The Politics of Sacrifice
Liberation, Deformity, and Odin in *The Book of Ahania*

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ABSTRACT: In William Blake's *The Book of Ahania* (1795), the figure Fuzon is killed by his tyrant father Urizen before being sacrificed in a pseudo-Crucifixion scene. While the Christian iconography is apparent, a closer textual reading of his subsequent deformity reveals that this scene also has roots in the British eighteenth-century Northern antiquarianism, a literary and artistic movement interested in the ancient North. In his poetry, Blake's engagement with Northern antiquarianism is visible in disabled and deformed figures that embody both liberation from and repression of State, religion, and nation. In *The Book of Ahania*, Blake examines the tension between Norse primitive warmongering and Gothic liberty as the foundations of a body politic—that of Urizen's oppressive State Religion—where Fuzon's death and deformity extends beyond Christological analogues to become a type of Odinic sacrifice. In this poem, I suggest that Fuzon transforms into a composite image of Odin-as-chieftain who seeks liberation from Rome, and Odin-as-priest.

RÉSUMÉ: Dans *The Book of Ahania* (1795) de William Blake, le personnage de Fuzon est tué par son père tyrannique, Urizen, avant d'être sacrifié dans une scène pseudo-crucifixion. Si l'iconographie chrétienne est évidente, une lecture plus attentive de son difformité subséquent dans le texte révèle que cette scène trouve également ses racines dans l'antiquarianisme nordique britannique du XVIIIe siècle, un mouvement littéraire et artistique qui s'intéressait au Nord antique. Dans sa poésie, l'engagement de Blake envers l'antiquarianisme nordique est visible dans les personnages handicapés et difformes qui incarnent à la fois la libération et la répression de l'État, de la religion et de la nation. Dans *The Book of Ahania*, Blake examine la tension entre le bellicisme primitif nordique et la liberté gothique comme fondements d'un corps politique – celui de la religion d'État oppressive d'Urizen – où la mort et la difformité de Fuzon dépassent les analogies christologiques pour devenir une sorte de sacrifice odinique. Je suggère que Fuzon se transforme dans ce poème en une image composite d'Odin en tant que chef de clan cherchant à se libérer de Rome, et d'Odin en tant que prêtre.

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The body, in all its incongruity, is a key visual and literary motif in the work of artist-engraver and poet William Blake. His illuminated books—that is, poetry with accompanying designs—lends itself to a wide and varied range of conceptualizations of the human form. For example, *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794) describes a world emerging from the deformed and disabled body of Urizen. *Milton: a Poem* (c. 1804–11) follows the eponymous poet on a journey through his own body in search of Selfhood, and in Blake's most famous epic, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (composed 1804–c. 1820), the narrative centres around Albion, the personification of the nation who subsumes other beings that then interact as various components of his body politic. Reading Blake's bodies through the Judeo-Christian context, they are seen as moving towards a pre-determined outcome as envisioned in the Bible; the Divine Christian body is the reunion between humankind and Eternal God through the Body of Christ, resulting in physical and spiritual renewal to achieve perfection (Tannenbaum; Erdman 1990; Rowland). Although Blake invests in the Human Form Divine, the body in the illuminated books is a complex signifier with multiple definitions and sometimes conflicting interpretations. It does not necessarily move towards resolution or completion, especially since Blake imagines multiple forms within single entities alongside the Human Form Divine. The body acts like a fluid force and an open configuration unfixed across poems, resulting in multiple ideas co-existing within the limits of their corporeality. This syncretic view of the body complicates normative conceptions by revising the human form into a plurality and network of interactions like an assemblage where, "despite the tight integration between its component organs, the relations between them are not logically necessary but only contingently obligatory" (DeLanda 12).

An over-reliance on hegemonic frameworks like a Judeo-Christian reading limits our critical purview, as it leads us to assume that the human form—literal or metaphorical—desires wholeness and correction of difference. For Blake, the body is an ever-changing motif which contributes to his critique of State Religion, an organized system that suppresses the divine into "forms of worship" (E38. 11).[1] Blake collapses the body to explore the consequences of repressive organization, and, in turn, re-think the body politic, a metaphor for a state or institution figured within a biological body, governed by an institutional Head or governing majority. The body politic is an idealistic and ableist model in that it determines functionality through unity, wholeness, and subsuming any variation within its totality, though the reality of such a system is to be debated (Hirschmann). In eighteenth-century political discourse, physiognomic language and imagery became a powerful discursive tool through which Britons imagined themselves as part of different communities (Forman Cody 27). Body politics are a type of embodied citizenship, and so they capture "the typically overlooked ways in which embodiment carries an ideological

weight for the visibly different citizens marked by disability, race, gender, and sexuality" (Russell 7). As a result, when "these encounters prompt an imaginative reconsideration of the body politic itself," the ableist impulse to organize physical difference pushes against the epistemological shift that disability induces by drawing attention to the limits of ideas (Russell 3; Siebers 3). An early conception of a body politic in the illuminated books is found in Urizen's aphorism, "One King, one God, one Law" (E72. 4:40), which places him as the figurehead of his universe. However, when Los the Eternal Prophet creates a body for him that desires wholeness, this model is revealed to be unsustainable, and they are "cut off from life & light frozen / Into horrible forms of deformity" (E77. 13:42–43). I read Urizen's deformity as a fundamental "misreading and subsequent failure to identify Urizen" by the Eternals and Los, and the adjective "horrible" here is not an indicator of a negative outcome, but, rather, it signals the problematic nature of organization (Choe 2020, 530). My reading of Urizen's aberrance as impacting the body politic centres on the way physical difference aggravates concepts of able-bodiedness, and the incompatibility of normative visions of the body with the body politic model (Choe 2020, 531–32).

Blake does not use the term "disability" in his poetry, and although he is interested in exploring aberrant, subversive forms, like most eighteenth-century writers, he "relies on metaphorical language and concepts that scholars in this field would view as ableist" (Lorenz 128). Deformity in Blake refers to both the aesthetics of form and the physical schisms created within the body and material environment as a result of discord. As such, it is not automatically an indication of an unfavourable form or aesthetic, but it communicates resistance against homogeneity and the problematic schema of wholeness. For example, at the end of *Jerusalem*, Albion textually seems to reunite with God through healing, and yet the poem ends on a final graphic plate where the vision of unity is somewhat left ambiguous due to the druidic symbolism that reminds readers of a sacrificial past and re-opens Albion once more for future potential movement (Choe 2022, 183; 226). Deformity and disability are part of the language Blake uses to challenge the perceived status quo of an able-body politic, offering an alternate model that instead relies on "relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage" (DeLanda 18). Although "disabled" and "able-bodied" were terms in circulation during the eighteenth century, they were not categories of identity that divided society by physical capability or impairment (Turner 17). Essaka Joshua examines key words used in lieu of "disabled" and "disability," arguing that the eighteenth century distinguished ability from aesthetics (184). In her examination of William Godwin, she suggests "capacity" as an alternative expression as it was synonymized by Godwin with "utility" to conceptualize a society where people moved towards their perfect state with new skillsets;

"capacity" then denominates the re-valuing of the socially disadvantaged within society (Joshua 42–48). Catherine Packham similarly observes that bodily toil in Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) translates into a calculation of labour's economic value, thus rendering "human variety and difference of work into a calculable and abstracted economic value" (83–85). In terms of a body politic, subjects became part of a single body where those thought to be "radically at odds" were transformed "into constitutive parts of a unified whole, achieving an expression of corporeality or aggregation in the face of seeming difference, and implying, against evidence to the contrary, the existence of shared, communal interests" (98). Taking into account Packham's view of eighteenth-century body politics, alongside Joshua's analysis of capacity as a substitute term for "disability," eighteenth-century visions of normative embodiment reinforce the connections between conformity and utility within a body politic or collective identity.

During the eighteenth century, the British nations were consolidating emergent ideas of national and individual cultural identity through textual production (Strabone 55; 64), and discourse concerning "Britishness" diffused into an appropriation of other cultures to reaffirm a sense of self. One such landscape was the ancient North. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland—which was under Danish rule at the time—provided alternate historical and ethnic heritages through which Britain renewed, contested, and adopted desirable cultural political beliefs. The developing eighteenth-century movement of Northern antiquarianism became a literary and artistic pursuit of Old Norse culture to consolidate a "British" identity and body politic, though it also consequently promoted independent cultural heritages across the British nations. Early in the century, antiquarian interests skewed towards Classical Greece and Rome, and so the Gothic nations were vilified as barbaric, with the term "Gothic" used to refer to something barbarous, savage, and uncouth (Parker 4). As the century progressed, this shifted into the view of Rome as synonymous with moral decay and therefore political decay, while the Gothic cultures gained public opinion (Weinbrot 36). Opinions on the Norsemen's barbaric impulse for war developed into an understanding where it was perceived as a cry for liberty and resistance against Roman corruption, and by the late eighteenth century, British poets and writers addressing the American and French Revolutions turned to the North for a landscape and culture that embodied their desire for political autonomy.

Between 1750–1760, the term "Gothic" was largely an ambiguous word conflated with other ethnic groups, and many used "Gallic," "Celtic," "Erse," "Gothic," "Teutonic," and "Runic" quite interchangeably to refer to the ancient languages and the poetry of North-Western Europe" (Clunies Ross 41). There was no real distinction between the "Gothic" and "Celtic," until the disputes

surrounding James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems prompted a determined move to distinguish the linguistic and cultural differences between these cultures. In Thomas Percy's seminal *Northern Antiquities* (1770), a translation of Paul-Henri Mallet's *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) and *Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poësie des Celtes* (1756), his Translator's Preface is provocatively titled, "Proofs that the Teutonic and Celtic Nations were ab origine two distinct People" (Percy 1:A3), and he expressly points out that his translation endeavours are rooted in how Mallet contributes to "a great source of mistake and confusion to many learned writers of the ancient history of Europe [. . .] confounding the antiquities of the Gothic and Celtic nations" (Percy 1:ii). Macpherson claimed his Scottish poems were discovered in the Highlands and derived from fourth-century oral tradition, and when he and *Ossian* apologist Hugh Blair defended Celtic culture, they drew marked differences between the "delicacy of sentiment" in Scotland and Scandinavia, a nation that they believed "breathes the most ferocious spirit" (Blair 11; Macpherson 171; 174). In England, Percy responded by offering an *Ossian* alternative, *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763), which laid claim to Norse culture as the roots of a fundamental English strength. Percy advocated for a revision of the public's view of Norse culture as war-mongering barbarism, and romanticized skaldic culture with the view of incorporating it into English heritage (Rix 60; Choe 2025, 32). A prime example is his presentation of Snorri Sturluson in *Northern Antiquities* as a poet with "a love for this art which suggested to him the design of giving a new EDDA, more useful to the young poets than that of Sœmund" (2:xxiii), which transforms the North as a culture of poetic freedom and liberation. As a result, Percy reinforced the division between Celtic-Scottish and Gothic-English poetry and persuaded his readership to "find the causes of this their love of poetry, in the rolling passion of the ancient Scandinavians 'for war,' in the little use they made of writing" (2:xx).

Percy's *Northern Antiquities* was the first accessible eighteenth-century piece of scholarship and translation of Snorri's *Edda*, via Mallet, into English. Its influential presentation of the Norsemen and their myths aligned older observations of Norse barbarism alongside their search for liberty. Between the first volume, where Mallet—with Percy's notations—presents Norse culture, and the second, which is a translation of Snorri's *Edda*, *Northern Antiquities* was the primary source of inspiration for many British writers and artists, including Blake who declared "Read the Edda of Iceland the Songs of Fingal [. . .] Likewise Read Homers Iliad" (E615. *Annotations to An Apology for the Bible*:[p. 8]). Snorri's *Edda* is an important part of Blake's syncretic worldview and practice, and Norse culture is visibly present in his recombination of multiple cultural artefacts into his own poetical lexicon. The North plays a key role in Blake's re-evaluation of the body's symbolic value, especially with regards to an emergent, but incongruous, British body politic. In *The Book of Ahania* (1795), Blake examines

the tension between Norse primitive warmongering and Gothic liberty as the foundations of a body politic. These two different conceptions of the North map onto the sacrifice of Fuzon, son of Urizen, who is deformed and sacrificed by his father. Extending beyond Christological analogues such as the Crucifixion, Fuzon's death can be read as a type of Odinic sacrifice, wherein his death is a composite image of Odin as chieftain seeking liberation from Rome, and Odin as priest. As such, the politics of Fuzon's sacrifice untangles the way Urizen's body politic pivots on a paradoxical liberation from and endorsement of an oppressive system. Fuzon's deformity, as I will discuss, reinforces this ideological schism within Urizen's State Religion, and augments Fuzon's Odinic features.

Fuzon the Son, Odin the Liberator

With Urizen representing State Religion and Fuzon offering freedom from oppression like Moses or Christ, they can be seen as diametrically opposed (Tannenbaum 226; Erdman 1954, 389; Mee 100). By the end of *The Book of Urizen*, Fuzon seeks to liberate the other sons and daughters from Urizen's quasi-theocratic system of "One King, one God, one Law," and *The Book of Ahania* begins with a furious altercation between Urizen and Fuzon, which culminates in a scene frequently read as a satirical Crucifixion of Christ. *The Book of Ahania*'s biblical imagery, such as the eroticism of the Song of Solomon and critique of the doctrine of Atonement through sacrifice, is part of how Blake engaged with eighteenth-century scriptural revisionist movements (Mee 1992; Mulvihill). David Worrall suggests that, while the poem has an Ossianic air, it contributes to "Blake's scepticism about his age's politicization of scriptural authority" (153), and Jon Mee asserts that the poem uses Northern antiquities to criticize Atonement as a heathen corruption of primitive Christianity, as was the view within more liberal eighteenth-century circles (100). For Mee, British druidism and human sacrifice coincide with orthodox Christianity through Urizen, but the politics depend on Fuzon, who is "smitten with darkness, deform'd" (E86. 3:43) and is deeply entrenched within Norse rituals of sacrifice.

Fuzon's death as a type of Odinic sacrifice complicates the simple dichotomy of freedom versus oppression or saviour versus persecutor since, being deformed, he draws attention to the inconsistencies within Urizen's body politic. *The Book of Ahania* displays some of Blake's clearest engagement with Northern antiquarianism and builds on the connection between Urizen and Odin through Fuzon. The suggestion that Urizen is a synthesis of Zeus, God, and Odin, or that he is Mallet's Odin of oppression, war, and druidism, originates from the explicit mention of Odin in *The Song of Los* (1795) (Frye 209; Mee 110). Here, Odin is a figure of laws and codes when "in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave

a Code of War" (E67. 3:30), and so he reifies law in a similar manner to Urizen in the illuminated books (Choe 2022, 71). Fuzon, though, also incorporates eighteenth-century euhemerist visions of Odin, a chieftain liberating the Gothic tribes from Rome:

> Fuzon, on a chariot iron-wing'd
> On spiked flames rose; his hot visage
> Flam'd furious! sparkles his hair & beard
> Shot down his wide bosom and shoulders.
> (E84. 2:1–4)

This energetic, able-bodied, vision is a stark difference to Urizen, "This cloudy God seated on waters" (E84. 2:11–12), thus marking an ideological, or even political, deviation. A dualism is established between light and dark, which further distances Fuzon the liberator from his father, whose obscurity in *The Book of Ahania* is a continuation of *The Book of Urizen*, where he is "obscure, shadowy" (E70. 2:4) and a "ninefold darkness. Unseen, unknown!" (E70. 3:9–10).

In comparison, Fuzon appears warlike and aggressive, akin to eighteenth-century visions of Norse warriors like those in Joseph Sterling's poem "The Scalder: An Ode" from *Odes from the Icelandic* (1782):

> Bright his kindling courage glows,
> Fierce he shakes his frowning crest;
> He grasps his sword, he burns with noble rage [...].
> (Sterling, 152)

Sterling's descriptions of brightness alongside courage and ferocity resonates in Fuzon who "flam'd furious!" against Urizen. This "noble rage" is no longer the primitive actions of a boorish Gothic warmongering, but a necessity for the Norsemen and their valorous exploits. Robert Southey euhemerizes Odin into a military leader in his 1795 poems, "The Race of Odin" and "The Death of Odin," describing "Where, upon some colder shore, / Freedom yet thy force shall brave, / Freedom yet shall find a home" (98). Southey's Odin leads his men to freedom, and so the North symbolizes contemporary revolutionary sentiment, while Rome corresponds to the *ancien régime* (Mortensen 228). Similarly, Fuzon's role as warrior and liberator is established through similar imagery, but this is quickly dismantled when he interacts with Urizen. The initial juxtaposition between clouds and brightness in *The Book of Ahania* seems to draw firmer boundaries between oppression and freedom, but the difference between father and son is not so clear cut when Fuzon,

> On clouds of smoke rages his chariot
> And his right hand burns red in its cloud

> Moulding into a vast globe, his wrath.
> (E84. 2:5–7)

At first, "clouds of smoke" seems to reinforce his role as a quasi-Moses liberator as it parallels the Book of Exodus when the Egyptians pursue the Israelites to the Red Sea, and "the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians" (Exod. 14:24). In fact, when Fuzon wages war, "the fiery beam of Fuzon / Was a pillar of fire to Egypt" (E85. 2:44-45), but here lies a contradiction. "To Egypt" infers both direction and possession; rather than emulating the pillar protecting the Israelites, Fuzon's beam also suggests an intervention in favour of the Egyptians, leading the children back to Egypt and Urizen.

The growing contradiction within Fuzon becomes clearer when read alongside other Northern antiquarian poetry. For example, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's short-lived periodical *The Watchman* (1796), the poem "Invocation to Liberty" combines cloud imagery with human sacrifice in an outcry for liberty:

> Tho' clouds of darkness round us lour
> Eternal sunshine cheers the breast.
> Scar'd at thy frown, (with human Victims fed)
> Oppression shrinks aghast, and hides his blood-stain'd head.
> (*The Watchman* 1796b, 100)

This vivid and grisly imagery is similar to Sterling's "The Twilight of the Gods," where "the clouds descend in streams of gore" until "His sacred beam the golden sun shall hide, / Nor spring nor summer shall enrich the plain" (Sterling 154). Despite their different subject matter—a political call for liberty versus a mythological apocalypse—both use blood, cloud, and sun imagery from Norse sources to signal ensuing conflict and oppression. Fuzon's appearance "on clouds of smoke" similarly is an early indication that, instead of being a bright liberator of a dark world, he is a mirror of his father with the potential of spearheading State Religion. As its figurehead, Urizen's desire for an able-body politic is rooted in his theocracy, but when Fuzon declares "I am God. said he, eldest of things!" (E86. 3:38), the son begins to emulate the father's self-proclamation as Creator. These descriptions blend together liberation and oppression, so that there is no simple duality where light is good and dark is bad. Instead, Fuzon slowly becomes complicit with Urizen's body politic despite an initial desire for liberty, and it is within death and deformity that this earlier Odin-like role as liberator converges with the Odin of priesthood, law, and religious corruption.

The Roots of a Nation

Fuzon's attack results in "the cold loins of Urizen dividing" (E84. 2:29), and this subsequent injury and disability sets up a more traditional idea of aberrance as something to be corrected since the body politic is compromised. However, in increments, it becomes clear that Fuzon revolts "not to bring freedom to all but in an attempt to secure their own iron rule" (Hutton 158). This is where the Christological framework falls short and does not fully account for this change. Even when viewed as a critique of Atonement or parody, unlike Christ who dies to bring salvation, Fuzon's death embeds him deeper within Urizen's organized religion, and his deformity signals a shift in the body's metaphorical and ideological value (Choe 2022, 129). Fuzon's death is not a martyrdom or consequence of tyranny, since this idea extends the view of a body politic striving for restoration. Instead, other antecedents and cultural narratives can offer alternate approaches to this complex scene. Fuzon's sacrifice clearly borrows motifs from Norse myth and is inspired by Mallet through Percy (De Luca 194; Mee 98), to the extent that Heather O'Donoghue confirms that the event situates Urizen as both a Christian God and Odin sacrificing his son Baldr (95). However, these observations still focus primarily on Urizen and his role as priest and Fuzon falls to the wayside, despite being the central element within the composite motif of deformed corpse and the Tree of Mystery.

Blake's Tree of Mystery is associated with Urizen's lawmaking, and, in *The Book of Ahania*, the Tree is initially where Urizen sits "on his dark rooted Oak" (E85. 3:16) and writes "in silence his book of iron" (E86. 64). It is a corruption of the French Tree of Liberty and reinforces a self-betraying system, while also carrying elements of the Tree of Knowledge, Yggdrasil, and the Upas Tree. Trees were an important motif in eighteenth-century British political culture. In *Northern Antiquities*, Gothic liberty emerges from the North like the roots of a tree and flourishes once attached to a strong body—a nation:

> That spirit of liberty, arising from their climate, and from their rustic and military life, had received new strength from the opinions it had produced; as a sucker which shoots forth from the root of a tree, strengthens by embracing it.
> (Percy 1:164)

The metaphor expands with propagation, "as it were in the bud, ready to blossom and expand through all Europe, there to flourish in their several colonies" (Percy 1:164–65), thus adopting this popular political motif in circulation. Conservatives and radicals adopted the symbol of the oak tree for Britain, and this pervasive motif became emblematic for an ancient English

constitution. The motif's origins can be traced to the sixteenth century's "Tree of Commonwealth," which was grounded on Christian faith, fair justice, honesty, and peace (Marks 217). It developed after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to represent English liberty until the 1790s, when it was used to address the tension between those who believed the constitution was rooted within aristocracy, and those who looked towards America and France to critique this outdated view.

The oak appears in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), where he addresses the rising discontent. Prior to this, in a 1772 letter to the Duke of Richmond, Burke looks to the tree to augment his pro-monarchist stance: "you people of great families and hereditary trusts and fortunes [. . .] You, if you are what you ought to be, are in my eye the great oaks that shade the country, and perpetuate your benefits from generation to generation" (2002, 155). Thomas Paine refuses to accept this view, and his incendiary response to Burke in *Rights of Man* (1791) demands that Britain "lay then the axe to the root, and teach governments humanity. It is their sanguinary punishments which corrupt mankind" (33). With Paine, the oak becomes synonymous with an antiquated social structure which influences Blake's version of Druidism and his opposition of the Burkean notion of British liberty (Whittaker 118). This influence is visible in *Milton* where "the Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife / But their Forms eternal Exist, For-ever" (E132. 32[35]:37–38).

Yggdrasil, the World Ash, is a core monument in Norse culture, and its similarities to the Tree of Mystery have already been noted, though not so much the way Blake uses Yggdrasil to address Britain's claim to Gothic liberty (Bloom 143; Mee 97–98; Whittaker 118; O'Donoghue 101). Although the ash is not as prominent as the oak or the toxic Upas in eighteenth-century British political imagery, it is understood by the radical periodical, *Politics for the People*, as an emblem for tyrannical institutions, since "the ash tree is destructive of vegetables which grow under it" and "will not suffer any animal or vegetable to exist within some miles of it" (*Politics for the People*, 8–9). Yggdrasil predominantly appears in eighteenth-century antiquarian literature about Ragnarök and does not deviate too much from the original myth. Percy describes how "the great Ash, that Ash sublime and fruitful, is violently shaken, and sends forth a groan" (2:163) during Ragnarök, and elsewhere Yggdrasil is associated with the fall of the gods.[2] For example, Edward Jerningham describes Yggdrasil as "the dread Ash" in *The Rise and Progress of Scandinavian Poetry* (1784), where the norns "stand in the deep recesses of the shade" (6), and Thomas James Mathias portrays "Ydrasils [sic] prophetic ash" in "The Twilight of the Gods" (1781), where it is felled and "nods to the air with sudden crash" (5).

Yggdrasil complicates the Tree of Mystery as it grafts Gothic liberty to a critique of Burkean hierarchical British liberty that is present within Blake's

motif. Not only that, but in *The Book of Ahania*, when "on the topmost stem of this Tree / Urizen nail'd Fuzons corse" (E87. 4:7–8) and transforms it into the "Tree of Fuzon" (E88. 4:47), it reinforces Urizen's repressive ideology, as it further collapses the difference between father and son, oppressor and deliverer. Leslie Tannenbaum believes that "Fuzon-Moses represents the passion for justice, the spirit of righteousness that quickly expends its vitality as it takes the form of doctrines, laws, and codes of living" (226), and through the Tree of Mystery, Fuzon is bound by the same doctrines and codes that he sought to remove. Snorri's *Edda* describes Yggdrasil as a place where "Þar skulu guðin eiga dóma sína hvern dag" [There the gods must hold their courts each day], and it is "allra tréa mestr ok beztr. Limar hans dreifask yfir heim allan ok standa yfir himni" [of all trees the biggest and best. Its branches spread out over all the world and extend across the sky] (Sturluson 2005, 17; Sturluson 1995, 17). In *Northern Antiquities*, Yggdrasil is described as the "ash *Ydrasil* [sic]; where the Gods assemble every day, and administer justice," with roots that spread between the Æsir, the Giants "in that very place where the abyss was formerly" (cf. "[. . .] þar sem forðum var Ginnungagap" [Sturluson 2005, 17]), and Niflheim (Percy 2:49). The Tree of Mystery similarly "grows over the Void / Enrooting itself all around" (E87. 4:2–3), which "recalls Yggdrasil even more insistently, for there are secrets deep beneath its roots" (O'Donoghue 95), but as a place of justice and administration, it is also complicit in lawmaking.

Self-immolation and Odin the Priest

Northern antiquarian letters and essays viewed Odin as a historical figure who—while resisting Roman corruption—was a religious figure connected to various religious rituals in groves that also supposedly included human sacrifice. Eighteenth-century Britons thought Scandinavians possessed "a simple religion, a libertarian government and a martial spirit," but in Odin and the Norsemen, war-chief conflates with religious leadership (Whittaker 27). In his *Letters from Scandinavia* (1796) William Thomson suggests that there developed an "Odnisim," when "Odin, the first king of the North, discerned the influence which religious enthusiasm had over the minds of his people: he joined the office of priest to that of king" (2:14), and so "the religion of the ancient Scandinavians, before the arrival of Odin from Scythia, would appear to have been very simple: they worshipped the sun, in which they supposed the chief deity to exist" (2:15). This account of apotheosis can be traced back to the original euhemerization of the Æsir, first mentioned in the *Edda's* Prologue, but detailed in *Skáldskaparmál*:

> En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannyndi þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar [. . .] ok þá

> næst frá Tyrkjum, hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fǫlsuðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúa þá guð vera.
> (Sturluson 1998, 5)

> [Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than in which it is presented at the beginning of this book [. . .] and after that about the Turks, how the people of Asia, known as Æsir, distorted the accounts of the events that took place in Troy so that the people of the country would believe that they were gods.] (Sturluson 1995, 64–65)

Eighteenth-century British writers were taken by this combination of law, liberation, and religion from the ancient North, and they ascribed this movement to Odin, "the founder of the Gothic mythology, [who] was an Asiatic"; in this light, Odin "had introduced into Scandinavia those doctrines which had been predominant in his own country" (Sterling 146). Coleridge writes that "Sigge, the son of Fridulf, commanded the Ases [. . .] as the priest of Odin, he assumed the name of that Deity" (*The Watchman* 1796a, 67), and attributes the warrior's deification to Sigge, a "priest of Odin." Mallet, through Percy, condemns Odin as a "terrible and severe God; the father of slaughter; the God that carrieth desolation and fire" (Percy 1:86–87), and in their review of *Northern Antiquities*, the *Monthly Review* takes particular interest in this image of a deity who corrupted original Scandinavian religion ("Northern Antiquities" 93–94). Urizen embodies this particular rendition of Odin, as discussed, but Fuzon captures all aspects: the deliverer of Gothic nations and lawmaker of oppressive religious institution.

Fuzon's conception of freedom is entangled with his claims to legal authority, and so the earlier altercation is not a fight between two polar opposites. Instead of light versus dark, beauty versus deformity, this conflict is an internal struggle where the body politic confronts its own hierarchical structure and Fuzon's deformity signals this self-reflexiveness as it further aligns him with Urizen, who is also deformed and disabled. Deformity comes to the fore in this body politic that "defies correction [. . .] to operate according to its own idiosyncratic rules" (Davis 54). The more he becomes implicated within Urizen's systems, the more Fuzon emulates Odinic sovereignty rather than war-chief, and he takes on the role of lawmaker that was once ascribed to Urizen. The perceived cultural impact of Odin arriving in the North converges with the warrior-king's self-apotheosis, consequently enmeshing sacrifice with the politics of liberty and State. Fuzon's death is not a consequence of sacrifice like in the Crucifixion, but his death occurs immediately after his declaration, "I am God," and he is "smitten with darkness, deform'd / And outstretch'd on the edge of the forest" (E86. 3:43–44).

Before he is even nailed to the Tree of Mystery, Fuzon lies "deform'd [. . .] on the edge of the forest," which is when liberation turns to priesthood and he reflects more of Urizen. In eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, "deformity is most commonly defined in relation to its effect" (Joshua 122), and it speaks to eighteenth-century conception of sympathy where a sympathetic mimesis is communication between individuals. Throughout the illuminated books, the refrain "he became what he beheld" (E97. 3:29) merges aesthetics, physical attributes, and literal bodies together. In *The Book of Urizen*, Los looks upon Urizen's deformity in horror and becomes deformed himself. Here, Fuzon emulates Urizen's deformity and what it represents: the darker aspects of Norse culture that vitiate Gothic liberty.

If deformity is defined in relation to its impact, then Fuzon's deformity is defined by how it transforms and integrates within Urizen's body politic, since this is what it influences. There is no cry of terror, like with Los, and Ahania's lament only serves to bolster the connection between Fuzon and Urizen, since it is through her voice that the Tree of Mystery becomes the "Tree of Fuzon." This moment recalls Thomson's account of Odinism, and how "Odin assumed the deity; and after *his death*, the Goths could not offer to warrior gods fruits and flowers: nay, the blood of beasts was deemed too mean an offering and human victims were dragged to the altars" (2:15). When Fuzon assumes the deity, his deformity signals a larger, more powerful, religion that overwhelms the simpler religious expression of Urizen, and, as a result, his installation on the Tree becomes an act of sacrifice to himself. In other words, a self-serving body politic.

The enjambment, "deform'd / And outstretch'd," may conjure an image of the Crucifixion narrative, but the surrounding landscape "on the edge of the forest" is more suggestive of Norse influences. Recalling Urizen earlier in the poem sitting under the Tree, he creates a grove of repressive institutionalism from the Tree of Mystery that "Grew to roots when it felt the earth / And again sprung to many a tree" (E86–7. 3:64–67). This is where he eventually "nail'd Fuzons corse." Similar features appear in the description of the groves of Uppsala in *Northern Antiquities*:

> [It] was full of the bodies of men and animals who had been sacrificed. They afterwards took them down to burn them in-honour of Thor or the sun [. . .] In whatever manner they immolated men, the priest always took care in consecrating the victim to pronounce certain words, as, "I devote thee to Odin." "I send thee to Odin." Or, "I devote thee for a good harvests; for the return of a fruitful season."
> (Percy 1:136–37)

This passage follows a discussion on the prophetic nature of sacrifice, where "the priests inferred what success would attend the enterprize" (1:135). The hanging bodies in "ODIN'S GROVE" are an act of consecration, and a similar kind of sanctification within Fuzon's death transforms him from a motif of spiritual renewal to one of human intervention and insight.

Depictions of these rituals were adopted and integrated into a pseudo-historical ancient British culture, notably the Druids, whose image synthesized with eighteenth-century mediations of Odin like in Jerningham's *Stone Henge* (1792), where "furious Odin might obtest the skies, / And bless a hecatomb for sacrifice" (4). The eighteenth-century's syncretic approach to world religions and myths regarded British druidism as an early iteration of Christianity, "that the Druids were of *Abraham's* religion intirely [sic]" (Stukeley 2). *Politics for the People* published a satirical history of England where the Druids "had obtained so complete an ascendancy over [the people], as to be permitted, without exciting either murmur or resistance, to make very numerous sacrifices of their miserable devotees" (*Politics for the People* 10). In these two examples, the druids come to symbolize or endorse oppressive religious organization, and this is no different in *The Book of Ahania*, where the treatment of Fuzon's body, and by proxy the body politic, conflates druidism with Norse elements to complicate further the idea of Gothic opposition to oppressive institutions.

There is a curiously provocative similarity between Fuzon's sacrifice and Odin's hanging in the Eddic poem *Hávamál*, especially since in both cases the death of a deity is self-serving and augments an extant system. The cultural practice of hanging corpses to Odin as known during the eighteenth century derives from *Hávamál*, which recounts the god's pursuit for knowledge. In this first-person narrative, Odin hangs from Yggdrasil for nine nights in a sacrifice from himself to himself:

> Veit ek at ek hekk
> vindga meiði á
> nætr allar níu
> geiri undaðr
> ok gefinn Óðni,
> sjálfr sjálfum mér,
> á þeim meiði
> er manngi veit
> hvers hann af rótum renn.
> (Kristjánsson and Ólason 350)
>
> [I know that I hung
> on a windswept tree
> nine long nights,
> wounded with a spear,

> dedicated to Odin,
> myself to myself
> on the tree
> which no man knows
> from where its roots run.]
> (Larrington 2014a, 32)

Both Odin and Christ are wounded with spears as they hang from trees, which Gabriel Turville-Petre suggests shows that this moment is "a pagan reflexion of Christ on the Cross. The similarities between the scene described here and that on Calvary are undeniable" (42). He reads Odin's hanging on Yggdrasil alongside medieval visions of Christ on a rood-tree with no roots (43), but, more recently, Jens Peter Schjødt has argued that "the myth of Óðinn's self-hanging must be unambiguously understood as the expression of a pagan thought complex" (177). Mallet translates *Hávamál* as "*Discours sublime* ou la *Morale d'Odin*" (135), which Percy takes as "'The Sublime Discourse of Odin'," and suggests that the maxims describe a moral system (2:205). *Northern Antiquities* does not translate *Hávamál* entirely and omits the verses concerning Odin. There is also no record of Blake knowing the myth, but it is visible in Fuzon, who earlier uses an "exulting flam'd beam" (E84. 2:20) like a spear to injure Urizen, and in death embodies the tenets of a religious system.

The cultural significance of Odin's death by spear moves beyond a simple Christianization of pagan sources, demonstrated with kennings "geirs dróttin" [lord of the spear] and "Gungnis váfaðr" [Gungnir's shaker] (Turville-Petre 43). Mallet describes Gungnir as a sword with which, during Ragnarök, Odin "prend son épée nommée *Gugner*, & marche droit au loup *Fenris*" [takes his sword named *Gugner*, & walks straight to the wolf *Fenris*] (110). Any Christianization of Odin's death is subsumed in a syncretic worldview in Northern antiquarian writing, and eighteenth-century travel writing expands on other cultural facets associated with Odin's self-immolation such as the "gálga," or gallows. In Uno von Troil's *Letters on Iceland* (1780), he corresponds with Baron Axel Lejonhufwud and discusses Icelandic poetic metre and kennings, including "sylgs gálga," which he translates as "at the gallows of Odin's Shield," or "the arm on which it is usual to wear the shield" (201–02). Schjødt views Odin's sacrifice and ceremonial stabbing as a mythic prototype for a symbolic death, one where, by dying, he is transformed through death-rebirth symbolism (179–80; 194). The takeaway here is Odin's association with hanging, which takes us back to the groves of Uppsala where victims are hanged in religious ritual. The association between Odin and death by hanging is perhaps more present in Blake's Fatal Tree at Tyburn, but the cultural significance remains an important element within the Tree of Mystery, especially when it transforms into the Tree

of Fuzon since, through deformity, Fuzon's sacrifice becomes an expression of Urizen's priesthood rather than of liberation.

Sacrifice is a transitional space where the body is a site of negotiation for simultaneous system-making and system-breaking. At the heart of *The Book of Ahania*, the sacrifice scene explores the consequence of religious institution by using deformity as a physical indicator of ideological similarities and shifts between Fuzon and Urizen. Fuzon's characterization is not a simple reflection of Christ or Moses, and the presence of Odin's warmongering and self-apotheosis moves him closer to his father, thus implicating him within the very system he initially resists. In *The Book of Ahania* desiring freedom does not necessarily result in liberation, because one system is no better than another, and it is Odin's multifaceted character—a perpetrator of Gothic liberty and founder of corrupt religious expression—that makes him a rich source for Fuzon's role as a freedom-seeking son of Urizen who will never be free of the system he originated from. Unlike Christ's death, Fuzon's demise does not lead to resurrection, resolution, or reunion with the Divine; it is a self-serving reaffirmation of established ideology. Moreover, as an important part of this sacrifice, his deformity placed at the forefront of a ritual reinforces the paradox of a body politic that does not seek wholeness. For this body, aggregation in the face of difference, or restoration and healing, was never the goal.

NOTES

1. Blake quotations are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, hereafter abbreviated as E. The illuminated books will follow this format: (E-page. Plate:Line).
2. In *Völuspá*, "Skelfr Yggdrasils / askr standandi, / ymr it aldna tré" [The ancient tree groans [. . .], / Yggdrasill shudders, the tree standing upright] (Sturluson 2005, 51; Larrington 2014b, 10).

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