>97</sup> Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, no. 157.

<sup>98</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 1030.

<sup>99</sup> Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson’s Search for Universal Laws*, 130.

<sup>100</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 196.

descriptions of the operations between phenomena and noumena), the greater is the capacity for perceiving analogies and correspondences in the organic world, and synthesizing discreet facts into truths that form larger wholes. This is less a process of rational comprehension, as it probably sounds, than it is a faculty of intuition and feeling. The best humans, Swedenborg writes, who come to occupy the highest heavens are those who the moment they hear truth intend to do it and live it—“knowing instantly, from an influx from the Lord, whether the truth they are hearing is actually true.”<sup>101</sup> As Hallengren puts it, paraphrasing a section of Swedenborg’s *Intercourse*, “a spiritual influx, which exists quite apart from the understanding, i.e. from thought, like that which makes animals act appropriately, is called instinct. That influx directly determines [human] actions.”<sup>102</sup> This analogy between influx and instinct can be found throughout Swedenborg, and draws by coextension an implicit line between the human and the nonhuman. As noted, Emerson eagerly followed a long review of Kirby and Spence’s *Etymology* that Sampson Reed published over three years in the *New Jerusalem Messenger*, between 1828 and 1830, that dealt with this connection; Emerson’s subsequent references to this important work on insects often hearken back to Reed’s Swedenborgianized review. Reed sets forth influx

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<sup>101</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Seen and Heard*, no. 26. Such celestial angels, we might note, are occasionally described by Swedenborg as living nomadic, pastoral existences in heaven, living in tents and abstaining from eating meat. These details went onto be evoked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century communitarian countercultures already mentioned, such as Fourierism and Associationism. Swedenborg’s presence in early Vegetarian movements is noted by Marguerite Beck Block, *The New Church in the New World; a Study of Swedenborgianism in America* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 69, 79. Such contexts become satirized in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short-story “Hall of Fantasy” (1843) where the companion of the narrator who has spoken reverently of Swedenborg’s statue in the imagination’s veritable Hall of Fame, interrupts (and ends) the narrative with his need for a vegetarian dinner of vegetables and fruit. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 744-745.

<sup>102</sup> Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson’s Search for Universal Laws*, 130.

as a kind of intuitive, spiritualized instinct: “When the human will shall be brought into coincidence with the Divine Will, then will also reason live from instinct and look towards it... Our instincts will no longer pass under the name of animal propensities by way of expressing their degraded inferiority to reason... .”<sup>103</sup> Hallengren stipulates this is probably “the background to Emerson’s reference to instincts in connection with self-reliance, and the reason why [Emerson] suddenly linked Swedenborg to Goethe and Carlyle when his major notion of individuality was developing.”<sup>104</sup> For our purposes of unfolding the environmental implications of Emerson’s thinking, “influx” can be read as a dynamic model of knowing that creates a complex and intimate kinship between human and nonhuman. As influx is an emanating, creative flow (ultimately of Divine Love) that is everywhere the same, the more regenerate the human perceiver, the nearer he or she comes, instinctively, into intuiting that this source behind himself and all appearances binds them together into relationships as part of a larger interconnected whole. This moment of perception is very different from the Platonic view of natural objects as mere shadows of fixed higher essences, and might be seen as approximating Merleau-Ponty’s late attempts to expand his phenomenology of the body to include “the flesh of the world.” According to ecologist David Abram, Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “Flesh” as a perceptual field situates “the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware, since we have never been able to affirm one of these phenomena, the perceivable world or the perceiving

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Hallengren, *ibid.*, 131.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

self, without implicitly affirming the existence of the other.”<sup>105</sup> For Emerson, Swedenborg’s influx that spiritualized instinct and privileged intuition bore an important ramification for the perception of nature: namely, that the “NOT ME” beyond the self—to paraphrase Emerson paraphrasing Coleridge and Fichte in *Nature*—was not best comprehended from a scientific perspective (although this, too, was indispensable), but was rooted in a feeling aligned with the intuition of the artist and with aesthetic experience in general.

Thus, despite the clarion call that Emerson felt “to be a naturalist” after his Paris epiphany in 1831, these sentiments illuminate Emerson’s later retreats, or careful negotiations, with the scientific. The close of Emerson’s “History” essay is remarkable in this regard, as it expresses a great leeriness towards extending language’s representative powers over nonhuman beings—quite a striking shift away from the purported anthropocentrism of *Nature*. Its direct invocations of influx might be read vis-à-vis Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh” as a tacit acknowledgement of perceptual reciprocity in nature, and a movement on the part of Emerson towards a more biocentric perspective. It certainly crystallizes, at any rate, Joan Richardson’s observation that Emerson and Edwards both demonstrated how “truth happens to an idea in a reciprocal relationship with an environment.”<sup>106</sup> Emerson writes at the essay’s finale:

I hold our actual knowledge very cheap. Hear the rats in the wall, see the lizard on the fence, the fungus under foot, the lichen on the log. What do I know sympathetically, morally, of either of these worlds of life? As old as the Caucasian man,--perhaps older,--

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<sup>105</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 66. For more on the environmental implication of Merleau-Ponty’s perceptual reciprocity, see Mauritia Harney, “Merleau-Ponty, Ecology, and Biosemiotics,” in *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, ed. Suzanne Cataldi (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 141-150.

<sup>106</sup> Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, 94.

these creatures have kept their counsel beside him, and there is no record of any word or sign that has passed from one to the other... Broader and deeper we must write our annals,--from an ethical reformation, *from an influx of the ever new*, ever sanative conscience,--if we would trulier express our central and wide-related nature, instead of this old chronology of selfishness and pride to which we have too long lent our eyes. Already that day exists for us, shines in on us at unawares, *but the path of science and of letters is not the way into nature*. The idiot, the Indian, the child and unschooled farmer's boy stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read, than the dissector or the antiquary.<sup>107</sup> (emphases mine)

The “influx of the ever new” into the human mind effects a moral regeneration of perception that opens Emersonian rays of relation “to those neighboring systems of being” in the homely creatures of the lizard and rats in the walls. Emerson is calling for a new kind of writing—“broader and deeper must we right our annals.” If we are to read Emerson’s “Poet” as anticipating and calling forth Whitman in specific ways, we might see the close of “History” as deliberately heralding Thoreau.

Thoreau came into Emerson’s circle precisely as Emerson’s criticisms of Swedenborg and the Swedenborgians were becoming sharper, distancing Emerson from his initial enthusiasm. He had written to Carlyle in 1834 how the Swedenborgian New Church “was deeply interesting, as a sect which I think must contribute more than all other sects to the new faith which must arise out of all.”<sup>108</sup> Yet a few years later, all Swedenborgians had sectarian “lockjaw,” and Emerson is

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<sup>107</sup> My emphasis; Emerson, *Essays*, 256.

<sup>108</sup> Emerson, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 32-33.

irritated at the “immense arrogancy and subtle bigotry” of Sampson Reed’s church.<sup>109</sup>

Swedenborg was killed by ideas “as moth to a flame,” his writings were “a dull prismatic blur,” he was “like a bear who fattens in the dark & in the cold.”<sup>110</sup> Sometimes Emerson’s critiques of Swedenborg’s theology coincided with his growing interest in eastern religious literature (an interest that also parallels the emerging intensity of Emerson’s relationship with Thoreau in the 1840’s).<sup>111</sup> Swedenborg’s correspondence theory, in fact, has been read by several scholars as a decisive factor in the subsequent rift that developed between Emerson and Thoreau. According to Joel Porte, correspondential theory was a “pious fraud” that Thoreau inherited from Emerson which had to be perforce exorcised, a process most apparent in the writing process behind *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849).<sup>112</sup> This book shows Thoreau (according to Porte’s influential reading) consciously eschewing Emersonian idealism to embrace “the reality of things” (in Thoreau’s words). Thoreau does indeed seem to write a rejoinder to Emersonian ethics in the penultimate “Friday” chapter of *A Week*, where he writes how “the eye which can appreciate the naked and absolute beauty of scientific truth is far more rare than that which is attracted by a moral one.”<sup>113</sup> Thoreau also frankly admitted he “had no practical use for Swedenborg.” Nevertheless, as Brian Harding has eloquently counter-argued, this dialectical

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<sup>109</sup> Emerson, *JMN* V: 481; VII: 31; IX: 300.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, X: 150, 357.

<sup>111</sup> c.f. “As for King Swedenborg I object to his cardinal position that evils should be shunned as sins. I hate preaching. I shun evils as evils. [...] As for this ‘shunning evils as sins,’ I prefer the ethics of the Vishnu. Too much form, O Swedenborg! too many steps, too much dogma, too much government. I see not that the soul can have need of elegance, said Confucius.” Emerson *JMN* IX: 313-314.

<sup>112</sup> Joel Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict* (New York: AMS Press, 1985).

<sup>113</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers ; Walden, or, Life in the Woods ; The Maine Woods ; Cape Cod* (New York, N.Y: Library of America, 1985), 294.

reading that pairs a materialist Thoreau, allied with the truths of science, against an idealizing Emerson out-of-touch with the real, elides how Thoreau's view of language and nature was a consistent attempt "to read the spiritual meaning of the physical world."<sup>114</sup> This, Harding claims, had direct roots in Swedenborgian theology. For Thoreau, Swedenborg was not "the airy mystic" but "a man whose vision transformed the commonplace."<sup>115</sup> Harding's recovery of Swedenborg for Thoreau's nature aesthetics relies on a careful attention to Thoreau's responses to James John Garth Wilkinson.

Wilkinson's writings on Swedenborg, and especially his English translations of *Biological Basis of the Soul*, the *Principia*, and *The Soul's Domain* also played an essential role in Emerson's reception of Swedenborg in the 1840's and 50's. Indeed, without Wilkinson's illumination of Swedenborg's science, it is easy to read Emerson's growing dissatisfaction with Swedenborg's theology and consequently imagine Emerson growing cool towards his representative mystic, perhaps to the point, even, of Swedenborg falling out of the *Representative Men* pantheon. A closer attention to Wilkinson's mediation of Swedenborg for Emerson (and also simultaneously to others in his circle, like Thoreau) elucidates how Swedenborg came to be viewed as, in Emerson's words, "a leader in that revolution, which, by giving to science an idea, has given to an aimless accumulation of experiments, guidance and form, and a beating heart."<sup>116</sup> Emerson's Baconian reading of Swedenborg that Hallengren locates is made explicit: Swedenborg infuses the *novum organum* with life and human presence. Emerson positions Swedenborg on the paradigmatic fault line between science and belief,

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<sup>114</sup> Brian R. Harding, "Swedenborgian Spirit and Thoreauvian Sense: Another Look at Correspondence," *Journal of American Studies* 8, no. 1 (April 1974): 70.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*, 66.

<sup>116</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 670.

between empirical procedure and the human demands of spirit and imagination. Emerson's provocative framing makes Swedenborg a very modern figure, of obvious import for ecocriticism.

**“Translating Nature into Thought”:  
Wilkinson, Blake and Transatlantic Imagination**

Ralph Rusk, the editor of Emerson's collected letters, stipulated that Wilkinson's relationship with Emerson began in 1846, when Wilkinson appears to have sent Emerson a copy of his *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* (which had been discussed in chapter two as *Biological Basis of the Soul*).<sup>117</sup> An earlier date of communication is likely, however, as Wilkinson and Henry James Sr. had already begun their robust transatlantic correspondence at least two years earlier. Wilkinson had published an important article in the *New Jerusalem Messenger* that had transcribed Coleridge's annotations to Swedenborg's *Biological Basis of the Soul* in 1841, an event that could not have failed to attract Emerson's keenest interest.<sup>118</sup> Given the closeness of Emerson to the James family, and his subscription and regular readings of the *New Jerusalem Messenger*, we can safely ascertain Emerson becoming interested in Wilkinson at least by 1843.

An even earlier date is possible. While the earliest surviving letter between Emerson and Wilkinson dates from 1846, other letters from Wilkinson to his wife make it clear that starting in 1838, Wilkinson maintained a semi-regular correspondence with Thomas Carlyle. In 1838, Wilkinson had sent Carlyle a packet of books containing several Swedenborg titles, as well as

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<sup>117</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), III: 342.

<sup>118</sup> Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson's Search for Universal Laws*, 110. Hallengren notes—correctly—that “in the literary world, Coleridge is among Swedenborg's earliest readers.” See the earlier footnoted discussion regarding Coleridge on page 91.

Wilkinson's reprint of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*—the first letterpress edition of Blake's iconic *Songs*, as has been noted. Carlyle responded in-kind to Wilkinson, and made the following comment about the gift of Swedenborg books:

“Hitherto I have known nearly nothing of Swedenborg; or indeed I might say less than nothing, having been wont to picture him as an amiable but inane visionary with affections quite out of proportion to his insights; from whom nothing was to be learned. It is so we judge of extraordinary men. But I have been rebuked already: a little Book by one Sampson Reed of Boston in New England which some friend sent hither, taught me that a Swedenborgian might have thoughts of the calmest sort on the deepest things; that in short I did *not* know Swedenborg, and ought to be ready to know him.”<sup>119</sup>

The “some friend” who had sent on Reed's “little book hither” was, of course, Emerson, who had sent Carlyle a copy of *Growth of the Mind* in 1834. While no surviving letters attest to Carlyle ever mentioning Wilkinson to Emerson, it could have been a likely topic given their transatlantic banter about Emerson's “Swedenborgian druggist” Sampson Reed.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, Wilkinson's seminal recovery of Blake's poetry came into Emerson's possession in 1842. At some point in this year, Wilkinson's edition (with his substantial preface) began to be read and discussed by Boston cognoscenti. An inscribed copy was given to Emerson by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody that year (who else, in light of her similar procurement of Oegger and other exotic rare texts?), which became subsequently annotated in Emerson's hand. As

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<sup>119</sup> Thomas Carlyle, “T.C. to James John Garth Wilkinson,” *The Carlyle Letters Online* 10, no. 1 (August 2, 1838): 141-142.

<sup>120</sup> A number of letters in the Carlyle—Emerson correspondence were stolen in 1885 by a secretary of Carlyle's after Carlyle's death. Their loss significantly hindered Edward Emerson's (Emerson's son) attempt to create a complete Carlyle—Emerson correspondence.

Richard Grivil points out, Emerson could have been aware of seemingly fleeting references to Blake that were made in the *New Jerusalem Messenger* as early as 1832. However, given that Emerson makes no direct reference to Blake until much later, in 1863, when he first borrows Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* from the library, the consistent earlier affinities between Emerson and Blake present, in Grivil's words, "one of the least understood facets of Anglo-American transactions in the Romantic period."<sup>121</sup>

According to Claire Elliott, who expands (and much improves) Grivil's initial research, this early American engagement with Blake via Wilkinson in the 1840's constitutes a significantly ignored chapter in the history of transatlantic Romanticism, as it demonstrates that while a readership for Blake more or less languished in England until the publication of Gilchrist's 1863 *Life*, the text that kick-started the great Victorian revival of Blake, there was a lively reading and discussion of Blake in America two decades earlier. Elliot ingeniously argues that there might be something "distinctly American" in Blake's poetics (and his politics of the 1790's), but that exploring these lines of influence (which she continues into Whitman) reinstate Emerson and Whitman as "heirs to a Blakean legacy" that complicates their respective emblematic status as carriers of uniquely American poetic individualism.<sup>122</sup> In addition to his *Songs* reprint, Wilkinson was directly responsible for republishing selections from Blake's *Poetical Sketches* in the pages of the *Harbinger* in 1848, where Henry James Sr. was the chief

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<sup>121</sup> Richard Grivil, "Blake in Boston: When and How?," *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations* 1, no. 2 (1997): 1.

<sup>122</sup> Clare Frances Elliott, "William Blake's American Legacy: Transcendentalism and Visionary Poetics in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman" (PhD Dissertation, Glasgow: University of Glasgow, Scotland, 2009).

editor. This marked the first time that these poems had been reprinted since their original appearance sixty-five years earlier, in 1783, as Raymond Deck observes.<sup>123</sup>

Wilkinson's role as facilitator in these transatlantic recirculations of Blake are being emphasized because they inform the backdrop of Emerson's partial disenchantment with Swedenborg and his simultaneous new engagement with Swedenborg's science throughout the 1840's. Blake was, due to Wilkinson's preface to the *Songs*, often read in this period as "Swedenborgian." For Emerson, then, Blake may have further suggested a literary potential within Swedenborg, a way of "creative reading" that would approach the mystic as Blake did, as an innovative bricoleur.<sup>124</sup> This claim could be made with more certainty had Emerson read Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and seen how Blake's critical reading of Swedenborg becomes the generative energy for the text—there is something quite piquant that happens when Blake's *Marriage* is placed next to Emerson's "Swedenborg; or, the Mystic," and one considers the role these respective texts play in larger configurations of Romanticism. But, again, Emerson did not read this work by Blake until the 1860's. Accordingly, the most overt echoes and allusions to Blake made by Emerson come quite late, in his "Poetry" lecture and long "Imagination and Poetry" essay. Nevertheless, even before these later writings, unpublished Wilkinson letters make it clear that Emerson was part of coteries during his England visit in 1847-1848 where Blake was an object of dinner table discussion.<sup>125</sup> Emerson did read (and

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<sup>123</sup> Raymond Deck, "Blake's 'Poetical Sketches' Finally Arrive in America," *Review of English Studies* 14 (1980): 183-192.

<sup>124</sup> "There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion." Emerson, *Essays*, 59.

<sup>125</sup> Many of these letters will be made available in their entirety for the first time in the forthcoming *England's Forgotten Philosopher: the Selected Letters of James John Garth*

annotate), perhaps already in 1842, Wilkinson's Preface to the *Songs* hailing Blake as an ignored revolutionary genius, where he described additionally the author in specifically Swedenborgian terms: Wilkinson reads Blake's iconography as illustrative of the process of vastation—a reading, that to my knowledge, has never been situated to Henry James Sr.'s later famous vastation experience.<sup>126</sup> According to F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James Sr. “greatly admired” Blake's *Songs*, and Wilkinson's Preface thus opens up a new line for coming to terms with James's self-description of his devastating breakdown in 1844: Wilkinson's version of Blake, in a sense, likely lay down an unacknowledged psychic template. James never alludes to Blake or Wilkinson in this regard, however, and narrates his vastation as being elucidated to him by Sophia Chichester; the precise date of when Wilkinson and James began corresponding, moreover, and when James first read Wilkinson's version of Blake, has yet to be determined.<sup>127</sup> Additionally, according to Kevin Hutchings, Wilkinson's Preface is one of the first critical readings of Blake that pays attention to Blake's conceptualizations of nature (albeit negatively: Wilkinson blames Blake for having an “excessive love” of natural forms).<sup>128</sup>

There is thus good reason for charting out how Swedenborg as a scientific writer evolved in tandem with Emerson reading him as the literary inspiration for a quintessential visionary like Blake. These two axes—the one scientific, the other wholly imaginative—help unravel

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*Wilkinson* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2011), a collection which I am editing that draws on unpublished Wilkinson letters held by the London Swedenborg Society, Harvard's Houghton Library, and the New York Public Library.

<sup>126</sup> See the discussion in Frederick H. Evans, *James John Garth Wilkinson: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: (privately printed), 1936), 20-22.

<sup>127</sup> See F. O. Matthiessen, *The James Family A Group Biography* (New York: Overlook Press, 2008), 8-9.

<sup>128</sup> Kevin Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics* (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 37, 150.

Emerson's consistent and enigmatic alignment of Swedenborg with literature and literary criticism, a thought that carries from the early "Literary Ethics" lecture into "The Poet," where "of all men in recent ages, [Swedenborg] stands eminently for the translator of nature into thought," and into the opening enigma presented in the Swedenborg essay from *Representative Men*—"I have sometimes thought that he would render the greatest service to modern criticism, who shall draw the line of relation that subsists between Shakspeare and Swedenborg."<sup>129</sup>

Emerson's constellation of readings of Swedenborg's science, when paired with encountering the most imaginative of British Romantic poets, might have seen to play out Sampson Reed's claim for poetry needing to become "the bulwark of science."

Wilkinson's biographical accounts of Swedenborg, both his 1841 essay for the *Penny Encyclopedia* and his longer full length book published in 1849, were used by Emerson as sources for his lectures on Swedenborg and the essay that appeared in *Representative Men*.<sup>130</sup> As Carl Theophilus Odhner writes, Wilkinson's 1849 biography was the first to postulate coherently a connection between Swedenborg's scientific projects and his subsequent theological career, braiding the two interests together.<sup>131</sup> "Another synthesis effected by Swedenborg," as Wilkinson writes in the biography, "is that of poetry with reason and science." The subsequent passages elaborate on the necessary role the imagination performs for science in being able to unite disparate parts together into larger wholes—a classic function of the Romantic imagination, we

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<sup>129</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 464; 661.

<sup>130</sup> Hotson, "Emerson's Biographical Sources for 'Swedenborg'."

<sup>131</sup> Carl Theophilus Odhner, *James John Garth Wilkinson: A Biographical Sketch* (Huntingdon Valley, PA.: Academy Book Room, 1901), 19.

might note, that Karl Kroeber claims is a crucial antecedent for ecosystemic holism.<sup>132</sup> In a passage reminiscent of the end of Emerson's "History," Wilkinson calls for the imagination in this "full stretch and lustiest life" to "touch the facts the living God has made." Wilkinson continues:

If you want to understand a beetle, look at with all the imagination through the glass of the universe; translate it into a mineral, into a vegetable, and into a man; run it along its own line of genera and species, and let it catch illumination from them all; and when you have enlarged it from this associated empire, its atomic theory will be palpable and distinct: every habit, limb and entrail will be a self-evident proposition.<sup>133</sup>

Wilkinson's valuation of this synthetic power of the scientific imagination is what leads Emerson to claim in "Representative Men" that Wilkinson has a "coequal vigor of understanding and imagination comparable only to Lord Bacon's."<sup>134</sup>

Wilkinson's particular commentaries and expositions on Swedenborgian correspondence are also noteworthy in this regard, as they emphasize the material, natural conditions necessary for its analogical structure. In Wilkinson's "Correspondence" essay that appeared in Peabody's *Aesthetic Papers*, for example, Wilkinson stresses how a genuine correspondence does not place substantial materiality in deference to a higher ideal realm, but rather unites the natural and spiritual together into a single moment of perception. As Harding puts it, "far from subordinating the physical to the spiritual, the theory of correspondence was seen by Wilkinson as a means of

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<sup>132</sup> Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 58.

<sup>133</sup> James John Garth Wilkinson, *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Biography* (London: W. Newbury, 1849), 261-262.

<sup>134</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 670.

making them one—of producing ‘conjunction’.”<sup>135</sup> Partially accounting for why Emerson writes that Wilkinson is a reincarnated Francis Bacon, Wilkinson in his *Aesthetic Papers* essay calls correspondence a “nexus of creation” that “manifests what Lord Bacon calls transitive instances” when “creation is taking place.”<sup>136</sup> Wilkinson’s interpretation of correspondences as Baconian “transitive instances” makes them play out a (proto)pragmatist sense of truth.

Reading Wilkinson’s influential articulation of correspondence theory as pragmatist further discloses the importance of lived experience that underwrites Wilkinson’s definition of how correspondential analogy operates, as it also explains Wilkinson’s sharp critique of continental Idealist philosophy as misanthropic, a point with which Emerson seems to have resonated. “There is,” Wilkinson writes in “Correspondence,”

however, one caution which cannot be too often enforced in the prosecution of analogies and correspondences. It is, that both terms of the intellectual equation *must lie within some sphere of experience*, or no conclusion will be valid from one to the other... *Experience, therefore, is indispensable in both spheres*; and, if there were no actual experience of the spiritual world, there could be no safe conclusion, except a negative one, from the natural world to the spiritual. Therefore correspondence does not engender, but simply follows experience...<sup>137</sup> (emphases mine)

The stress on lived experience here re-encapsulates a longer argument Wilkinson made via Swedenborg in his “Introductory Remarks” to Swedenborg’s *Outlines on the Infinite* (a segmented part of the larger *Principia* project) in 1847. Emerson highly valued this particular

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<sup>135</sup> Harding, “Swedenborgian Spirit and Thoreauvian Sense,” 71.

<sup>136</sup> James John Garth Wilkinson, “Correspondence,” in *Aesthetic Papers*, ed. Elizabeth Peabody (Boston: the Publisher, 1849), 138.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136.

essay by Wilkinson; he gushed to Margaret Fuller that that “you ought to see [Wilkinson’s essay]. Tis much the best piece of criticism on Modern Opinions, especially Transcendentalism, which has yet been written.”<sup>138</sup> This was almost surely what Emerson had in mind when he later wrote in *Representative Men* that Wilkinson’s various prefaces “throw all contemporary philosophy of England into shade” (a further oblique jibe, it would seem, at Carlyle, with whom Emerson was falling out as Carlyle became ever more cantankerous and conservative, and given that Carlyle held, privately, Wilkinson at a bemused, skeptical distance). Wilkinson’s “Introductory Remarks” to the *Outlines* is a robust critique of Kantian Idealism premised on Swedenborgian theology, arguing that their transcendental philosophy, in a scrambling attempt to counteract skepticism and materialism, completely neglected human and natural facts, creating a version of the mind that was ultimately “disembodied life,” as Wilkinson puts it, and therefore unintelligible. Kant’s insuperable divide between noumena and phenomena led to a philosophical Gordian knot where “both spiritual and natural experience are shaken to the base, and all scientific vision of the deeper parts of nature, is set down as a dream, in which, the figments of the mind are mistaken for the unattainable truth of ‘things in themselves.’”<sup>139</sup> Wilkinson’s proposed solution to this Kantian dilemma is a necessary encounter with (and accounting for) the “natural foundation” of truths in “our mechanical age,” that shows the interdependence of both

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<sup>138</sup> Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, III: 414.

<sup>139</sup> James John Garth Wilkinson, “Introductory Remarks by the Translator” in Emanuel Swedenborg, *Outlines of a Philosophical Argument on the Infinite, and the Final Cause of Creation ; and on the Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body* (London: W. Newbery, 1847), 6.

spiritual and natural realms. The domain of thought is naturalized; ideas carry force just as tangible and real an impression on the mind as the five senses.<sup>140</sup>

Wilkinson's attempt to reconcile an Idealist position with the "outward universe" can be mapped in conjunction with Emerson's own shift away from Idealist positions taken in *Nature*, where the natural world is wholly subject to the higher moral needs of man, to a more complex and simultaneously pragmatic vision that begins to emerge in the 1840's and comes to culmination with the essays in *The Conduct of Life* (1860). "Nature is no sentimentalist," as Emerson writes in "Fate," in a passage that would be jarringly out-of-place in the earlier *Nature*: "[Nature] does not cosset or pamper us. We must see that the world is rough and surly, and will not mind drowning a man or a woman; but swallows your ship like a grain of dust... The habit of snake and spider, the snap of the tiger and other leapers and bloody jumpers, the crackle of the bones of his prey in the coil of the anaconda—these are in the system, and our habits are like theirs."<sup>141</sup> But, the same essay also asks in the wake of all this bloody natural history data, "How shall I live?" "Our geometry cannot span these extreme points, and reconcile them. What to do?" Emerson's incipient pragmatism implodes the cliché of him as the otherworldly dreamy mystic—as pilloried in Christopher Pearce Cranch's famous caricature of Emerson as a

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<sup>140</sup> A teleological process elaborated by Richardson extensively in *Natural History of Pragmatism*. With few exceptions, the significance of Swedenborg as a philosopher in this naturalization in the history of ideas—what philosopher Richard Rorty has concisely called evolution of "the 'idea' idea"—has been barely noted (no doubt due to Swedenborg's trappings of mysticism). As the transatlantic correspondence of Henry James Sr. and Wilkinson makes abundantly clear, taking Swedenborg as a philosopher of ideas (and not ostensibly as theologian or exegete) prompts both Wilkinson and James (especially in the latter's *Substance and Shadow*) to shape unusually sharp Kantian critiques that subsequently left a marked impact on Pragmatism. This trajectory of the "idea" idea in American philosophy has been barely traced, and is substantial enough to warrant expansion into a separate study.

<sup>141</sup> Emerson, *Essays*, 771.

distended floating eyeball—that have corroborated ecocritiques of Emerson as an out-of-touch Idealist, a writer who continued a dangerous Cartesian disjuncture between mind and body that Kant had reinstated at the end of the Enlightenment.<sup>142</sup> That Wilkinson, and his deliberate weaving of correspondence to a natural, organic base informed by natural history, became part of Emerson’s later conceptualizations of nature should perhaps come as no great surprise; the pragmatist strand could be devolved back even further to Reed’s gnomic aphorisms in *Growth of the Mind* that “truth, all truth, is practical,” that “truth is the way in which we should act,” and truth “adheres to objects.”<sup>143</sup> Reed’s source for such statements lies in Swedenborg’s elaborations on “use” and truth; Hallengren makes a sophisticated case for Swedenborg’s emphasis on morality affecting the Transcendentalist adaptation of British Utilitarian and Common-Sense philosophy—Swedenborg allowed Emerson and others to “spiritualize use” away from the strictly human (and even explicitly commercial, free-market) overtones that “utilitarian philosophy” had acquired in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a shift essential for the subsequent emergence of an ethically-oriented pragmatist philosophy.<sup>144</sup>

Emerson was not the only Transcendentalist to respond to Wilkinson and his Swedenborgian ideas in ways we might read as either proto-pragmatist or proto-environmental. In 1851, a year after supposedly breaking free from the “pious fraud” of Swedenborgian correspondence doctrines (according to Porte, anyway), Thoreau’s journal details a sustained and

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<sup>142</sup> On reading Kant as (negatively) reinstating Cartesian dualism in this regard, see Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 137-138.

<sup>143</sup> Reed, “Observations on the Growth of the Mind,” 24; 49.

<sup>144</sup> Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson’s Search for Universal Laws*, 166-175. On the presence of Swedenborgian “use” philosophy within Pragmatism, see Paul Jerome Croce, “Mankind’s Own Providence: From Swedenborgian Philosophy of Use to William James’s Pragmatism,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (2007): 490-508.

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telling reading of Wilkinson's *The Human Body and Its Connexion with Man, Illustrated by the Principal Organs* (1851), a book length study—perhaps Wilkinson's best monograph—on the universal correspondence of the human figure as a kind of master signifier for scientific fields.

Thoreau writes at length in response to Wilkinson's words:

Wilkinson's book to some extent realizes what I have dreamed of a return to the primitive analogical & derivative senses of words- His ability to trace analogies often leads him to a truer word than more remarkable writers have found.-- ... The man of science discovers no world for the mind of man with all its faculties to inhabit – Wilkinson finds a *home* for the imagination--& it is no longer cast out and homeless. All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy.—we reason from our hands to our head.<sup>145</sup>

Swedenborg's correspondential vision, his hieroglyphics of nature, diffused here through Wilkinson's vivid prose, stimulate Thoreau to dream "of a return to the analogical and derivative sense of words." This dream becomes the foundation for *Walden* and its repeated etymologies that trace language through a series of turning puns back to recover linguistic roots, when words were once "one with things." This climaxes in *Walden* in its penultimate "Spring" chapter, where Thoreau's meditation on the melting, muddy banks of snow push him to a profoundly evolutionary perspective on language, as many have taken note. According to Philip Gura, "while Thoreau's notion of the relationship between language and nature can hardly be termed 'transcendental' in the Emersonian or 'correspondential' in the Swedenborgian sense, he arrived at his philosophical and imaginative conception of language by working through the linguistic

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<sup>145</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, ed. John C Broderick, Robert Sattelmeyer, and Sandra Harbert Petrulionis (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1981), IV: 46.

premises of such theories.”<sup>146</sup> This acknowledgement should correct the common ecocritical contention that Thoreau’s hermeneutics of nature primarily stemmed from his encounter with texts by Coleridge.<sup>147</sup> Along with Gura, I would argue that these overlooked readings in Wilkinson, Reed, and Swedenborg were just as significant for revolutionizing an approach towards Thoreau experiencing (and writing about) nature as “living poetry,” and “written revelation,” as the jubilant end of *Walden* puts it.<sup>148</sup>

Thoreau exemplifies what Emerson had made implicitly possible through his rendering of Swedenborg as a “representative man” for America at its mid-century, a “lens through which we read our own minds.” Swedenborg’s ideas were to be used, to be pragmatized: “the power to which [representative men] communicate is not theirs... Great men exist that there may be greater men. The destiny of organized nature is amelioration.”<sup>149</sup> Positioned by Emerson as a figure who straddled the divide between nature and language, as a mediating juncture for perception and thought, Swedenborg’s representative qualities were channeled into the later environmental poetics of American Transcendentalism. Swedenborg’s emblematic status became amplified in Emerson’s circle, and Swedenborgian “influx” and “correspondence” became broadcasted as components of aesthetic experience that went on to gravitate and coalesce around the emergence of the environmental imagination, as the brief discussions of Thoreau and Whitman above have tried to suggest. The subsequent groundswell of an American ecological movement in the preservation and conservation efforts at the century’s close was energized and driven by John Muir’s concurrent vision of aesthetic value in wild spaces that inculcated

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<sup>146</sup> Gura, *The Wisdom of Words*, 137.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred*, 138-139.

<sup>148</sup> Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*, 569, 570.

<sup>149</sup> Emerson, *Essay*, 631-632.

religious, ecstatic wonder. This has at its core a concept of the transcendental self engaged in a hermeneutical decoding of nature, suddenly released by an epiphanic perception of correspondence and felt connection with larger wholes.<sup>150</sup> To Muir, his beloved Sierra Nevada mountains displayed “divine hieroglyphics”; they were holy places where one could witness nature “eternally flowing from use to use, beauty to yet higher beauty; and we soon cease to lament waste and death, and rather rejoice and exult in the imperishable, unspendable wealth of the universe.”<sup>151</sup> That an 18th century Scandinavian mystic shadows Muir’s influential proclamations about the American west here is one of the stranger and more interesting stories in the history of American ideas and transatlantic Romanticism. That this kind of metaphysical otherness of nature remains so hotly contested by environmentalists and ecocritics further suggests how the ray of relation that Emerson drew from Shakespeare to Swedenborg continues as a live wire into our present, echoing a Romantic aesthetic legacy that refuses to relinquish its grip on the ways we continue to imagine ourselves and the world around us.

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<sup>150</sup> The importance of Christian mystical traditions to Muir is covered by Dennis Williams, “John Muir, Christian Mysticism, and the Spiritual Value of Nature,” in *John Muir: Life and Work*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 64-99. Williams’ rather general survey does not discuss or mention Swedenborg; yet, a large body of letters exchanged between Muir and Joseph Worcester, the Swedenborgian minister and Arts-and-Crafts progenitor based in San Francisco, evince that Swedenborg was a thinker that Muir took seriously. Annotated copies of Swedenborg’s volumes (gifted from Worcester) that Muir owned and kept in his library are currently housed at the Muir Center, University of the Pacific.

<sup>151</sup> John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), 296.

### Afterword: Prospects

“The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not without observation—a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God,—he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight.” – Emerson, *Nature*

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Towards the end of his essay on Swedenborg in *Representative Men*, Emerson writes that Swedenborg is “retrospective”—always a negative keyword for the ever-future oriented Emerson, his preferred term of cultural indictment he uses for the opening salvo of *Nature*. “I think, sometimes,” Emerson writes further on, “that [Swedenborg] will not be read longer.” He is “the last Father in the Church, and he is not likely to have a successor.”<sup>1</sup> Such remarks partially reflect Emerson’s stinging disappointment in Swedenborgians like Sampson Reed who had seemed to offer so much radical potential at the outset of Emerson’s career. Yet, by 1849, Emerson found the “Swedenborgian Church an imprisonment in the letter; never a hero stirs out of it,” and Reed went on to endorse Daniel Webster’s opprobrious concessions to slavery.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, Emerson’s death-knell for Swedenborg as a serious figure bore itself out in the decades that followed. Henry James Senior’s *The Secret of Swedenborg: Being an Elucidation of His Divine Doctrine of Humanity* (1869) was widely met with critical derision—William Dean Howells famously quipped that if Swedenborg had a secret, well, then James Sr. certainly

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 688, 676.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. XI: 117.

seemed to have kept it.<sup>3</sup> For all of Wilkinson's élan and brilliance that Emerson and Thoreau duly appreciated, and his ongoing prodigious publishing of works related to Swedenborg that went on into the 1870's and 80's, Wilkinson nonetheless remained obscure and largely ignored by the various literary coteries he circulated within. As Emerson noted in a letter to Sam Ward, he was reading Wilkinson "with admiration, as always, of his talent. Yet, with prodigious genius, he has no following; more following than [Bronson] Alcott. In England, I never found one reader or believer in him. And he himself plainly knew not his own rate."<sup>4</sup> Swedenborg's influence certainly subsisted at a popular level into the Gilded Age within spiritualist circles, the New Thought movement, and later forms of Blavatskian theosophy, but as a serious philosophical presence in the way that Swedenborg had functioned as a lodestar for Emerson and Blake did not substantially last beyond the earlier Romantic eras that their work respectively delineates.

There are exceptions one could readily argue here. Paul Croce and Eugene Taylor have both undertaken to demonstrate how the Swedenborgian philosophy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially as it came to be articulated and formed in the late work of Henry James Sr., formed a vital context for the emergence of Pragmatism in William James and Charles Sanders Pierce.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Eugene Taylor, "Pierce and Swedenborg," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 6, no. 1 (1986). Reprinted online at: [http://www.shs.psr.edu/studia/index.asp?article\\_id=101](http://www.shs.psr.edu/studia/index.asp?article_id=101)

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), Vol IV: 255.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Taylor, "Pierce and Swedenborg." and Eugene Taylor, "The Appearance of Swedenborg in the History of American Psychology," in *Swedenborg and His Influence*, ed. Erland Brock (Bryn Athyn, Pa.: The Academy of the New Church, 1988), 155-176. Paul Jerome Croce, *Science and Religion in the Era of William James: Eclipse of Certainty, 1820-1880*, illustrated edition. (University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Paul Jerome Croce, "Mankind's Own Providence: From Swedenborgian Philosophy of Use to William James's Pragmatism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (2007): 490-508. Joan Richardson also argues the influence of Swedenborg via Henry

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Swedenborgian philosophy became a further essential conduit for Zen Buddhism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in both the pioneering translations and work of D.T. Suzuki and the activities of Philangi Dasi (the pseudonym of Herman Vetterling, an ex-Swedenborgian minister who established the first Buddhist journal in North America).<sup>6</sup>

This project has utilized an ecocritical rubric and the contours of environmental history to frame Swedenborg's presence in transatlantic Romanticism, particularly as we might locate this in Emerson and Blake. Both of these figures, it has been argued, lent themselves to an idealist-based tradition of nature writing that counters the substantialist canon that most green accounts of Romanticism have built themselves upon.<sup>7</sup> Swedenborg's correspondence doctrine and theories of immanent influx came to shape aesthetic sensibility that tended to translate the experience of nature and wilderness into a hermeneutical network of signs that—paradoxically—became increasingly secular as the century progressed, even as it maintained a certain notion of the transcendental self and its necessary experience of conversion. Swedenborg thus illustrates how the evolution of nature aesthetics and their attendant legal properties of conservation and preservation are inextricable from the wider problem of the place of religion in Romantic cultures.

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James Sr. is not to be underestimated in the cases of both William and Henry the Younger. Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially chapters four and five.

<sup>6</sup> See Devin Zuber, "Buddha of the North: Swedenborg and Transpacific Zen," *Religion and the Arts* 14, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-33. Thomas A. Tweed, "American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 249-281.

<sup>7</sup> c.f. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

If this project were to be developed further, there are several key lines dilating outwards from Romanticism into explicitly environmental contexts, especially within the United States, that could be productively expanded upon. John Muir presents perhaps the most obvious example of an opportunity for extending an inquiry as to how Swedenborgian correspondence and influx became rearticulated in wilderness aesthetics. As noted at the close of the last chapter, Muir maintained a lengthy correspondence and friendship with Joseph Worcester, a Swedenborgian minister, architect, and progenitor of the American Arts-and-Crafts movement.<sup>8</sup> The landscape painter William Keith was also close to Muir and Worcester, and Keith's later paintings—much like his contemporary George Inness—attempted to develop a specific painting style and theory of representation that was based on Swedenborg's theological writings. His iconic landscapes, such as *Glory of the Heavens* (1891), according to Richard Silver, dissolve place and a sense of time into something atmospherically abstract that was meant “to stimulate the viewer's imagination. The audience had to create the painting.”<sup>9</sup> As significant as Swedenborg's writings were for Keith attempting to paint the interpenetration of a spiritual world with the natural, so were his extended wilderness trips he took with Muir, and Keith became one of Muir's closest confidantes essential for the establishment of the Sierra Club (Muir famously dubbed Keith his “painter-poet”).

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<sup>8</sup> Worcester's importance for west coast Arts-and-Crafts is covered in Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim, *Building with Nature: Inspiration for the Arts & Crafts Home* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2005). Freudenheim notes the importance of Swedenborg for Worcester's vision of architecture that would reveal “the divine beauty of nature.”

<sup>9</sup> Richard Kenneth Silver, “The Spiritual Kingdom in America: the Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on American Society and Culture, 1815-1860” (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1983), 270.



William Keith, *Glory of the Heavens* (1891)  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

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The annotated volumes of Swedenborg in Muir's library (gifts from Keith and Worcester), as well as Muir's extensive unpublished correspondence with both Worcester and Keith, are suggestive entry points for further expanding this present project's findings.

If this indicates a potential node on the west coast, the more or less contemporaneous regionalist fiction by Sarah Orne Jewett in New England suggests another direction that the groundlines established here could be taken. Jewett's fiction writing has become important for ecocritical appraisals of late 19<sup>th</sup> century literary productions ever since Buell gave attention to her use of regional realism to turn "the impoverishment of place into imaginative gain."<sup>10</sup> Jewett has subsequently become the object of several longer and sustained environmental readings, although most of these have proceeded without looking at Jewett's sustained interest in Swedenborg. If Josephine Donovan and Paul Blanchard are correct claiming Swedenborg's transcendental theology as one of the primary sources for Jewett's "impress of spiritual design in the material world," this must be reckoned in the ongoing greenings of Jewett into the ecocritical canon.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, adumbrating Swedenborgian concepts like correspondence within Jewett's fiction may go towards better understanding how her work creates a deliberate tension between a kind of visionary intensity and the mimetic pressures of the regional realism genre she worked within; a tension, I would argue, that charges her work with a unique elegiac tone when it comes to witnessing the disappearance of place and locality in post-civil war America. Moreover, as

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<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Ma.: Belknap Press, 1995), 177. See also Sylvia Mayer, "Literature and Environmental Ethical Criticism: Sarah Orne Jewett's New England Texts," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 124, no. 1: 101-121.

<sup>11</sup> Josephine Donovan, "Jewett and Swedenborg," *American Literature* 65, no. 4 (1993): 731-751. Swedenborg is treated extensively in Paula Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Works* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1995), chapters 7 and 8.

Jewett has been claimed as a writer unusual for her biocentric perspectives and conscious eschewing of Emersonian forms of anthropocentric Transcendentalism, the specific relationship between Swedenborg's correspondence theories and the "surprising correspondences Jewett forges between plant, animal, and human life," as Gail Smith puts it, seem another rich area for future investigation.<sup>12</sup>

In both of the above cases, noting Muir and Jewett's resorting to Swedenborg might further complicate ecocriticism's often facile critiques of post-Cartesian Idealist philosophy as the bugaboo of "authentic" environmental thought, and thus answer Timothy Morton's call for new, more complex kinds of ecocritical negotiations with (and even uses of) a legacy of dualistic thinking that runs from Descartes to Kant and beyond—what Morton, tongue-in-cheek, calls "dark ecology" (instead of Næssian "deep" ecology) that begins with an acknowledged premise "that we can't escape our minds."<sup>13</sup> Emphasizing these aspects in Muir and Jewett would also further demonstrate the vitality of religious ideologies that undercuts American nature-writing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and thus work to further complicate ecocriticism's conspicuous lack of theorizing religion as a generative locus. As both John Gatta and Catherine Rigby have forcefully argued, most green studies continue to treat Romanticism as part of a larger teleological process of secularization brought on by advancements in science, which ultimately makes the dominant greenings of Romanticism repeat M. H. Abrams contention that the period hinges on a crux of "the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking."<sup>14</sup> As

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<sup>12</sup> Gayle Smith, "The Language of Transcendence in Sarah Orne Jewett's 'White Heron,'" *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett*, ed. Gwen Nagel (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 69-76.

<sup>13</sup> Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 201, 205.

<sup>14</sup> M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 12.

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the first chapter argued, emphasizing secularization over a process of re-enchantment runs the risk of eliding the varied Romantic responses to the heterogeneity of religious traditions. Re-examining Swedenborg's place in Romantic aesthetics can thus work to restore the role that religious experience played in forming the 19<sup>th</sup> century environmental imagination, and the ways the imaginary was increasingly called upon to negotiate a space for belief under growing pressure from the natural sciences.

Better comprehending these Romantic roots of this historical tension may ultimately aid the present conversation about the contested relationship between religion and environmental ethics. Are “the moral systems of Western ethics and religion nearly powerless,” as Charlene Spretnak writes, to aid us in our moment of ecological crisis, “because those systems are largely devoid of ecological wisdom”?<sup>15</sup> Or, conversely, to frame the problem from a different angle: if Charles Taylor and other scholars of religion are correct in deconstructing the traditional pairing that is made between the unfolding of modernity and secularism, and their defining the emergence of a “post-secular” era—something that seems all the more tenable given the recent rapid growth (in America, at any rate) of mega-church cultures and the resurgence of competing forms of fundamentalisms—what then happens to modernity's alignment of secular cosmopolitan values with a scientific culture of truth and environmentalist practice?<sup>16</sup> Turning backwards to the Romantics' use of Swedenborg to re-enchant nature will not provide any

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<sup>15</sup> Charlene Spretnak, “Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. I. Diamond and G. F. Ornstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).10-11.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). See also Colin Jager, “After the Secular: The Subject of Romanticism,” *Public Culture* 18, no. 49 (Spring 2006): 301-321. Colin Jager, “Secularism, Cosmopolitanism, and Romanticism,” *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, [http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/secularism/jager/jager\\_intro.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/secularism/jager/jager_intro.html).

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solutions to such present challenges. Addressing the era's complexities may help us, however, account for the remnants of an ideology about the self, nature, and the authentication of belief that continues to pattern western aesthetic responses to nature—acutely apparent in something like the ongoing viability of the landscape as a representational tradition—a factor that becomes all the more critical to negotiate as we face environmental problems demanding global cooperation between stakeholders from very different cultural backgrounds and divergent ways of imagining the world.

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