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Secrets of heaven: allegory, Jews, the European Enlightenment and the case of Emanuel Swedenborg

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Dissertation

**SECRETS OF HEAVEN: ALLEGORY, JEWS, THE EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT
AND THE CASE OF EMANUEL SWEDENBORG**

by

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Dedicated to Rafi
and to Ari, Moses, and Miriam

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REBECCA KLINE ESTERSON**

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ABSTRACT

This project argues for the persistence of biblical allegory in eighteenth-century Christian thought, contrary to the narrative of allegory's demise, found, for instance, in the work of Peter Harrison and Hans Frei. I demonstrate that two factors in particular, the scientific revolution and Christian discourse about Jewish interpretation, shaped the content and quality of allegorical interpretations of the Bible in this century. Using the case of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), natural philosopher and biblical commentator, the dissertation will consider how allegory functioned amidst epistemological shifts brought on by new naturalistic and mechanistic explanations of the universe, and amidst tides of anti-Judaism and Christian Kabbalah.

This project is divided into three parts, which examine the context, content, and reception of Swedenborg's multi-volume biblical commentary, *Arcana coelestia*. Part one lays contextual groundwork with a brief comparative look to the commentaries of other eighteenth-century figures, both Jewish and Christian. I survey the discourse about allegory, science, and religious identity in the commentaries of William Whiston, Johan Kemper, Moses Mendelssohn, and Menaḥem Naḥum. Part two contains a close reading

of Swedenborg's interpretation of Genesis 3, revealing a bias against the two communities of interpreters he believes incapable of accessing the full depths of biblical wisdom: scientists, or the learned skeptics of natural philosophy, and the Jews. Using Harold Bloom's concept of the "anxiety of influence" I point to resemblances in Swedenborg's own hermeneutic to interpretive methods deemed, by either himself or those around him, to be Jewish, kabbalistic, or naturalistic. Part three examines Swedenborg's reception, revealing a double ambivalence to Swedenborg and to allegory among figures as diverse as Immanuel Kant, John Wesley, Friedrich Oetinger, William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These men had in common a fascination with Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, but also harbored deep reservations that manifested in moments of harsh criticism and even ridicule. Despite such protestations, those interested in Swedenborg often produce reformulations of biblical allegory in their own terms. This is, therefore, a study of the relationship between texts and contexts, and the persistence of allegory even in an age that was supposedly hostile to it.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Demise of Allegory”

In his book *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science*, historian Peter Harrison traces the demise of allegorical interpretation of the Bible in early modern Europe. Harrison points to the Protestant Reformation and its antiauthoritarian turn to *sola scriptura* as the impetus, not only for the hermeneutical preference for the plain sense, but for the scientific revolution itself.¹ A new kind of natural history, for instance, emerged with the work of John Ray, one that represented an unprecedented, secular approach to the subject. Ray’s method would have been impossible in the medieval world of Hugh of St. Victor, for example, for whom the book of nature and the book of scripture corresponded at every point. Ray, on the other hand, presented his classifications of plants without reference to “*Hieroglyphics, Emblems, Morals, Fables, Presages*.”² A singular focus on the plants themselves was all that was necessary; whatever relation they bore to other realities remained the work for another author. The effects were evident in astronomy as well, with Galileo, whose mathematical understanding of nature replaced a symbolic one. Galileo himself was a devoted reader of the Bible and believed that scripture spoke truth on many levels: “nobody will deny that it is often very abstruse, and may say things which are quite different from what its bare words signify.”³ But as his famous letter to the Grand Duchess Christina demonstrates,

¹ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.

² From John Ray’s preface to *The Ornithology of Francis Willughby*, as quoted in Harrison, *The Bible*, 2.

³ Galileo Galilei, “Galileo Galilei to the Most Serene Grand Dutchess Mother,” in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 181.

he also believed that scientists needed to be free from the constraints of biblical theology in order to do their work. This separation of the study of nature from the study of the Bible was a critical moment in the demise of allegory. Harrison writes:

The new conception of the order of nature was made possible by the collapse of the allegorical interpretation of texts, for the denial of the legitimacy of allegory is in essence a denial of the capacity of things to act as signs . . . The mathematical and taxonomic categories imposed by Galileo and Ray on physical objects and living things represent an attempt to reconfigure a natural world which had been evacuated of order and meaning.⁴

With the divorce of the study of nature from the study of scripture, the Bible lost something of its symbolic potential.

Hans Frei explores this phenomenon, especially with regard to the changing methods of biblical interpretation in the eighteenth century, in his seminal work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. He writes: “Despite the influence of Pietism, the fate of ‘spiritual’ reading and thus of double meaning in the interpretation of scripture in the later eighteenth century was finally as dim as that of the principle of interpretation through tradition, evaporating the remnants of whatever mystical-allegorical reading on the part of Protestants had survived the seventeenth century.”⁵ In this period, he argues, we find a double iconoclasm. Not only did the typological and spiritual reading of the Bible “evaporate,” but the realistic reading as well. In particular, the creation stories of Genesis and the miracle stories of the gospels came under scrutiny. As scientists called into question these supernatural claims in the Bible, the text was placed under the critical

⁴ Harrison, *The Bible*, 4.

⁵ Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 55.

eye of German positivism and English deism. Scholars turned their attention to a safer form of literal interpretation: philological and historical literalism. Linguists, having inherited the venerable tradition of Christian Hebraism, doubled down their efforts to study the text objectively, identifying multiple sources and conflicting manuscripts. These methods allowed readers of the Bible to engage on terms familiar to the sciences: inspection of artifacts, testing of theories. Allegorical interpretation came to be seen as naive and simplistic in the face of a new epistemology that sought mathematical certainty and mechanistic order.

However, such a view of the plight of allegory in the eighteenth century betrays a certain selectivity on the part of both Harrison and Frei, in terms of whose interpretations speak for the age. In fact, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest more continuity with pre-modern interpretive strategies than this narrative allows. Allegory did not die with the Enlightenment, but took on different forms and responded to different questions. In his conclusion, Harrison points to the Achilles heel of his argument. The stubborn persistence of Neoplatonism in the form of Kabbalah, the Great Chain of Being, alchemy and the like is present in any number of natural philosophers of the early modern period, including Isaac Newton, Robert Fludd, Robert Boyle, and many others. Rather than view this trend as “an unconscious reluctance to admit the failure of the old world picture”⁶ as Harrison does, I view it as evidence that symbolic or allegorical thinking was not in fact absent after the Reformation. As this dissertation will demonstrate, allegorical biblical exegesis, while certainly no less fraught than it had been in the past, survived the

⁶ Harrison, *The Bible*, 271.

reformation and the scientific revolution and impacted various cultural, philosophical, and religious milieux, where the symbolic potential of language, art, and even the human psyche would be explored and exploited well into modernity.

Allegory, Jews, and Kabbalah

Christian allegorical interpretation of the Bible has relied on narratives about the nature of Jewish texts and Jewish interpretations since its first instance in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Paul's allegorical interpretation of the Genesis matriarchs Sarah and Hagar, which contrasted slavery, the law, and the flesh on one hand, with freedom from the law and the power of the spirit on the other, set the tone for Christian discourse about the Bible and about Jews for the ages.⁷ With the emergence of Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible in the late fourth century, Jews were further characterized as literalists. Jerome's reliance on Jewish interlocutors for this Latin translation brought with it the threat of accusations of Judaizing. His defense was to attack, not only the traditions of Jews, but most importantly, their ability to properly interpret the Bible. In his view, Jewish understanding of scripture was limited to the literal or historical sense, while Christians alone had access to the allegorical, spiritual meaning. The success of this characterization of Jewish and Christian interpretive abilities can be traced from Jerome, through Augustine, to Martin Luther, and in the thought of countless religious and political figures in between. The trope became entangled with Christian self-identity and claims of doctrinal authority and occupied a central place in Christian definitions of

⁷ See Galatians 4:21-5:26.

Judaism as a carnal, worldly and spiritually deficient tradition. As author Megan Hale Williams writes, Jerome's work "contributed greatly to the emergence of a new Christian discourse of the Jew, and to its persistence in the Latin West for at least a millennium."⁸

It is somewhat unexpected, therefore, to find in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the emergence of an opinion among certain influential thinkers in Western Europe that Christian interpretation of the Bible was associated with literalism while rabbinic interpretation was associated with allegory. This was a reversal of the previous scheme. This way of characterizing Jewish interpretation was often derisive, as in Robert Hooke's words distancing his work in microscopy from the perceived obsession with biblical minutiae on the part of rabbis: "*Rabbins* find out *Caballisms*, and *Enigmas* in the figure, and placing of Letters, where no such thing lies hid; whereas in *Natural* forms there are some so small, and so curious, and their design'd business so far removed from the reach of our sight, that the more we do magnify the object, the more excellencies and mysteries do appear."⁹ On the other hand, Christian thinkers often exploited Jewish sources out of a perception that they contained an interpretive depth unmatched in the Christian commentaries. Many learned experts believed the mystical books of the Jews, such as the Zohar, contained ancient wisdom from distant lands, supposing them to be much older than we now know them to be.¹⁰ Some even believed them to be the

⁸ Megan Hale Williams, "Lessons from Jerome's Jewish Teachers: Exegesis and Cultural Interaction in Late Antique Palestine," in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*, ed. Natalie Dormann and David Stern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 77.

⁹ From Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* as quoted in Harrison, *The Bible*, 197.

¹⁰ See footnote in chapter 1 on belief in the antiquity of the Zohar. Guy Stroumsa argues that the eighteenth-century fascination with ancient cultures came hand in hand with a fascination with foreign cultures. The "savages" of the present day were compared with the prehistoric man. Stroumsa notes that the texts, practices, and history of the Jews, as "foreigners within," became the locus of decoding for Christian intellectuals. Cultures of the Far East were often described according to the ways in which they were Jew-like. As missionaries moved east, scholars moved back in time, discovering hidden and long

foundation upon which the gospels were written, such that free thinker Anthony Collins was able to exploit this correlation in his ironic interpretation of the New Testament through the wisdom of an anonymous Rabbi, “well skill’d in the Talmud, the Cabbala, and the allegorical books of the Jews.”¹¹ Thus, even while Jewish mysticism was derided by some for its association with allegory, it was appropriated by others precisely for its hermeneutical value, revealing a tension within the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century. In the case of those who appropriated, as we will see, the interest in the purportedly ancient commentaries of the Jews provided for the circulation of ideas between Judaism and Christianity as well as the perpetuation of traditional notions of multiple levels of meaning in scripture. We see this, for instance, in the commentaries of the Christian kabbalists; among members of the university faculties, such as in Sweden, where research into rabbinic and kabbalistic texts informed the study the Bible; and in the work of individuals such as Anthony Collins, Isaac Newton, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Friedrich Oetinger, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose interest in Kabbalah was due in part to its value as a venue for allegorical interpretation.

In certain circles then, what had been thought of as a standard Christian approach to scripture up until the sixteenth century, namely allegory, becomes hereafter associated with Jewish mysticism. The traditional Christian discourse of the literal and spiritual senses in the Bible was, in the eighteenth century, no less tied to the discourse of the Jew

forgotten meaning in the exotic philosophies of the Jews. Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 41.

¹¹ From Anthony Collins’ *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, as quoted by David Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 63.

than it had been previously.¹² The early modern version of this discourse did, however, bring with it a twist in the plot. The perceived affiliation of Jewish sources with ancient, foreign, secret biblical meanings, and the influence of these sources on Christian thought, counters notions of allegory's demise.

Given all this, the allegorical commentaries of the scientist turned mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), provide insight into the matrix of boundaries and boundary crossing between Jews and Christians in the eighteenth century. Swedenborg's reliance on traditional notions of Jewish literalism comes despite (or perhaps because of) the manifest resemblances in his biblical commentary to key images, concepts and exegetical techniques of Kabbalah. Swedenborg uses the old trope even though he relies on sources who are themselves steeped in Kabbalah, such as Leibniz and his beloved brother-in-law, Uppsala professor Eric Benzelius. The fact that in his allegorical biblical commentaries Swedenborg regularly denounces the interpretive abilities of the scientifically learned on one hand, and of the Jews on the other, despite his own scientific background and the resemblances between his exegesis and Kabbalah, exposes something of the knotted nature of influence, and allows us to explore the contours of the discourse and the polemics of early modern biblical interpretation.

This project will demonstrate the persistence of biblical allegory in eighteenth century Christian thought, and its entanglement with both the developments of the scientific revolution and the figured discourse of Jewish and Christian religious identity,

¹² See, for instance, Deeana Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); and Williams, "Jerome's Jewish Teachers."

via the example of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The Case of Emanuel Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg was the son of a prominent Swedish Lutheran Bishop, a natural philosopher, inventor, assessor for the Swedish Board of Mines, frequent guest of King Charles XII and correspondent with members of the Royal Academies in London and Paris. Difficulties with a speech impediment kept him from certain types of public engagement, such as university lecturing, but he made up for this by publishing prolifically. His scientific writings cover such wide-ranging topics as *Stereometry*, *New Arithmetic*, *Blast Furnaces*, *Earth's Revolution*, *Finding Longitudes*, *Hydrostatics*, *Swedish Currency and Finance*, *Large Metallurgical Works*, *The Cerebrum*, and many more. Beginning in the 1740's, after working to build his career in the secular world, Swedenborg began experiencing tumultuous dreams and later waking visions of Christ, angels, and spirits from other worlds, all of which he recorded in his journals with the tone of a curious scientist. His many theological writings, which were the product of these experiences, include *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *True Christian Religion*, *Marriage Love*, and perhaps his most well-known work, *Heaven and Hell*. Biographers, historians of the European Enlightenment, and scholars of modern esotericism have time and again come to the question of what influences of the day may have informed Swedenborg's philosophical and religious positions. The subsequent impact of his thought in the United States and Europe was significant. Among the ranks of prominent figures to have been formatively shaped by Swedenborg are William Blake, William James, Carl Jung, Ralph Waldo Emerson, D. T. Suzuki, and Helen Keller. Therefore, the question of how

Swedenborg both responded to and contributed to patterns of intellectual history is related to broader genealogies of western religious thought.

Swedenborg is an important case to consider in the context of early modern biblical interpretation and Jewish-Christian relations. Firstly, his biblical commentary, the multi-volume *Arcana coelestia* (*Heavenly Secrets*, 1749-54) presents an intricate, allegorical reading of the Biblical text. He opens the commentary with the following line: “The Word of the Old Testament contains heavenly arcana [secrets], with every single detail focusing on the Lord, His heaven, the Church, faith, and what belongs to faith; but no human being grasps this from the letter.”¹³ The commentary unfolds three senses—the natural, the spiritual and the celestial—and works its way painstakingly through a verse by verse account of these meanings. Secondly, the commentary responds, by means of allegory, to the challenges of the epistemological shifts of the day. Prior to writing *Arcana coelestia*, Swedenborg’s scientific work considered the location and biological substance of the soul in the human body. *Regnum Animal* (*The Soul’s Domain*, 1744) treats, among other things, the functioning of the cerebral cortex and the nervous system, in an attempt to establish the existence of the human soul. The project ultimately failed, and Swedenborg was forced to the realization that if the soul did in fact exist, it was not detectable with scientific instruments. This work on the soul coincided with the beginning of his other-worldly visions, and the combination triggered a crisis of faith.

¹³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia: Principally a Revelation of the Inner or Spiritual Meaning of Genesis and Exodus*, trans. John Elliott (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1983-1999), 1. The translation I have chosen to quote from in this dissertation, by John Elliott, adopts the spelling *caelestia*, which follows the spelling that accompanied the first English translation of the commentary. I will use the spelling *coelesita* in the body of the dissertation, which follows the spelling of the first Latin editions and the majority of other subsequent editions and translations. Following convention, I will cite Swedenborg’s theological works using paragraph numbers rather than page numbers.

That he turned solely to the Bible and its interpretation for the next ten years of his life, as a response to this personal crisis of science and religion, is an interesting point from which to consider the confrontation between physics and metaphysics in the eighteenth century and its effect on biblical hermeneutics. By articulating an ontological connection between what can be seen in the text, and what is hidden within it, a resolution to his scientific crisis emerged: “as to the letter alone [the Word] is like the body without a soul.”¹⁴ A close reading of *Arcana coelestia*, as well as the extensive biblical indexes he prepared alongside the commentary, reveals Swedenborg’s biblically based response to the challenges of deism and materialism.

And finally, we find in Swedenborg’s work certain contradictions regarding his perception of Jews that will be relevant to our study of allegory. On the one hand, Swedenborg’s conception of the Jews as literalists, that they are limited to the “external sense,” draws on stereotypes with deep roots in Christian exegesis, as outlined above. Against the background of a rising preference for literalism in many circles, and also a growing association between Jews and allegory, Swedenborg’s use of the old trope in the context of his allegorical commentary could be simply characterized as old fashioned. Yet, as so many of his readers have noticed, the parallels to Kabbalah in his commentaries are hard to ignore, especially given the contexts of his intellectual and relational orbits, contexts that were heavily indebted to kabbalistic thought. The absence of reference to Kabbalah in his vast and all-encompassing corpus of writing is especially curious given his context and given his shared horizon with kabbalistic exegetical themes, and suggests a conscious or unconscious erasure is at play. A further

¹⁴ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 3.

contradiction relates to Swedenborg's descriptions of conversations with Jews in the spiritual world, while it appears that his this-worldly contact with Jewish interlocutors is heavily mediated through Christians. These celestial dialogues bring to sharp focus the "phantom Jews" that populated the European imagination from ancient times. As David Nirenberg articulates in his history of anti-Judaism in the West, the figurative, or imaginary Jew, has been conjured time and again as a constitutive idea in Christian thought, regardless of the presence or absence of actual Jews.¹⁵ As was the case in the past, Swedenborg's phantom Jews serve to distinguish Christian interpretive abilities and Christian self-identity.

In considering Swedenborg's relationship to Jewish sources, I will rely on Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence." According to Bloom, influence, defined as "literary love, tempered by defense"¹⁶ moves along labyrinthine rather than linear lines. But the difficulty in tracing influence lies principally in the fact that a borrowed tradition is misread in transmission. A strong reading is always a creative misreading, a "poetic misprision." Swedenborg's biblical commentary brings this reading and misreading into view. Together, the resemblances to Jewish sources and the accompanying attack on Jewish interpretive abilities in *Arcana coelestia* present a narrative of the patterns of accommodation and resistance that reflect the environment in which it was written.

¹⁵ Nirenberg further argues that anti-Judaism is a basic tool with which edifice of Western thought was constructed. See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 1-12. On the idea of the phantom Jew, see also Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers*, chapter 5; and Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, "Foundations of Biblical Philology in the 17th Century: Christian and Jewish Dimensions," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 81.

¹⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 8.

Tracing the anxiety of influence in Swedenborg’s biblical commentary sets it against the backdrop of the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Those who survey the contours of the reading and misreading that occurs between Jewish and Christian sources over the centuries, discover a discourse that belies any understanding of these as entirely distinct traditions. David Stern represents one aspect of this body of literature when he notes that differences between Jewish and Christian texts cannot always be traced to an essential difference between them, as would be suggested by the familiar “Hebrew” v. “Hellenism” refrain.¹⁷ The degree of exchange between these communities becomes more acute the more we engage this history. One striking example is Israel Jacob Yuval’s *Two Nations in Your Womb*. Yuval’s understanding of the dialectical, and often defensive, nature of the exchange is important to this discussion. His challenge to prevailing claims concerning the ancient Jewish origins behind the Passover/Easter parallels, for example, highlights not only the polemical undertones of these customs, but the degree of borrowing that went on at their inception.¹⁸ We might also consider, in this vein, the work of Yehuda Liebes who explores the evidence for Christian influence on the Zohar. In pointing to evidence of a response to trinitarianism in the text, Liebes concludes that we should reconsider the interpretive abilities of Christian kabbalists, who found the trinity everywhere in the Zohar, even if they failed to grasp the polemical elements of the Zohar’s “son.” In fact, Christian kabbalists may have preserved

¹⁷ As David Stern notes, the strongest expressions of this binary have gone out of fashion but its specter, “the tendency to view the history of Jewish and Christian exegesis as dueling rivals,” still remains. David Stern, “Introduction: On Comparative Biblical Exegesis—Interpretation, Influence, Appropriation,” in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*, eds. David Stern and Natalie Dohrmann (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 12.

¹⁸ Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Christological elements in the Zohar that were edited out in Jewish copies.¹⁹ Daniel Boyarin, Peter Schäfer, David Ruderman and David Biale, to name just a few, likewise explore in their work the circulation of ideas and practices between Jews and Christians throughout the last two millennia, and this dissertation will build on their insights and their methodology.²⁰

The Trouble with Allegory

It may, at first, seem unwise to showcase “allegory” in a historical study of a century that was decidedly turned off by the term. Many of the figures featured in this dissertation, including Swedenborg, revealed a semantic preference for “representations,” “signs,” “emblems,” and “symbols” in their commentaries, and allegory is often enough associated with “enthusiasm,” “mysticism,” or any number of supposed heresies of the day.²¹ Such ambivalence results from, as Jon Whitman puts it, “the polemic against

¹⁹ Yehuda Liebes, “Christian Influences on the Zohar,” in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 142-143.

²⁰ David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); David Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God From the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²¹ Swedenborg doesn’t use the term allegory to refer to his own methods, and where he does use the term its sense is negative. In *Vera Christiana religio* (True Christianity 1771), for instance, he disparages the sermons of those who preach their own opinions rather than revealed truth. And yet, Swedenborg, like Luther quoted below, makes his point using allegory: “Such is their teaching. It was said that as a consequence there was no more spirituality in their sermons than in the songs of birds, and that they were merely allegorical adornments, like wigs beautifully curled and powdered on bald heads. The mysteries of their discourses on justification by faith alone were likened to the quails brought up from the sea and strewn about the camps of the children of Israel (Num. 11), because of which several thousand persons died; while the theology of charity and faith together were likened to the manna from heaven. I once heard their preachers talking together about faith alone; and I saw a kind of image formed by them, which represented their faith alone. In their light, which was the light of hallucination, this appeared like a great giant; but when light from heaven was let in upon it, it appeared like a monster above and a serpent below. Seeing this, they withdrew, and the bystanders threw the image into a pond.” Emanuel

speaking ‘otherwise’ that had developed from the late Middle Ages and the Reformation to the Romantic period.”²² Yet it is precisely the fact that allegory persists in such an environment that interests me. For despite their ambivalence towards allegory, and occasionally their well-formulated distinctions between, for instance, allegory and symbol,²³ many eighteenth century authors demonstrate a meaningful connection to a heritage that understands Bible to be saying *something else* (*allos agoria*).

The ambivalence about allegory itself has deep roots in biblical tradition. Often, the use of the term allegory has been pejorative, either disparaging the methods of some other interpreter, such as Jerome distinguishing his work from “that allegorist” Origen, or pointing to the temptation in one’s self to distort the text, as in Martin Luther’s warning that allegory is “a beautiful harlot who fondles men in such a way that it is impossible for her not to be loved.”²⁴ In either case, when used pejoratively, the accusation is usually that the allegorist leaves behind the plain sense of scripture and replaces it with something of their own, making God’s word disposable, or worse, making God a liar. Such a definition of allegory, one that identifies a rejection of the apparent, or literal, meaning of the text, is sometimes made by modern historians as well. Elliott Wolfson does so in differentiating the interpretations of Nahmanides from those of Maimonides. According to Wolfson, due to his reliance on Kabbalah, Nahmanides held to the ontological reality of two parallel worlds, and he therefore believed the biblical text to be both ontologically and exegetically significant at both levels of meaning. For

Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, trans. Jonathan Rose (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation 2006), 810.

²² Jon Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 20.

²³ See discussion of Coleridge’s distinction in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

²⁴ As quoted in Jon Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory*, 3.

Maimonides, on the other hand, the distinction between two levels of meaning has exegetical or epistemological importance only; it does not represent two levels of reality.²⁵ Maimonides' interpretation is, by Wolfson's account, *merely* allegorical in places. Such a use of the term allegory, however, wherein the literal sense is dismissed or discarded, is especially murky when dealing with biblical interpretation: preservation of the text's sanctity has generally been of foremost concern for the Bible's commentators, even those whose interpretations wander into foreign territory.

Whitman writes of the history of allegory that in its early iterations in Greek and Roman antiquity there was less of a concern for whether the signifying events "really" occurred. In this context allegory "indicates primarily a transfer from one word or concept to another. Something is said (*agoreuein*), and something else (*allos*) is signified."²⁶ Greek allegorists, he argues, were motivated by the search for an underlying logic (*logos*) in the passages of the story (*mythos*).²⁷ However, Jewish and Christian appropriations of allegory, beginning around the turn of the first centuries B.C.E and C.E., generally did so while affirming the veracity of the original meaning of the text. This was done differently by different communities. Whitman's edited volume on the subject demonstrates, for instance, how the Alexandrian Jews emphasized the performative elements, or the behavioral context suggested by the linguistic context of scripture. The Midrashic tradition isolated and elaborated on verses or words of scripture, not to "expose" or "impose" meaning, but as a kind of "interposition between the words

²⁵ Elliot Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," in *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (Autumn, 1989): 111, 122.

²⁶ Jon Whitman, "From the Textual to the Temporal: Early Christian 'Allegory' and Early Romantic 'Symbol,'" in *New Literary History* 22, no. 1 (Winter, 1991): 162.

²⁷ Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory*, 35-37.

of scripture.”²⁸ Paul’s use of the term *allegory* in Galatians in the late first century drew connections between earlier events and later events, laying the foundation for Christian typologists in the millennia to come.²⁹ These, and other Jewish and Christian ways of characterizing and reading texts, relied on a preserved connection to an original canon and an original community. That is not to say that Jews and Christians have uniformly affirmed the truth of biblical accounts: they have not. But it highlights the difficulty in defining allegory according to what is rejected or taken away rather than by what is added.

Borrowing Peter Harrison’s definition, this project broadly understands allegory to be the “capacity of things to act as signs” without qualification regarding the integrity of the things (sacred texts in this instance) themselves.³⁰ Put another way, an allegorical interpretation understands a text to have more than one level of meaning. This study of allegory in the long eighteenth century will required us to investigate figures who distance their own methods from allegory, begging the question of how and why they did so. Allegory’s troubled history is precisely what allows us a pathway into anxieties about text and history. As Whitman notes, allegory shouldn’t be thought of as a single “kind” of interpretation, but a “series of critical negotiations” between a text and its readers.³¹ By seeking out and uncovering a hidden meaning, the reader is able to either hold on to something they are in danger of losing, or introduce innovation into a community that would be otherwise suspicious. In addition, at least for those whose commentaries I will

²⁸ Ibid., 41.

²⁹ Whitman, “From the Textual,” 162-164.

³⁰ Harrison, *The Bible*, 4.

³¹ Ibid, 5.

consider below, it allows for a connection to holy things unseen.

In the last half-century, literary critics and philosophers have reversed the Romantic distinction between allegory and symbol, and effectively “rehabilitated allegory” as a category for understanding hermeneutics, pointing to the subjectivity of signs and the figured nature of language more broadly.³² Scholars have also challenged the notion that allegory springs from an essentially Greek or Western heritage, as for instance, in the work of Zhang Longxi, who studies allegoresis in Chinese poetry, and rejects misconceptions of Chinese literature as radically monistic, literal, natural, and impersonal.³³ This dissertation will build on this scholarly attention to the persistence of allegory, not in an attempt to demonstrate that *all* interpretation is allegory,³⁴ but to argue that the political, social and religious utility of allegory explains its presence in even those environments that are supposedly hostile to it. Allegory ensures a certain flexibility in a textual tradition, allowing connections to contexts foreign to that of the text’s origins. As Moshe Idel writes of Kabbalah, allegory brings to life “a whole literary universe, mostly a biblical one, compounded of dead persons, destroyed cities [and] shattered temples.”³⁵ Early modern readers of the Bible were no less concerned with the question

³² See, for instance, Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory*, 15-20, and part 2 “The Late Middle Ages to the Modern Period” with notable contributions from Azade Seyhan, Rainer Nägele, and Tobin Siebers; and Susanne Knaller, “A Theory of Allegory Beyond Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man” in *The Germanic Review* 77 (Spring 2002): 83-101. Knaller uses the phrase “rehabilitation of allegory” in reference to the work of Walter Benjamin. Gadamer also uses the phrase in discussing the direction of aesthetics and hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 79-81.

³³ Longxi argues for a likeness between traditional Chinese interpretations of the Confucian *Shi jing* and Jewish and Christian interpretations of *The Song of Songs*. Zhang Longxi, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

³⁴ See Whitman’s summary of this position, most famously articulated by Northrop Frye, in *Interpretation and Allegory*, 16-17.

³⁵ Moshe Idel, “Kabbalistic Exegesis,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: A History of Its Interpretation* I, part 2, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000), 461.

of the relevance of biblical places and characters than their ancestors were.

Methodology and Structure of the Dissertation

This is in part a study of context. It will consider the history of the European Enlightenment and Haskalah, Deism, pietism, Hermetic undercurrents, the fall of Sabbatai Zevi, and other social, religious and political forces at play. This is also a study of texts, in a very traditional sense of the term. It is a study of written language, of narrative, of intertextuality, of terms and techniques. Ultimately, this study will reveal the ways that the relationship between text and context is, in a sense, itself typological. We will explore the figurative nature of themes and characters in the commentaries of Swedenborg and his contemporaries, such as Jews, naturalists, the sciences, and even dogmatic formulations such as the trinity or justification by faith, finding that these things act as signs, and carry meanings that reflect the world of the commentator. In exploring the discourse between text and context, or the discursive nature of such figures, this dissertation is indebted the theoretical groundwork of those in the related disciplines of history of religion, philosophy of religion, intellectual history, and literary criticism.

This project will be divided into three parts: on allegory in the eighteenth century (or the discourse contiguous with *Arcana coelestia*), on Swedenborg's allegory (or the discourse within *Arcana coelestia*), and on various responses by those who read Swedenborg to his allegorical interpretations (or the discourse about *Arcana coelestia*). The first part will therefore lay contextual groundwork with a brief comparative look to the commentaries of other eighteenth century figures, both Jewish and Christian, whose work contributes to our understanding of these themes. The project will take up the scientific biblicism of the English William Whiston (1667-1752), a Newtonian

mathematician who believed that any obstacle to understanding the *literal* veracity of the Old Testament prophecies was due to their early corruption by allegorizing Jews. It will also consider the allegorical, kabbalistic commentaries of Johan Kemper, Professor at Uppsala University, close friend of Swedenborg's brother-in-law and Sabbatean convert to Christianity. Thirdly, it will review the exegetical work of Moses Mendelssohn, whose rabbinic-inspired theory of language advanced a defense of semiotics. And finally, a reading of Ḥasidic biblical commentary from the same time period will highlight a shared horizon with the psychologizing, internalizing interpretations found in *Arcana coelestia*. These four commentaries are significant to this study, not because of a direct connection to Swedenborg (though in the case of Kemper this connection is meaningful), but because they will help draw the map, so to speak, highlighting the topography of eighteenth century discourses about the Bible, science, and Jewish and Christian religious identity and interpretive abilities.

Part two will examine Swedenborg's own biblical commentary, *Arcana coelestia*. It will introduce and analyze Swedenborg's iteration of the Bible's inner senses, and their connection to a doctrine of correspondences he developed during his scientific career. A close reading of Swedenborg's interpretation of Genesis 3 will demonstrate how his allegorical interpretations work, and will reveal a bias against two communities of interpreters he believes to be incapable of accessing the full depths biblical wisdom: scientists, or the learned skeptics of natural philosophy, and the Jews. We will consider Swedenborg's relationship to these two communities in separate chapters, arguing that in each case his anxiety can be traced to apparent resemblances between his own hermeneutic and that of the offending community.

Swedenborg's *Arcana coelestia*, unsurprisingly given its orientation to "things seen and heard" in the spiritual world, received mixed reviews, and its reception will be considered at length in part three of this dissertation. Three chapters will take up, in turn, Swedenborg's reception in philosophy, theology and the arts and literature. Where *Arcana coelestia* is received positively we find a split between those who link it to an ancient and hallowed spiritual sense tradition and those who claim that Swedenborg's inner sense is entirely unique, marking a new age and a "New Church." Where the reception is mixed or negative, we find evidence of a double ambivalence: toward allegory on one hand, and toward Swedenborg on the other. Figures as diverse as Immanuel Kant, John Wesley, Friedrich Oetinger, William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, had in common a fascination with and in some cases sustained study of Swedenborg's correspondences, while also harboring deep reservations that manifested in moments of harsh criticism and even ridicule. We will find, however, that despite their protestations, an interest in Swedenborg among these and others comes along with a reformulation of biblical allegory in their own terms. While such figures formally denounce or diminish allegory, their assertions regarding the Bible's *other* meaning or *true* sense is striking. With Swedenborg as a common interlocutor, we will consider Kant's "moral sense," Coleridge's poetic "inner sense," and even Blake's "Proverbs of Hell," as evidence of allegory's resilience. Furthermore, a consideration of how each of these interpretive moments is colored by the advancements of the sciences on one hand, and on views of Jewish and Christian religious identity on the other, will help us analyze the variations in allegory's function and form in each case.

Swedenborg rejected the idea of Christ's bodily return to earth, and believed the second coming to be a new understanding of the spiritual sense of the Bible, a point that some deemed religiously scandalous (such as Oetinger), while others agreed in qualified terms (such as Kant) or even judged it poetically inspired (such as Blake). In one sense, it was Swedenborg's most outrageous claim: that he had been chosen as scribe to witness and record the present-day messianic event taking place in the spiritual world. In another sense, however, Swedenborg's reformulated eschatology spoke to many of the religious concerns of the day, with its emphasis on self-judgement, personal reformation and regeneration, and a new age of intellectual freedom and freedom from oppressive ecclesiastical institutions. To be sure, messianic expectations were alive and well in the long eighteenth century, but the counter currents of Deism, pietism, Neoplatonism, dissenting sectarianism, and even skepticism conditioned new age receptive to a personalized apocalypse. That Swedenborg then organized these themes into an elaborate, and at times eccentric, allegorical reading of the Bible was a move that severely limited his influence in academic and scientific circles, but also inspired more poetic and literary minds. Swedenborg's spiritual apocalypse was, as we will see, his greatest and most damning allegory.

Among his many publications, this dissertation is organized around Swedenborg's *Arcana coelestia* in particular for a number of reasons. *Arcana coelestia* is his longest published biblical commentary (published originally in eight volumes); it is his first theological publication after the end of his scientific career; it contains the fullest articulation of his views of Jewish interpretive abilities and the role of the "Jewish Church" in history; and it contains his first sustained application of the doctrine of

correspondences to the Bible. Swedenborg's name becomes associated with the concept of correspondences in locations throughout Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because of his *Arcana coelestia*. Therefore, even in cases where *Arcana coelestia* isn't cited or consulted directly, the reception of Swedenborgian hermeneutics is indebted to this opus on the secrets of heaven.

This is, therefore, a study of the use of allegory in a particular period in history, a period in which assumptions about ontological connections between nature, scripture, reason, and spirit were challenged and changed. As a consequence, exegetical and literary articulations of semiotic relationships in language and text were also changed. But despite the claims of some eighteenth century critics as well as some critics today, allegory did not breathe its last breath in the eighteenth century. This argument will be investigated through the lens of a particular commentary, *Arcana coelestia*, which responds, using allegory, to a number of religious and epistemological currents of the day, and whose reception follows the enduring, if fraught, life of allegory into the nineteenth century. A study of *Arcana coelestia's* context, content and reception will demonstrate the persistence of allegory in the Age of the Enlightenment.

PART I
ALLEGORY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: THE DISCOURSE
CONTIGUOUS WITH *ARCANA COELESTIA*

CHAPTER 1: FOUR COMMENTARIES

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
 And scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter,
 And He will make it plain.

Hymn, W. Cowper

Within the traditions that hold the Bible, in its various configurations, to be sacred scripture, every generation has faced questions about how to properly interpret the text and about how it mediates a connection to the Divine. As discussed in the introduction, factors such as the Protestant Reformation's belief in *sola scriptura*, the success of Pietistic movements, and the scientific turn away from metaphysical explanations, encouraged many eighteenth-century readers to focus on the immediate meaning of scripture. God's words and intentions were apparent to each man in his own language, bypassing the requirement for clerical interpretation and its potential for corruption. Every believing reader could access the plain truth, available from God there on the page; "God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain" the popular hymn proclaimed.³⁶ Parallel movements in the direction of literalism were noticeable in Catholicism as well.³⁷

³⁶ William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," in John Newton, *Twenty-six Letters on Religious Subjects to Which Are Added Hymns* (Dublin: W. Gilbert, 1780), 252.

³⁷ See Kileen and Forshaw, eds., *Word and the World*, which responds to Peter Harrison's argument in *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* that the preference for literal readings in the Early Modern period was a uniquely Protestant activity.

While it was by no means a uniform movement, by affirming the Vulgate and Patristic exegesis as authoritative, the Council of Trent effectively downplayed reliance on the medieval four-fold sense of scripture.³⁸ Catholic scientists, especially Jesuits, made significant contributions to mechanical philosophy, and Jesuit commentaries, such as that of Cornelius Lapide, highlighted the literal sense and its alignment with science while moderating, if not outright rejecting, traditional reliance on allegory: "*hoc ineptum ac somniorum interpretis*" Lapide wrote of allegorical interpretation.³⁹

However, even as trust in the written text was fortified, the accuracy and reasonableness of biblical religion came under attack from multiple angles, including textual criticism, scientific advancements in physics and natural history, and the growing number of freethinkers and Deists who challenged traditional sources of religious authority in unprecedented ways. As they had done so often in the past, many Christian scholars responded by looking to Judaism and Hebrew study for answers and tools that could be applied to interpretive challenges. The difference this time was that the Christian's "hermeneutical Jew" was allied with allegory and hidden meaning, rather than literalism, and the growing ambivalence towards allegory was in turn directed at Jews, their texts, and their traditions.

This chapter will set the stage for a contextualized study of *Arcana coelestia* by examining four biblical commentaries from roughly the same time period and reflecting

³⁸ Killeen and Forshaw, eds., *Word and the World*, 6-7.

³⁹ As quoted by J. R. Armogathe in "Per Annos Mille: Cornelius a Lapide and the Interpretation of Revelation 20:2-8" in *In Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture, Volume II Catholic Millenarianism: From Savonarola to the Abbé Grégoire*, ed. Karl A. Kottman, (Netherlands: Springer, 2001), 45.

many of the same hermeneutical subtleties, even while drawing radically different conclusions. I have selected four commentaries, two Christian and two Jewish, that demonstrate something of the relationship between the two traditions as well as the nuances of eighteenth-century attitudes towards allegorical interpretation. The commentaries also span the range of Eastern to Western European thought. The ideas presented in these commentaries, like their authors in some cases, crossed religious as well as national boundaries. Together, they tell the story of the persistence of allegorical interpretation, both in places isolated from economic and scientific advancements as well as in universities and other purported centers of intellectual innovation.

As discussed in the introduction, Kabbalah, and in particular the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah, played a major role in the persistence of allegorical interpretations of the Bible, both Christian and Jewish, in the eighteenth century. Belief in the antiquity of the Zohar's sources was still standard, in spite of occasional challenges,⁴⁰ and reinforced the association between ancient wisdom and divine truth, even in an age that heralded novelty, progress and invention, and even among the century's most innovative characters. Kabbalah's influence among natural scientists as well as biblical commentators is significant, and as historian Allison Coudert and others have revealed, reflects a complicated history of exchange between traditions:

The Kabbalah offered something of a permeable barrier between Christians and Jews, allowing the circulation of ideas. Both Christianity and the

⁴⁰ Yaacob Dwek demonstrates seventeenth-century criticism of the Zohar, for instance, in the work of Venetian rabbi Leon Modena who questioned the early dating. See Yaacob Dwek, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 2011. Belief in the early dating of the Zohar persisted into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, especially in Christian kabbalistic circles, where it was believed to be part of an ancient wisdom, predating the New Testament.

Kabbalah were profoundly influenced by the same Neoplatonic doctrines. Christians were therefore not wrong to discover Christian (or neoplatonized Christian) concepts in the Kabbalah, for Jewish kabbalists lived for the most part among Christians and absorbed Christian ideas. But the ideas absorbed were attenuated, shorn of dogmatic subtleties, and mixed with Jewish concepts. When Christians rediscovered these ideas, they were therefore very different from their original form.⁴¹

Many Christian scholars were therefore attracted to ideas in Kabbalah that were both familiar and foreign, novel, but with an air of antiquity. These ideas also provided a venue for the displaced proclivity for allegorical thinking. For, on the one hand, the hunger for rational, systematic, universal truth that had been building since medieval times produced the Enlightenment palate for language that was simple, clear and meant only what it appeared to mean. On the other hand, readers of the Bible were confronted anew by discoveries, historical, linguistic and geological in nature, which made the plain sense of the text nearly impossible to accept in places. Each of the four authors discussed below reveals something of the panorama produced by these opposing landscapes. We will begin with a man, William Whiston, and a tradition, English Deism, that fervently resisted allegorical interpretations of the Bible, and end with a man, Rabbi Menahem Naḥum of Chernobyl, and a tradition, Ḥasidism, that fully embraced and magnified the tradition of uncovering multiple levels of meaning. Between these, we will explore the commentaries of two men who bridged seemingly disparate worlds, Christian and Jewish, east and west: Moses Mendelssohn and Johan Kemper. The end of the chapter will

⁴¹ Allison P. Coudert, "Leibniz, Locke, Newton and the Kabbalah," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard College Library, 1997), 163.

briefly consider possible connections between these four and Emanuel Swedenborg, the most probable, substantive connection being with Kemper. Each of these figures illuminates not only the thorny plight of allegory in modernity, but also the ever present barriers and passageways between Judaism and Christianity, and it is for these reasons, rather than for direct lines of influence, that they are helpful in providing a contextual footing for a study of *Arcana coelestia*.

William Whiston

We will begin our study of the Bible in the eighteenth century with a look to the debate over allegorical interpretations in England at that time, and to William Whiston (1667-1752), whose singlehanded war on allegory utilized the latest in scientific discovery as well as the study of Hebrew and Judaism as arsenal. Whiston, like so many of his contemporaries, embodies the historian's familiar refrain that science and religion were not yet separate disciplines in the early eighteenth century. Whiston's work in biblical chronology, translation of Josephus, early church history, and biblical manuscript study interfaced with his work in mathematics and astronomy in ways unique to his age. Among his many books demonstrating this interface was his *Astronomical Principles of Religion, Natural and Revealed*, in which he applied his exegetical skills and his scientific reasoning to the task of determining, among other things, the location of hell. Using a "curious mixture of physico-theological reasoning and prophetic admonition" as one scholar puts it⁴² Whiston determined that the place of darkness and fire described in

⁴² Roomet Jakapi, "William Whiston, the Universal Deluge, and a Terrible Spectacle," in *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 31 (2005): 7-14.

scripture could be none other than a “Comet, ascending from the Hot Regions near the Sun, and going into the Cold Regions beyond Saturn, with its long smoking Tail arising up from it, through its several Ages and Periods of revolving . . .”⁴³ This is but one example of how the Bible was explained anew by the pious scientists of early modernity.

Whiston’s incorporation of astronomy into his exegesis was made possible by his mentorship with Isaac Newton. A student of Isaac Newton and successor to Newton as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, Whiston inherited several of Newton’s positions and interests regarding natural philosophy, biblical interpretation and most famously, Arianism. However, the question of how these two men aligned, or not, over their approaches to the Bible is yet to be settled, and a word should be said about this before proceeding.

James Force, whose research centers on Newton and his influence, argues in his book *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian*, that Whiston’s approach to the Bible is essentially Newtonian in nature, and that Newton was a behind the scenes promoter of Whiston’s Boyle lectures on biblical literalism, entitled *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies*. Force’s evidence for “Whiston’s literal Newtonian interpretation”⁴⁴ has been challenged in more than one review,⁴⁵ and, as I will revisit over the course of this dissertation, such an argument depends a great deal on how one defines “literal.” For

⁴³ William Whiston, *Astronomical principles of religion, natural and reveal'd : in nine parts* (London : J. Senex and W. Taylor), 1717.

⁴⁴ A phrase Force employs repeatedly. See for instance: James Force, *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 83.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, the reviews of Force’s *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* by Simon Schaffer in *The British Journal for the History of Science* 19 (July 1986): 226-228; Anita Guerrini in *The Journal of Religion* 67, (January 1987): 100-101; and Mordechai Feingold in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21 (October 1987): 141-142.

while Newton's biblical studies indeed rely on his knowledge of cultural history and the calculations of measurements and the like in order to determine *what actually happened*, his interest in alchemy and symbolism, especially in the tabernacle and temple descriptions, suggests an approach somewhat different from Whiston's in its reliance on coded meaning.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that the National Library of Israel, which has collected and curated Newton's religious papers, describes Newton's biblical interpretation as unambiguously non-literal. In its online introduction to the collection, the library curators describe the papers as "evidence of the great lengths that Newton went to in trying to decipher writings that, in his opinion, contained secret knowledge encrypted in the Holy Scriptures of ancient cultures and in historical documents."⁴⁷

What is clear from the content of both Newton's and Whiston's extensive writing on the Bible, is that they shared a near obsession with deciphering and preserving an uncorrupted version of text. Both men employ comparison between Greek, Latin and

⁴⁶ See especially Newton's *Prolegomena ad lexici prophetici partem secundam in quibus agitur De forma sanctuarij iudaici*. Ms. 434, The Babson College Grace K. Babson Collection of the Works of Sir Isaac Newton, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. He writes: "It is universally accepted that future events are foreshadowed by the prescriptions of the law, and the Apostle Paul amply testifies to this in Colossians 2.17 and Hebrews 8.5 and 9.23. That is why those prescriptions are more fitted than the natural World to be a system of things from which the Prophets could derive types; it is also why the Apocalypse is full of these types, and therefore these prescriptions and the Apocalypse explain each other like twin prophecies of the same things, and cannot be properly understood apart from each other. For that book, sealed by the hand of Him who sits upon the throne, is the very book of the law, as will be shown later, and its seals are opened in the Apocalypse. We must now therefore study the world of Israel, and expound the significance of its parts and ceremonies. And above all we must survey the Sanctuary in which the requirements of the law were carried out. This had three phases: the Tabernacle down to the time of Solomon, the first temple down to the Babylonian captivity, and the second temple down to the captivity under the Romans. We must get to know their design, if we want to have a proper grasp of their significance." Accessed on June 26, 2016.

<http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00079>

⁴⁷ Accessed on May 6, 2016.

<http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/collections/Humanities/newton/Pages/default.aspx>

Hebrew versions of the Old Testament, and their criticism of the Hebrew Masoretic text falls in line with broader accusations against Rabbinic tradition surfacing at the time. More will be said about these accusations and Whiston's role therein below. The implications of this manuscript work were significant for many reasons, and worked into several epistemological fault lines of the enlightenment. Fundamentally, the exegetical writing of both men exhibits the conviction that the antiquity of a text or tradition was a demonstration of its truth. Born out of a Protestant distrust of tradition, eighteenth century thinkers such as these tended to view religious developments in both Christianity and Judaism from the second century on as corruptions. The Talmud and the Council of Nicaea alike came under scrutiny, and the scholar set his aim at discovering the purest, most ancient, most holy Bible. Of the many conclusions these two men came to, Arianism, or the rejection of the Trinitarian formula of Athanasius and the Church fathers, was by far the most controversial and ended with Whiston's banishment from Cambridge University in 1710. Much more popular and with farther reaching consequences, was Whiston's assault on allegorical interpretation, which he promoted with renewed vigor thereafter in London.

A word on context will help situate Whiston's attack on allegory. At the heart of eighteenth-century debates in England surrounding the Bible and its interpretation were two components of biblical literature: Genesis, specifically the creation story and the flood, and the Old Testament prophets and their connection to New Testament events. On the one hand, developments in natural history and astronomy called into question the validity of the Genesis narratives, and on the other, manuscript discoveries and textual

criticism called into question the assumed correspondence between the prophets and the Christian messiah. With each new discovery old assumptions were challenged, and Deism, a rising alternative to biblical religion, gained new advocates. Following on late seventeenth century philosophical meditations on the subject, such as John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696) and John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), defenders of the faith were tasked with demonstrating the genuineness of Christian scripture and the logical sophistication of its message.

The rise of the natural sciences led some thinkers to defend biblical truth claims by means of "general providence" only, or by means of the ordinary processes and forces of nature. Those who insisted on the traditional notion of God's active intervention by means of "special providence" in upholding the two pillars of biblical revelation, namely miracles and prophecy, were challenged as never before. Enter William Whiston, with his tool box of Newtonian physics, textual dexterity, scholarly rigor and zealotry for the truth of the printed Word of God.

Whiston's views on allegory are best understood as a response to the attacks of Deism, which were triggered in part by the work of Thomas Burnet and his influential 1681 *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*. On one hand, Whiston and Burnet had much in common, as they both attempted explanations of biblical accounts using mechanistic principles. Burnet, for his part, worked to do this with as little recourse to special providence as possible, which made the hexameron, or six-day creation, a particularly

difficult stumbling block.⁴⁸ He believed that the world was created in the order and manner described in Genesis, but that the length of time itself could only be understood allegorically. That it did not literally take six days was no innovation. As far back as Augustine, Christian exegetes had been relativizing the measurement of time *in the beginning*. But Burnet's turn to allegory in an otherwise positivist study stood out. His qualification was viewed as a weakness by responding Deists and theists alike.⁴⁹ That one could be so convinced regarding the science behind the Bible, but make use of allegory when things got tricky became a point of ridicule. Whiston thought he could do better, and was determined to defend the biblical account of creation without the crutch of Burnet's "parabolick sense."⁵⁰ Whiston's support of the Genesis events relied again on theories of the impact of comets. The impact of colliding spheres on their natural course rapidly changed the landscape of the earth, and the six days of creation describe exactly what it would have looked like to an observing set of eyes. No allegory is needed; the text means precisely what it says.

That the biblical text could have only one meaning, and that its meaning was to be understood literally, became fundamental to Whiston's overall hermeneutical

⁴⁸ The reception of Spinoza in seventeenth-century England triggered discussions about the reasonableness of belief in biblical miracles. Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, for instance, wrote in defense of miracles in responding to Spinoza. See Rosalie L. Colie, "Spinoza in England, 1665-1730," in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 3 (June 19, 1963): 183-219. Burnet's work attempted to straddle two positions seemingly at odds in Spinoza's wake: the inerrancy of scripture and God's operation via the laws of nature.

⁴⁹ Burnet had many critics, including Christianus Wagner, Herbert Crofts, and Erasmus Warren. On the Deist response to Burnet, see Force, *William Whiston*, 35-38.

⁵⁰ William Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth, From its Original, to the Consummation of All Things, Where the Creation of the World in Six Days, the Universal Deluge, And the General Conflagration, As laid down in the Holy Scriptures, Are Shewn to be perfectly agreeable to Reason and Philosophy* (London: J. Whiston and B. White, at Mr. Boyle's Head in Fleet-Street, 1755), 66.

approach. He outlined this approach in three postulates in a publication responding to Burnet's and pointedly titled *A New Theory of the Earth, From its Original, to the Consummation of All Things, Where the Creation of the World in Six Days, the Universal Deluge, And the General Conflagration, As laid down in the Holy Scriptures, Are Shewn to be perfectly agreeable to Reason and Philosophy*. His postulates were stated as follows:

- I. The Obvious or Literal Sense of Scripture is the True and Real one, where no evident Reason can be given to the contrary.
- II. That which is clearly accountable in a natural way, is not without reason to be ascrib'd to a Miraculous Power.
- III. What Ancient Tradition asserts of the constitution of Nature, or of the Origin and Primitive States of the World, is to be allow'd for True, where 'tis fully agreeable to Scripture, Reason, and Philosophy.⁵¹

Whiston's Boyle lectures as well as his 1724 follow-up book, *The Literal Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecy*, apply these postulates to the Old Testament prophecies. Like Genesis, interpretation of prophetic literature had become a point of controversy amidst the challenges posed by Deism, especially for their reliance on double meanings. In order to meet this challenge Whiston set out to prove that messianic prophecies referred to events surrounding the birth, life and death of Jesus alone, and not to the immediate circumstances of the Judahite and Israelite kings and kingdoms to which

⁵¹ Ibid., 95.

they were pronounced. Traditional Christian reliance on more than one sense of scripture here was to be abandoned along with other patristic perversions.⁵² “I observe that the Stile and Language of the Prophets, as it is often peculiar and enigmatical, so it is always single and determinate, and not capable of those double Intentions, and typical Interpretations, which most of our late Christian Expositors are so full of upon all Occasions.”⁵³

In order to demonstrate the literal meaning “without any recourse to Typical, Foreign and Mystical Expositions”⁵⁴ Whiston postulated the corruption of the text by second-century Jews, whose intent, he insisted, was to confound Christianity. Just as the Athanasian Creed brought confusion and falsity to Christian notions of the father and the son, Jews had manipulated the text of the Bible to mislead its followers during the period of early Christianity. As Irven Resnick has shown, this accusation of Jewish textual corruption has always existed in Christendom, and gained strength and sophistication in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁵⁵ Such accusations also flourished in Islam. Whiston was therefore weaving an old story into his text-critical work: a familiar anti-Judaism into new manuscript discoveries and analysis.

⁵² Eighteenth-century Arianism, such as that of Newton and Whiston, was part of a post-Reformation wave of enthusiasm for the earliest forms of Christian doctrine, as discussed above. Here, allegory and Trinitarianism are both considered by Whiston to be part of the corruption of Christianity over time. As we will see in chapter 6, in 1783 John Wesley would accuse Swedenborg of rejecting the literal sense of scripture, and with it the doctrine of the Trinity. That the Trinity could be so closely associated with allegory and with literalism by two different leading English theologians speaks to the particular interpretive uncertainties of the day.

⁵³ William Whiston, *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies: Being Eight Sermons Preach'd at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in the year MDCCVII* (London, 1708), 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Irven Resnick, “The Falsification of Scripture and Medieval Christian and Jewish Polemics,” in *Medieval Encounters* 2, no. 3 (1995): 344-380.

In his *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament* (1722) Whiston cites the Talmudic principle of *tiqqun sopherim* as a starting point for his accusation against the Hebrew Masoretic text, and its departures from other versions.⁵⁶ He faults the “later Jews” for altering the chronology and the messianic prophecies of the Bible, to “stop the power of the Gospel.”⁵⁷ In a nod to their own religious convictions, Whiston states that these rabbis were “lying for God,”⁵⁸ but blames them unapologetically for all “modern difficulties” in interpretation.⁵⁹ His *The Literal Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies* presents a detailed study of the prophecies in question, placing them side by side in two columns with their New Testament fulfillments. Marginal notes explain every corruption to the text made by Jews. Using the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Roman Psalter for comparison, Whiston notes where the Hebrew text misleads. Where no existing manuscript provides a prophecy to correlate with a New Testament citation, the Jews are blamed for the absence in every version, as in this note on Matthew 2:23: “This Text is entirely wanting in all our Copies, Hebrew and Greek. Nor do there at present the least Footsteps of it remain, since the Jews corrupted their Copies.”⁶⁰ With the latest tools of biblical scholarship at hand, therefore, Whiston proposed to reconstruct the original text, which would, he believed, present a straightforward description of the messiah born in Bethlehem.

⁵⁶ William Whiston, *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament, and for Vindicating the Citations Made Thence in the New Testament* (London: J. Senex, 1722), 221.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 224

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁶⁰ Whiston, *Literal Accomplishment*, 4.

Most significant for our present purposes is Whiston's association of allegory with the contaminating nature of Jewish interpretation, which he makes in a supplement to *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament*. The supplement takes up the case of the Canticles, and argues against its inclusion in the canon. Whiston does not challenge the traditional attribution of authorship to King Solomon, but says that it was written late in Solomon's life when he was influenced by Egyptian ways and entrenched in idolatry. Any moral content that could be derived from Canticles would depend on a reading that was "entirely mystical and allegorical."⁶¹ The literal sense alone is depraved, and as such has no place in holy scripture. Whiston uses Canticles as an opportunity to declare allegory "that later Jewish Method of Interpretation,"⁶² pointing to Philo as the father of allegory and to Philo's Egyptian (i.e. idolatrous), heritage. He argues that allegory takes a hold on biblical tradition only after the fall of Jerusalem, and is used by the earliest Christians only when they are engaged in debate with Jews.⁶³ The inclusion of Canticles in the canon came in the second century, when allegory was in fashion and, importantly, at the same time the Jews were engaged in their textual corruptions: so goes Whiston's argument.

However, while Whiston's understanding of the role of Jews in the history of religion centers on their corruption of scripture, more positive elements of his interaction with Judaism manifest the knotty relationship between early modern Christian thinkers

⁶¹ William Whiston, *A Supplement to Mr. Whiston's Late Essay, Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament: Proving, That the Canticles Is Not a Sacred Book of the Old Testament; nor Was Originally Esteemed as Such, Either by the Jewish or the Christian Church* (London: J. Senex, 1723), 12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 21.

and their hermeneutical exploitation of Jews and Judaism. Adam Shear points to the fact that Whiston's lifetime coincides with the period of Jewish settlement in England as evidence for what he calls Whiston's "Judeo-centric Christianity."⁶⁴ His Arianism made Jewish acceptance of Jesus as divine unnecessary for their salvation. And Jewish national restoration was seen by Whiston as an important precursor to, rather than result of, the second coming of Christ. Even more striking was Whiston's incorporation of mitzvot, kashrut, and the Saturday Sabbath into his notions of what a true Christian practice should look like. The purest form of Christianity, again, would have been the earliest, and consequently would reflect the Jewish context of Jesus' Judea. Whiston is very much a product of his time in his fascination with Jewish customs, and inherited the project from such Christian Hebraists as Johannes Buxtorf and his 1603 *Synagoga Judaica*. His "chimerical philosemitism,"⁶⁵ to borrow Shear's phrasing, was also not unique, as Christians across Europe had long viewed the conversion of the Jews as integral to bringing on the messianic age. Whiston's distinctive contribution was his elaborate documentation of Jewish textual corruption, and the accompanying link between Jews and allegory.

Whiston had many critics. But none elicited the spirited response, from Whiston and others, that freethinker Anthony Collins did with his work *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*.⁶⁶ Collins argued that rather than rescue

⁶⁴ Adam Shear, "William Whiston's Judeo-Christianity: millenarianism and Christian Zionism in early enlightenment England," in *Philosemitism in History*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93-110.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁶ Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London: 1724).

the Old Testament for Christianity the man was undermining it. In his sardonic attack Collins questioned the very notion that more reliable sources for the Old Testament could be identified or that if they could Whiston was the man for the job. He asserted that, in his words: “a Bible restor’d, according to Mr. Whiston’s Theory, will be a mere Whistonian Bible, a Bible confounding and not containing the true Text of the Old Testament.”⁶⁷ Collins’s *Discourse* pointed to the need for a radically different approach to scripture, one found paradoxically in the heart of Judaism. For this Collins cited the theories of Dutch scholar William Surenhusius, whose legendary encounter with a wise Rabbi led him to believe in the revelatory nature of the Mishnah and the legitimacy of Jewish methods for interpreting scripture. The anonymous Rabbi, who was described as: “well skill’d in the Talmud, the Cabbala, and the allegorical books of the Jews”⁶⁸ was an astute interpreter of the New Testament as well as the Old. When presented with the problem of how the New Testament authors inaccurately cite Hebrew scriptures, the Rabbi revealed the solution. He demonstrated that the New Testament is a mystical interpretation of the Old, properly interpreted only by the methods of Kabbalah. Collins surmises from his consideration of this account, that Paul, as well as the Gospel writers, must have been educated in the ways of Kabbalah, gaining the ability to interpret the mysteries of scripture. Citing Surenhusius’s encounter, Collins therefore concluded that “Christianity is the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, and is not improperly called mystical Judaism.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 92.

Collins's admiration for Jewish mystical hermeneutics is tinged with irony, and conflicting theories exist among contemporary historians and biographers on exactly how sarcastic Collins was being: on whether or not Collins's admiration for Surenhusius was genuine.⁷⁰ David Ruderman, for his part, argues for the seriousness of Collins's underlying purpose, even if it was cloaked in irony. In his book *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth Century England*, Ruderman considers the possibility that Collins was offering a sincere response to Whiston's theories. Perhaps a rabbinic approach to the New Testament was not such a ridiculous concept for a text created in first century Palestine. As evidence, Ruderman points to both Collins's source, Michel de la Roche, and his followers, such as Edward Chandler, bishop of Coventry, who took the point very seriously indeed, as did Surenhusius's followers on the continent. Such scholars, steeped in Hebrew studies and Judaics already, saw something genuine and even erudite in Collins's proposition. The genius of Surenhusius's work, these men recognized, was in comparing the citations of scripture in rabbinic texts, which take certain liberties in their transmission, to citations in the New Testament. De la Roche wrote that the New Testament authors "have done nothing in the present Case but what was practiced by the ancient Hebrew Theologers."⁷¹ One English follower of Surenhusius, William Wotton, who elaborated a Mishnaic

⁷⁰ Scholars such as James O'Higgins, David Berman, Pascal Taranto, Hans Frei and David Ruderman each present a different Anthony Collins. Some view him as an atheist, others as a deist, still others as a committed Christian. For his part, Frei points to the fact that Collins was a disciple of John Locke as evidence of Collin's skepticism with regard to rabbinic methods. In Frei's view, Collins would have believed, as a follower of Locke, that the "lost rules governing nonliteral interpretation are completely arbitrary nonsense and the interpretation itself therefore nonsensical." Frei, *The Eclipse*, 70.

⁷¹ From Michel de la Roche's *Memoirs of Literature*, as quoted in Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants*, 72.

interpretation of the Bible, wrote of his findings: “If I had ever had an Opportunity, I wou’d most certainly have gone thro’ the New Testament under a Jew . . . that they understand it infinitely better than we do.”⁷² Even if Collins was wholly sarcastic, therefore, many of his readers were not.

Christianity faced unprecedented challenges in the eighteenth century, and the latest in historical and scientific methods of exegesis had not always served it well. In many instances it had left behind a text that no longer cohered. New methods of interpretation were needed; the medieval reliance on allegorical reading was viewed by many as naïve and out of touch with advancements of modernity. Whiston’s attempt at a scientific and literal reading of the Bible was the result of a crisis in Christian hermeneutics, and Collins’ response exploited the impossibility of the project. That both men benefitted from their version of the “hermeneutical Jew”⁷³ tells us more about the history of Christianity than it does about Judaism, and will be a point for comparison with other biblical commentators of the eighteenth century.

Moses Mendelssohn

The question of the polysemic nature of the biblical text was revisited by eighteenth century Jewish intellectuals as well, responding to challenges in many ways similar to those facing Protestantism and Catholicism, but also in ways unique to Jewish contexts. Such challenges included, but were not limited to, forms of biblical criticism

⁷² From William Wotton’s *Miscellaneous Discourses*, as quoted in Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants*, 85.

⁷³ See Shear, “Whiston’s Judeo-Christianity,” 109.

initiated by Spinoza in the seventeenth century, and challenges to the veracity of the masoretic text, such as those illustrated above in the work of William Whiston. As with Christian biblicism, Jewish scholarship struggled to demonstrate the reasonableness of traditional modes of interpretation, including non-literal ones. In the introduction to his Hebrew language commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes, German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) defended the medieval model of four methods of interpretation, with an appeal to logic: “As is well known, there are four ways to elucidate our holy Torah, *peshat*, *derash*, *remez*, and *sod*. They are all words of the living God and are all correct. This neither contradicts the ways of the intellect and logic, nor is strange and astonishing to human understanding, as I will elucidate with the help of the Eternal, may He be blessed.”⁷⁴ This statement is a defense of an old hermeneutical system for a new age. Written in Hebrew, his commentary appealed to a Jewish audience, but Mendelssohn made use of systems of thought developed in his German-language philosophical work throughout his commentary, and responded to theoretical challenges facing biblical religion more broadly. As such, it gives us an insight into the themes we are considering in this chapter from a Jewish vantage-point, namely: biblical interpretation in the age of science, Jewish-Christian relations, and the fate of allegory amidst the growing interest in literal, historical, and linguistic study of the Bible.

⁷⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, “Biar Megilat Kohelet,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Alexander Altmann et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Germany: F. Frommann, 1971-), as translated in Michah Gottlieb, ed., *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 176.

Before turning to Mendelssohn's biblical commentaries, a word on Jewish intellectual and scientific culture during the European Enlightenment in its order. One finds, among the histories, a wide range of descriptions, from those that illustrate a time of relative isolation and even stagnation, to those that speak of unprecedented integration and advancement of the Jews of Europe. Hillel Levine, for instance, writes that the Jewish community was "curiously unshaken" by the changing winds of European epistemology.⁷⁵ Among the many reasons for this disengagement, he points to: the Jewish concern for history over nature, the effects of persecution in turning the Jewish community inward, and the messianic hopes of a people in exile which made divine intervention a difficult reality to compromise on. The work of Gershom Scholem contributes to an understanding of early modernity as a time of crisis, leading to increasing messianism and mysticism, and a time of decreasing interest in traditional forms of study and the structures of rabbinic leadership. However, another side has been illuminated in the revisionist histories of Jonathan Israel, David Ruderman, Noah Efron and others.⁷⁶ Ruderman, for his part, argues that there was an increase in Jewish integration in medical schools and universities in this time period and consequently a growing positive awareness of the secular sciences,⁷⁷ and that the intellectual achievements of Anglo-Jewry challenge the standard view that the German Haskalah was

⁷⁵ Hillel Levine, "Paradise Not Surrendered: Jewish Reactions to Copernicus and the Growth of Modern Science," in *Epistemology, Methodology and the Social Sciences*, ed. R. S. Cohen and M. W. Wartofsky (Dordrecht: D Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), 204.

⁷⁶ See Noah J. Efron, *Judaism and Science: A Historical Introduction* (London: Greenwood Press, 2007); and Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁷ David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

the sole source and inspiration of the Jewish Enlightenment.⁷⁸ Opportunities for Jewish integration were ultimately made possible, argues Ruderman, by the separation of metaphysics and the natural sciences in European universities, weakening official truth claims that required the exclusion of non-Christian perspectives.⁷⁹

Mendelssohn, as our representative Jewish European intellectual, himself manifests the contrasting emphases that we find in these histories. As we will see, Mendelssohn believed Judaism could provide key insights into the potential for an enlightened and pluralistic Germany, and that Jewish participation modeled the coexistence of diverse communities in a unified state. He also wrote that the impetus for his biblical translation and commentary work was that it would be “the first step toward culture from which my nation, alas, is so estranged that one is almost ready to despair of the possibility of improvement.”⁸⁰ Alternating views of Judaism, as already sophisticated and as in need of rehabilitation, present in Mendelssohn’s work, and in this he reflects the various contexts laid out by our histories, and something of the complex reality of Jewish life in early modern Europe.

In terms of trends in biblical studies, a few things can be said about the particular state of Jewish scholarship in this time period. Firstly, the polyphonic nature of Jewish hermeneutics allowed for traditional interpretations of scripture in the face of advancements among Jews who were engaged in the natural sciences. A discrepancy

⁷⁸ David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷⁹ Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, 11. The history of this separation and the emergence of “secular theology” in the seventeenth century is explored in Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁸⁰ From Letter to August Hennings, June, 1779, as translated in Gottlieb, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 188.

between nature and scripture was not necessarily cause for alarm in a rabbinic tradition at home with diverse interpretations.⁸¹ Secondly, as Edward Breuer argues, the study of Talmudic law and Jewish mystical traditions prevailed over biblical grammar and exegesis as the focus of interpretive activity, limiting overall engagement with the rapidly developing field of biblical criticism. Breuer writes: “Despite the many important accomplishments of early modern Jewish scholarship, the general area of Bible and language study was pervaded by a palpable sense of decline.”⁸² The scholarly pursuits of the Christian universities into language and manuscript study did not receive the same attention in Jewish centers of learning. It is important not to exaggerate the effects of this gap, however, as the ground had been laid for Mendelssohn and his “Biurists” in the earlier work of Judah ben Bezalel Loew of Prague (1525-1609), whose influential critique of Ashkenazi education included an appeal for more formal study of Hebrew grammar, the Bible, and science.⁸³ Further, Maimonides was a model of the integration of biblical interpretation and philosophical investigation for Jews and Christians alike in this period, and Spinoza’s contribution to biblical criticism cannot be overstated. Eighteenth-century biblical studies was by no means a frontier breached by Christians alone, but one shaped by the discourse between Jews and Christians, as it had been since biblical times.

⁸¹ For examples of how this played out in the work of Jewish scientists, see Noah Efron, *Judaism and Science*; and Noah Efron and Menahem Fisch, “Astronomical Exegesis: An Early Modern Jewish Interpretation of the Heavens,” *Osiris*, 2nd Series, Vol. 16 (2001).

⁸² Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 71.

⁸³ See David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 169; and Breuer, *Limits of Enlightenment*, 72-74.

The challenge for Mendelssohn and his followers, the *Maskilim*, was to engage the field of modern biblical scholarship as it was developing in Germany, while not compromising on the authority of medieval Jewish sources, which they understood to be the key to biblical interpretation. Breuer writes: “they were all committed to maintaining rabbinic hegemony in the normative interpretation of Scripture. In upholding exemplary features of medieval Jewish culture, eighteenth-century Maskilim embraced a literature that was self-consciously and thoroughly imbued with a sense of its own particularism.”⁸⁴ This rabbinic particularism proved to be at odds with the universalist spirit of the Enlightenment, and the resulting dissonance threatened to put a barrier between Jewish and Christian biblical scholarship during the Haskalah.

Mendelssohn saw himself as uniquely suited to bridge the two worlds of Jewish tradition and enlightenment scholarship. At once committed to rabbinic authority and to Hebrew language study and literary criticism, Mendelssohn’s middle way involved a dedicated engagement with both ways of knowing. This is most evident in his publication of a German translation of the Pentateuch with commentary, *Sefer netivot ha-shalom*, commonly referred to as the *Bi’ur*, a collaborative effort he spearheaded with some friends after beginning a translation for his son’s education. Mendelssohn’s attention to grammar and philology reflected the interests of modern biblical scholarship, as did his consideration of various manuscripts of the biblical text. The introduction and much of the commentary addressed the concerns of the modern reader, while the commentary drew heavily on interpretations from rabbinic exegetes, especially Ibn Ezra and Rashi, as

⁸⁴ Breuer, *Limits of Enlightenment*, 21.

a “guide to the medieval plain tradition” as David Sorkin puts it.⁸⁵ In all of this, Mendelssohn sent the message that Judaism was not only capable of engaging in a sophisticated rendering of the biblical text, but that it was uniquely suited to do so.

While Mendelssohn’s commentary drew from various rabbinic sources with the intension of expanding on the plain sense of the text, or the *peshat*, he also spearheaded a sophisticated defense of the tradition of multiple meanings of scripture, as we see in the quote above from his commentary on Ecclesiastes. His efforts in this area rest on a general theory of language: put very simply, that all language, written or spoken, can be interpreted in multiple ways. Inspired in part by Maimonides, he develops the concepts of the primary and secondary meanings of language. Language uses both conventional and spontaneous signs; it carries a generally intended meaning, as well as subtle nuances that belie levels of intentionality on the part of the speaker. In this, it is like other aspects of the natural world. Limbs, and other body parts perform various functions, as do the elements of nature. “For example, He created the nose for smelling, for breathing, for expelling excess moisture, and for enhancing facial beauty. . . Therefore it is not implausible that the [Supreme] Wisdom should have many different intentions in one utterance, and that they are all true.”⁸⁶ All created things have more than one purpose, and scripture participates in this design. If, with common sense, we can understand the levels of meaning in everyday speech and other natural phenomenon, Mendelssohn argued, how much more so with a sacred text? “This is what is meant by the sayings of

⁸⁵ Sorkin, *Religious Enlightenment*, 183.

⁸⁶ Moses Mendelssohn, “Biur Megilat Kohelet,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, as translated by Gottlieb in *Moses Mendelssohn*, 181-181.

the sages, may their memories be for a blessing: ‘one verse is expounded in many senses’ . . . On this basis, you will understand how it is possible to elucidate in many ways—through *derash*, *remez*, and *sod*—everything that is said through prophecy or the holy spirit, and how they are all correct along with *peshat*, which is the most necessary of all.”⁸⁷ His understanding of the conventional and spontaneous aspects of speech, the primary and secondary meaning of language, was thereby applied to traditional rabbinic hermeneutics.

In Mendelssohn’s conception, the *peshat*, the plain sense, can be gleaned from a loose reading of the text: by paying attention to the general meaning, with little concern for the particularities of word choice and rhetoric. On the other hand, a nonliteral meaning relies on every detail. Just as one might analyze the specific words, their ordering, or the tone with which they are delivered, of another person’s speech in order to read the implicit connotations of what they are saying, so too rabbinic tradition reads levels of meaning into every nuance of the text. Breuer explains: “[from] the perspective of the *derash*, the arbitrary becomes purposeful.”⁸⁸ The *derash*, or the secondary intention of the text, requires the isolation of and elucidation on specific terms: “Therefore you will see that when Rashi, the light of the exile, may his memory be for a blessing, follows *derash* in his commentary on the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings,

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸⁸ Breuer, *Limits of Enlightenment*, 191.

he will at times elucidate each verse on the basis of some isolated feature, detached from neighboring verses, leaving aside their context and continuity.”⁸⁹

Mendelssohn, in the spirit of Maimonides, Rashi, and others, thereby highlights a plain sense reading of scripture wherever possible, while also “leaving a place” for non-literal interpretation. In the introduction to *Sefer netivot ha-shalom*, Mendelssohn meditates on the problem of translation, and specifically on how *literal* a good translation needs to be. It is a problem of utmost concern, as there are instances when a literal translation can mislead, and even make a liar out of the text.⁹⁰ He proposes a methodology to guide his own translations as a way to avoid this grave pitfall: where the *peshat* and the *derash* agree, he translates according to the *peshat*; where they diverge, he translates according to the *derash*. Using the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, and Radak, as guides, Mendelssohn considers the primary and secondary meanings to the passages he translates and makes word choices accordingly, to best guide his readers. In every instance where the *peshat* can carry multiple meanings, it must be preserved: “It is the way of one who has mastered a language to sometimes have different intentions in one statement.”⁹¹

In a technical sense, therefore, Mendelssohn’s translation was guided by traditional rabbinic interpretations on multiple levels. His exegesis, as well, was informed by an understanding of the text as speaking to more than one level of meaning

⁸⁹ Moses Mendelssohn, “Biur Megilat Kohelet,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, as translated by Gottlieb in *Moses Mendelssohn*, 180.

⁹⁰ Moses Mendelssohn, “Or Lintivah” [“Light for the Path,” the introduction to *Sefer netivot ha-shalom*], in *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe* as translated in Gottlieb, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 192.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 199.

simultaneously. An example from his commentary on Genesis 2 demonstrates an instance where scripture tells the true story of real people in history, but also instructs the reader on the level of personal morality. Mendelssohn here describes the events of the biblical narrative as a kind of encoded prediction of what will happen to the human race as a whole.

The entire account of creation, as well as all that scripture recounts regarding what happened to Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, is all true and reliable without doubt: what actually happened to these individuals is just as [scripture] recounts it. In addition, however, these stories contain an allusion to and model for what will happen to the entire human species in general. What happened to Adam and his children in particular is what happens to the entire species in general. For this reason, scripture describes at length the details of their [lives], on the basis of which a wise individual will understand all that happens to human beings, from the time they were created to the end of all the generations.⁹²

At first glance, this appears to be the kind of typological and teleological reading of human history that we find so often in Christian sources. Christian thinkers from Augustine, to Joachim of Fiore, to Immanuel Kant, traced the history of human perfection from past, to present, to future along a developmental model (with Christianity representing a mature phase). However, as we continue reading in this commentary, one key difference between Mendelssohn's model and a standard Christian model becomes apparent. The development represented by Adam and his children happens on an individual level only. This development involves the human task of achieving balance between two complimentary faculties: comprehension and desire. When Adam ate of the

⁹² Moses Mendelssohn, *Sefer Netivot Hashalom*, in *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, "Commentary on Genesis 2:9" as translated in Gottlieb, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 208.

Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he became like the angels. But an angelic balance of these faculties is not appropriate for humans: desire overtook his comprehension. Each individual's character is determined by the ability to bring the two faculties back into a harmonious relationship. A person's disposition emerges "in accordance with an individual's comprehension and capacity for distinguishing between good and evil, as well as in accordance with the faculty of desire that leads him to do good and refrain from evil."⁹³ Mendelssohn describes here the perfection of the individual only, as a rational independent being; the collective advancement of the human species is not discussed.⁹⁴ Furthermore, unlike much Christian typology, the interaction of Mendelssohn's multiple levels of meaning is not one of succession or supersession. One level does not follow or displace another. They always exist simultaneously, available to the reader to make use of in whatever order or combination benefits him/her at a given moment.

Mendelssohn did share many of the philological concerns and insights of his Christian interlocutors, but the conclusions he drew regarding the role of the Bible in human religious understanding and action countered many fundamental truth claims of Christianity. We will turn briefly to Mendelssohn's understanding of the role the Hebrew language played in the development of human knowledge and reason, and to his bold assertions regarding the particularity of biblical revelation, before returning to an analysis

⁹³ Ibid., 209.

⁹⁴ Elsewhere Mendelssohn explicitly rejects a developmental model of human religious history, "nature does not intend the perfection of mankind; its goal is the perfection of man, of the individual." see Moses Mendelssohn, selection from "letter to August von Hennings" as translated by Eva Jospe in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from His Writings* (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), 168.

of his theory of the multiple senses of language, in order to clarify his place in the history of biblical interpretation.

Following the work of William Warburton, Mendelssohn became interested in the relationship between Egyptian hieroglyphics and Hebrew script and the religious implications of such a connection. In his *Jerusalem*, he posits that the Hebrew language was the bridge between a pictographic system and an alphabetical system, each of which have their advantages and disadvantages. It solved the problem of idolatry, inherent in hieroglyphics, but mediated more of a direct connection than a fully conventional system by maintaining some resemblances. The Hebrew letter *bet* looks like a *bayit*, the *gimel* like a *gamal*, etc.⁹⁵ Hebrew is therefore a kind of archeological artifact documenting the shift in human knowledge that abstraction made possible. Mendelssohn believed abstract signs are necessary for the development of human reason, as they contain and communicate knowledge while encouraging the mind to look for meaning beyond a simple picture. “Wise Providence has placed within the soul’s immediate reach a means which it can use at all times. It attaches, either by a natural or an arbitrary association of ideas, the abstracted characteristic to a perceptible sign which, as often as its impression is renewed, at once recalls and illuminates this characteristic, pure and unalloyed.”⁹⁶ Hebrew, which Mendelssohn believed to be “the source of all other known ways of writing” led the way in making units of writing more abstract and human knowledge more refined. However, the threat of idolatry still remained.

⁹⁵ Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 110n.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn postulates that even text that is made abstract, avoiding the pitfalls of hieroglyphics, can become an idol. Anything that is fixed in time and space can become the object of misdirected devotion. Even the Pythagoreans, who attempted to avoid idolatry by seeking the divine in numbers alone, eventually failed, and put math before God. This is why, according to tradition, Moses was permitted to write down only the bare minimum of the revelation he received. The rest was transmitted orally. Furthermore, the revelation that was committed to writing was primarily instruction for “ceremonial law” – a living script that could adapt to the unique needs and customs of every generation. Speech (oral Torah) and action (fulfillment of the law) are superior symbols because of their flexibility and transparency. As Mendelssohn scholar Gideon Freudenthal writes: “Mendelssohn’s idea is this: a good symbol is ‘transparent.’ We look ‘through’ it to what it stands for. A good symbol does not itself attract attention, is often not ‘seen’ at all.”⁹⁷ The peshat of the Torah is revelatory to the extent that it points to a holy expression in words and action.

Mendelssohn’s assertion that ceremonial law is the primary emphasis of the Torah countered the popular accusation that Jewish customs were backwards and outdated. Here we have a description of Jewish law and ceremony as a living connection to God. Mendelssohn viewed Jewish ritual as a particular manifestation of revelation in signs, but it is by no means universal or absolute. It is its very particularity that becomes a model

⁹⁷ Gideon Freudenthal, *No Religion without Idolatry: Mendelssohn’s Jewish Enlightenment* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 107.

for other religions, other nations, whose knowledge of revelation may be quite different: not better or worse, but necessarily different.

It is his reformulation of the relationship between the universal and the particular, and the role that divine revelation plays in this relationship, that will take us finally to Mendelssohn's most radical departure from the Christian philosophers of his day: the particularity of the Bible itself. According to Mendelssohn, we can discern three kinds of truth: two are generalizable to all people while one is not generalizable but is relative, or particular to a given community. The first two, borrowed from his reading of Leibniz, are necessary truth and contingent truth. Each of these is universal and absolute. The third category, historical truth, is provided by providence to suit the unique needs of a given community and is not generalizable to humanity as a whole. Revealed truth comes under this third category, and includes the entire biblical tradition. Fueling the fire of such heterodoxy, Mendelssohn asserts that the content of historical truth, i.e. revelation, does not concern matters of salvation or redemption. Human reason and observation alone are capable of accessing necessary and contingent truth, which can provide the guidance needed for an individual to achieve his or her potential for perfection; any other arrangement would be cruel given how few people have access to true revelation. Historical truth, or revelation, he writes, is about action, not belief. To be sure, the Bible, he writes, contains "an inexhaustible treasure trove of rational truths and religious doctrines"⁹⁸ but such insights are not exclusive to revelation. The Torah is exceptional,

⁹⁸ Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 99.

not for its presentation of universal truth, but for its ability to steer its audience away from idolatrous forms of religious expression.

Such a line of reasoning challenges several fundamentals of Christianity: the nature of scripture, the role of faith and the promise of salvation through Christ. However, Mendelssohn's goal is not to weaken Christian truth claims, but to establish a philosophical framework for the flourishing of religious pluralism. A given community can hold fast to its version historical truth as divine revelation without imposing this truth on those of other traditions.

In many ways Mendelssohn's views on the particularity of written revelation was made possible by Spinoza's influential and iconoclastic *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670), which provided a philosophical endorsement for historical criticism of the Bible, and inspired such sentiments as Gotthold Lessing's oft quoted statement: "The letter is not the spirit and the Bible is not religion. Hence, objections to the letter and to the Bible are not likewise objections to the spirit and to religion."⁹⁹ At the same time, Mendelssohn's body of work on Torah commentary also provided a defense of rabbinic truth claims and rabbinic methods, backed by medieval-style arguments from tradition and from the purported observations of Jews present with Moses at Mt. Sinai.¹⁰⁰ His work walked the line between the thought patterns of the Middle Ages and those of modernity. As such, it drove a vision for pluralism, where Jew and Christian, traditionalist and critic

⁹⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Editorial Commentary on the 'Fragments' of Reimarus, 1777," in *Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63. On Spinoza's influence on Lessing and Mendelssohn see Allan Arkush. *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*. (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994), chapter 5.

¹⁰⁰ See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 168-170.

can occupy the same thought space, even if it also provided plenty to object to from the perspectives of both orthodoxy and secularism. In his *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn suggests that by viewing revealed truth as historical, contextualized truth, Judaism provides a model for religious coexistence. Multiple types of historical truth, multiple histories, can thrive side by side. His last lines “Love truth! Love Peace” are a quotation from the eighth chapter of Zechariah, where Jews bring together the nations of the world.¹⁰¹ It is difficult to see this utopian vision as anything other than eschatological. But Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* does not herald the messianic age. It points to the realizable harmony between citizens of different faith traditions, and suggests that Germany’s Jewish minority, rather than a mere remnant of a forgotten past, might have something to contribute to the health of the state.

It is not always wise to simplify a vast and varied set of writings, such as Mendelssohn’s, into a convenient summary. For our purposes, however, a few key points are worth reviewing. Mendelssohn’s contributions include the following: all language carries multiple meanings. The Bible presents multiple meanings through signs. These meanings are carried via the subtleties of the written text, even in the shape of the letters, and rabbinic tradition holds the key to unlocking these meanings. The Hebrew language provided a pathway for the advancement for human understanding through abstraction (away from idolatry). As a technology it was providential, but its truth is not universal. Text is revelatory to the extent that it guides the religious practice of its reader. The Torah is holy to the extent that it sanctifies the ceremonial life of Jews, who, by

¹⁰¹ Zechariah 8:23 (NRSV).

participating in this particular lived interpretation of their texts, can be a model for other communities. Mendelssohn, thereby recast Jewish allegorizing in light of the political, historical, and theological concerns of his day and for the sake of Jewish integration. His general theory of language, that all language necessarily carries multiple meanings and requires interpretation, allowed him to mine rabbinic commentaries for treasures of meaning that could connect Jewish readers to their tradition. Furthermore, his assertion that the text of the Bible, as language, could mean more than one thing, reflected a political affirmation that communities, diverse even in their truth claims, can live together amicably.

While Mendelssohn worked to integrate Jews into the intellectual and political life of Europe, another plot line in the story of Jewish-Christian relations in the eighteenth century and its effect on biblical interpretation can be told through the life of the convert. In Johan Kemper and his biblical commentary we have an example of rabbinic, kabbalistic hermeneutics applied directly and consciously to a Christian reading of scripture. Furthermore, Kemper is an important addition to this study for providing an example of how the Sabbatian controversy affected both Christian and Jewish interpretations of scripture.

Johan Kemper

In his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, *Me'irat einayim* (1704), Hebrew lecturer at Uppsala University, Johan Kemper (1670–1716), makes the curious connection between the biblical image of the serpent and Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In commenting on Matthew 8:26, wherein Jesus commands the seas to calm, Kemper ties

together Old Testament and New Testament imagery: “Observe that Moses lifted his staff over the sea and divided it, and this staff is a *remez* of the Staff of mightiness, which is Jesus, as it is written: ‘The Lord will extend your mighty scepter’ (Ps 110:2); and consequently that staff turned into a snake, because ‘snake’ by means of gematria is equal to the Messiah, and therefore that staff swallowed up the snakes that the magicians made.”¹⁰² This association would not have been entirely lost on his Christian readers, who would have inherited typological comparisons between Jesus and Moses’ staff-turned-serpent in Exodus 4, Exodus 7, and Numbers 21. This instance in particular, however, betrayed Kemper’s commentary as distinctively Sabbatian. While kabbalistic references to the “holy serpent” have their origins in thirteenth century Spanish Kabbalah¹⁰³ it became a central figure in the late seventeenth-century messianism of Shabbetai Zevi and his prophet, Nathan of Gaza.¹⁰⁴ Kemper’s reading is backed by the numerological equivalence between the Hebrew words for messiah and serpent: *mashiah* and *naḥash* both add up to 358 according to the system of gematria. Kemper’s use of the term “dragon” in the same paragraph to refer to the serpent bears the mark of Nathan’s Zoharic *Treatise on the Dragons*, and Shabbetai Zevi himself used the figure of the snake

¹⁰² Johan Kemper, *Me’irat einayim*, as translated in Eskhult, M. “Rabbi Kemper’s Case for Christianity in his Matthew Commentary, with Reference to Exegesis,” in *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers Presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions*, eds. Arie van der Kooij and T. L. Hetteema (Assen, the Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 157. The full Latin translation of Kemper’s commentary on Matthew 8:26, *Illuminatio oculorum*, can be found in Josef Eskhult, “Andreas Norrelius’ Latin translation of Johan Kemper’s Hebrew commentary on Matthew: Edited with Introduction and Philological Commentary.” PhD diss. (Uppsala University, 2007), 347-348.

¹⁰³ The image of the holy serpent appears in *The Treatise on the Left Emanation* by R. Isaac b. Jacob Ha-Kohen and in Zohar III 119b. See Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Studies*, II, (1927), p. 273.

¹⁰⁴ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton University Press, 1976), 235, 309, 813.

in his personal signature.¹⁰⁵ As scholars such as Elliott Wolfson, Mats Eskhult and others have recently demonstrated, Kemper's commentaries and other writings present a man whose former messiah, a seventeenth-century imposter, came to be replaced by the first century Jesus. Other Sabbatian terms and concepts found in Kemper's commentary include his repeated use of the term "Holy King," his reference to the three *parzufim*, or faces, of the divine,¹⁰⁶ and most importantly, his treatment of Jewish law with its simultaneous fulfillment and retraction, a theme to which I will return below.¹⁰⁷

How did such a commentary, written in Hebrew and then translated and published in Latin, come to be produced at the Swedish University? A scan of the scholarship on Kemper and his role at Uppsala reveals the recurrence of the term "philo-Semitism" by way of contextualization. The phrase has been problematized by today's historians of early modern Europe,¹⁰⁸ but it nevertheless describes something of the fervor of Protestant Hebraism that characterized the period and the place. The question of how to describe this particular iteration of Christian interest in things Jewish, whether to frame it positively or negatively, is not easily answered. Historian Hans-Joachim Schoeps compares the relationship between philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism in the seventeenth century to "a sluggish canal and a broad torrent," and given the missionizing intentions of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 235.

¹⁰⁶ Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Barocke Juden, Christen, Judenchristen* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1965), 60-67, as translated by George Dole for *Studia Swedenborgiana* 7, (December 1990), <http://www.baysidechurch.org/studia/default.asp?ArticleID=53&VolumelD=25&AuthorID=2&detail=1> accessed 7/5/2016.

¹⁰⁷ Elliot Wolfson, "Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in the Early Modern European Culture: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, ed. M. D. Goldish and R. H. Popkin (New York: Springer, 2001), 153.

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, Eliane Glaser, *Judaism without Jews: Philosemitism and Christian Polemic in Early Modern England*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

the many efforts in this direction, the difference between *philo* and *anti* is made murky by the tide. With this complexity in mind, something can be said about the role Swedish Universities played in advancing the study of rabbinic Judaism in Europe. Like other European nations, Sweden experienced a wave of interest in Kabbalah and primitive Christianity due to a variety of influences including Pietism and Neoplatonism. King Carl XI encouraged scholarly investigation of Jewish texts, despite the complete absence of Jews from his kingdom,¹⁰⁹ and the surge of dissertations on rabbinic topics in Sweden left “all other European countries far behind” as Schoeps writes.¹¹⁰ Jewish commentaries, such as those by Maimonides, Abravanel, Ibn Ezra, and Rashi, were made available in university libraries and converted rabbis were sought for the teaching of Hebrew and rabbinics.

Kemper’s autobiographical *Unterthäniger bericht* (“Humble Report”) tells the story of both his conversion from Judaism to Christianity and his migration from Kraków to Schweinfurt to Uppsala. Born Moses Aaron, he was made fatherless as a young boy and as a consequence of the family’s instability and his facility with learning, he found himself in the homes of Rabbis and of Christians, educated in various religious contexts in rabbinic texts and in the Bible. As an adult he was “seized by a heavy anxiety about the true sense of the prophecies,” as biographer Josef Eskult puts it, and was drawn to the

¹⁰⁹ King Carl XI exemplifies the murkiness of Swedish philo-Semitism in his remarks to Laurentius Norrmanus, who was sent to Germany in search of a Jewish convert to teach at Uppsala, when he instructs Norrmanus to “find Jewish entrenchments and how to undermine them.” See Eskhult, “Rabbi Kemper’s Case,” 152.

¹¹⁰ Schoeps, *Barocke Juden*, Dole translation.

messianic predictions that followed the apostasy of Shabbetai Zevi.¹¹¹ Moses Aaron threw himself into the hope of a coming messianic age along with so many Jews who looked to the pseudo-messiahs of the time. His profound disillusionment after the foretold date of September 5, 1695 came and went, led him to reconsider his understanding of scripture. His relationships with Christian clergy members who had sought him out for Hebrew instruction were fortified in this crisis, and ultimately led him to his conversion and to Sweden where he fit the profile of an able *Judaeus conversus* to teach at Uppsala University.

Kemper's biblical commentary is of interest to scholars for several reasons. His blend of Christianity, the Zohar, rabbinic Judaism, and Sabbatianism, all in the associative style of midrash and all in Hebrew, tells not only his personal story but the story of an age. He was of course held up by his students as a model of the marriage of ancient Jewish sagacity and true Christian faith, or in the words of his Latin translator Anders Norrelius a "Rabbi moistened with the waters of the salvation-bringing Baptism and of the sound spring of wisdom."¹¹² To contemporary historians, his commentary stands at the intersection of ideas and movements characteristic of the early eighteenth century, and can tell us a great deal about a particular clash of culture and thought that led to new ways of thinking as the century progressed.

¹¹¹ Eskhult, "Andreas Norrelius' Latin," 316. It wasn't Zevi's apostasy that caused Kemper's ultimate disillusionment, but the false prophecy of the kabbalist Zadok of Vilna, who predicted the Messiah would come in 1695, 29 years after Zevi converted to Islam.

¹¹² Anders Norrelius *Prolegomena*, translated in Eskhult "Andreas Norrelius' Latin," 315.

In considering how Kemper is unique among the Christian kabbalists of early modernity, Elliot Wolfson points to his need “to preserve the nomian framework of the Kabbalah even as he sought to undermine that framework by proving the truths of Christianity on the basis of the traditional texts.”¹¹³ In fact, Wolfson names this tendency, which is fed by Kemper’s rabbinic background and his effort to extend the law beyond the boundaries of Judaism, “hypernomianism.” The law becomes even more relevant in a Christian context. And while a spiritualized explanation of the laws of circumcision, for instance, does have other Christian corollaries, his insistence that the close reading of kabbalistic texts is key to a true Christian understanding of the law is distinctive. For instance, Kemper’s Trinitarian interpretation of the customary kabbalistic prayer “for the sake of the unification of the blessed holy One and his presence” is backed by an understanding of the nature and relationship between the divine attributes, the *parzufim*. His formula suggests that Jews everywhere, as Wolfson puts it, “unwittingly affirm the trinity” whenever they recite it.¹¹⁴

Kemper’s “split consciousness”¹¹⁵ is nowhere more evident than in his commentary on the Zohar, *Beriah ha-tikhon*, where he insists that the Gospels are the true Oral Torah.¹¹⁶ The Word made flesh is the spoken word, the Oral Torah, the true interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures.

This Torah was spoken orally by the Messiah to all the patriarchs and to the true prophets, and it was as clear as the sun, but they were commanded to

¹¹³ Wolfson, “Messianism,” 141.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹¹⁶ Johan Kemper, *Beriah ha-Tikhon*, fols. 201b-202a (www.alvin-portal.org), as translated in Wolfson, “Messianism,” 150.

write it in a hidden way that would have to be explained orally to the masses, and especially the teaching of the Gospel that the holy mouth spoke to you. This secret may be revealed, but to others it must be by way of parable that needs a commentary, and this is the true, just and correct Oral Torah.¹¹⁷

This does not negate the wisdom of the Talmudic sages; again, Kemper draws on his rabbinic training in his post-conversion commentaries. The sages, he insists, knew the truth of the Gospels, and encoded it in their own commentaries. The Talmud, like the Torah, has layers or senses, and when properly interpreted bears testimony of Christ. For “[the] masters of the Talmud were cunning, and all of the words that they uttered were parables and riddles, and words that draw the heart.”¹¹⁸ Rashi, too, knew this truth and encoded it. For instance, Kemper incorporates Rashi’s interpretation of Genesis 28 into his own interpretation of Matthew 21:42 (itself an interpretation of Psalms 118:22). Employing the kabbalistic methods of *sod*, *remez*, and *peshat*, Kemper demonstrates the levels upon levels of tradition and text that need uncovering for the truth of Christianity to be revealed. On the stone that the builders rejected, he writes:

This is a matter of *sod*, namely he took the stone, (Gen 28:11) which (in turn) is a *remez* of the Messiah, because Jacob placed his head on the stone of justice, since he believed in the Messiah . . . Observe, it is not the literal sense that Rashi refers to, when he, drawing from the Talmud, says that Jacob took more than one stone, when he made a kind of gutter, etc., and the Holy, blessed be he, made these into one. The secret is that Jacob took three stones, a hint of the Trinity, and they became one, that is Unity.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Johan Kemper, *Avodat ha-Qodesh*, fol. 134a (www.alvin-portal.org), as translated in Wolfson, “Messianism,” 151.

¹¹⁸ Johan Kemper, *Beriah ha-Tikon*, fol. 160a (www.alvin-portal.org), as translated in Wolfson, “Messianism,” 167.

¹¹⁹ Johan Kemper, *Me’irat einayim*, as translated in Eskhult, M. “Rabbi Kemper’s Case,” 157. The Latin translation of Kemper’s commentary on Matthew 21:42 can be found in Eskhult “Andreas Norrelius’ Latin Translation,” 384-385.

That Rashi expands on the biblical text, adding to it the idea that many stones were needed to create a ditch for Jacob's head, and that God then made these stones one, is a hint to the reader of a Triune God. Therefore, according to Kemper, the Trinitarian truth of the Torah was known to all of its Jewish authors and commentators, but is lost on the typical Jewish reader. As Wolfson puts it, "the open secret of Christianity is the esoteric truth of Judaism."¹²⁰ The general population of Jews are in the dark when they read and study their texts, but nevertheless preserve a truth they cannot perceive. Satan himself is to blame for the Jews' forgetfulness: for their inability to recall the true meaning of scripture. "He who has a brain in his head will conclude that the patriarchs point to the Trinity, and Satan assisted them in this matter, until the point that the wisdom of the Kabbalah was also lost. But know that even today they have very ancient and just customs that instruct about the Trinity, but they cover their faces with a mask."¹²¹ The Jews are rebuked for hiding their faces with a mask, even as the three faces of God are concealed in holy texts. A holy mystery contends with a wicked disguise.

As we see in the other eighteenth-century commentaries in this study, Judaism is associated with allegory. Both the Torah and its commentaries contain hidden secrets that the sages preserve. Christianity is associated with the uncovering of secrets, the bringing out into the open. As someone who inhabited both worlds, however, Kemper divides the Jews into two camps: the sages who knew the truth of their encoding and the reading public who miss the point. An ignorant literalism is associated with Jews while an

¹²⁰ Wolfson, "Messianism," 141.

¹²¹ Johan Kemper, *Maqqal Ya'aqov*, fol. 49b (www.alvin-portal.org), as translated in Wolfson, "Messianism," 161.

enlightened literalism is attached to Christians and to the New Testament as Oral Torah.¹²²

Kemper read Jesus into every story of the Hebrew Bible and into every Jewish custom using the Hebrew term for type: *mashal*. Jesus is the *shekhinah*. Jesus is the *afikoman*, the *mezuzah*, the fiftieth day after Pesah. Jesus is Torah, Shabbat, Metatron. Jesus is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Job. He is the ark, the stone, and the Temple: “the goal, archetype, end and fulfilment of all prophecies, holy prototypes and prefigurations.”¹²³ Again, there is certainly precedence for such a hermeneutic in Christianity, regarding the Bible at least, and Kemper’s conversion can explain much of his interpretation even if the format is in an associative, midrashic style. However, we can also trace such an interpretive fixation through Sabbatianism. Nathan of Gaza borrowed the methods of the marrano Solomon Molko, who introduced Christian allegories into his commentaries. Nathan used Molko’s interpretations and substituted his own Messiah when interpreting Job, for instance, as an allegory for Shabbetai Zevi.¹²⁴ About which sources influenced Kemper’s own biblical interpretation we can only speculate. But it certainly bares the markings of a tortuous genealogy, one with forays into Jewish contexts, Christian contexts, and contexts whose Jewish and Christian strands are indistinguishable. His personal history as well as his life’s work tell the story of

¹²² This resonates medieval distinctions between the Christian literal sense and the Jewish Carnal sense. See Klepper, “Literal vs. Carnal.”

¹²³ As described by Kemper biographer Anders Norrelius in his *Prolegomena*, translated in Eskhult “Andreas Norrelius' Latin,” 319.

¹²⁴ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 309.

religious nomadism and allegory is the vehicle for the passage of ideas back and forth across religious borders.

Menaḥem Naḥum

Finally, reference to the hermeneutics of Ḥasidism will round out this study of allegorical interpretation in the eighteenth century, and will provide a valuable point of comparison with Emanuel Swedenborg, for reasons that will become apparent. Unlike Mendelssohn and the Maskilim, Ḥasidic exegetes were less concerned with integration into the philosophical and scientific discourse of non-Jews. They were generally unencumbered by biblical criticism or the fervor over allegorical interpretation as it was developing in universities and around the work of men like William Whiston and Thomas Burnet. We have in Ḥasidism, a contribution to eighteenth-century biblical interpretation that is thoroughly and unashamedly allegorical: one that weaves together medieval rabbinic and kabbalistic sources and puts these sources to work in producing an “extreme spiritualization of the biblical text,” as Arthur Green terms it.¹²⁵ Informed a great deal by the Zohar, eighteenth-century Ḥasidic commentary has much in common with the commentaries of Kemper, with the obvious difference that they were written entirely by and for the Jewish Ḥasidic communities of eastern Europe, and therefore are not concerned with the kind of religious boundary-crossing that we see in Kemper’s work. However, it would be wrong to characterize the Ḥasidic movement as entirely isolated or anomalous, as the arch of critical scholarship in this field has demonstrated.

¹²⁵ Arthur Green, Introduction to Menaḥem Naḥum, *Upright Practices, The Light of the Eyes* (New York: Paulist Press 1982), 8.

Earlier scholarship on Ḥasidism tended to highlight the anti-intellectual dimensions of the movement, which grew out of folk traditions and the surge of practical Kabbalah present in Poland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Scholar Joseph Weiss compared the Ḥasidic movement to seventeenth-century English Pietism because of what he termed its “emotional intensification.”¹²⁶ Similarly, Simon Dubnow noted that the movement, by focusing on healings, fortune telling, and other-worldly journeys, denounced reason “while Paris lauded reason.”¹²⁷ An earlier focus on Ḥasidic folklore, demonology, and opposition to the Haskalah, has, however, been balanced by more recent scholarship, such as that of Arthur Green, whose many publications and translations draw out the homiletical and exegetical elements of the tradition. Immanuel Etkes, as well, warns historians not to adopt the rhetoric of the Haskalah itself by associating Ḥasidism with superstition and ignorance.¹²⁸ A brief look at one Ḥasidic commentary in particular will demonstrate the rich contribution of this tradition to the history of biblical interpretation, especially as an example of eighteenth century commentary that is fully kabbalistic and allegorical.

Rabbi Menaḥem Naḥum of Chernobyl (1730-1797) came out of the Mezrich school of Ḥasidic thought, a student of the Baal Shem Tov and Dov Baer. The Mezrich tradition, and Rabbi Naḥum’s Torah commentary, *Me’or einayim* in its wake, is known for its heavy reliance on rabbinic intertextuality. “The Mezrich period in the history of

¹²⁶ Joseph Weiss, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism and Ḥasidism* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 1985), 3, 22.

¹²⁷ Simon Dubnow, "The Beginnings: The Baal Shem Tov (Besht) and the Center in Podolia," in *Essential Papers on Ḥasidism*, ed. Gershon David Hundert, (New York: NYU Press, 1991), 36.

¹²⁸ See Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader*, trans. Saadya Sternberg (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 259-271.

Hasidism represents a reappropriation of earlier Jewish mystical terms and symbols and their integration into the new religious experience that lay at the core of the Hasidic world view.”¹²⁹ Reinterpretation is at its core. The primary literary sources for *Me’or einayim* are the Pentateuch, Aggadic texts and the Zohar. These texts are interwoven and utilized for Torah interpretation with a new emphasis: the internal, spiritual life of the individual.

Of interest is the psychologizing tone of the Rabbi Naḥum’s homilies, typical for students of Dov Baer. For instance the *sefirot*, or the ten emanations of God described in the Zohar, become expressions of the ten aspects of a person’s inner life. As Green writes: “rather than realms within God, they now describe stages and qualities of human personality that are essential to the religious life.”¹³⁰ The upper three *sefirot* represent the intellectual faculties, faculties of abstract thought, while the lower seven represent aspects of emotional and moral faculties, such as love, fear, grace, rigor, etc.

Rabbi Naḥum’s interpretation of the Temple likewise points to the internal life of the individual.

Thus scripture says: “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell within them” (Exod. 25:8). It is known that the light of the Infinite, blessed be He, shines forth and dwells in the letters of Torah. When a person attaches his inner life-force and his words to the Torah, that life within him is bound to the portion of divinity that shines forth from Torah’s letters. Such is the case of one who studies with this intent, and has no ulterior motivations or extraneous goals. This person is himself also called a “sanctuary,” for by means of the longing and joy that reach Him from such service, God contracts His *shekhinah* so that it may enter that man. Just as the Creator contracted His *shekhinah* so that it was able to be present in the collective Temple, coming down between the two staves of

¹²⁹ Green, introduction to Naḥum, *Light of the Eyes*, 7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

the ark (even though the very heavens cannot contain Him!), so does He do in the individual sanctuary within the person. . . This was the true dwelling of the *shekhinah* between the two staves of the ark: the two chambers of the heart.¹³¹

That the true meaning of the staves on either side of the Ark of the Covenant would be the two chambers of the human heart is one example of the kind of allegorizing present everywhere in this commentary. *Me'or einayim* is exemplary of the interiorizing, anthropocentric, immanentist, nature of Ḥasidic commentary, and as such represents a full expression of these themes in Jewish thought.¹³² Moshe Idel articulates Rabbi Naḥum's remarkable aim in terms of self-fulfillment:

By attaining one's own perfection, each person is able in the present to play the role he is destined to play in the final drama of redemption by becoming, according to R. Menahem Naḥum, a channel for the divine influx. Personal perfection as the main tool for the collective eschatological effort has some remarkable implications. Eschatology is not the unconditional self-negation of the individual for the sake of a larger goal, a self-denial of the revolutionary who is ready to deprive himself of the pleasure of well-being for the benefit of the next generations. On the contrary, the self-fulfillment of a particular individual is tantamount to his attaining the maximum in his personal life and playing the destined role in the "public" arena.¹³³

¹³¹ Naḥum, *Light of the Eyes*, trans. Green, 73.

¹³² See Ron Margolin, *The Human Temple: Religious Interiorization and the Structuring of Inner Life in Early Ḥasidism* [Hebrew] (The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2006).

¹³³ Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 224.

Therefore, the primary reference in *Me'or einayim* is the individual Ḥasid and his internal life.¹³⁴ In *Me'or einayim*, “every single Jew is a complete Torah in miniature”¹³⁵ and every person who serves God is “called a ‘miniature world.’”¹³⁶ The actions and intentions of the individual have cosmic implications: the Torah is restored, heaven and earth are united, Divine influx is released and let down. Therefore, the individual is the axis mundi: the site of world creating and world centering. This provides an interesting comparison to Mendelsohn, who as we saw, interpreted the lives of biblical figures to speak to the balance of faculties in the individual.¹³⁷ One could also compare it to religious movements during the Enlightenment more broadly, which tended in many cases to stress the “cultivation of an intensely personal inner religiosity”¹³⁸ as Thomas Broman puts it. In Ḥasidism, this emphasis in the individual becomes the primary focus of biblical interpretation.

Something of the process of the individual spiritual realization can be seen in the working out of the figure of Egypt in the text. In the opening lines of *Me'or einayim* we are introduced to a play on words that will echo through the entire text. The Hebrew *Mitzrayim* is separated into two words *meitzar* and *yam*, “straits” and “sea.” Egypt is the

¹³⁴ There is some debate as to whether Ḥasidic materials are intended to guide the life of a Ḥasid, as a singular, elite, male Rabbi, as argued by Ada Rapoport-Albert, or whether they are meant broadly for all Jews, as argued by Gershom Scholem and Arthur Green, for instance. *Me'or einayim* in particular does refer to all Jews in many places.

¹³⁵ Nachum, Manachem, *Me'or einayim*, trans. Rabbi Eugene J. Cohen (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corp, 2003). 246. Cohen's translation will be used for sections not translated in Green's excerpted version in *Upright Practices*. A full translation by Green is forthcoming.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³⁷ See his interpretation of Genesis 2, above.

¹³⁸ Thomas H. Broman, “Matter, Force, and the Christian Worldview,” in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 108.

narrow straits, the “lowest rung” on the sefirotic ladder “for joy is greater when it is lifted out of darkness.”¹³⁹ A second play on words brings us fully into the cosmology of Lurianic Kabbalah: the “produce” *shever*, of Egypt, which attracted both Abraham and Jacob in times of famine, is related to the word in Hebrew for breakage. It wasn’t, then, just grain that brought the patriarchs to Egypt, but “the fallen fruit of supernal wisdom is Torah, that which has fallen from above and become ‘broken.’”¹⁴⁰ The descent of Torah, and of Abraham, and of the individual Jew, into Egypt is descent into death, complete brokenness. Egypt is elsewhere described in terms of moral ineptitude; it is a place of “spiritual filth”¹⁴¹ and “filled with promiscuity.”¹⁴² Entering Egypt is therefore an individual’s state of moral failure or brokenness. It is Abraham renouncing his wife as his sister. It is incest, separation, exile. *Me’or einayim* instructs its readers to view life’s inevitable lows, times when earthly concerns overwhelm, times of “formlessness and void,” as opportunities for releasing God’s hidden holiness, because there is holiness in all things. The task of each person in these moments is to hold onto the two lifelines of love of God and fear of God, *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, the right arm and the left arm of the sefirotic tree. In this state the Ḥasid begins the joining of heaven and earth, or the coupling of God the wife with God the bridegroom, the evening and morning are one day. “The darkness longs to be included in the light.”¹⁴³ Egypt is described as an iron crucible, refining and purifying by fire.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Naḥum, *Light of the Eyes*, trans. Green, 49.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Nachum, *Me’or einayim*, trans. Cohen, 344.

¹⁴² Ibid., 70.

¹⁴³ Naḥum, *Light of the Eyes*, trans. Green, 52.

¹⁴⁴ Nachum, *Me’or einayim*, trans. Cohen, 247.

In relating the Lurianic triple process of *zimzum*, *shevirat ha-kelim*, and *tikkun*, to poetic influence, Harold Bloom writes: “In Luria, creation is a startlingly regressive process, one in which an abyss can separate any one stage from another, and in which catastrophe is always a central event. Reality for Luria is always a triple rhythm of contraction, breaking apart, and mending, a rhythm continuously present in time even as it first punctuated eternity.”¹⁴⁵ This pattern of breaking for the sake of healing, with its echoes from the Sabbatian experience, reverberates throughout the Ḥasidic commentary. Egypt works well as a figure for this process, as the typological focal point for spiritual progress. There are other biblical types that symbolize the uniting of heaven and earth, most notably the tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem. Egypt is an especially interesting instance, because it is also related to spiritual imprisonment, regression and estrangement, all of which are integral to the union at hand. Simply put, the “going down” that occurs with Egypt reflects the spiritual “bringing down” of the divine to earth. We have, therefore, a mystical tradition that sees union with God as a process that involves “bringing” God, rather than being absorbed up and dissolved into God.

Egypt also becomes a figure for the hermeneutical process itself. The “letter” of the scripture, like the nation to the south of Israel, is the lowest rung of a ladder reaching into heaven. By descending, entering into it, the rivers of divine influence are released. “When you have done all this, all the blessing that flows into the world will come for your sake; you become a channel by which that flow comes down from the world

¹⁴⁵ Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1983), 39.

above.”¹⁴⁶ Egypt, like the plain sense of the text, contains levels of meaning that can only be accessed in its midst.

Key to understanding Rabbi Naḥum’s idea of the role of Egypt in spiritual union is the act of redeeming knowledge. At the time of the flood, we read, true knowledge went into exile in Egypt. With Abraham and his sons, the people of Israel went to rescue it. To rescue knowledge is to “liberate the letters” of Torah. This is done symbolically through slave labor: interpreting the text is compared to the work of the slaves in Egypt. Working the bricks, *levenim*, and mortar, *ḥomer*, is related to the hermeneutical principles of interpreting Torah, *libun hilkhatah* and *kal va- ḥomer*.¹⁴⁷ The “back breaking labor,” *Be-farekh*, is like the Talmudic questioning, *pirkhah*. Even in the act of interpretation, restriction, or constriction, is essential to the process. This is symbolized by the five letters of the alphabet that have a final form, the *sofit* form. They constrict the otherwise flowing goodness of God in the interpretive act. “One who understands that receiving a restricted flow of God’s goodness is meant to motivate him to return to God.”¹⁴⁸ Like Egypt, the *sofit* forms limit in order to conjoin. They conceal in order that revelation can occur. The *peshat* of the text, therefore, constrains meaning and it contains meaning. The individual who works it, as a slave works the land, will release what holiness lies hidden within.

Every detail of the text of Torah becomes ripe with meaning in this commentary. Even the small silver sockets described as fittings for the boards of the Tabernacle signify

¹⁴⁶ Naḥum, *Light of the Eyes*, trans. Green, 106.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

a deeper meaning. Here we find a word play on the Hebrew: the word for “sockets” in the construct form *adonei*, is like the Hebrew word for God *Adonai*, which literally means “my Lord.” The possessive form of the title for God is significant in the *Me’or einayim*, as it is interpreted to refer to “God within.” We read of the relationship between the two names for God, *Adonai* and the Tetragramaton:

God’s glory, however, is manifest in His many garments; the whole earth is a garbing of God. It is He who is within all the garments. This aspect of divinity is called ‘*adonay*, related to the word for “sockets” by which the tabernacle was held together. This is God’s presence as it has come down into the lower and corporeal rungs; our task is to unite it with the source from which it came, with YHWH Who calls all the worlds into being. In ever act of worship, be it study or prayer, eating or drinking, we bring about this union. All the worlds depend on this: the union of God within—‘DNWY—with God beyond—YHWH.¹⁴⁹

The silver sockets are the foundation of the sanctuary, the point of contact with the world. Here God’s sanctuary penetrates the earth. The Ḥasid’s focus on this earthly point of union draws on a theme we find throughout the work of joining the lower and upper worlds, and that the place of union is the human heart. Like the precious metal used for this purpose, the heart is purified by the study of Torah and evil impulses are put aside in order to manifest the divine. “Further, he who studies Torah, uniting the upper wisdom with the lower, also defeats his own evil urge.”¹⁵⁰ Reading Torah is going down into Egypt; reading Torah is the silver socket standing God’s sanctuary in place. Therefore reading is both the method and the reference of allegorical interpretation.

Conclusion: Question of Connection to Swedenborg

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

The history of Judaism, in ways both similar to and distinct from the history of Christianity, has seen periods of ambivalence and even animosity towards allegorical interpretation. Judaism has nevertheless been the native ground for many of the Bible's greatest allegorists, starting with Philo in the first century. Ḥasidism is certainly not unique in Judaism for its pursuit of deeply hidden meaning within the *peshat*, but the range and extent of its exegetical digging is unmatched. Arthur Green, while not employing the term “allegory” notes the significance of the rabbinic context of this kind of commentary:

The notion of a spiritualized Temple is of great significance in the course of this homily. Too often has it been claimed, both by defenders and detractors of Judaism that the tradition of the rabbis did not allow for symbols of Biblical religion to be read in truly spiritual fashion. Ḥasidism provides the literature that gives the ultimate lie to this claim. Writing wholly within the rabbinic idiom, our author here makes it abundantly clear that the true sanctuary of God lies within the human heart, and that this inner Temple lay behind both the original command by which the outer Temple was erected and the destruction of that same shrine.¹⁵¹

Ḥasidism's relative isolation from Christian society and theology make this spiritualizing tendency particularly interesting. That a Ḥasidic commentary would bear such striking similarities, as we will see, to that of a Protestant mystic and natural philosopher from Stockholm is a problem worth pondering. Swedenborg's spiritualized Temple and spiritualized Egypt could be added to a substantial list of similarities between his commentary and those of the Ḥasidic masters living at the same time (see chapter 3). Might a counter-reaction to the literalism brought by the Reformation share certain

¹⁵¹ Green, introduction to Naḥum, *Light of the Eyes*, 71.

characteristics with a post-Sabbatian, Jewish approach to sacred text? That both movements echoed with the pulse of Neoplatonism is surely worth our attention.¹⁵² What was it about the ideas of Kabbalah, as found in the Zohar for instance in the form of Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*, that drew in such men as Gottfried Leibniz, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and Henry More? Is the timing of Swedenborg's *Arcana coelestia* and *Me'or einayim* coincidental, or was there a movement of ideas that spanned Eastern and Western Europe in the mid to late eighteenth century, influencing how the Bible was read and understood in both Christian and Jewish contexts?

Possible connections between Swedenborg and the other three commentators in this chapter are worth brief consideration before shifting to a singular focus on the Swede. Evidence that Swedenborg read or was directly influenced by the work of William Whiston is lacking, though at least one scholar, Friedemann Stengel, argues that he likely was. Stengel points to similarities between the two men in their rejection of the doctrines of the trinity, predestination, and original sin.¹⁵³ We could say a great deal about the problems with such a comparison; Swedenborg's anti-trinitarianism, for instance, was significantly different from Whiston's Arianism in that it highlighted, rather than downplayed, the divinity of Christ.¹⁵⁴ Our interest, however, is in each man's opinion of allegory as an approach to biblical interpretation, and on this point the two men could not be farther apart. While Whiston's focus was on demonstrating the

¹⁵² The question of Swedenborg's connection to Neoplatonism will be taken up in chapter 3.

¹⁵³ Friedemann Stengel, *Aufklärung bis zum Himmel: Emanuel Swedenborg im Kontext der Theologie und Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 433-435.

¹⁵⁴ For Swedenborg, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all contained in the person of Jesus Christ. Swedenborg's view of the Trinity is discussed further in chapter 6.

accuracy of the Bible without use of allegory, Swedenborg's focus remained on revealing levels of spiritual and celestial senses concealed within the text. Whatever influence there may be between them, therefore, it had little positive impact on Swedenborg's hermeneutics.

The only evidence we have of a connection between Mendelssohn and Swedenborg is the former's correspondence with Immanuel Kant and his review of Kant's book on Swedenborg, *Träume eines Geistersehers* (1766), in which Mendelssohn quotes Kant in calling *Arcana coelestia* "eight quarto volumes of nonsense."¹⁵⁵ More will be said on the exchange between Kant and Mendelssohn in chapter 5, and one possible explanation for Mendelssohn's reaction, namely, Swedenborg's reliance on traditional anti-Jewish tropes, will be explored in chapter 3. This reaction aside, a comparative study could be made between Swedenborg's exegesis, particularly the persistent theme of the conjunction of the individual's will and understanding, with Mendelssohn's focus on the progression of the individual and the bringing into balance the faculties of comprehension and desire, found in his commentary on Genesis 2.¹⁵⁶ The focus on the inner life of the individual that we find in Rabbi Nachum's *Me'or einayim*, Mendelssohn's *Sefer netivot ha-shalom*, and Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia*, is worth considering in light of other Enlightenment-era movements that held up inner transformation and a personal relationship to the Divine, such as English Methodism. Significant and meaningful

¹⁵⁵ Moses Mendelssohn, review of Kant's *Träume eines Geistersehers*, as translated in *Kant on Swedenborg, Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory R. Johnson, trans. Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee (Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 123.

¹⁵⁶ Moses Mendelssohn, "Commentary on Genesis 2:9" as translated in Gottlieb, *Moses Mendelssohn*.

differences exist between these authors on matters related to public and private life, which we do not have time to explore here. But that allegorical interpretation was the means of expression of the ideal of inner, personal transformation, speaks to the persistence of an old methodology in a new age.

Of the four exegetes considered in this chapter, Kemper is the most likely to have had significant contact with or influence on Swedenborg. Kemper's time at Uppsala overlapped with Swedenborg's, and the close relationship both men shared with Eric Benzelius is suggestive of a connection, as we will explore in chapter 3. Swedenborg does not credit Kemper for any of his methods or concepts on biblical interpretation, though important similarities can be drawn. Swedenborg's insistence that his religious writings were influenced by no earthly thinker prohibited his referencing the work of someone like Kemper, but there is reason enough to think that Kemper's kabbalistic commentaries would have been accessible and of interest to Swedenborg in his university days, as we will see.

Taken as a whole, then, these five exegetes, including Swedenborg, do not align neatly into a clear web of connections and influences. Any recognition of similarity between such disparate sources as these should be tempered with a study of differences in both content of thought and in religious and social context. Some of that has been done in this chapter, and more will be done in chapter 3, in taking up methodological questions concerning the comparison between Swedenborg to Kabbalah. With these difficulties in

mind, comparison, as a “disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge”¹⁵⁷ in the words of Jonathan Z. Smith, can nevertheless offer insight into shared points of horizon as well as conflict. Our intention has not been to determine fixed lines of influence between these Christian and Jewish authors, but to reveal something of the nature of allegorical interpretation in the eighteenth-century, and the way allegory functioned in the ongoing discourse on interpretation between Jews and Christians at a time when systems of knowing were undergoing radical change. By considering the currents and counter currents of thought present in these four biblical commentaries from the same era, some contextual grounding has been laid for a study of *Arcana coelestia* and its reception.

¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52.

PART II
SWEDENBORG'S ALLEGORY: THE DISCOURSE WITHIN *ARCANA*
COELESTIA

CHAPTER 2: SWEDENBORG'S SCIENCE AND ALLEGORY

We find in the eighteenth century a curious debate arising between some members of the scientific community regarding the location of hell. Traditionally, hell had often been thought of as a subterranean destination. But renewed interest in astronomy brought with it speculations of cosmic termini. As discussed in chapter one, the English Newtonian William Whiston determined, based on the description in Revelation 14, that hell must be on a comet: its tail of smoke rising continuously as it processes through the heavens for all to witness. This echoed a similar hypothesis put forward seven years earlier by Leibniz in his *Théodicée*.¹⁵⁸ Another location was suggested in the 1714 *An Enquiry into the Nature and Place of Hell*, by Tobias Swinden. Based on the study of solar flares by Jesuit astronomer Athanasius Kircher and his brother Christof Scheiner, Swinden concluded that hell must be on the sun. Only a solar hell could make sense of biblical descriptions of the burning damned. We see in this just one example of the kind of literalism that captured the imaginations of many of those interested in aligning the new sciences with biblical narratives.

¹⁵⁸ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, ed. Austin Farrer, trans. E.M. Huggard (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1985), 133. Leibniz here identifies Jesus with Adam Kadmon of Kabbalah, and describes his return to earth to remove those who are saved. The remaining damned are left on earth, which becomes a flaming comet with a tail of smoke like that described in Revelation.

In a 1719 exchange of letters between the young scientist abroad, Emanuel Swedenborg, and his esteemed brother-in-law back home, Erik Benzelius, we find a discussion of Swinden's theory and the responses to it in published reviews. Swedenborg presents his own speculations depicting the sun as a locus for godly and heavenly things, for *beatorum* rather than *damnatorum*.

My reasons are the following: first, that the sun is the centre of the whole of our planetary system, and that motion, with the existence of everything in the solar vortex, derives its origin from the above-named centre; secondly, that above, or the heaven of the planets, is towards the sun, but below is towards the extremities of the vortex, towards Saturn and Tartarus; thirly, that the principal light and splendor are in the sun, and on the other hand, darkness and other terrors are at the greatest distance from it, where the sun can scarcely be seen; fourthly, but the principal reason seems to be, because the most refined air, and the most subtle essence which exists in the least elements, are in the sun: for the nearer we draw to the sun, the finer everything becomes, and in its centre we should probably find such a degree of refinement and subtlety, that the particles would be almost without any composition, when they would also lay aside the name of matter, as well as form, gravity, and other properties, which belong to compound particles. It seems also probable, that in the greatest refinement, there would likewise be the most refined existence; that God, and the angels, that a something which has nothing material in its substance, would be there chiefly in their element .

¹⁵⁹

Swedenborg goes on to speculate that solar flares could not be a place of torment, because they would instantly consume the body of the dead, while the fire of hell would be a lasting torment. He ends the letter with a fleeting comment that hell fire might rather be conceived of as the “remorses of conscience” before quickly adding the careful disclaimer: “I hope that my philosophizing on such a

¹⁵⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, letter to Erik Benzelius, Stockholm, November 26, 1719, in *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, ed. and trans. R. L. Tafel, (London: Swedenborg Society, 1875), vol. I, doc. 86, 313-314.

subject may not be misinterpreted; for after all God's Word is the foundation [of everything].”

This brief suggestion of the hell of the conscience would reemerge in full force some forty years later in his most famous work *De Coelo et Ejus Mirabilibus, et de Inferno* (Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell, 1758), in which heaven and hell exist outside of time and space, and manifest the internal states of mind of their inhabitants. Swedenborg was certainly not the first to suggest a metaphorical/psychological hell. But that he does so while positioning himself as a scientist, concerned with the exegetical challenges delivered by the physics and astronomy of his day, is indicative of a turn to a certain kind allegorical thinking that characterizes Swedenborgian thought, whose influence counters the narrative suggested by Hans Frei, Peter Harrison and others that the eighteenth century witnessed the inevitable “demise of allegory.”¹⁶⁰ On the contrary, Swedenborg was among those in the eighteenth century who continued to allegorize the Bible, and his influence manifests in the work of theologians, poets and psychologists, who were drawn to Swedenborg's articulation of an allegorical heaven and hell – a heaven and hell of the conscience. The poetry of Charles Baudelaire, the paintings of William Blake, and the psychology of William James and Carl Jung, are but a few examples. As we will see in part 3, those influenced by Swedenborg in this way drew on a particular understanding of the relationship between the outer natural world, and the inner world of spirit. In connecting biblical imagery with

¹⁶⁰ Harrison, *The Bible*, 4.

inner transformation Swedenborg and his readers carried forward the well-worn tradition of biblical allegory into modernity.

In this chapter I will demonstrate how Swedenborg's scientific career, far from inhibiting his allegoresis, was fully integrated with it both before and after his professional turn to biblical interpretation and his *Arcana coelestia*. In particular, the scientific work he did in the ten years leading up to this turn, including *Principia rerum naturalium* (Basic Principles of Nature, 1734), *Prodromus philosophiae ratiocinantis de infinito* (Precursor to a Reasoned Philosophy Concerning the Infinite, 1734, henceforth *De infinito*), *Oeconomia regni animalis* (Dynamics of the Souls Domain, 1740-41), and *Regnum animale* (The Soul's Domain, 1744), demonstrate an increasing interest in the symbolic, or correspondential relationship between the finite universe and infinite things, or between the body and the soul: concepts which would later become part of the topography of his biblical interpretation. Swedenborg thus serves as one case at least, of an instance of Enlightenment era science fostering a regeneration of allegory, in contrast with the cases of literalism demonstrated in the examples above.

This chapter will begin our discussion of the discourse within *Arcana coelestia* by considering the concepts developed by Swedenborg during his scientific career that stand in relationship with his subsequent search for hidden meaning in the Bible. A study of Swedenborg's use of allegorical thinking both

before and after his turn to the *ouverage d'esprit*¹⁶¹ will reveal an important connection. We will take up three areas of thought, developed prior to his work with the Bible, which very much informed his methods of interpretation. These are: the doctrine of series and degrees, the intercourse between the body and soul, and his “Hieroglyphic key” and related theories of language and dream interpretation. *Arcana* both builds on these thought systems and develops them in the direction of antimaterialism, as we will see towards the end of the chapter.

The connection between Swedenborg’s earlier, philosophical and scientific work and his biblical exegesis has caused some to wonder about the genre of Swedenborg’s doctrine of correspondences: is it scientific or religious? Some historians, including the Swedish Inge Jonsson and the German Friedemann Stengel, maintain that Swedenborg’s allegorical methods of biblical interpretation can almost entirely be explained by paradigms, or “building blocks” as Stengel puts it, developed in his scientific career.¹⁶² As an example, Jonsson finds a parallel with Pythagorean philosophy in Swedenborg’s struggle to find a universal mathematical language, and suggests that this struggle “helped to lay the ground for the symbolization of reality.”¹⁶³ Alternatively, some compare Swedenborg’s biblical interpretation to religious sources such as Philo, Origen and Kabbalah, as does

¹⁶¹ A term he uses in French in his Dream Diary, when contrasting this work with his scientific interests. Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg’s Dream Diary*, trans. Anders Hallengren (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2001), 187.

¹⁶² Inge Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist: The Effects of Science and Philosophy on Swedenborg’s Cosmology*, trans. Catherine Djurklou (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 1999), 188; Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 4, 199-204.

¹⁶³ Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 73.

Martin Lamm in his book *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of His Thought*.¹⁶⁴ It must be emphasized at the outset that to isolate his scientific conceptions and discoveries from philosophical, theological or esoteric ones is an anachronistic venture. While Swedenborg himself seems to have made such a distinction when he denied having read “dogmatic and systematic theology before heaven was opened to me”¹⁶⁵ so as to avoid the suggestion of worldly influences, the philosophical sources he admits to are themselves enmeshed in dogmatic and theological contexts. Swedenborg himself was raised in an orthodox Lutheran household, exposed to Swedish folklore regarding spirits inhabiting the world around him, and given a traditional Christian education from early childhood. Whether his science influenced his religion or his religion influenced his science is a moot point: the two were always entangled. The essential point for the argument here is that Swedenborg serves as an example of a scientist whose secular career and engagement with Enlightenment thought bolstered his non-literal reading of the Bible, rather than undermining it.

Background: Science, Deism, Materialism and Orthodoxy

As was the case with the four commentators we considered in chapter one, Swedenborg’s work must be understood against the background of the intellectual culture of his day. Challenges to revealed religion and Christian orthodoxy in the

¹⁶⁴ Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of His Thought*, trans. Tomas Spiers and Anders Hallengren (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999), chapter 9.

¹⁶⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg letter to Dr. Beyer, February, 1767, in Tafel, ed., *Documents*, vol. II:1, doc. 234, 260.

name of reason took on different forms in eighteenth-century Netherlands, Germany, England and France: all places Swedenborg visited multiple times for the purpose of acquiring the latest knowledge in any number of scholarly fields. The legacies of Spinoza, Descartes, Newton, Locke, and Leibniz, to name just a few, produced a wide array of philosophical debates, and impacted religious and exegetical discourses in a number of ways. It is not within the scope of this chapter to fully explore each of these figures and their impact on either Swedenborg or the wider epistemology of his time, though their impact cannot be overstated in either case. We will have to limit ourselves to making two general points with regards to this context.

First, it is important to avoid a “teleological history of secularization,” to borrow a phrase from Wayne Hudson.¹⁶⁶ Hudson’s revisionist history of English Deism, attempts to decouple unorthodoxy and secularization, and highlights the religious commitments of many of England’s most critical thinkers, as well as the intra-Christian context of many of the era’s hottest debates. The deists he studies radicalized their ontologies with “no difficulty in combining a sincere Christian supernaturalism with philosophical ideas which could be turned against it.”¹⁶⁷ A similar emphasis is made by Jonathan Sheehan in his treatment of *The Enlightenment Bible*. Sheehan posits that the “cultural bible” that the Enlightenment produced did not come about by attack, but by the development of a

¹⁶⁶ Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 1.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

set of instruments aimed at internal, religious reformation. Sheehan and Hudson position themselves as corrections to narratives of “the rise of modern paganism” as framed by Peter Gay, and the progression of secularism describe by historians such as Diego Lucci and Jonathan Israel.¹⁶⁸

A second point balances the first: that even while religious commitments remained in-tact for many or most Enlightenment thinkers, the effects of their critical impulse challenged traditional reliance on revealed truth as never before. Empiricism and rationalism, in many ways rival siblings, formed an alliance in displacing long held assumptions about the nature of God, God’s world and God’s Word. Truth was sought in human reason and in the experimental sciences with unprecedented confidence. The resulting anxiety from within Christian establishments regarding biblical truth claims is reflected both in accusations of materialism lodged against Swedenborg by reviewers of his scientific writings,¹⁶⁹ and in Swedenborg’s own frequent attacks against philosophers and “learned men” in his theological writings, as we will see.

What concerns us in this chapter is Swedenborg’s place in shifting attitudes regarding the relationship between the “book of scripture” and the “book of nature.” He was writing at a time when “a rift appeared between the exact language of formulae and the symbolism of poetry” as Jonsson writes.¹⁷⁰ On the one hand,

¹⁶⁸ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Diego Lucci, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth Century British Deists* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008); and Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*. See Hudson’s treatment of Israel in Hudson, *The English Deists*, 18-19.

¹⁶⁹ See Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 118-120.

¹⁷⁰ Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 3.

the study of invisible forces led by Isaac Newton renewed an interest in the mysteries of the universe that would inspire the work of Franz Mesmer, Erasmus Darwin, and others. On the other hand, the natural world and the human body were being described in fully mechanistic terms, in the work of Julien Offrey de la Mettrie, for example, and metaphysical explanations were threatened with obscurity, or so feared the critics of such theories. Questions that circulated between national boundaries and among natural philosophers included: Is matter active or passive? Is space empty or full of particles? What underlying principle of nature animates life in plants, animals and humans? Is there a hierarchy of souls among these organisms? Can the origin of the universe be explained without the use of biblical or supernatural explanations? Confidence in technical descriptions of natural phenomenon reached new heights, and science was no longer designated the “handmaiden of theology,” to borrow a traditional metaphor. All of this affected how people talked about nature and scripture, and whose voices held authority. Whether Swedenborg’s allegorical interpretations of nature, language, dreams and biblical texts were judged as old fashioned, insane, poetic, or divinely inspired depends on which area of reception one chooses to focus, as we will see in part three. By studying the development of these methods in the decades prior to his writing *Arcana* we can see how his biblical interpretation builds on and responds to his scientific thought. We will now take a brief look at three areas of this thought that relate to allegory—the doctrine of series and degrees, the body and

soul connection, and theories of language—in order to explore the relationship between his earlier and later work.

Doctrine of Series and Degrees

Swedenborg formally developed his “doctrine of series and degrees” while working on *Oeconomia regni animalis* just a few years before beginning his *Arcana*. He defines the doctrine in volume II of *Oeconomia* as “the mode observed by nature in the subordination and coordination of things, and which in acting she has prescribed herself.”¹⁷¹ Every element of nature is a series in itself, and also belongs to a series, as a branch belongs to a tree. Six types of series make up the entire universe, three above and three below. The lower series, comprising of the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms, operate by means of laws and forms that simulate each other as well as those above. By studying one series, the astute observer can learn about other series and about the macrocosmic whole. Therefore, a study of minerals, plants or animal bodies enables access to knowledge of metaphysical realities: “for as often as nature betakes herself upwards from visible phenomena, or, in other words, withdraws herself inwards, she instantly as it were disappears, while no one knows what is become of her, or whither she is gone, so that it is necessary to take science as a guide to attend us in pursuing her steps.”¹⁷² This position permeates the three volumes of *Oeconomia*, which considers at great

¹⁷¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically*, trans. Augustus Clissold (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955) vol. 2, 7.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

length and detail subjects such as the fibers of the brain, the chambers of the heart, the mineral make up of blood and blood's purification in the lungs, the development of fetuses, the connection between animation of the brain and movement of muscles, and more. The suggestion, more explicitly stated as the work progresses, is that all of this science also describes the nature of the human soul and its spiritual regeneration.

Degrees within and between series help to explain this relationship.

Continuous degrees are units in a series, while discrete degrees are connected by correspondence only; they are rungs in the ladder, never touching each other but connected by vertical channels. Therefore discrete degrees between series, such as between a human and an animal, are bonded by likeness rather than contiguity. However, while various forms separated by degree occupy distinct spheres, lower forms are filled with the essence of the higher forms. For instance, the cortical substance, the seat of the soul, flows into every part of the body. "Thus the microcosm or animal world is likened to the macrocosm or universe, wherein are spheres celestial, sublunary and terrestrial. The likeness also lies in the fact that the sphere which holds the supreme position or which represents heaven is also within and most fully present in all the inferior spheres."¹⁷³ More spiritual forms, such as what he terms the "simple fiber" descend successively from one series to another, generating a similarity of essence between elements in a sequence of types.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 277

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 280-281

Ralph Waldo Emerson points to the Platonic tradition of Identity Philosophy as the primary inspiration for Swedenborg's doctrine of series and degrees, that "nature is always self-similar,"¹⁷⁵ and contemporary historians rightly cite Swedenborg's reliance on Leibniz and Wolff as interlocutors for this particular iteration of the classical concept.¹⁷⁶ He shares with these men a fundamental interest in investigating a principle of causes, and developing a universal language based on the logic of mathematics.

The mathematical principals of the doctrine of series and degrees builds on theories from Swedenborg's earlier work, *Principia rerum naturalium*, in which the origin of the universe is traced to a single mathematical point. This point became a sort of door-way between the worlds of the infinite and the finite, recalling Janus, the two-faced Roman god of passage ways.¹⁷⁷ From this point, every finite element comes into being as part of its own series, and reflects a corresponding series in the universe of infinite things. Cartesian dualism framed in the language of Christian Wolff goes a long way in explaining these images. To trace these concepts themselves to any single point of origin, however, would be a grave oversimplification. Such determinism misleads in this case, where a surplus of contextual sources leaves us pointing in several directions. Similarities to

¹⁷⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Nature, Addresses and Lectures* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 104.

¹⁷⁶ See Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 72; Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 100, 129-132, 203-204, 359, and elsewhere.

¹⁷⁷ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Principia or the First Principles of Natural Things: To Which are Added the Minor Principia*, trans James Rendell and Isaiah Tansley (London: Swedenborg Society, 1912), vol. 1, 59.

kabbalistic images and explanations, for instance, will be considered in the next chapter.

While Swedenborg applies his doctrine of series and degrees to a number of biological studies, one motive arises above all else as inspiration for Swedenborg's efforts in the period of his writing *Principia* and *Oeconomia*: to understand the relationship between the body and the soul. Why this project would eventually drive him into ten years of singular focus on the interpretation of the Bible is a question worth pondering, and whose possible solutions we will consider as we proceed.

The Body-Soul Intercourse

Arguably, the most controversial idea to come out of Swedenborg's scientific career was the claim that the soul could be materially traced to a certain location within the body. His work in this area was aimed at determining the physical qualities of the "spirituous fluid," which contained the soul, as well as determining its location *in the body* and the nature of its mechanical effects *on the body*. This science, titled *Rational Psychology* (after Christian Wolff's work of the same name), is defined in the opening of Swedenborg's *Oeconomia*:

Psychology is the science which treats of the essence and nature of the soul, and of the mode in which she flows into the actions of the body; consequently it is the first and last of those sciences which lead to the knowledge of the animal economy. But whereas the soul has her residence in a place so sublime and eminent, that we cannot ascend to her, and attain to the knowledge of her, except by a particular and general investigation of the lower and accessible things of her kingdom; or whereas she lives withdrawn so far within, that she cannot be exposed to view until coverings under which she is hidden are unfolded and removed in order: it hence becomes necessary

that we ascend to her by the same steps or degrees, and the same ladder, by which her nature, in the formation of the things of her kingdom, descends into her body.¹⁷⁸

Like the inner qualities of nature cited above, the inner essence of the person is described as hidden behind layers of coverings, and science is the only guide capable of uncovering and investigating the mysteries within.

In *De infinito*, Swedenborg presents the theory that the soul is finite, though immortal, extended (meaning it occupies space), bound to a single body, and operates according to mechanical laws of nature. In the spirit of Isaac Newton, he writes: “Are we to say, because they are hidden from the senses, because the causes are unseen, that they are not equally subject to mechanism or geometry?”¹⁷⁹ Above all, Swedenborg believed the soul to be a knowable object of study, for without knowledge of the soul the philosopher is led to doubts of every kind.¹⁸⁰ The connection between the soul and the body “whereby the one can operate upon the other”¹⁸¹ occurs through the traceable motion of substances. Motions of the soul are so subtle as to be barely detectable, but can be observed through the eventual effects on membranes in the body. And while the effect on membranes can be observed throughout the body, the special membranes and the movements of the

¹⁷⁸ Swedenborg, *Economy*, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Infinite and the Final Cause of Creation also the Intercourse between the Soul and the Body: Outlines of a Philosophical Argument*, trans. James John Garth Tfilkinson (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1902), 149.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

cortical substance in the cerebrum are evidence of it the brain's role as the "seat of the rational soul."¹⁸²

In the ten years following *De infinito*, Swedenborg would attempt to make good on these theories by proving the soul's existence using mechanistic principles. "If we had a microscope, we might be able to see the entire structure [of the] soul" he wrote.¹⁸³ The mechanical model used by Swedenborg to explain the movements of the soul in the body was based in vibrations. Tremors are created by the subtle movement of fluid in an advancing spiral, recalling Descartes's Theory of Vortices. On an anatomic scale rather than a cosmic one, the spiral motions effected a chain of reverberations throughout the body, from finer to grosser. The body could be compared to a musical instrument, which produced its sound from the subtle quivering of strings. In the body, these tremors are carried by fluid through the vascular and lymphatic systems, and make their effect on membranes and in turn on the skeleton. The effect in both cases he describes as "harmonious." The interaction of the body and the soul produces an organic melody.

Unsurprisingly, *De infinito* raised the eyebrows of those who considered themselves watch guards against materialism. Stengel, who makes a study of the reception of Swedenborg's work among his contemporaries, points to reviews, such as one published in *Nova Acta Eruditorum* a year after *De infinito*'s publication, outlining its materialist features. Reviewers warned, as well, of Swedenborg's

¹⁸² Ibid., 222.

¹⁸³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Psychologica: Being Notes and Observations on Christian Wolf's Psychologia Ampirica*, trans. Alfred Acton (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1923), 78-79.

possible deistic tendencies in that espoused a philosophy that leaned towards universalism and privileged moral conduct over belief.¹⁸⁴

Indeed, it is conceivable that Swedenborg might have taken these concepts in a distinctly materialist direction if he had gone a step or two further and concluded that the soul could be classified and studied as just another organ in the body. However, he held fast to his Cartesian dualism and to his devotion to doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and increasingly applied this work to the ontological distinction between the spiritual and natural worlds. By the time he writes his *Regnum Animale*, his dualism is such that he describes the relationship in typological terms: “The body is her image, resemblance, and type; she is the model, the idea, the head, that is the soul of the body. Thus she is represented in the body as in a mirror.”¹⁸⁵ The mirror is appropriate metaphor for his later understanding of the body-soul relationship, since a body and its reflected image don’t touch or occupy the same space. They appear identical and move in identical ways, but are wholly distinct. To speak in geometrical terms, the relationship is one of parallel lines rather than a single vortex (or perhaps Swedenborg would have been particularly taken with the model of the double helix – combining the two). We can speculate as to whether this turn to the language of “correspondence” and “representation” was due in part to his failure to prove the existence of the soul using sensory evidence, or was a response to accusations of materialism, or was the

¹⁸⁴ Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 118-120, and 145-149.

¹⁸⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically*, trans. James John Garth Wilkinson (London, 1843), 16.

result of allegorical methods of dream and scripture interpretation he was developing on the side. Whatever the reason, Swedenborg eventually dropped his search and study of the soul's physical presence in the body entirely, and with it he dropped nearly all professional work in the physical sciences.¹⁸⁶ Like the mythical Daedalus, after whom (in one of the greatest ironies of Swedenborg's life) he named his scientific journal in his early career in Sweden, Swedenborg's materialist ambitions disintegrated as he sought too close a proximity to the secrets of the soul.

Thus, while his doctrine of series and degrees remains intact and is even enforced as he turns from biological to textual interpretation, Swedenborg's ideas concerning the nature of the soul are marked by a change of course. As we will see, the immateriality of the soul has important implications regarding the invisibility of the highest sense of scripture. That the body-soul connection becomes one of discrete degree, informs his understanding of distinct levels of meaning in the Bible.

Language Theory

When discussing the function of the kidneys in *Regnum Animal*, and the corresponding regenerative, or purifying process of the human spirit, Swedenborg

¹⁸⁶ Many years later, Swedenborg would describe the folly of this project in an unpublished manuscript titled *De divina sapientia* (1763). Here he points to the motion of the heart and lungs as forming a connection to the soul, but contrasts this with the notion that the soul itself could be located in space: "How greatly do they go astray who assign to the soul some particular position in the body, like the brain or the heart, for a man's soul which is to live after death, is his spirit." Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom*, trans. E. C. Mongredian (London: Swedenborg Society, 1963), 98.

is inspired to offer the following digression on the persistence such correspondences in all of nature.

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 vocal terms, and to convert these terms only into the corresponding spiritual terms, we shall by this means elicit a spiritual truth or theological dogma, in place of the physical truth or precept.¹⁸⁷

What is astonishing about this excerpt, is the suggestion that nothing more than the substitution of words, the *vocal* substitution of terms, is required for spiritual truth to be made evident.¹⁸⁸ A similar claim is made in a note in another work, *De Cultu et Amore Dei (The Worship and Love of God, 1745)* in which the “transposition of words” is all that is required to initiate an opening of celestial paradise.¹⁸⁹

Swedenborg’s interest in the ontological power of language persists and gains in strength, even as his scientific pursuits wane. The bridge between Swedenborg’s secular career and his turn to biblical commentary was his work on language theory and semiotics. As his work on the soul’s domain was nearing an end, Swedenborg wrote several unpublished documents that treated the relationship

¹⁸⁷ Swedenborg, *The Animal Kingdom*, 293.

¹⁸⁸ In *Arcana caelestia* 195 Swedenborg describes early human vocalization of spiritual qualities corresponding to things in the natural world: “The most ancient people did not compare all things in man to beasts and birds but actually called them such.” See chapter 4.

¹⁸⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, trans. Alfred Acton and Frank Sewell (Boston: Massachusetts New Church Union, 1925), 55n.

between corresponding elements on different levels of existence as well as the symbolic nature of language, both written and spoken. These include: *Clavis Hieroglyphica Arcanorum Naturalium et Spiritualium (A Hieroglyphic Key to the secrets of Material and Spiritual Things by Way of Representations and Correspondences*, 1741), A draft on the topic of Rational Psychology (1742), *De Cultu et Amore Dei*, (*The History of Creation as Given by Moses*, 1745), and *Explicatio in Verbum Historicum Veteris Testamenti (The Historical Word of the Old Testament Explained*, 1746).¹⁹⁰ A few words on Swedenborg's application of his doctrine of series and degrees, or correspondences, to language in this period will shed further light on the nexus between his scientific work and his allegorical approach to the Bible.

Swedenborg's *Clavis Hieroglyphica* presents 21 examples of the connection between natural and spiritual things via correspondences. Each example explores three degrees of reality: the level of the natural word, the level of human reason and intellect, and the level of divinity. The third level includes a range of conceptions, including things related to the nature of God, love, goodness and wisdom (these being higher faculties than intelligence and truth in this arrangement). The distinction between the higher two levels is made using the terms "spiritual" and "celestial." So, for example, the trinity of light, intelligence, and wisdom

¹⁹⁰ On the development of Swedenborg's theory of correspondences in these works see the section on "Primary Source Analysis of Swedenborg's Thought on Biblical Exegesis Prior to the Arcana," in James F. Lawrence, "And Speaking of Something Else: Biblical Allegories, Swedenborg, and Tradition," 106-136. PhD diss. (Graduate Theological Union, 2011).

correspond to each other. Just as “Light reveals the quality of objects, but the quality of the object appears according to the state of the light, for the object is not always what it appears” so too in the case of intelligence at the second level: “Intelligence discovers the truth of things, but this truth appears according to the state of the intelligence, for what is thought true is not always really so.” Wisdom, at the third level and in like manner, reveals the goodness of things. *Clavis Hieroglyphica* ends with a meditation on the nature of correspondence. “The spiritual world is the region of antitypes or exemplars; the animal kingdom is the sphere of images and types; nature is the realm of shadows or resemblances.”¹⁹¹ There are 4 species of correspondence, he suggests in this short work, which resemble the various four-fold senses of scripture in medieval commentaries. For Swedenborg, these are: harmonic, allegorical, typical, and fabulous. The breakdown of levels of meaning, or senses, would vary somewhat in later exegetical writings, but the emphasis remained: the world is full of these types.¹⁹² And while his scientific career saw his interest in correspondences move from the astrological, to the anatomical, to the linguistic, it isn’t until the very end of *Clavis* that he suggests their direct application to biblical texts: “it is good to interpret the Holy Scripture on these principles, for the spirit speaks spiritually as well as naturally.”¹⁹³ With this suggestive conclusion, Swedenborg foreshadows the work

¹⁹¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Hieroglyphic Key to Natural and Spiritual Mysteries: By Way of Representations and Correspondences*, trans. James John Garth Wilkinson (London: William Newberry, 1847), 33.

¹⁹² On the variations in the number and function of Swedenborg’s senses, see chapter 4.

¹⁹³ Swedenborg, *Hieroglyphic Key*, 34.

that would occupy him for the next ten years and that would define him in many ways for generations to come.

While Swedenborg had long been interested in the study of scripture for the sake of understanding both physical and metaphysical realities, it wasn't until the mid-1740s that he began, as it were, searching out the soul of the biblical text. His first attempts were more poetic, as for example, the unfinished *De Cultu*, a fanciful novel retelling the creation story and incorporating his astronomical and cosmogonic theories. However, his exegesis became progressively more systematic and scientific in tone as time went on, aided by the reference materials he created for himself. Concordances of biblical terms and verses would be valuable tools for organizing his symbolic arrangements in future material, especially the opus *Arcana coelestia*.

It was Swedenborg's interest in the unique qualities of the Hebrew language that enabled, to some degree, his transition into biblical interpretation. He believed the Hebrew language was particularly suited to achieving correspondential relationships. Much could be said about the particular flavor of seventeenth and eighteenth century Hebraism here. The work of Leibniz, Wolff, and others demonstrates an interest in ancient languages such as Chinese, Hebrew, and Egyptian hieroglyphics, for their potential to reveal a universal language.¹⁹⁴ This was due in part to the intellectual fascination in Kabbalah and primitive cultures,

¹⁹⁴ See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

but also to interest in emblematics as a literary genre. As we saw in chapter one, Mendelssohn wrote about the mediating role of Hebrew in advancing human reason, by moving language away from pictorial representations and their potential for idolatry to abstract thought. Johann Gottfried Herder's *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* also detailed the unique qualities of the language and the kind of thinking, or poetic feeling in this case, it engendered.¹⁹⁵ In terms of impact on Swedenborg, we have to go a few decades before Mendelssohn and Herder, and look to Casper Newman's *Clavis Domus Heber*, which considers the symbolic meaning of individual Hebrew letters, is a possible influence with Wolff as intermediary.

Swedenborg's interest in the Hebrew language therefore forms an important part of the link between his earlier philosophical and scientific work and his later religious work by providing an opportunity to apply Leibnizian and Wolffian philosophy to biblical interpretation. Hebrew, he believed, was closest to the language of the angels and as such could mediate influence between degrees of reality, bridging the heavenly and earthly realms. Hebrew enters his otherworldly experiences on a number of occasions during the transition years, in the mid-1740s. In his *Spiritual Diary*, he writes that the Hebrew letters, by their very shape and arrangement, contained heavenly secrets that were entirely lost in translation.¹⁹⁶

Hebrew parallelism, where two words are used to communicate a single idea,

¹⁹⁵ Herder, Johann Gottfried, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Marsh (Burlington, VT: Edward Smith, 1833).

¹⁹⁶ Swedenborg, *The Spiritual Diary*, trans. Johann Friedrich Immanuel Tafel, John Henry Smithson and George Bush (New York: Bush, 1846-1850), 4671; *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, trans. John C. Ager (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), 260.

likewise allows for the interpretation of levels of meaning: “one expression meaning celestial things, the other spiritual.”¹⁹⁷ The consonant sounds of Hebrew communicated spiritual realities related to faith and reason, while vowel sounds communicated higher, celestial realities, or those related to love and affection.¹⁹⁸ The peculiarity of Semitic languages for the absence of vowel letters made Hebrew especially useful for its ability to convey multiple meaning in a single word. This fact, along with the absence of capital letters and punctuation, uniquely allows for the expression of inner meanings.

The Hebrew Language is such as to embrace ideas, and in fact each of the words contain many ideas, so that they are general ideas more than the words of any other language. This is clear from many considerations, among others that there had been no vowels there so that the meaning of the letter would be known from the inward meaning, but not the inward meaning from the meaning of the letter, which is what happens instead when vowels are attached. Therefore, one who sees the meaning of the letter from the inward meaning understands better without vowels what was written by Hebrew letters, than with them.¹⁹⁹

This reflection on the significance of the absence of vowels recalls Casper Newman’s comparison between Hebrew vowels and the soul of the body, which he relates to the Cartesian separation between soul and body.²⁰⁰ Swedenborg adopts this model, and adds the innovation of classifying Hebrew vowels into two categories: those making the sounds “U” and “O” having a higher, celestial, more loving intonation than “E” and “I.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 100.

¹⁹⁸ Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, 278; *Heaven and Hell*, 241. On Hebrew pointing see Emanuel Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary*, 2414.

¹⁹⁹ Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary*, 2631.

²⁰⁰ Jonnson, *Visionary Scientist*, 147.

²⁰¹ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia* 793; *Heaven and Hell*, 241.

All of these technical qualities of the Hebrew language, which encourage interpretive investigation, serve to underscore the symbolic nature of all language. The bottom line for Swedenborg is that the absence of vowels and punctuation in the text, and their insertion and interpretation by individuals, allows for the text to take on as many meanings as there are readers. Therefore, there are discrete levels of correspondence (natural, spiritual, celestial), but within those levels, the number of interpretations is infinite. In his diary he describes a vision he has that demonstrates how single word can contain thousands of ideas within it, like molecules in a cloud, or a like single point seen under a microscope, revealing hundreds of tiny insects.²⁰² This is true of all language, but especially of the biblical text.

Antimaterialist Discourse

During the 1740s, when Swedenborg's interest in the symbolic logic of both the natural world and language was peaking, Swedenborg wrestled internally with his own attachment to scientific and materialist aspirations. This is made evident in his dream diary and his journal of spiritual experiences, which give us insight both into his tumultuous state of mind during this period as well as his reliance on *correspondences* and *representations* in interpreting the images that came before his mind's eye. "The dreams and visions of this period become parts of an inward discussion on particulars of his scientific work in progress, on which his thoughts

²⁰² Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary*, 680-681.

are continuously centered”²⁰³ writes the translator and commentator on Swedenborg’s *Dream Diary*, Lars Bergquist. In one dream, for instance, a shadowy image is thrown at him and appears to have a lame foot. Swedenborg interprets: “This meant, I think, that natural reason could not accommodate to spiritual reason.”²⁰⁴ In another example, he dreams of riding a horse and pulling a heavy cart behind. The cart is too heavy for the horse, who eventually collapses and dies of exhaustion. This signified “that perhaps I am on the wrong track; the load was my remaining work, which followed me.” Like the cart, his work in natural philosophy is weighing him down. His dreams and waking visions frequently feature women, who are either nurturing and beautiful or threatening and repulsive. The beautiful (and sometimes pregnant) women he interprets to be those encouraging of his spiritual pursuits, while the vulgar women, often associated with harlotry or promiscuity, represent the lure of philosophy and reason for their own sake and Swedenborg’s own “immoderate desire” for mathematics.²⁰⁵

Swedenborg’s anxiety regarding materialism was not entirely new in this period. We find in his earlier notes selections copied from Leibniz’s *Théodicée* in which accusations of materialism are considered:

[The] followers of Hobbes and Spinoza alone must be charged the destruction of liberty and contingency; for they suppose that what happens, is the only possible thing that can happen, and that it must needs happen by brutal and geometrical necessity. Hobbes indeed holds that all things are material and that they are subject to mathematical laws alone; while Spinoza in addition

²⁰³ Bergquist, *Swedenborg’s Dream Diary*, 19.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁰⁵ See, for instance, Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 4658; Bergquist, *Swedenborg’s Dream Diary*, 41 and 239, and Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 18.

deprives God of intelligence and choice, leaving him only a blind power from which all things emanate by necessity.²⁰⁶

Swedenborg is careful in his philosophical work to distance himself from the perceived extremist view of men such as Hobbes and Spinoza. In fact, the unnecessary amount of emphasis he places on the distinction between the finite and the infinite in works such as *De infinito* is best understood as defending his theories against accusations of Spinozism. The fact that he was then labeled with materialism because of his ideas about the soul in reviews of *De infinito*, must have been a hard blow. Whether or not his turn away from science to biblical studies was motivated in part by such reviews, we do find in his biblical commentaries a vigorous attack on materialism and science for its own sake.

His work on biblical interpretation, and especially his publication of eight quarto volumes on Genesis and Exodus in his *Arcana coelestia*, represents a shift in focus, as we have seen. The work was not only a new direction in terms of the object of study, from the natural world to the world of spirit and scripture, but a major break from his earlier materialist leanings. The interpretation of biblical images and themes as relating to a struggle against materialism and philosophy for its own sake are present in *Arcana coelestia* from the beginning. As we will see in chapter 4, the drama played out between Adam, Eve and the serpent in Genesis 3 allegorically relates the story of individuals who become “sense-oriented” (those seeking the evidence of the senses) and who are blinded by philosophical reasoning

²⁰⁶ Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Philosopher's Notebook*, trans. Alfred Acton (Pennsylvania: The Swedenborg Scientific Association, 2009), 371.

and book learning. The serpent, in particular, represents people who “spend much time constructing arguments based on things they can sense and specifically things they can see—things of the earth, their body, the world, and nature—and that is why the snake was described as being crafty above every wild animal of the field.”²⁰⁷ Whether Swedenborg is reacting against his own earlier proclivities, or primarily against the misguided focus of his contemporaries is up for interpretation, though we can see how it manifests an ambivalence towards materialism that mirrors to some extent Swedenborg’s own history.

Continuities in *Arcana coelestia*

While *Arcana coelestia* can be read as a break from or reaction against materialism and his own scientific pursuits, we find many affinities to his earlier philosophical systems. In his interpretation of the first two verses of Exodus 7, for example, which describe the chain of communication from God, to Moses, to Aaron, to Pharaoh, Swedenborg references a model of successive degrees:

[T]hrough those consecutive degrees all things exist in a continuous chain linked to the First Being (*Esse*). And it is in accordance with those degrees that influx takes place; for Divine Truth coming forth directly from Divine Good flows into one degree after another. On the way down or with each new degree it becomes more general, and so grosser and more obscure, and becomes more sluggish, and so more responsive and frigid. All this clarifies the nature of Divine Order consisting of consecutive degrees and consequently of the nature of influx.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 195.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 7270 [3].

Divine influx, or revelation, descends through a series of steps. Each plane of reality is connected to the last by means of this influx, and the whole of heaven and earth are joined in communion; every part stands in relation to the whole.

The pattern of series and degrees which he developed in his earlier work reaches its peak in a theological context much later in Part 3 of his *Sapientia angelica de divino amore et de divina sapientia* (Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom, 1763). It is put to use much earlier, however, as a tool to biblical interpretation throughout *Arcana coelestia*, where his three upper series become three levels of meaning, three heavens and three degrees of an individual's understanding. "Therefore as many distinct and separate degrees exist in the human being as there are heavens."²⁰⁹ The vertical channel connecting these degrees is their correspondence, a pattern of similitudes that opens channels of descending influx. "That good passes down a flight of steps so to speak, the nature of it being determined at each distinct and separate level by the way it is received."²¹⁰

And while his opinions regarding the physicality of the soul changed as he turned against materialism, we can see many remnants in *Arcana coelestia* of his earlier work on the relationship between body and soul. The opening paragraphs of *Arcana coelestia* compare the letter of the Bible by itself to "a body without a soul."²¹¹ Such a metaphor is far more than a poetic flourish for the author of this

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 5114 [3].

²¹⁰ Ibid., 5144.

²¹¹ Ibid., 3.

commentary, who occupied himself over the preceding decade with technical questions related to the body-soul connection. In this light, *Arcana coelestia* can be seen as an antidote, in some ways, to his failure to locate the soul physically in the body. If he can demonstrate the existence of a hidden soul to the text, the body's soul is implied even if it remains out of the reach of scientific instruments. His break from materialism was not, therefore, a break from an essential motivating factor which pervades his work, scientific and religious. His motivation throughout was to demonstrate the reality of higher levels including God, heaven and the soul, and to demonstrate the connection between these higher levels and lower ones in the earth, nature and human body. If he failed to empirically prove the existence of these higher levels with the instruments of science, his theological writings set out to prove them using the instruments of his spiritual senses, drawing on "things seen and heard" in a state of altered consciousness.

Conclusion: Experimental Science

While the successes and failures in Swedenborg's scientific career appear to have caused a great deal of anxiety for him in the years leading up to his turn to biblical commentary, those experiences also appear to have given him the very tools with which he constructed his biblical hermeneutics. The same serpent who led Adam and Eve out of paradise seems to have led Swedenborg into paradise, or at least to have accompanied him along the way to an understanding of the connectedness of natural and spiritual things and to his self-described spiritual awakening. His scientific pursuits crystalized around in his doctrine of series and

degrees and his doctrine of correspondences, the very doctrines he subsequently employed in his biblical pursuits.

Historians see no coincidence in the naming of *Arcana coelestia*, which echoes microbiologist Antonie van Leeuwenhoek's *Arcana naturae detecta* (1695): a publication that informed much of Swedenborg's views on cellular biology and the generation of organisms. If the connection is to be trusted, Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible can be seen as a response, or counterpart, to Leeuwenhoek's investigation of biological forms. Leeuwenhoek crafted the first magnifying lenses able to see individual cells hidden from ordinary site, and Swedenborg's spiritual lenses investigated the inner senses of biblical language, invisible to the average reader.

Those who compare Swedenborg's biblical commentaries and theological publications to his earlier philosophical and scientific writings will notice several distinctions. One in particular is quite telling: in his later writing, he almost never cites the work of predecessors, while his scientific work frequently documents the thinkers on whom he builds his ideas, including Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and many others. As noted above, Swedenborg believed providence kept him from the formal study of theology so that his theological writing would be the result of heaven's influence alone. But if we consider statements made in the preface to *Oeconomia*, another explanation presents itself. Here, he describes two types of scientists: those who build up hypotheses from experimentation, and those who, from contemplation and analysis of this built up knowledge, are able to discover

the principles and causes of things. Swedenborg himself never performed dissections or charted the course of the stars with telescopes. He worked from the sketches, descriptions, charts and tables of other men.²¹² He was the reaper of other's men's harvest: "[The] proper time has arrived; for a rich store of experience is at hand; an accumulated heap sufficient to enable us to build a palace; a luxuriant field where our sickles may reap an abundant harvest; a table where we may enjoy the most sumptuous banquets."²¹³ Perhaps in turning to the divine sciences, in which his insights are based on "things seen and heard" while touring the spiritual world, Swedenborg reversed his role and took upon himself the work of an experimental scientist. From here on out, his role is to observe and report, while interpretation is left to the angels and to God, who replace earthy scientists as his primary interlocutors.

As we have seen, Swedenborg's allegorical methods were neither hindered nor suppressed by his engagement with natural science. His science was fully allegorical in itself. Every particle, every organ, every revolution of the planets and every fiber in the body was excavated for whatever heavenly secrets it might conceal. In turn, his exegesis was fully scientific, to the extent that his earlier philosophical systems remain more or less intact in *Arcana coelestia*, despite cautionary themes regarding the pitfalls of materialism.

²¹² Cyriel Sigrid Ljungberg Odhner Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic: The Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg*, (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 150-51.

²¹³ Swedenborg, *Economy*, 14.

We will take up the question of the reception of Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences in part three. It is worth mentioning in closing, however, that it seems to have had some impact on Swedish scientists who came after Swedenborg. As historian Sten Lindroth writes in his book *Swedish Men of Science*, the doctrine inspired scientists who "found a warrant that the fragile objects they worked with had a spiritual significance which sanctified the scientist's working day."²¹⁴ While many scientists of the Enlightenment moved away from religious explanations of natural phenomenon, others remained within a theological framework, even as the contours of that framework were refitted to a new environment. Contrary to histories that point to a teleological secularization, Swedenborg sits in a chain of so many scientists of modernity whose religious convictions motivated inquiry and investigation.

Thomas Broman, argues that rather than secularizing, the result of Enlightenment on religious expression is better understood as privatizing. The appearance of religious movements in England and elsewhere that stressed the "cultivation of an intensely personal inner religiosity" demonstrates this movement. "Thus, instead of hailing or condemning the Enlightenment as the creator of the conflict between 'science' and 'religion,' might we not more usefully understand it as the origin of another fundamental boundary, that between 'public' and 'private'?"²¹⁵ The internalizing of religious expression, and especially of biblical exegesis, is evidenced in *Arcana coelestia*, where

²¹⁴ Sten Lindroth, "Emanuel Swedenborg: 1688-1772," in *Swedish Men of Science 1650-1950* (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute, 1952), 58. Lindroth names as examples the brothers Adam and Johan Afzelius, August Nordenskiöld, Leonard Gyllenhaal, and C. J. Schonherr.

²¹⁵ Broman, "Matter, Force," 108.

scientific explanations for the seven days of creation, for example, are rejected in favor of an account of the seven steps of personal, spiritual regeneration allegorically represented.

Thus we find in Swedenborg an example of enlightenment thought in which the logic of symbolism did not disappear. A study of Swedenborg's secular career in physics, anatomy, chemistry, and astronomy reveals patterns of thought consistent with the hermeneutics of *Arcana coelestia*, and gives us an alternate narrative to the history that marries Enlightenment science and biblical literalism.

CHAPTER 3: SWEDENBORG, JEWS, AND THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE

Chapter one of this dissertation explored how the interpretation of the Bible in the eighteenth century was informed on the one hand by new challenges brought by the scientific revolution, and on the other hand by conceptions of Judaism and of the Hebrew language that built on and in some cases reversed previous notions of Jewish literalism. Chapter two considered the integration of Swedenborg's biblical allegoresis with the methods and theories from his scientific career. This chapter will take up the question of Swedenborg's relationship to Judaism and the effects of this relationship on his biblical interpretation. Swedenborg's simultaneous reliance on and ambivalence toward Judaism in his biblical interpretation and his understanding of human religious history provides a case study in early modern hermeneutics and Jewish-Christian relations: one that draws on traditional notions of Jewish literalism, while also producing exegetical content with striking resemblances to Jewish mysticism.

This chapter will consider two questions. The first asks what function the Jews serve for Swedenborg in his role as commentator. Given their recurring presence in his published and unpublished work, and the lack of evidence that he interacted closely with living Jews around him or with Jewish texts, we can assume that Swedenborg's treatment of the Jews is discursive, or that Swedenborg's figurative Jews stand in for a mode of interpretation that he wishes to critique. Secondly, we will take up the question of Swedenborg's relationship to Kabbalah. This will require an investigation into existing scholarly responses to this question, a review of the nature of Kabbalah in Swedenborg's environment, and possible avenues of influence. More fundamentally, however, it will

require a theoretically robust framework for thinking about comparison, since much of the discussion of Swedenborg and Kabbalah, from Immanuel Kant to Moshe Idel, has been based solely on similarity of content. Finally, we will consider whether these two questions answer one another. Should Swedenborg's negative depiction of Jewish literalism, given the resemblance of his commentary to Kabbalah, be understood as defensive? Or would he have been unaware of the connection peers and future readers alike would draw to Kabbalah? Should his negative views of Jewish interpretation be simply understood as traditional anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism? My conclusion will be in favor of a defensive stance, though I will argue it is an inherited defensiveness, drawing on tropes available to him from Paul, Augustine, Luther and others, triggered by an awareness, on some level, that his spiritualizing comes too close to the methods of mystical Judaism that were held in such esteem by family members and intellectuals close to him. Bloom writes: "In psychic life, as in international affairs, 'defense' is frequently murderous. In the realms of the inter-poetic, defense is rather murderous also, because there defense is always *against influence*."²¹⁶ Swedenborg's defensiveness comes to him ancestrally, but is magnified by the threat of resemblance between his own interpretations and that which has already been destroyed.

"The Jewish Church" in Swedenborg's Published and Unpublished Work

In the first volume of *Arcana coelestia*, Swedenborg explains the paradox of the plural titles and verbs in Hebrew used to describe God. The word for God with its plural

²¹⁶ Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 54.

ending, *Elohim*, as well as verses such as Genesis 1:26, “Let us create *adam* in our image” have long challenged Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible, who professed an object of worship that was singular in essence at least. Swedenborg, for his part, asserts that such grammar indicates the inclusion of the angels in heaven: “Where anything is effected by the ministry of angels, as in the first chapter of Genesis, He is spoken of in the plural number.”²¹⁷ Whether knowingly or unknowingly, this interpretation put Swedenborg firmly on one side of a centuries-old exegetical debate between Jews and Christians, and not on the side one might expect of the son of a Swedish Lutheran bishop. In the footsteps of Justin Martyr, Christians have tended to see this verse as the earliest, most ancient evidence of the role of Christ, or Logos, in creation.²¹⁸ Jewish classical sources on the other hand put God in conversation with ministering angels, who question the necessity of this new creature, *adam*, even as they assist in his creation.²¹⁹

On the one hand, one could argue that any resemblance to Jewish sources in *Arcana coelestia* is coincidental. Swedenborg’s rejection of Lutheran atonement theology left him more unitarian than trinitarian, and his prolonged visions of angels in the

²¹⁷ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 300. See also *Arcana caelestia* 4402:4, 9160 and Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Apocalypse Explained: According to the Spiritual Sense in which the Arcana Therein Predicted but Heretofore Concealed are Revealed*, trans. John Curtis Ager (New York: American Swedenborg printing and publishing society, 1915), 222.

²¹⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 62:2 as cited and discussed in Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 40.

²¹⁹ *Genesis Rabbah* 8.4-5. Daniel Boyarin points to evidence that at the time of Justin’s *Dialogue* the Jewish interpretation involving angels may not have been without controversy within the Jewish community. Boyarin argues that it is Justin’s insistence on identifying the Logos with Christ that forces the issue. Justin works to “deny the Logos to the Jews, to take it away from them, in order for it to be the major theological center of Christianity, with the goal of establishing a religious identity for the believers in Christ that would, precisely, mark them off as religiously different from Jews.” *Border Lines*, 38.

spiritual world brought them front and center to his reading of the Bible.²²⁰ However, if we consider that this interpretation of Genesis 1:26 is immediately followed by an attack on Jewish interpretive abilities, another picture emerges. Swedenborg writes here of the inability of Jews to understand the internal sense of scripture: “that they did not know and do not know of the existence of the internal man, or of anything internal, for if they had known of it, or if they now knew of it, so as to acknowledge it, such is their character that they would profane it, and there would be no hope of any salvation for them in the other life.”²²¹

The example of Swedenborg’s interpretation of the verse from Genesis with its resemblance to Jewish sources and the accompanying attack raises questions about intellectual and cultural exchange between Christians and Jews. It will be my contention that what we find in Swedenborg is more than a hermeneutical mugging. More helpful than accusations of thievery or more benignly, inspiration, is Harold Bloom’s concept of “poetic misprision.” Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” will provide a theoretical grounding on which to interpret Swedenborg’s relationship to Judaism towards the end of this chapter. More must first be said about how Jews are depicted in Swedenborg’s work, published and unpublished.

²²⁰ An important difference should be noted between Swedenborg’s concept of angels and the angels of classical Judaism. While in Judaism angels are a different species all together, present at the time of the first human’s creation, for Swedenborg they are human in every respect: beings who have died and are living in heaven. The story of creation for Swedenborg is not about the creation of the universe in time, but the spiritual regeneration of the individual in this life, which other people, angels, participate in from heaven. The association of the days of creation with personal spiritual growth is also made in Hasidic texts, though angels remain non-human.

²²¹ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 302.

The Jews are regular interlocutors for Swedenborg, not in the “natural world” but in the “spiritual world” – in his dreams and waking visions of interactions with those who have passed on. Swedenborg kept a diary of his spiritual experiences from 1747-1765, which he never published, though significant sections of it were copied into published works such as *Arcana coelestia*. The pages of this diary record interactions with angels, spirits and demons in the spiritual worlds, all of whom are humans who once lived an earthly existence and maintain identifying features such as gender, ethnicity, and religious and national affiliation. This last point is one that marks Swedenborg’s view of angels and spirits as unique from other Christian and Jewish conceptions: his angels and spirits are not a separate species but are entirely human. The Jews referenced in his *Experientiae Spirituales* are therefore no longer living on earth, but are human in every other way. Every instance of his having “spoken frequently with Jews” occurs in the spiritual world.²²² The recorded interactions should not be interpreted, as at least one influential scholar has done,²²³ as descriptions of specific *this-world* conversations or relationships he held with those living around him, but rather as symbolic manifestations of his internal world, images informed by his religious and historical imagination. They are telling, not as coded evidence for the influence of Jews and Judaism on his ideas, but

²²² For example, see Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Last Judgement (posthumous): Various Things Concerning the Spiritual World*, trans. John Whitehead (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1934), 254 and *Arcana caelestia*, 3481.

²²³ Marsha Keith Schuchard, in a number of her publications, cites Swedenborg’s entries in his *Spiritual Diary* as records of actual meetings. For example, see *Emanuel Swedenborg, Secret Agent on Earth and in Heaven: Jacobites, Jews, and Freemasons in Early Modern Sweden* (Boston: Brill, 2012) 429-430, referencing *Spiritual Diary* numbers 2097 and 3500.

as descriptions of how Swedenborg thought about Jews. And for this, they are quite useful.²²⁴

Swedenborg's spiritual-world Jews are, in a word, stubborn. He records several conversations, in which he argues with Jews about the coming of the Messiah. He goes to great lengths to explain biblical, prophetic evidence that Jesus is Messiah, and yet they walk away from him. He wields insights from Greek and Hebrew study, he insists on the impossibility of bodily resurrection and the physical repopulation of Canaan, but they are not moved.²²⁵ They refuse true faith in Christ, and in one particularly unfortunate number they are relegated to the spiritual world's ghettos, living in close and filthy quarters.²²⁶ This description of their living quarters in the other life comes just before we are invited into the particulars of one disputation between Swedenborg and a group of Jews on the question of the Messiah. In this episode, the Jews describe a literal coming of the Messiah, while Swedenborg insists on a spiritualized event:

When they are asked whether they firmly believe that they will all get to the land of Canaan, they say that all will then go there, and that the Jews who are dead will then rise again, and from their sepulchres will enter that land. To the reply that they cannot possibly come out of the sepulchres, because they are already living after death they say that they will then descend and enter their bodies, and so live again. When told that the land cannot hold them all, they reply that it will then be enlarged. When told that the kingdom of the Messiah, because He is the Son of God, will not be on earth but in heaven, they reply that the land of Canaan will then be heaven. When told that they do not know where Bethlehem Ephratah is, where the Messiah is to be born, according to the prediction in Micah (5:2), and in the Psalms (132:6), they reply that the mother of the Messiah will nevertheless there give birth to Him;

²²⁴ Similarities to Swedenborg's other-worldly attempts at conversion can be found in medieval conversion narratives, which often contained a dream element. See, for example, Ryan Szpiech *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²²⁵ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 3481.

²²⁶ Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, 841.

and some say that wherever she brings forth there is Bethlehem. When they are asked how the Messiah can dwell with such wicked people, and it is proved by many passages in Jeremiah, and especially by the sons of Moses (Deut. 32), that they are the worst of men, they reply that among the Jews there are both good and bad, and that the bad are there meant. When they are told that they sprang from a Canaanitish woman, and from Judah's whoredom with his daughter-in-law (Gen. 38), they answer that that was not whoredom. But when to this it is replied that still Judah commanded her to be brought forth and burnt for whoredom, they go away to consult about it, and after consultation say that Judah only acted the part of a brother-in-law, a duty which neither his second son, Onan, nor his third son, Selah, fulfilled. And to this they add that very many of them are of the tribe of Levi, who held the priestly office, and that it is enough that they are all from the loins of Abraham. When they are told that within the Word there is a spiritual sense wherein Christ or the Messiah is fully treated of, they reply that this is not true; and some of them say that within the Word, or in its depths, there is nothing but gold; and other such statements they make.²²⁷

This number is noteworthy for the fact that Swedenborg insists on a spiritual sense to the prophetic predictions of Christ's coming, but quotes scripture and uses a literal interpretation of the Bible's negative descriptions of the Israelite people against the Jewish community of his present day. That the Jews of the Bible are "the worst of men" and also the scribes of the Word of God, containing all of heaven's secrets, is an irony that pervades Swedenborg's work, and expresses, I will argue, an anxiety that is both familiar to many manifestations of Christian messianism before him, but also uniquely his own.

The number quoted above ends with a reference to biblical interpretation for the sake of alchemy, a detail that reappears in the few places Swedenborg acknowledges a Jewish tradition of multiple levels of meaning in scripture. Elsewhere he makes the explicit correlation between alchemy and Jewish mysticism: "I have spoken to them

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 845.

about the spiritual meaning, to which they responded at first that they were aware of the Word's having in it a mystical meaning, and that by that mystical meaning they know that they acquire gold and are able to make gold."²²⁸ Also: "Moreover, they declare that the Word contains within itself many arcana, which they term mystic; but they have no desire to know that these relate to the Lord. They are, however, willing to know when it is said that they relate to gold."²²⁹ The association between Jewish mysticism and alchemy can be understood in light of Swedenborg's familiarity with the work of Gottfried Leibniz, whose interest in both alchemy and Kabbalah formed the basis of a lengthy relationship with Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, collaborator in the production of the *Kabbalah denudata*.²³⁰ It is worth noting that there is no reference in Swedenborg's writing to Jewish mysticism that does not mention alchemy,²³¹ while references to Jewish literalism pervade his biblical commentaries. He seems also to distinguish between the "spiritual sense" available to Christians, and the "mystical sense" spoken of by the Jews.²³² However, upon closer examination we discover that Swedenborg's use of the word "mystical" evolves over time and his earlier uses of the term are primarily positive. For instance, in the unfinished commentary he worked on prior to *Arcana coelestia*, *Explicatio in Verbum Historicum Veteris Testamenti*, Swedenborg uses the phrase "mystical sense" synonymously with "spiritual" or "internal sense."²³³ The terms

²²⁸ Swedenborg, *Last Judgement*, 254.

²²⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *De verbo*, trans. John Whitehead (London: Swedenborg Society, 1934), 23.

²³⁰ Allison Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 7.

²³¹ Aside from quotations recorded in his *Philosopher's Notebook*, as discussed below.

²³² This distinction recalls that made by George of Siena, who separated the Christian "literal sense" from the "carnal sense" of the Jews – even while drawing on Jewish exegesis for his interpretations. See Klepper, "Literal Versus Carnal."

²³³ See, for example Swedenborg, *Adversaria*, 1:154-155.

“mystical” and “mysticism” carry no special meaning and no controversy. In *Arcana coelestia*, however, it is never used synonymously with “spiritual” and we find several examples of its use with negative connotations. Here the mystical sense is associated with doubters who obscure the true sense of scripture with their own cleverness and reasoning,²³⁴ with those who use correspondences to deceive and work magic,²³⁵ or with the allegorical Song of Songs, whose correspondences are a mere imitation of those in the books of Moses and the prophets.²³⁶ It appears that around the time he began *Arcana coelestia*, the *sensus mysticus* was relegated a category for false or corrupted uses of correspondences. It was a category that included all those who were incapable of a true interpretation, including Jews, magicians, and those deluded by their own cleverness.²³⁷

To understand Swedenborg’s treatment of Jews and Judaism in his biblical commentary, it is necessary to examine his many references to the “Jewish Church.” The Jewish Church is a term employed by Swedenborg in discussing the role of Jews in the religious history of humankind.²³⁸ In line with the trend popular in his day and building on the work of Venerable Bede, Joachim of Fiore, and many other Christian thinkers, Swedenborg divided the history of religions into a set number of eras. He writes, in *Arcana coelestia* 2894-2900 and elsewhere, that there have been four previous churches, or ages, in the history of humankind, each with its own kind of connection to the heavens

²³⁴ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 3833.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5223.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3942.

²³⁷ In the next chapter we will take up Swedenborg’s phrasing “*Sensualia et scientifica*,” which functions similarly to categorize those who misinterpret scripture – the Jews and the scientists.

²³⁸ The phrasing of the “Jewish Church” is not unique to Swedenborg, and can be found in the work of Isaac Newton and others.

and consequently its own unique revelation. The first of these, the *Ecclesia Antiquissima* required no written Word because its connection to God and to heaven was unmediated. People of this era were in direct and constant communication with angels, and understood the connection between natural and spiritual realities without the need of a mediating scripture: “they indeed saw worldly and earthly things with their eyes, or apprehended them by some other sense, but from them and by means of them they thought of celestial and spiritual things.”²³⁹ After the fall of this most ancient church, the second, *Ecclesia Antiqua*, required revelation in the form of a written Word, though that Word is almost entirely lost.²⁴⁰ These people had a diminished connection to heaven; they understood heavenly truths on an intellectual level but not a direct experiential level. They “knew but did not perceive what the representatives and significatives involved.”²⁴¹ With the fall of the ancient churches, the *Ecclesia Judaica* was established and with it came a new written revelation in the form of the Old Testament. With the fall of the previous ages, all direct experience and knowledge of heavenly truths was lost on humankind, and people were left with the symbols only. The people of the Jewish Church, therefore, had the representations, the symbols, and the external forms of ritual, with no concept of the correspondences they invoked. This church’s Word, the Old Testament, was filled everywhere with correspondences that were lost on its audience. The Christian church

²³⁹ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 2896.

²⁴⁰ Swedenborg found remnants of this “ancient word” in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Job, a book “full of correspondences:” see *Arcana caelestia* 8313 and *True Christianity* 201. The text is alluded to in biblical references to “the Wars of Jehovah” in Numbers and the “Book of Jasher” in 2 Samuel and in Joshua, *True Christianity* 265, *Spiritual Diary* 6107, and elsewhere. The full text, according to Swedenborg, is lost somewhere in Great Tartary, *True Christianity*, 279.

²⁴¹ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 2897.

ushered in a fourth era, and served as a corrective to its predecessors in that heaven and earth were united in a divine/human body rather than a coded text. God's Word came directly from the mouth of the Messiah God, though representatives and symbols were still employed, and were still mysterious too much of Christendom. Here, early on in *Arcana coelestia*, Swedenborg terms this fourth era *Ecclesia nova*, but later iterations of his history of churches will mark the "New Church" as a fifth, post-Christian dispensation; its revelation consisting of the opening of the spiritual sense of the Old and New Testaments, via the servant of God, Swedenborg himself.

Swedenborg's historical arrangement therefore situates Judaism as the middle part in the general decline of the human race, in terms of its ability to perceive and communicate with heaven. Judaism, and with it the Jews of his day, manifested a form of human religiosity that, while ripe with hidden meaning, had lost all explicit understanding of what it was about. As mentioned, this scheme builds on the work of many before him, and it is worth noting that Christian models for dividing history this way in medieval times were inspired, to a certain extent, by the threefold historical outline found in Tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud, which was termed in Christian circles the *Vaticinium Eliae*. The Talmud's division of time according to the governance of the law resonated with a Pauline conception of historical progression and conveniently fit a trinitarian scheme. Similar models were put forth after Swedenborg as well. One pronounced and popular example from the eighteenth century is Gotthold Ephriam Lessing's *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (*The Education of The Human Race*, 1778), which describes the Old and New Testaments as educational

primers for the human race at different stages of its development. The Old Testament is like a textbook for children while the New Testament is a textbook for adolescents.²⁴² Swedenborg's scheme is therefore one in a chain of theories of the history of human religion and reason, a chain with Jewish and Christian links. His particular iteration borrows the developmental model, and incorporates theories of pagan coded symbolism and Jewish appropriation of those symbols, theories that were circulating among contemporaries such as Leibniz, Mendelssohn, and William Warburton, bishop of Gloucester.²⁴³

All of this, of course, reflects the traditional Christian attitude, articulated so acutely by Augustine, that the Jews are the *scriniaria*, the desk, the library, the means of preservation of truth, even if their carnal nature forbids them from knowing the depths of the very thing they guard.²⁴⁴ Swedenborg's variation on this theme presents a particular puzzle because it comes amidst a growing acknowledgement of Jewish non-literal readings of scripture, and it comes in a form that looks remarkably similar to kabbalistic sources easily available to Swedenborg and to those around him. This puzzle has been the focus of several scholarly investigations in recent decades, which will occupy the next part of this chapter.

Swedenborg and Kabbalah

²⁴² Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "The Education of the Human Race," in *Literary and Philosophical Essays: French, German and Italian*, trans. F.W. Robertson, 195-217 (New York: Collier, 1910).

²⁴³ See Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 96-111.

²⁴⁴ See Augustine *Contra Faustum* 12:23, and Paula Fredriksen's discussion in *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (Yale University Press, 2010), 276.

Given the environment of his upbringing and his professional activities, Swedenborg was embedded in an amalgam of conflicting views regarding the wisdom to be mined from Jewish sources and the perceived ignorance of Jews themselves. Currents of hermeticism, Neoplatonism, Hebraism, and Kabbalah swirled between thinkers and movements in eighteenth-century Europe, and these currents clashed in some cases with tides of Christian orthodoxy and traditional stereotypes of Jews. Swedenborg, in the very ambiguity of his relationship to Jewish mysticism, embodies the tension between creativity and destruction that this environment conditioned. The resemblances to Kabbalah together with the anti-Judaism that pours forth in his theological writing are evidence, not of direct unmediated influence, but of an inherited history of ambivalence.

Scholars have identified three potential avenues for influence: philosemitic trends present at Uppsala University in the eighteenth-century, the diffusion of kabbalistic thought among intellectuals in England, France, Sweden and Germany with whom Swedenborg had either direct or indirect contact, and hermetic undercurrents present in the religious practices in certain circles of European society which Swedenborg may or may not have frequented. It should be noted that there is no consistent definition of “Kabbalah” in the work of these authors. Most often they do not attempt a working definition; a problem to which I will return below.

The first type of evidence that Swedenborg was familiar with Kabbalah, at least in its Christianized form, comes out of Uppsala University where Swedenborg was a student from 1699-1709. At this time, Uppsala was rising in recognition as a center of European intellectual advancement. In the wake of Descartes’ visit to Sweden in 1650, the nation’s

natural philosophers were moved by a spirit of freedom of thought and by royal decree scientific studies at Uppsala were released from the oversight of the church “The doctrines of the Christian faith may not be subjected to philosophical criticism, but for the rest, philosophy shall be free, in practice and discussion.”²⁴⁵ Added to this climate of liberal education was a fascination with Old Testament monarchical narratives on the part of the Carolean autocracy, which drew parallels between Swedish history and ancient Israel. As Eskhult writes: “Thus, the March across the ice-covered Belts in Denmark were in panegyric poetry compared to Israel's crossing of the Red Sea in the midst of the waves upon the dry ground. Likewise, Charles XII's introduction of extra taxes on rich people was justified by reference to a similar event in biblical Israel (2 Kings 15, 20).”²⁴⁶

This backdrop explains the surge in Hebrew and Rabbinic studies at Uppsala in the early eighteenth century, despite the prohibition against the settlement of Jews in Sweden, also by royal decree. During the years that Swedenborg was a student in Uppsala's department of philosophy, the department employed professors of Oriental languages with expertise in Hebrew, rabbinic studies and “the sacred antiquities of the Jews,” such as Johannes Palmroot and Daniel Lundius.²⁴⁷ Daniel Djurberg, professor of theology during this time, was integral to the development of the study of Kabbalah, and his treatise on the Zohar was accompanied by the following dedicatory poem extolling

²⁴⁵ By decree of Charles XI, see Sigstedt, *Swedenborg Epic*, 8-9.

²⁴⁶ Eskhult, “Andreas Norrelius' Latin,” 54.

²⁴⁷ “The Curricula in Swedenborg's Student Years,” trans. Enoch S. Price, published serially in *The New Philosophy* 35:1 (January 1932) through 37:4 (October 1934). See also Eskhult, “Andreas Norrelius' Latin,” 56-63.

the value of Kabbalah for the Christian interpreter: “Who does here appear as a new teacher of the old synagogue and from where shines such a good light forth in the dense darkness? Whoever you are, I recognize the metals drawn out from a better mine and the property left by the old Fathers. The cloud is scattered and the world turns bright. Ben Jochai gives light to the Christians.”²⁴⁸ There was a perception that the study of Kabbalah would aid Christian understanding of scripture and would assist in efforts to convert Jews.

This trend in rabbinic and kabbalistic studies was inspired in no small part by the philosemitic interests of Swedenborg’s brother-in-law, Eric Benzelius, with whom he lived while he was a young student and with whom he corresponded regularly in later stages of his life. Benzelius was professor and chief librarian at the Uppsala and a Hebrew enthusiast who traveled Europe acquiring kabbalistic texts for the University. It was on behalf of Uppsala that Benzelius aided in the recruitment of Johann Kemper, whose commentaries were explored in chapter one, to teach Hebrew and Zoharic interpretations of the New Testament. It was also Benzelius who petitioned for the translation of Kemper’s commentaries into Latin.²⁴⁹ While we have no evidence that Swedenborg interacted with Kemper and we cannot assume, as some have, that Swedenborg learned Hebrew from Kemper, it is likely that his presence at Uppsala had an impression on young Emanuel especially given the mutual connection to Benzelius.

²⁴⁸ Eskhult, “Andreas Norrelius' Latin,” 63.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

Among contemporary scholars who take up the issue, Bernd Roling is one who bases an argument for Swedenborg's kabbalistic influence on the environment at Uppsala.²⁵⁰ This scholarship generally builds on the groundbreaking work by Hans-Joachim Schoeps on seventeenth-century Swedish philosemitism.²⁵¹ Recent research by Swedish historian Susanna Åkerman-Hjern has uncovered a dissertation by Uppsala University Hebrew professor David Lundius, bearing Swedenborg's signature on the cover page, indicating his ownership of the document. Lundius's dissertation gives a general overview of Kabbalah, describes the functions of the various *sefirot* and references the *Sefer Yetzira* as well as mystical *Bereshith* and *Mercabah* literature. Åkerman-Hjern notes two Latin phrases in the dissertation which resemble important terms in Swedenborg's later theological writings: *influxum Divinum* and *arcana Dei*. She concludes from the Uppsala evidence that a "soft but definite" influence is present.²⁵²

A second focus for the study of kabbalistic influences on Swedenborg is the impact it had more generally on European natural philosophy and theology. Swedenborgian scholar James Lawrence writes "Leaders of both Jewish and Christian orthodoxies forcefully rejected Christian Kabbalah from the beginning, yet the reception of Kabbalah into serious conversations in early modern and modern theosophical currents created a broad intertext among philosophers with religious commitments—especially

²⁵⁰ Bernd Roling, "Erlösung im Angelischen Makrokosmos: Emanuel Swedenborg, die Kabbalah denudata und die Schwedische Orientalistik," in *Die Kabbala denudata. Text und Kontext: Akten der 15. Tagung der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft*, ed. Andreas B. Klicher (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 385-456, and "Emanuel Swedenborg, Paracelsus und die Esoterischen Traditionen des Judentums in Schweden," in *Offen Tore* (2008), 181-228.

²⁵¹ Schoeps, *Barocke Juden*.

²⁵² Åkerman-Hjern, "De sapientia Salomonis," 5.

those interested in the nexus of metaphysics, natural philosophy, and theories of representation in images, mathematics and language.”²⁵³ Lawrence cites Swedenborg’s admitted admiration of Gottfried Leibniz as a critical point of contact with kabbalistic thought, particularly in Leibniz’s search for the perfect language and fascination with Hebrew and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Swedenborg never met Leibniz in person (Benzelius did), though he comments on and quotes liberally from Leibniz’s *Théodicée* in his *Philosopher’s Notebook* (otherwise known as Codex 36). It is here, in quoting Leibniz and Hugo Grotius that we find the only three explicit references to Kabbalah in Swedenborg’s entire corpus of writing. The term enters the conversation on a few key topics: human freedom, the substance of the soul, and messianism. Each is a direct quotation, in the words of other men, and do not represent a working knowledge of Kabbalah on the part of Swedenborg himself. The *Philosopher’s Notebook* suggests a generalized familiarity on Swedenborg’s part with some basic concepts and terminology, but from secondary sources only.²⁵⁴

Helpful here is Swedenborg biographer Ernst Benz’s description of Swedenborg’s changing philosophical interests over time, away from mechanistic philosophy and towards more theosophical interests. Whereas he had previously revered the geometric principles put forth by Descartes, his encounter with German metaphysicians such as Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and Andreas Rüdiger mediated a crucial shift. Through these figures, Swedenborg began an investigation into divine physics, drawing on organic

²⁵³ Lawrence, “Speaking of Something Else,” 167.

²⁵⁴ Swedenborg, *Philosopher’s Notebook*, 160, 250, 303. 379 also contains a partial quote from Grotius that leaves out the sections on Kabbalah – see discussion below.

principles that linked the nature of God, the Bible, the natural world, and the human body. Benz describes a network of influential natural philosophers, whose thought intersected around certain interests and traditions of knowing:

By grounding all living forms in a primary universal formative energy, Swedenborg joins the great tradition of mystical *Naturphilosophie*, ranging from Albertus Magnus and Nicholas of Cusa, through Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme, then through the English Behmenists and Rosicrucians like Robert Fludd, to the great researchers like Johann Baptista van Helmont and Henry More, whom Swedenborg so frequently quoted. The terms he used to describe the creative energy of nature already indicate that he knew the tradition of this idea.”²⁵⁵

We do know of significant kabbalistic influences on many of the figures listed by Benz here, as well as Platonic and Aristotelian principles.²⁵⁶ Such genealogies help us understand certain epistemological contexts, but offer little clarification for determining whether and in what ways Swedenborg can be said to have been specifically influenced by Kabbalah. Kabbalah itself is a concept whose definition gets lost in such a context. Renaissance Hellenism blended into Christian and Jewish mystical cosmologies, and its effects surely did not follow a linear path on its way to eighteenth-century philosophy.

The related question to all of this, of how much of a direct impact Neoplatonism had on Swedenborg, is unsettled. The 1915 Swedish-language study by Martin Lamm makes the strongest case for a connection to Neoplatonism in Swedenborg’s work, and also for a strong connection to Kabbalah as we will see below. Lamm points to both his reading of patristic sources and to the influence of the Cambridge School, though much

²⁵⁵ Ernzt Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clark (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 131.

²⁵⁶ For a discussion of the Kabbalah of Johann Baptista van Helmont and Henry More, see Coudert, “Leibniz, Locke, Newton.”

of Lamm's argument is speculative.²⁵⁷ Inge Jonsson plays down Swedenborg's direct reliance on Neoplatonism, pointing to significant theological differences with Plotinus, for instance, but does place Swedenborg in the category of *philosophia prennis*, with many of its Platonic implications intact.²⁵⁸ Though an in-depth study to address problems with defining and identifying Neoplatonism in Swedenborg and his interlocutors is not within the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting that many of the factors complicating a direct connection to Kabbalah also relate to the question of Neoplatonic influence. Swedenborg's readers have long assumed he drew from a Neoplatonic understanding of the world and the soul, though the exact nature of this influence is elusive. Positive comparisons can be made in any number of specific instances, though alternative explanations can often be found. At the very least, scholars agree that the currents of Neoplatonism were certainly in the water, so to speak.

A third possible avenue for kabbalistic influence has been raised by Marsha Keith Schuchard. Schuchard's premise is that the reason Swedenborg was so silent when it came to Jewish Mysticism was that he was a secret practitioner of "Judaized Yoga" or "Tantric Kabbalah." His erotic meditative techniques, she argues, were taught to him directly by Jews and by Moravian acquaintances who acquired such practices from their missionary activity among the Jews of Europe and the Buddhists of Asia. In fact, she writes, Swedenborg was involved in a host of clandestine activities not the least of which

²⁵⁷ See Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 31-32, 55-56, 75-77, and 80-81.

²⁵⁸ See Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist*, 80-81, and 190-191.

was serving as a secret intelligence agent for the Swedish and French monarchies.²⁵⁹ Through her articles, books, and a recent biography of Swedenborg, she paints a picture of a man involved in high-level conspiracies and a practitioner of sexualized forms of mystical devotion. Through all of this, she argues, he was a master of Kabbalah, receiving wisdom from his *maggid* and achieving union with the *Shekhinah*, though these are terms never employed by Swedenborg himself. She asserts: “From August 1743 through July 1745, Swedenborg lived virtually incognito in Holland and London, where he studied Hebrew and advanced through the stages of kabbalistic visionary training.”²⁶⁰

Schuchard makes many claims regarding Swedenborg and Kabbalah that are difficult to verify or outright mistaken.²⁶¹ As reviewer Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke writes

²⁵⁹ For a discussion of Swedenborg’s relationship to members of the Swedish political party the Hats, and their support of an alliance with France and receipt of money from Louis XV, see Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg’s Secret: The Meaning and Significance of the Word of God, the Life of Angels, and Service to God* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2005), 353-366.

²⁶⁰ Marsha Keith Schuchard, “Emanuel Swedenborg: Deciphering the Codes of a Celestial and Terrestrial Intelligencer,” in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, edited by Elliot R. Wolfson, (New York : Seven Bridges Press 1999), 190.

²⁶¹ For example, many of her claims concerning Swedenborg’s supposed kabbalistic practices are grounded in the assertion that he knew and learned from Rabbi Samuel Falk, the “Ba’al Shem of London.” See, for example, Marsha Keith Schuchard, ‘From Poland to London: Sabbatean influences on the mystical underworld of Zinzendorf, Swedenborg, and Blake’, in *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit, MI, 2011), 260. Her evidence for this connection relies on her interpretation of numbers in his *Spiritual Diary*: “In his spiritual diary, Swedenborg described a charismatic magician and alchemist, whose features, garb, and rituals seem to point to the Ba’al Shem, who taught Kabbalah and performed Hermetic experiments for curious (and wealthy) Christians.” Her footnote to this statement references five unconnected numbers in Swedenborg’s *Spiritual Diary*. Two of the numbers (4047 and 4140) simply describe visions of candles and ornamental candlesticks. Presumably the fact that Falk was believed to have performed miracles by keeping candles alight for lengthy periods of time is the link Schuchard sees in these numbers. Number 3771 describes a vision of a Quaker community in the spiritual world, and does mention a man “seen ascending and speaking upon a certain platform, such as is constructed for diviners, who was said to have been one of their chiefs.” The description of the man ends there, but it is clear that the reference is to a Quaker, not a rabbi. In number 4072 Swedenborg simply describes seeing a tall man dressed in white “like the mass robes in our churches.” If anything, Swedenborg believes he is seeing a priest in this instance, and not Rabbi Falk. And finally, number 4305 describes seeing a man grinding meal and surrounded by mirrors, who Swedenborg compares to a magician, and who makes the statement that all things are illusory.

of her 2012 biography of Swedenborg, Schuchard's claims "regularly stretch the interpretation of her sources" and "verge on conspiracy theory."²⁶² Similar credulity issues follow her work on other figures as with her 2008 book *William Blake's Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision*.²⁶³ Swedenborg is not the only historical figure who becomes, in her world, practitioner of ritualized, Judaized, Orientalized sex. Despite these problems, her work has had a surprising reception in academia, where she has made it into more than one edited volume, and it is difficult to find a contemporary consideration of Swedenborg and Kabbalah that does not reference her work.²⁶⁴ Her problematic conclusions unfortunately obscure what would otherwise be an interesting set of questions posed by her study. What are the implications of the cultural and religious balagan that was London's East End in the mid-eighteenth century, where Jew, Moravian, Quaker and Mason lived in close quarters and might have met in a local coffee house or printing press? How is this context reflected in the visions and thought of Emanuel Swedenborg, who worked, socialized and published there during his most spiritually tumultuous years? Schuchard is right to pose such questions, but her answers veer too quickly into fantasy and lose their relevance.

²⁶² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, review of *Emanuel Swedenborg, Secret Agent on Earth and in Heaven: Jacobites, Jews, and Freemasons in Early Modern Sweden* by Martha Keith Schuchard, in *Reviews in History*. <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1236>, accessed September 27, 2016.

²⁶³ Marsha Keith Schuchard, *William Blake's Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision*, (Inner Traditions: 2008).

²⁶⁴ Volumes include: *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York : Seven Bridges Press 1999); *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011); *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, ed. Allison P. Coudert, Richard H. Popkin, and Gordon M. Weiner (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998).

As we wade through what little evidence we can gather, then, a picture emerges of a man who was familiar with Jewish mystical thought as interpreted by converts and Christian kabbalists in his early university years, and through the mediated influence of western esoteric and theosophical currents of the day, but beyond that we know very little for sure. The particulars of how he was influenced and which of his ideas might justifiably be credited to Kabbalah remains consigned to the art of speculation. Nevertheless, the comparisons are compelling. Swedish historian Martin Lamm describes the many analogies of thought between Swedenborg and Pico della Mirandola, all the while relenting that “We are unfortunately faced with the more or less impossibility of establishing by which route the doctrines of the Kabbalistic philosophy have reached him.”²⁶⁵ This doesn’t stop Lamm from attempting a few educated guesses, however, and he traces the possible routs of kabbalistic influence through medical documents in Swedenborg’s possession and through Swedish poet George Stiernhielm. He also notes the importance of Plotinus, whose *Enneads* was a common source of inspiration to both Pico and Swedenborg.²⁶⁶

Lamm’s comparative interest is shared by many. Lists of similarities between Swedenborg and Kabbalah most often cite 1) Swedenborg’s interest in the mystical significance of individual Hebrew letters,²⁶⁷ 2) the connection between earth and heaven

²⁶⁵ Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 284.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 55, 284.

²⁶⁷ The following example is taken from his *Spiritual Diary*, 4671: “every letter contained some idea, yea, the sense of the ideas; and he also taught me what [yod], what [aleph], and what [hey] signified; but, what the rest [of the letters] signified, it was not permitted him to tell: he said also that all things of the Word are inspired in this manner, and that the third heaven knows thence, when the Word is read by man in the Hebrew text, all the divine-celestial which is inspired, and that each and all the things therein treat of the Lord. Such a sense cannot be explained, because it is the celestial sense, of which not one idea can

mediated by the flow of influx, 3) the marriage relationship within the Godhead, or the uniting of “male” and “female” divine attributes, 4) the creation of the world from a single “point,”²⁶⁸ and finally and most frequently cited 5) *Adam Kadmon* of Kabbalah and Swedenborg’s *Maximus Homo* – that the realm of the Divine takes the shape of a human body. To this list, I would add sets of similarities depending on which kind of Kabbalah is in question. The Christian Kabbalah of Johan Kemper and Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont similarly allegorize the life of Christ as it relates to individual spiritual progression. Macroprosopus and Microprosopus of the *Kabbalah denudata* compare nicely with Swedenborg’s interpretation of the Divine *Esse* and *Exestere*. Another significant overlap with Christian Kabbalah is in what Elliot Wolfson terms “hypernomianism” in his study of Johann Kemper: that “the commandments possess an enduring spiritual value but that their practical application is limited to a specific time in history.”²⁶⁹ Hasidic Kabbalah is strikingly similar in a number of ways: its interpretation of biblical themes and figures as symbols for elements in the individual’s psychological and religious life;²⁷⁰ the language of microcosm and macrocosm to explain the relationship between human and divine worlds; the idea of *avodah be-gashmiyut*, or worship through mundane activity; and the concept that the angels are directly affected by the rituals and text study of earthly humans. To these sets of similarities, we can add

be expressed. From this it may be apparent, that the Word, according to the Lord's words, is inspired as to every jot and tittle.”

²⁶⁸ See Lamm’s discussion of Swedenborg’s *punctum naturale*, in Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 30-31. And on the primordial point of Kabbalah, see, for instance, Daniel Matt’s translation and notes in *The Zohar, Pritzker Edition: Translation and Commentary*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1:115b.

²⁶⁹ Wolfson, “Messianism,” 4.

²⁷⁰ Margolin, *The Human Temple*.

curious details, such as the fact that in both the *Zohar* and in Swedenborg's *Arcana*, priests are symbols for divine love,²⁷¹ or that Swedenborg's *reliquae*, or remnants of holiness buried in the souls of individuals, are represented in the Bible by the number ten, recalling the ten *sefirot* and the *nitzutzim* of Lurianic Kabbalah.²⁷²

With any such comparison, the differences are as significant as the similarities, and for all of the points listed above we could elaborate important distinctions. For example, the Christian Kabbalah of Kemper, while alike in allegorizing the life of Christ, differs in its pervasive reliance on Trinitarian theology (Swedenborg, as was said above, denounced the doctrine of the Trinity). Hasidic commentaries are alike for their internalizing hermeneutic, but differ in their regular reliance on word play and skilled manipulation of the Hebrew language for doing this, something Swedenborg's cursory knowledge of the language prevented him from doing even though he idealized Hebrew as the language of the angels.

Regardless of important differences, however, the fact of similarity is itself sometimes taken as evidence of influence: *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Renowned scholar of Jewish Mysticism, Moshe Idel, makes one such leap in his book *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*. He comments on a certain vision Swedenborg recorded of a girl dressed in black and joyfully moving between lights. In Swedenborg's words "I was told that the interior things of the Word are such when they first ascend.

²⁷¹ In *Arcana caelestia* 1728 Swedenborg writes that the Lord's divine truth is represented in the biblical symbol of king and the Lord's divine love is represented in the symbol of the priest. In the *Zohar*, king and priest are Binah and Hesed respectively. See Matt, *The Zohar*, 2:67b.

²⁷² See Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 576, 1906, 2075 and elsewhere.

The black dress stood for the Word in the letter. Afterwards, a young girl flew towards the right cheek, but this was only seen by the interior sight.” Noting that Swedenborg says nothing of the dress of the second girl in the vision Idel muses: “she may correspond to the woman who discloses her secrets in the Zoharic parable. I would therefore suggest that Swedenborg has adapted kabbalistic material in his visions.”²⁷³ Idel is here comparing Swedenborg’s vision to a famous Zoharic parable of the Torah as a woman who reveals herself to her lover gradually in a series of unveilings. The similarity is interesting, and much more could be said about it,²⁷⁴ but Idel’s move to view this as a direct adaptation of kabbalistic material is not convincing. He glosses over an important difference between the two mystical accounts, namely that in Swedenborg’s account neither of the girls remove articles of clothing or in any way reveal hidden parts of themselves to the spectator.

Comparison is seductive, as the more sober proprietors of theory and methodology would remind us, and the recognition of patterns is not to be trusted as evidence of contiguity. Wouter Hanegraaff and Friedemann Stengel are two contemporary scholars who firmly downplay such similarities in their discussions of Swedenborg’s possible relationship to Kabbalah, insisting that other explanations can

²⁷³ Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 305.

²⁷⁴ A more interesting comparison than the one Idel makes is with Swedenborg’s first girl, the one in the black dress. Gershom Scholem writes of *Tikkune Zohar*: “[The] idea of the garment of the Torah recurs over and over again in this latest section of the *Zohar*, though with very divergent shades of meaning. It is based on the identification of the *Shekhinah* (who is also the Queen of Matrona) with the Torah as it was revealed to men. It is stated several times, for example, that the color of her garments after the fall of man, but in particular during the period of exile, is black in token of mourning. But in other passages the color black is related to the literal meaning of the Torah, which is the first layer of meaning to be discerned in it.” In *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 67,

nearly always be found.²⁷⁵ Swedenborg's *Maximus Homo*, for instance, can be explained by his dedicated and lengthy study of human anatomy. That the organizing structure of the heavens is in the image of a human body suggests that his religious imagination simply borrowed from his intricate knowledge of the body's organs and systems. The Zohar's "Primordial Man," according to this argument, is not the same figure. To take similarity as evidence of influence is what Jonathan Z. Smith calls the confusion of homeopathic and contagious magic.²⁷⁶

Comparison nevertheless has its place, as the likes of Jonathan Z. Smith, Kimberley Patton and others have so artfully demonstrated. Just as we must clarify what comparison cannot tell us, we must also ask what it can tell us. In Swedenborg's case, we can safely assume that the comparison to Kabbalah would not have been entirely lost on Swedenborg himself. Given all that has been said above; given the philosemitic environment at Uppsala and other European universities, his close relationship with his brother-in-law Eric Benzelius, his admiration of Leibniz, and the growing association of Kabbalah with allegory, we have to assume that he would have been aware at least of the potential association readers would make. That is to say, while we cannot determine with any certainty which of his concepts or methods are borrowed from Jewish or Christian Kabbalah, however similar they appear, we can assume that taken as a whole, his commentary would look somewhat kabbalistic to the average European intellectuals of

²⁷⁵ Hanegraaff, "Swedenborg, the Jews," 135-154; Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 408-419.

²⁷⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 21.

his day, and these were Swedenborg's target audience.²⁷⁷ Therefore, just as, for instance, his overly zealous distinction between the infinite and the finite, found in *De infinito*, is best understood as a distancing from Spinoza's pantheism as we saw in the last chapter, the distance he places between his interpretations and Jewish hermeneutics should be understood in context: both the context of eighteenth-century conceptions of Kabbalah, and the context of the history of Jewish-Christian relations in Europe. A cursory study of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" will provide a way forward for thinking about Swedenborg and Kabbalah, given all that comparison can and cannot tell us about the relationship.

The Anxiety of Influence

While Bloom's theories on the "anxiety of influence" are primarily aimed at literature and poetry, the application to religious texts is an appropriate one. "Religion is spilled poetry"²⁷⁸ he writes in his work *Kabbalah and Criticism*. According to Bloom, influence, defined as "literary love, tempered by defense"²⁷⁹ moves along labyrinthine rather than linear lines. But the difficulty in tracing influence lies principally in the fact that a borrowed tradition is misread in transmission. A strong reading is always a creative

²⁷⁷ Benz argues that his target audience would be the university "As knowledge of the new natural sciences emanated from university lecterns and learned societies, Swedenborg thought that the truth of his writings could spread through the universities and gain an increasingly firm hold among scholars." His choice of the Latin language as well as the format and rhetorical style of Swedenborg's theological writings point to his intended readership, Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 490-491. In a 1767 letter to Dr. Gabriel Beyer this is explicit: "The universities of Christendom must first be instructed; then will come the teachers, for the new heaven has no influence upon the old spirituality which is based securely on the doctrine of justification by faith alone." See Document 234 in Tafel, ed., *Documents Concerning*, vol. II:1, 261.

²⁷⁸ Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 52.

²⁷⁹ Bloom, *Anatomy of Influence*, 8.

misreading. Precisely because of its novelty and inaccuracy, it has the potential for future life; it survives by suggesting yet another misreading. Bloom admits the troubling implications of this approach, but notes that literary critics and philosophers alike have turned their attention from the “thing in itself” to hermeneutics, to a study of the prejudices of the interpreter, a move he likens to Kabbalah: “The Talmud warns against reading Scripture by so inclined a light that the text reveals chiefly the shape of your own countenance. Kabbalah, like the poetry of the last two centuries, read Scripture only in so inclined, or figurative a defensive mode.”²⁸⁰ In his own creative misreading of Cordoverian Kabbalah, Bloom compares literary influence to the process of divine emanation, or the way in which the ten *sefirot* come to being in succession, each from the last. Like the *sefirot*, a poem contains all future misreading within it. When the new creation emerges, cause and effect are reversed, the child infuses the parent with new life, and both together empower a new generation.²⁸¹ This is an apt description, not only of the process of a poet’s use of his or her sources, but of the relationship between the Bible and the countless generations of commentaries and interpretations it has inspired, which themselves provide a kind of reverse inspiration, allowing for the Bible’s continued relevance in foreign contexts.

The Bible has been inspiring “creative misprision” for over two thousand years. By exploring the contours of the reading and misreading that occurs between Jewish and Christian sources over the centuries, a discourse emerges that belies any understanding of

²⁸⁰ Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 90.

²⁸¹ For a description of the “behinot sequence” and how it relates to literary influence, see Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 64-70.

these as two, distinct traditions, even when, or perhaps especially when, the commentaries themselves insist on such a distinction. In those moments when Christian and Jewish sources resemble each other, a study of comparisons can provide a narrative, not of origins, but of memory, or what Bloom calls “belatedness.” Latent, or forgotten, strategies in one tradition are triggered by the something in the presence of the other tradition. Like Swedenborg’s *reliquiae*, or the *nitzutzim* of Kabbalah, remnants of a shared heritage are discovered in hidden places, even if the shells that contain them are potentially destructive.

David Stern writes of the impact the critical theory of Harold Bloom and others has had on the study of ancient and medieval Jewish and Christian exegesis: “If the study of ancient exegesis over the last two decades has taught us anything, it is the lesson that interpretation is inevitably overdetermined. Multiple forces and sources seem always to feed into it.”²⁸² Rather than embracing the purity of genealogy, or polarized oppositions such as Hellenism and Hebraism, Stern argues that today’s scholars face an economy of negotiations being played out in the texts they study. Every interpretation is a negotiation on multiple levels, some of which scholars have access to, but some of which we can only guess at. The biblical interpreter *appropriates*, making the text his/her own, and this involves all the idiosyncrasies of any creative act. To understand exegetical texts, we must understand them as works of culture, read them “by using the comparative context

²⁸² David Stern, “Introduction: On Comparative Biblical Exegesis—Interpretation, Influence, Appropriation,” in Dohrmann and Stern, eds. *Jewish Biblical Interpretation*, 13.

to explore the different ways in which exegesis can be understood only by understanding one interpretation and its tradition in the context of others.”²⁸³

We might also consider, in this vein, the work of two scholars who consider instances of the anxiety of influence between Jews and Christians, and the slipperiness of Kabbalah in particular. Yehuda Liebes who explores the question of Christian influence on the Zohar, chiefly points to evidence in the text of a response to Christian trinitarianism.²⁸⁴ He highlights resemblances in the figure of R. Simeon b. Yohai to Jesus Christ, and to evidence of Christian influence in Zoharic formulations of Genesis 1:1. All of this is explainable, argues Liebes, when you consider the decidedly Christian context in which the Zohar was written. However, while such concepts may have been impacted by Christianity, the meaning behind them changed significantly in the new context. For instance, while we do find something of a father/son relationship within God, “in the Zohar the time of the ‘son’ is definitely not the messianic era; on the contrary, it refers to the period of exile. The ‘son’ is seen as defective and marred by barrenness, while the Messiah is a transformed version of this ‘son.’”²⁸⁵ Liebes concludes that it is in light of this influence that we should reconsider the interpretive abilities of Christian Kabbalists, who saw evidence of the trinity everywhere in the Zohar and may have even preserved Christological elements in the Zohar that were edited out in Jewish copies.²⁸⁶ Their

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸⁴ Liebes, “Christian Influences.”

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

failure to grasp the polemical elements of the Zohar's "son" should come as no surprise, but should be seen as one more generation of creative misprision.

Another example of contemporary scholarship that informs how we think about influence between Judaism and Christianity is that of Peter Schäfer. His research into feminine images of the divine in Christianity and Kabbalah explores the nature of influence in Jewish-Christian contexts: "influence does not describe the relationship of two entities, one of which is the 'original' and 'active' partner, while the other is its 'passive' counterpart, a receptacle that receives and imbibes material without changing it."²⁸⁷ Schäfer argues that to trace the feminine aspect of divinity in one direction or the other – to say that Christians adopted kabbalistic language, or that it was Jews who were influenced by Mariology – is to miss the point that these traditions have always occupied the same world. Christianity and Judaism should be viewed "not as two essentialized self-contained entities, but as two poles of one spectrum or as two components of one religious discourse constantly engaged in active relationship. This relationship produces various configurations—positive and negative, friendly and hostile, attracting and rejecting—but it is always a relationship, which (consciously or unconsciously) never obliterates their common origin."²⁸⁸ Following Bloom, Schäfer traces the anxiety of influence as it related to feminine images of God, and especially as triggered by the figure of Mary, mother of Christ.²⁸⁹ Mary seems to have been a lightning rod for

²⁸⁷ Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 231.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 232-233.

²⁸⁹ See also Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, The Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context," in *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Association for Jewish Studies, Apr., 2002), 1-52.

expressions of such anxiety, as anti-Jewish and anti-Christian sentiments were able to be expressed through images and legends of Mary in both traditions. Such depictions, however, bore the markings of a complex itinerary: “the polemical rejection of Mary’s function in the process of the salvation of humankind does not necessarily exclude the positive adaptation of her role and attributes through the transformation of the Christian narrative into a bold Jewish counternarrative.”²⁹⁰ That the figure of Mary could at once express polarization and creativity speaks to the intimate nature of the communities in question.

Swedenborg and the Anxiety of Influence

Swedenborg is best interpreted in light of this history of negotiation and influence, of adaptation and resistance. His embrace of allegorical modes of interpretation would have made his commentary comparable to kabbalistic commentaries coming out of Uppsala and elsewhere, such as those produced by Johan Kemper discussed in chapter one. Resurrecting the old familiar trope of Jewish carnality from the grave sites of Jerome, Augustine, Martin Luther and others, marked his spiritual interpretations as distinctly and traditionally Christian. In doing so, he bears the markings of the many cultural negotiations at play in his day and in the centuries preceding.

Swedenborg insisted that no mystic, Christian or Jew, influenced his theosophical views. When asked by a friend about views on the writings of Jakob Böhme in 1767, he replied that he could not judge Böhme’s writings because he never read them: “I was

²⁹⁰ Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 216.

forbidden to read writers on dogmatic and systematic theology, before heaven was opened to me; because unfounded opinions and inventions might thereby have easily insinuated themselves, which afterwards could only have been removed with difficulty.”²⁹¹ It may very well be true that Swedenborg never formally studied the work of Böhme or others whose visions and hermeneutics so closely resemble his own. However, I share the perspective of scholar of comparative mysticism Steven Katz, who argues that the pre-experiential patterns of the mystic’s surrounding religious and social structures necessarily affect his mystical experience.²⁹² The various cultural and spiritual negotiations being played out in the lives of those in Swedenborg’s relational orbit, as well as the tensions inherent in those negotiations, are evident in his experiences, in his theology and in his commentary. This fact does not disaffirm the sense of originality he expresses. Harold Bloom writes of “sublime” literature in particular, quoting Longinus: “. . . sublime literature transports and enlarges its readers. Reading a sublime poet, such as Pindar or Sappho, we experience something akin to authorship: ‘We come to believe we have created what we have only heard.’”²⁹³ I argue that this experience of the sublime, and the accompanying confusion between reader and author is at play in biblical commentary, and especially in mystical biblical commentary. Emerson, who was himself deeply immersed in Swedenborgian thought, “declared himself free of precursors: ‘That which I can gain from another is never tuition but only provocation,’ fit motto for a

²⁹¹ Emanuel Swedenborg letter to Dr. Beyer, February, 1767, in Tafel, ed., *Documents Concerning*, vol. II:1, doc. 234, 260-261.

²⁹² Steven Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven Katz, 22-74 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

²⁹³ Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence*, 18.

prophet rather than a poet”²⁹⁴ writes Bloom. If we understand the claim of originality to be an indication of sublimity, a conversation emerges between an author and numerous feeds of information. Assimilation breeds antagonism, but also creativity.

Swedenborg’s *Philosopher’s Notebook* contains, as discussed above, three quotations from Leibniz and Grotius with content on Kabbalah, and are the only instances of the word Kabbalah in his own handwriting. A fourth, related, quotation on page 178 of the Codex contains a few curious omissions. He records some thoughts on messianic prophecies from Hugo Grotius’ *De veritate religionis christianae*, but leaves out the source of the interpretation being discussed. The lines Swedenborg left out have been helpfully provided in brackets by Alfred Acton in his 1931 English translation. The quotations with bracketed lines reinserted are as follows:

[The Jews themselves were not unaware that many things in the Sacred Writings must be understood in a figurative sense, such as] that the wolf should lie down with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, the lion with the ox, and that a little child should sport with snakes; that the mountain of God should rise above other mountains; that strangers should come thither to perform holy rites. [Some things are promised definitely and without condition, and] if they have not yet been fulfilled, they can still be expected.

[The Cabalistic Jews set up a certain son of Enoch as a medium between God and man, without any indication that he had any such great power. How much more justly shall we set Him up who has given us so many testimonies of His power.] Nor does this tend to the lessening of God the Father from whom this power came to Jesus, and to whom it will return, and whose honor it serves.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁹⁵ As quoted in Swedenborg, *Philosopher’s Notebook*, 379. From Hugo Grotius *De veritate religionis christianae*, 347-348 and 366.

The second paragraph, which contains the explicit reference to Kabbalah, compares Christian conceptions of Christ to kabbalistic conceptions of Enoch, as a means of elevating the relationship between Father and Son. The first paragraph, however, is telling for the fact that Swedenborg copied sections that were interesting to him for their interpretation of the Prophets, while intentionally leaving out the line about Jewish figuration. Was the idea of Jewish allegory uninteresting to him, or did he pass over these lines because of the dissonance they would have caused with his understanding of Jews, that they “worship external things” and know only the “external sense” of scripture? It is my contention that Harold Bloom’s concept of “poetic misprision” helps us understand the kind of erasure we see in Swedenborg’s notebook. As Schäfer writes, concerning the application of Bloom’s ideas to Jewish-Christian relations: “the act of re-creation is tantamount to ‘killing’ the transmitted; thus the inevitable feeling of anxiety towards the ‘source’ that is transformed and recreated, the ambivalence of attraction and repulsion.”²⁹⁶ Swedenborg’s notebook was not intended for publication, and we cannot assume that the omission was out of any sense of fear that reliance on Jewish interpretations would challenge his reputation. However, we can assume that the Jewish origin of the particular interpretation in question was displeasing to him, given the nature of the other entries in the notebook. His notebook was created for the purpose of recording the sources of content that was meaningful to him. Credit is given everywhere else in the text.

²⁹⁶ Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 232

The notebook omission provides evidence that Swedenborg would have certainly known about Jewish allegorical interpretation, and would have been aware of kabbalistic interpretive activities that had nothing to do with alchemy. This notion is reinforced by his connection to Uppsala University scholarship on Jewish and Christian Kabbalah. His strongly worded negative descriptions of Jewish literalism and carnality suggest a defensive stance, or what Bloom terms “kenosis,” the act of isolating oneself from one’s sources of influence. In addition to his treatment of Jewish interpretive abilities, we can understand Swedenborg’s placement of the “Jewish Church” in the decline of human religious history as, in Bloom’s sense, kenotic. That the term more frequently refers to Christ’s emptying his divinity in order to take on a human nature is a telling coincidence. Christian exegetes, in the image of Christ, empty themselves of the Jewish heritage associated with their Bible, a practice initiated by Paul and carried on through the generations by so many Bible scholars who denounced Judaism while also mining its resources for the precious stones that can best refract religion’s light.

Conclusion: Types and Stereotypes

Swedenborg’s understanding of the role of the Jewish Church in history is tangled up with his understanding of the nature of Jewish people living in his day and their inability to interpret scripture correctly. Descriptions of the Jews in his theological work slip between the past tense and the present tense without a thought. He generalizes across time and space, painting a picture of Judaism that is flat, entirely without nuance. Generalizations are also leveled at Moravians, Quakers, Catholics, Africans, the Dutch, and more. Christians as a whole are condemned in several places for corrupting the true

faith. Swedenborg was not alone, of course, in creating broad taxonomies of race and culture or in offering judgements about the spiritual qualities of certain categories of people. These generalizations were not out of order for his time. If they raised eyebrows, it was because of the backdrop of conversations with angels and spirits, not because of stereotyping. Of the many objections readers of his day made in to his published works, anti-Judaism was not high on the list.²⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the labeling of Jews as purely “external” in nature pervades his construction of history and religion in a way the other generalizations do not.

It is my contention that the anti-Judaism we find in Swedenborg is the result of the anxiety of influence. On one hand it is the inherited anxiety of Christendom, whose reading and interpreting of the Bible was indebted to and challenged by Jewish sources. On the other hand, it is a personal anxiety of influence, for a man whose travels through heaven and hell and whose allegorical methods of interpretation bore too much resemblance to the sources of kabbalistic thought he was exposed to as a young man.

My argument is not that Swedenborg intentionally copied any particular Jewish or kabbalistic concept. He may have, but the evidence for such intentionality is weak. I am arguing that the likeness between his commentary and aspects of Kabbalah would not have been lost on him, and that this awareness triggered a defensive appeal to stereotypes of Jewish literalism available to him from familiar sources such as Augustine and Luther. It is also my contention that Swedenborg’s commentary can be read, in Bloom’s words, as a “creative misreading” of Jewish and Christian sources before him and that his work

²⁹⁷ More will be said about these objections in part 3.

reflects the complex history of these sibling traditions. To better demonstrate how Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence plays out in Swedenborg's biblical commentaries, the following chapter will undertake a close reading of the interpretation of Genesis 3 in *Arcana coelestia*, where the Jewish Church figures prominently in an allegorical reading of Adam, Eve and the serpent of Eden.

**CHAPTER 4: SENSUALIA ET SCIENTIFICA: A READING OF ARCANA COELESTIA ON
GENESIS 3**

In considering the discourse within Swedenborg's own writing, the topic of part two of this dissertation, we have so far looked at allegory from two perspectives: on the one hand in the relationship between Swedenborg's biblical interpretation and his philosophical and scientific career, and on the other hand, in the troubled relationship to Jews and Judaism that manifests as he works out a spiritual sense that both resembles Kabbalah and denies Jews the ability to interpret beyond a literal reading. In this chapter we will explore the format and content of *Arcana coelestia* and through a reading of his commentary on Genesis 3, will see how these two threads come together in this one example. For, in the single figure of Eden's serpent, Swedenborg presents the spiritual pitfalls common to Jews and scientists alike:

The pages to come, though, by the Lord's divine mercy, will reveal how the snake destroyed those lowest things in pre-Flood people through a focus on the senses and through self-love. They will show how the snake destroyed them among Jews through a concern with sensory experiences, tradition, and trivialities, and through self-love and materialism. Then they will show how the snake has destroyed and is destroying people at the present day through sensory, scientific, and philosophical matters, and once more through self-love and materialism.²⁹⁸

The traits represented by the serpent caused not only the first great fall of the human race (see more on this below), but also the fall of the Jewish people and the fall of learned men in Swedenborg's day. And what were these sins? We find here, and repeated throughout this chapter the pairing of two qualities, marking two particular ways of

²⁹⁸ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 259 [2].

knowing that lead one astray: the sensory and the scientific, *sensualia et scientifica*. This pairing occurs 14 times in Swedenborg's interpretation of Genesis 3. And in three of these instances a third kind of knowledge, philosophical, joins the two (as in the above quotation). These qualities, these ways of knowing, are indicators for the faulty logic and moral corruptibility of both Jews and academicians: two categories of people who receive a great deal of Swedenborg's attention as he decodes the Eden story. In this chapter we will consider this interpretation at some length in order to demonstrate Swedenborg's methods of interpretation as an example of eighteenth century allegory. As with the four commentaries we considered in chapter one, Swedenborg's engagement with allegory was tied to epistemological developments during the Age of the Enlightenment and to the discourse about Christian and Jewish religious identity and interpretive abilities.

Before embarking on a reading of Genesis 3 through *Arcana coelestia*, two introductory matters will be considered. The first is the degree to which Swedenborg's concerns regarding *sensualia et scientifica* are autobiographical. This will provide us the opportunity to refer to the unpublished commentary he wrote prior to *Arcana*, *Explicatio in Verbum Historicum Veteris Testamenti* (The Word of the Old Testament Explained, 1746), in which his personal spiritual crisis is openly incorporated into the allegorical interpretation of Genesis and Exodus. Secondly, I will present a general introduction to the format, content, and publishing history of *Arcana* to provide the necessary background for a close reading of the text.

Selling off Silver and Cattle: Swedenborg's Spiritual Crisis

As we saw in chapter three, the anxiety Swedenborg experienced towards the end of his scientific career is recorded in his unpublished journals, where he described vivid visions and dreams. According to his interpretations of these experiences, he associated sexual desire and other temptations of the senses with his appetite for acquiring knowledge and with a longing to be praised for his intellectual accomplishments. As he moved away from scientific and philosophical matters and turned toward the study of the Bible, traces of this anxiety lingered and made their way into his commentaries. In the following four numbers from the unpublished *Explicatio*, he interprets the selling of silver, livestock and land by the Egyptians in famine time from Genesis 47. His interpretation begins in abstract and universal terms, discussing the pitfalls of knowledge without spiritual application. His first two autobiographical statements are parenthetical, but he soon drops the brackets and with an increasingly agitated tone identifies personally with the starving Egyptians, and ends with a direct appeal to God for guidance.

The cognitions themselves are signified by silver. These are of no use without application to things spiritual. They are the first things to be taken away, so that the cognitions which have hitherto been made, thus serve no use, being without application to things heavenly. (If I am deprived of these, as now appears, then the cognitions hitherto granted me by the divine mercy of God Jesus Christ are of no use; thus up to now the labor has been in vain, this being a consequence).

Cattle and the like, together with horses, also signify interior cognitions, like horses; here, they signify the pleasures and cupidities of the world. (These also are taken away from me, so that I dare nothing, I know nothing, as to whither I shall go.)

The land is the intellect belonging to the mind. This is taken away at the same time, so that I understand almost nothing; for so do evil spirits obscure me, and the things which I may be able to write are given me piecemeal.

This is my state today, exactly as was presignified to the man of Egypt. What further these words mean, I know not. I await thy salvation, God Messiah!²⁹⁹

This pleading prayer is followed by a line drawn across the page, and the rest of the page is left blank.³⁰⁰ The interpretation resumes on the next page, returning to universal principles and without the use of first-person pronouns. The commentary takes on a personal tone again over a hundred numbers later, when considering Jacob's end-of-life words to his son Dan, in which he declares that Dan "shall be a serpent upon the way, an asp upon the path; he shall bite the horse's heels, and his rider shall fall backward."³⁰¹ Here, we realize the origin of Swedenborg's previous supplication in Jacob's words "I await your salvation, O Lord!" and the verse triggers again the insertion of Swedenborg's own life story into the biblical narrative. The serpent, he explains, signifies science.³⁰² Dan, who bites the heels of horses, causing the rider to fall back, signifies those who "by means of their own sciences . . . wish to scrutinize and search out things superior, such as things spiritual and celestial."³⁰³ Of his own life, he then writes of falling backwards in this way:

²⁹⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Word of the Old Testament Explained*, trans. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1928-1951), 423-425. Evidence in *Explicatio* of Swedenborg's troubled state is currently the subject of research by George Dole and I am indebted to conversations with him for these insights.

³⁰⁰ See Emanuel Swedenborg, *Emanuelis Swedenborgii autographa* Tom. VIII, *Explicationes in verbum, seu Adversaria* II:270 (Holmiae: ex officina phototypographica Lagrelius & Westphal, 1901-1916) 2:270.

³⁰¹ Dan in Hebrew means Judge.

³⁰² Swedenborg, *Adversaria*, 2:1273. English translation from Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Word of the Old Testament Explained*, vol. 3, trans. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1934) 2962. For an explanation of the difference in paragraph numbering between the manuscript and Acton's translation, see "Prefatory Remarks," in Alfred Acton, *Introduction to the Word Explained: A Study of the Means by which Swedenborg the Scientist and Philosopher became the Theologian and Revelator* (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1927), 4-5.

³⁰³ Swedenborg, *Adversaria*, 2:1279. English translation from Acton, trans., *The Word*, 3:2969.

I should confess that whenever I have desired to consult the understanding in those things which are heavenly, I seem to myself to fall backward; and this so clearly, and on such innumerable occasions, that unless, by the divine mercy of God Messiah, I had been at once returned to the way, I would quickly have fallen backward. Thus I have the clearest experience before my eyes. Wherefore, human philosophy can never enter into things which are spiritual and celestial, but spiritual and celestial things must introduce the natural.³⁰⁴

This last statement, that philosophy cannot enter into spiritual things, echoes the old formulation that philosophy is the handmaid to theology. However, Swedenborg is situated in an age that challenged this arrangement in stark terms. His sentiment, for instance, resonates with Kant's understanding of the limits of human reason, but Kant formulates his distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal as a critique of metaphysics (as will be discussed in chapter 5), while Swedenborg's distinction results in a critique of the sciences. He himself has experienced the limits of human philosophy, and has been thrown off his horse countless times with the inappropriate application of science to higher things rather than the other way around. That Swedenborg knows firsthand the sting of the serpent's bite is relevant to our understanding of his published interpretation of Genesis 3 in *Arcana coelestia*. The cause of his fall relates, as it were, to the cause of humanity's first fall and present-day fall, and the cause of its darkest days during the era of the "Jewish Church." This will all be illuminated below. Some introductory remarks on *Arcana coelestia* are in order first.

Publishing the Secrets of Heaven

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 2: 1282. English translation from Acton, trans., *The Word*, 3:2971.

While Swedenborg's earlier attempt at a commentary on Genesis and Exodus in *Explicatio* was never published, his more systematic and fulsome *Arcana coelestia* appeared in print in London beginning with the first volume in 1749, in quarto format. In a likely attempt to improve sales, volume 2 was published simultaneously in English and Latin versions, and printed one chapter at a time. The experiment did not continue, however, and the remaining six volumes were published whole and in Latin only. All eight volumes were published anonymously, with the final volume arriving in 1756, and the entire project was financed by Swedenborg personally.³⁰⁵ While we do not know the reason why he published it anonymously, we know that his identity was generally known by 1761. Swedenborg's choice of a London printer should be understood in light of the religious freedom and the thriving new publishing industry that arose uniquely in this environment. John Feather writes: "In the eighteenth century, the English book trade flourished as never before in its history. The comparative freedom of the press, the abolition or abandonment of traditional controls on personnel, the growth of a leisured and wealthy class of cultured readers, and the development of an international market for English books all made their contribution to its commercial success."³⁰⁶ The publication of *Arcana coelestia* was therefore part of a larger moment in the history of the printed book: Swedenborg was on the forefront of a newly mechanized enterprise for producing and distributing written work.

³⁰⁵ The estimated cost of the total printing is £3,200 pounds. On the question of financing, and receipt of money from Louis XV, see Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, 353-366.

³⁰⁶ John Feather, "British Publishing in the Eighteenth Century: A Preliminary Subject Analysis," *Library* 8 (1986), 32.

One aspect of the British printing trade that characterized the age was the emergence of the advertisement, and this too, Swedenborg was privy to. John Lewis, bookseller and printer, handled the publication and in his advertisement for the English translation, praises the work for its erudition, innovation and freedom from tradition:

This work is intended to be such an exposition of the whole Bible, as was never attempted in any language before. The Author is a learned foreigner, who wrote and printed the first volume of the same work but last year, all in Latin, which may be seen at my shop in Paternoster Row, as above mentioned. . . He hath struck out a new path through this deep abyss, which no man ever trod before; he has left all the commentators and expositors to stand on their own footing; he neither meddles nor interferes with any of them; his thoughts are all his own; and the ingenious and sublime turn he has given to everything in the Scripture, he has copied from no man; and therefore, even in this respect, he hath some title to the regard of the ingenious and learned world.³⁰⁷

If Swedenborg's commentary was entirely unique, as Lewis advertised, it was not because of his allegorical methods, but because of the nature of the non-exegetical material included. Swedenborg's *Arcana* is only one part biblical commentary. Each chapter in this eight volume opus begins and ends with a section on "The Marvels – things seen in the world of spirits and in the angelic heaven."³⁰⁸ These accounts, which detail such things as the nature of heaven and hell, the speech of angels, and the experience of waking up after death, bookend each episode of biblical commentary, and are entirely unrelated thematically to the exegetical material. Many of the *memorabilia* or

³⁰⁷ John Lewis, "Advertisement," as found in Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church, in England, America, and Other Parts: Particularly in Reference to its External Manifestation by Public Worship, Preaching, and the Administration of the Sacraments, with Other Ordinances of the Church*, ed. Edward Madeley (London: Hodson & Son, 1861) 2-3.

³⁰⁸ Swedenborg, "Author's Introductory Note," in *Arcana caelestia*.

“memorable relations” as they are often referred to in English, continue between chapters as episodes or installments of a larger essay.³⁰⁹ This method was not repeated in any of the many subsequent theological works he published, and in fact his very next publication, *De Coelo et Ejus Mirabilibus, et de Inferno, ex Auditis et Visis* (Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: Drawn from Things Heard and Seen, 1758), is a work singularly focused on his other-worldly experiences. As we will see in the final chapters of this dissertation, the layering of two modes, or genres, of writing had repercussions for how *Arcana coelestia* was received: critics and philosophers such as Immanuel Kant tended to focus solely on Swedenborg’s memorable relations; religious followers tended to emphasize, and preach on, the exegetical material; while artists and poets, such as William Blake, responded to the combination.

Whether or not this method was effectual, Swedenborg gives his reasons for the unique arrangement at the beginning of chapter two:

The Lord, in his divine mercy has given me the opportunity to learn the inner meaning of the Word, which contains deeply hidden secrets that no one has ever been aware of before. No one can become aware of them without learning how things stand in the other life, since almost all of the Word’s inner meaning looks, speaks, and points to that life. For these reasons I have been granted the privilege of disclosing what I have heard and seen over the past several years of interaction with spirits and angels.³¹⁰

His presentation of visionary experiences therefore serves as a kind of evidence, not only of his being gifted the ability to understand scripture from God and heaven, but

³⁰⁹ These “memorable relations” do appear also in *Explicatio in Verbum*, though in a less systematic, more associative style. They are marked, not as opening and closing sections of each chapter as in *Arcana*, but simply with marginal indentation wherever they land.

³¹⁰ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 67.

of the very nature of scripture, that it serves as a conduit to other dimensions of spiritual reality. In several places in *Arcana coelestia*, Swedenborg describes how the Bible is perceived and interpreted by the angels in three heavens. In number 167, for example, he writes that those in the lowest heaven reenact for each other, in a dramatic production, the literal stories of the Bible, while the angels of the second, or spiritual heaven, perform the stories with finer detail and attention to their inner meaning. The angels of the third and highest heaven, the celestial heaven, enact a meaning of the text that is ineffable and infinite: “in great richness . . . filled with angelic ideas for which there are no words, and by the Lord’s good pleasure, they see it in all its boundless variety.”³¹¹

While Swedenborg has much to say about the way scripture is interpreted on various heavenly planes, he does not encourage others to seek the kind of direct access to heaven and hell that he has been granted. Whatever connection to angels a reader of the Bible initiates, certain veils are not meant to be lifted. Consequently, an important effect of the way Swedenborg combines his experiences and his exegesis is that he claims unique authority to interpret directly from God, bypassing ecclesiastical authority and tradition. As discussed above, he denies the influence of any tradition or teacher. He dismisses past attempts by Christians to allegorize as misguided, and associates Jewish mystical interpretation with alchemy.

Wouter Hanegraaff argues on the basis of Swedenborg’s claim of independence from tradition that Swedenborg’s spiritual sense is distinctly Protestant: it is from

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

scripture alone, and by the grace of God that the Word is opened to him.³¹² However, Swedenborg might better be understood as part of a tradition of charismatic interpreters reaching into the Middle Ages. Robert Lerner, for instance, has described a particular school of thought developed in the high and later Middle Ages that utilized an “ecstasy defense” against charges of heresy. Robert Liege, Joachim of Fiore, Arnold of Villanova, and many more, produced innovative interpretations of the Bible on the basis of visions and miraculous experiences. Swedenborg especially fits the profile of this school of thought, with its emphasis on illuminating the spiritual sense of scripture (a gift distinguished from prophecy), on decoding the book of Revelation in particular, and on progressivist interpretations of human religious history. In this light, Swedenborg’s is not uniquely Protestant, but part of a thread with pre-reformation roots devised to challenge authority and to justify exegetical innovations in a “framework of subversive historical theology.”³¹³ Joachim of Fiore is an important predecessor to Swedenborg, given that he so effectively set the stage for future Christian conceptions of typology and of religious history. Joachim believed that the Old Testament represented the historical age of the Father, the New Testament the age of Christ, and the Apocalypse the age of the Spirit to come. He believed that he lived to witness the beginning of the final age; that ecclesiastical reforms of his time would signal the messianic era; and that by correctly interpreting the actions of present-day popes and kings, he could decipher the unfolding

³¹² Wouter Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant: Three Perspectives on the Secrets of Heaven*, (West Chester, Pennsylvania: The Swedenborg Foundation, 2007), 25.

³¹³ Robert E. Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” in *Speculum*, vol. 67, no. 1 (The University of Chicago Press, January, 1992), 47. On continuity between medieval and early modern biblical interpretation, see Deeana Klepper, “Theories of Interpretation,” in *New Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol 3 1450-1750*, ed. Euan Cameron, (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

of events predicted by biblical figures.³¹⁴ All of this has interesting parallels in Swedenborg's work, and his version of the successive eras of religious history will be explored below.

We can trace Swedenborg's messianic interests to well before he began writing *Arcana coelestia*,³¹⁵ but over time Swedenborg comes to view the unlocking of scripture provided in his own publications as the second coming of Christ, the inauguration of the new and final age predicted in the book of Revelation.³¹⁶ The devastating events in Revelation do not describe the second coming literally, but are all symbolic for a spiritual upheaval, a rebalancing of heaven and hell that will occur at the end of one era (the Christian Church) and the beginning of a new one (the New Church). The opening up of the secrets of scripture is one effect of this event, and Swedenborg believed himself to have been selected for the job of scribe. *Arcana coelestia*, as well as his other commentaries, such as his *Apocalypsis Revelata* (Apocalypse Revealed, 1766), were therefore understood by their author to be major moments in the Apocalypse itself.

However, not every book of the Bible concealed a hidden meaning, according to Swedenborg, and he believed an internal sense was revealed to him for just 29 Old Testament Books, and five from the New Testament. Swedenborg's small canon was a point of controversy among his readers, as we will see in chapter 6, but there is no tone of

³¹⁴ See Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "Epochs and Eras," in *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, 369-408 (Netherlands: Springer, 2004).

³¹⁵ See for instance the short, unpublished *De Messia Venturo in Mundum*, (On the Messiah Who is Going to Come into the World, 1745). English translation in *The Messiah About to Come*, trans, Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1949).

³¹⁶ *nunc liceat intellectualiter intrare in arcana fidei* "it is now permitted to enter understandingly into the mysteries of faith." *True Christianity*, 508.

apology in those places where he lists the books with a spiritual sense.³¹⁷ His rationale for the exclusion of so much of the Christian scriptures centers on the sayings of Christ and the fulfillment of prophecy in the events of the Christ story. He cites Luke 24:44, in which Jesus says: “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”³¹⁸ Swedenborg reasons that the Law includes the five books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. He adds the Major and Minor Prophets and the book of Psalms, and leaves out material otherwise categorized as wisdom literature or Writings. As for the New Testament, Swedenborg excludes all but the four Gospels and the book of Revelation.³¹⁹ The precise words of Christ, recorded in the Gospels alone, contain hidden wisdom: “all of which have concealed in them a spiritual sense, through which immediate communication with heaven is granted, while the writings of the Apostles contain no such sense, although they are nevertheless useful books for the church.”³²⁰ This language, acknowledging the usefulness of the rest of the New Testament material if not its holiness, echoes Luther’s reason for separating the deuterocanonical material from his Old Testament in 1534 under the heading: “Apocrypha: These books are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures, and yet are useful and good for reading.”³²¹ Whether or not Swedenborg consciously saw himself as either participating in, or improving on, Luther’s edited down canon, a spirit of reform and renewal pervades his commentaries. His messianic calling to uncover and record the

³¹⁷ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 2606 and 10325. For more on Swedenborg’s treatment of Paul, see the introduction to chapter 4.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6752:6.

³¹⁹ For a discussion of Swedenborg’s treatment of Paul’s Epistles, see Chapter 6.

³²⁰ Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Explained*, 815:2.

³²¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 337.

spiritual sense of scripture was overly ambitious, however, and only three of the 34 books of God's true Word received his full commentary: Genesis and Exodus in *Arcana coelestia*, and Revelation in *Apocalypsis Revelata*.

As for the format of the exegetical material in *Arcana coelestia*, it follows a consistent pattern. Each chapter of the Bible is first quoted in its entirety in Latin, drawing heavily on Sebastian Schmidt's 1696 Latin Bible. Swedenborg then gives a brief summary of the spiritual sense of the chapter, before beginning a lengthy, verse by verse study of the inner meaning. Each verse is quoted in turn a second time in the main body of the commentary, followed by paragraphs elucidating each word or phrase in that verse.³²² In the introduction to the latest English translation of *Arcana*, the New Century Edition, William Ross Woofenden and Jonathan Rose compare this format to the proofs of Euclid, whereby a proposition is stated, argued and proven in a design imitating geometric patterns.³²³ By considering the biblical text from these three vantage points—quoted by chapter, summarized and then scrutinized in verse and word—Swedenborg makes use of different “optical powers,”³²⁴ a metaphor suited to the hermeneutics of Swedenborg, who himself compared the perception of internal realities of spiritual things to seeing nature through a microscope.³²⁵

A major component of Swedenborg's biblical commentary is cross-referencing. Nearly every interpretive moment is reinforced with the quotation of one or more verses

³²² For a fuller discussion of this format and pattern, see the Reader's Guide to the New Century Edition of *Arcana caelestia* by William Ross Woofenden and Jonathan S. Rose in *Secrets of Heaven*, trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008-2014).

³²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

³²⁵ For example, Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary*, 680-681.

from different parts of the Bible. He most frequently uses proof texts from the Psalms and the Prophets, but the citations span the biblical corpus, including the New Testament, and draw on the extensive concordances he produced for himself from 1746-1748. His cross-references typically serve to reinforce a particular allegorical interpretation: to show how the meaning of a given word or concept is consistent throughout the Bible. For example, when introducing the inner sense of the serpent in Genesis 3, he cites five other instances of snakes in the Bible and elucidates their meaning in each context, demonstrating the consistency of the reference. The snake in Psalm 140:3-5 refers to people who “beguile others with false reasoning;” with Psalm 58:3-5 he describes those who “prevent people from listening to anything wise,” with Amos 5:19-20, those who place too much “confidence in the evidence of our senses,” with Jeremiah 46:20-24, those who are blinded by *sensualia et scientifica*, and with Job 20:16-17, those whose sophistic arguments are like the sound of a snake.³²⁶ These exhaustive references, coupled with the repetition required by his axiomatic method, make reading *Arcana coelestia* notoriously laborious, a point that will feature in our discussion of *Arcana coelestia*'s reception in the following chapters. It nevertheless creates a network of correspondences that reaches across the biblical text, intended to demonstrate the rootedness of certain symbols, that their meaning is fixed and consistent.³²⁷

³²⁶ Swedenborg, *Arcana coelestia*, 195.

³²⁷ Paul Ricoeur's understanding of symbols is similar to Swedenborg's in this respect, that they are “bound to the universe,” fixed in correspondences. See Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and Symbol” in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 45-69. On the history of French philosophical engagement with the concept of correspondences (a term Ricoeur does employ) see Lynn Rosellen Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

As we will see in part three of this dissertation, Swedenborg was criticized for his heavy emphasis on interpreting Old Testament texts by prominent contemporaries such as Immanuel Kant and John Wesley. However, such an emphasis was not out of place in the context of the work of Newton and Whinston, for instance, who took seriously the work of interpreting the Old Testament in light of new scientific and intellectual advancements, and amidst the surge in hermetic and kabbalistic interests among Swedenborg's predecessors. Neither should the emphasis be overstated, as typological readings in *Arcana coelestia* involve regular digressions into Gospel texts, and the book of Revelation receives special attention in later publications, as discussed above.

Finally, a word on Swedenborg's "senses," or the levels of meaning he finds encoded in the biblical text is in order. While there is much in *Arcana coelestia* to suggest Swedenborg intended a systematic, even mathematical, approach to the internal sense, in practice his interpretation is quite fluid.³²⁸ The number of senses varies from place to place: he sometimes divides them into three³²⁹ and other times into four.³³⁰ More frequently he simply refers to the "internal sense" as distinct from the "external sense" effectively dividing the levels of meaning into two broad categories, which can be then

³²⁸ On the discrepancy that often manifests between hermeneutical principles and practice in biblical exegesis, see Ocker, *Biblical Poetics*.

³²⁹ For example see Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 10614 [2], and *Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love and Wisdom*, trans. John C. Ager (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995), 221.

³³⁰ For example Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 4279 [2]. Also *Apocalypse Explained* 1024 and 1066. On the comparison between these four senses and other Christian and non-Christian four-fold models of interpretation see Lawrence, "Speaking of Something Else." See also William R. Woofenden, "Doctrinal Patterns in *Arcana caelestia*," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 7:4 (January 1992): 31-47; 8:1 (July 1993): 49-77; 8:2 (July 1993): 29-53; 8:3 (December 1993): 43-63.

subdivided in various arrangements.³³¹ Rather than force a consistent pattern or framework onto the content of Swedenborg's interpretation, we do better to identify the general themes or references. The internal sense usually refers to one of three things: the spiritual growth of the individual, the history of churches or eras, or the life of Christ. Each of these three follows a developmental model and concerns the process of spiritual growth or "regeneration." An interpretation of a given word or verse in the Bible might reference one, two, or all three of these themes. It might reference, for example, Jesus' education when he was a child, while also speaking to the childhood of people more generally, or the infancy of the human species during ancient times. We can identify certain emphases in certain sections or volumes of *Arcana coelestia*, but he does not treat these three themes systematically.³³² He can move from one to another without notice, or discontinue one line of inquiry before it reaches a full conclusion. Therefore, while Swedenborg's tone is often scientific or systematic, his train of thought can be circuitous. This is not surprising given the overall content of the work, and it again brings to mind that *Arcana coelestia* is at least as much a record of his religious experience as it is doctrinal exposition.

For all its inconsistencies, one premise remains constant in *Arcana coelestia*. Fundamental to Swedenborg's hermeneutics, and the concept upon which his exegetical and theological writings build, is the division of every spiritual reality into two essential

³³¹ This division into two basic categories that are then subdivided fits a pattern in the history of Christian biblical interpretation. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Marc Sabanc (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 25-26. For a historical overview of various divisions between senses by Christian exegetes, see Klepper, "Theories of Interpretation."

³³² See Wouter Hanegraaff's chart in the Introduction to Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, 98.

parts: love and wisdom. In God, Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are married. In humans as well, these faculties can be discerned: as the human brain is divided into right and left hemispheres, the human mind is divided into will (love) and intellect (wisdom). The heavens are likewise divided into celestial (loving) and spiritual (wise) realms. They correspond to the sibling virtues of goodness and truth, and their hellish counterparts are evil and falsity. In the human body they correspond to the heart and the lungs. In worship they are the bread and the wine, and so forth. The importance of this fundamental dualism for understanding Swedenborg's biblical interpretation cannot be overstated.³³³ Love and wisdom correspond to every biblical pairing: sun and moon, the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air, Abram and Sarai, Esau and Jacob, priests and prophets, tree and river, curtain and board, pearl and jewel, etc. Their imbalance is the subject of nearly every biblical conflict and their unity is the subject of every resolution. Taken as a whole, the biblical narrative warns of the consequences of one side predominating, or what amounts to having faith without charity or charity without faith. This dualism will inform much of Swedenborg's reading of chapter 3 of Genesis, and speaks most frequently to his general concern about the dominance of intellectualism and dogmatism, a concern that is, as we have seen, at least somewhat autobiographical.

Adam, Eve and the Serpent

Swedenborg's interpretation of Genesis 3 can be found in the third chapter of his first volume in *Arcana coelestia*. The chapter begins and ends with parts of a memorable

³³³ On Swedenborg's possible connection to Platonism and Neoplatonism in this and other instances of dualism, see the discussion in chapter 3.

relation on the topic of what it is like for a person who has just died and is waking up and being welcomed in the spiritual world. The contents of the memorable relation and the interpretation of Genesis 3, as we said above, are not related to each other thematically and Swedenborg makes no attempt to connect them as the chapter progresses: the reader is simply given two wholly distinct portions of material to digest in one chapter. The implications of this arrangement, again, are twofold: 1) that Swedenborg gains the authority to interpret, not from any source of book learning or church tradition, but from his unique admittance to heaven while still living in his natural body and 2) that to read and interpret scripture is to participate in an activity whose effects span heaven and earth. And while the content is unrelated, the use of allegorical interpretation is present in both the memorable relation and the exegetical material. The objects and events he witnesses in the spiritual world are interpreted immediately. For example, upon waking up Swedenborg sees a young man riding a horse and trying to steer it towards hell. The horse refuses to move, and the man is forced to dismount and begin walking. This symbolizes, he writes, that before a person is permitted to drive themselves into either heaven or hell, they are first “taken to a society of good spirits” and “instructed in the knowledges of what is true and good.”³³⁴ Having interpreted his visionary experience, Swedenborg turns his attention to the text of the Bible.

The interpretation of Genesis 3 is divided into three parts: verses 1-13, 14-19, and 20-24. Each section begins with the entire text laid out first with no commentary and this is followed by a brief summary. In his summary of verses 1-13 Swedenborg reminds us

³³⁴ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 187-188.

(as the content of the interpretation relates to that from Genesis 2), that the Garden of Eden narrative tells, in its inner sense, about the spiritual demise of the earliest humans. Importantly, he does not point to a historical Adam or Eve, but says they represent the earliest humans as a whole, or the “Most Ancient Church.” This is a break from Swedenborg’s earlier commentary in *Explicatio*, in which Adam and Eve are treated as historical figures.³³⁵ In *Arcana coelestia* they become figures in a typological sense, and represent qualities of the first people, not the people themselves. Those of the Most Ancient Church were characterized by innocence and an unmediated connection to heaven. They existed in a “celestial” state, like those of the highest heaven, and therefore embodied the harmonious balance of love and wisdom in which love leads. Genesis 3 tells of their downfall, which begins with the third generation.

The two trees in the garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge represent the two faculties of Divine Love and Divine Wisdom discussed above. Their balance is indicated by the placement of the trees at the center of the garden and correspond to the harmonious state of the first humans. That the Tree of Knowledge was violated signifies the introduction of an imbalance: that facts and intelligence became more important than love and charity, or that through doctrines they learned about love, rather than the other way around.³³⁶ The association of religious knowledge, doctrines, and faith with the “left

³³⁵ See *Explicatio*, Chapter 2. Interestingly, while Adam is indeed the “first-born” of all humanity in *Explicatio*, Swedenborg writes here that his rib was removed “only in a kind of dream” and that Eve was created separately in another location. We see in comparison to *Arcana caelestia*, a different arrangement of Swedenborg’s use of allegory. See verse 21.

³³⁶ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 200. Mendelssohn’s interpretation of the eating of the forbidden fruit, discussed in chapter 1, similarly speaks of an imbalance between desire and comprehension. In Mendelssohn’s arrangement, however, desire overtook comprehension, whereas in Swedenborg’s it is understanding, or wisdom, that overpowers love. Swedenborg’s regular use of the metaphor of marriage

brain” activities of the intellect is characteristic of Swedenborgian thought, and the dominance of this side is related to the pitfalls of both Lutheran faith alone theology and the arrogance of the educated elite, as we will see. The snake, the first man, and first woman, each represent different faculties within this ancient community as it began to deteriorate: the snake their attachment to their sense perceptions, the woman their self-love, and the man their ability to reason. The narrative of their fall from God’s favor represents that “driven by self-love they began to believe nothing that they could not grasp with the physical senses”³³⁷ and that they began to “examine closely the tenets of faith in the Lord.”³³⁸ It is therefore doubt, questioning, the fixation on the senses and the “making sense” of faith that led to their demise, or their fall from a state of perfect perception and loving connection to God and heaven. The particulars of this fall, and how it connects to Swedenborg’s commentary on the state of Jews and modern scientists, emerges as he works through the interpretation verse by verse.

The Bible is full of signs rather than similes, Swedenborg writes, because the earliest people “did not compare various human traits to animals and birds but called them such.”³³⁹ Ancient mythic symbolism refers to inner qualities of the human spirit, and the Bible is written in this tradition, as the practice “persisted in the ancient church . . . and prophets perpetuated it.”³⁴⁰ When we read about trees and snakes in a garden,

to describe the relationship between love and wisdom echoes the Zoharic interpretation. In the Zohar, the trees represent different *sefirot*: the Tree of Life is Yesod, and the Tree of Knowledge is Shekhinah. The sin of Adam and Eve is in separating these would be lovers, and their reunification is the goal of human religious activity. See, for instance, Matt, *The Zohar*, 1:35a-1:36b.

³³⁷ Ibid., 191.

³³⁸ Ibid., 192.

³³⁹ Ibid., 195.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

therefore, we are also reading about human traits.³⁴¹ Swedenborg's semiotics has an ontological component: the correspondence relies on the integrity of the sign. This contrasts, for instance, with Kant's formulation in which biblical symbols can be removed once they have served their purpose of pointing to a moral philosophy. Kant's views will be explored in the next chapter, but it helps to underscore the nature of Swedenborg's biblical reading. His is a theory of naming in which what a thing is called shares in the reality of certain underlying qualities. The serpent, in this view, is the symbol for the lure of sense and science, *sensualia et scientifica*, and this meaning would have been immediate for someone living at the time of the most ancients: "In ancient times, people who put more trust in what they learned through their senses than in what had been revealed were called snakes."³⁴² But "snakes" are by no means a problem exclusive to antiquity.

"The situation now is even worse" writes Swedenborg. People today who will believe only what can be proven with the senses become in the end blind to truth.³⁴³ Scholars and philosophers deny the reality of spirit, and see only matter. They "bury the idea [of the spirit] in speculation until it disappears from their sight and turns into nothing."³⁴⁴ They believe they are being led by the pursuit of truth, but their love of self and of the world distorts their perception. As it was in ancient times, so is it today. Much of Swedenborg's interpretation of Genesis 3:1-13 is taken up with comparing the

³⁴¹ The capacity for pagan or ancient cultures to appreciate and encode sacred knowledge was a subject of particular fascination during the enlightenment. See Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 102.

³⁴² Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 196

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

skepticism of humanity's third generation to the skepticism of his day. He goes into great detail describing what these people, in both time periods, are like.

Such people want to be recognized as gods or as founts of wisdom, but if you ask them whether they know what it is to lack selfhood, they will answer that it is nonexistence; once deprived of it, they would be nothing. If you ask whether they know what it is to live from the Lord, they consider the concept a fantasy. If you inquired whether they knew that conscience was, they would describe it as nothing more than an imaginary something-or-other good for keeping the common people under control. If you inquired whether they knew what perception was they would do nothing but sneer and call it a sign of religious mania.³⁴⁵

We have in this description something of a portrait depicting Swedenborg's perception of the Deists and skeptics of his day. They are the learned blind, the educated fools. They are Adam and Eve exposed, driven by reason and self-love. Their store of knowledge is the true wealth keeping the camel from passing through a needle's eye.³⁴⁶ It is a skepticism that he was himself susceptible to at certain times in his life, as we have seen, and so its threat is also a personal one.

Just as Swedenborg blurs past and present in describing these snake people, he likewise blurs the boundary between earthly and spiritual representatives of this class. Swedenborg meets spirits in the other world who are characterized in the same way. They confuse evil and good to such a degree and are utterly confused by their own intelligence. They "take to debating what constitutes spiritual and heavenly life, or faith, and they always succumb to doubt and even denial, as I have been allowed to see. . . While they are in this abyss, the slightest objection overpowers a thousand truths, like a spec of dirt

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

on the pupil of the eye that prevents a viewer from seeing the universe and everything in it.”³⁴⁷ Speculation and debate obscure true perception. He identifies this fault in people from the ancient past, people in his immediate cohort, and in spirits living on past death who nevertheless deny spiritual realities. It is a fault that pervades his cosmos, crossing every boundary of time and space.

We are left wondering about these grave and ubiquitous errors. What exactly constitute the qualities of *sensualia et scientifica*? Much later, in considering the act of interpretation itself, in the dream interpretation of the baker and butler in Egypt, Swedenborg lists 14 kinds of illusions of the senses that lead one astray (and in this case away from the internal sense). They begin with things related to scientific discoveries and move into more religious matters. Some of these illusions of the senses are: the belief that the sun revolves around the earth, that the existence of all things proceeds from an original moment at creation rather than the perpetual coming into existence from God, that all reality can be detected in simple substances such as monads and atoms, that life ends when the body dies, that the soul resides in the brain or the heart and rules the body as if it were a machine, that man lives from himself alone and not from God, that adultery is allowed, and that man is saved by faith alone.³⁴⁸ We see in this list several of the religious and scientific debates of Swedenborg’s day, as well as positions he himself once held, such as the material domain of the soul and the Lutheran doctrine of faith alone (faith without charity, in the Swedenborgian framework, signals the dominance of the

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5084.

intellectual, or wisdom side of the faculties). That Swedenborg found such views alluring, or that his own proclivity for intellectual debate and academic advancement was interpreted as a temptation of the senses can be seen in his treatment of many of the Bible's female characters, such as Sarah whose beauty was too much for her Egyptian hosts to resist.³⁴⁹ That Eve could sway Adam in favor of the serpent's path, therefore, is less a commentary on sexual temptation than intellectual temptation.³⁵⁰

In the second section of the Genesis 3 commentary, on verses 14-19, sensuality becomes more of a focus, and we see a decoupling of the *sensualia et scientifica* pair. Swedenborg reiterates the cause of the fall of the Most Ancient Church in terms of their reliance on their senses, as time went on, and in this section he associates this focus on the senses with literalism. In a telling comparison, Swedenborg links the way the ancients began to rely on their sensory experience for knowledge, rather than influx from heaven, to people who concentrate on the grammar and words of language rather than the message those words impart.³⁵¹ Just as the ancients lost sight of the reference of their symbolic language, literalists cannot perceive the truth embedded in language, and in both cases it is the senses that lead astray. The shallow perceptions of sight, sound, taste

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 1480.

³⁵⁰ Swedenborg does exploit standard gender role divisions in parts of his interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3, as discussed in Susanne Scholz, "Beyond Postmodernism? Esoteric Interpretations of Gen 1-3 by E. Swedenborg, R. Steiner, and S. D. Fohr," in *Hidden Truths from Eden: Esoteric Readings of Genesis 1-3*, eds., Caroline Vander Stichele and Susanne Scholz, 169-196 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Scholz, however, overstates the case and misses the significant ways Swedenborg's interpretation overcomes a gendered reading. For instance, in *Arcana caelestia* 152-159, Swedenborg presents the interpretation that by "man" (*vir*), and "woman" in Genesis 2: 22-23, are not meant individuals of different genders, but two faculties within the individual.

³⁵¹ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 241.

and touch distract from spiritual realities. The consequences of this distraction are various forms of disbelief, symbolized by the curses God gives to the three sinners in Eden.

It is in the middle of an interpretation of Genesis 3 verse 15 that Swedenborg begins his discussion of the state of the Jewish Church. The introduction of disbelief that occurred in the later generations of the Most Ancient Church, and that is symbolized in the curses on the serpent and Eve, continues to grow as humanity develops collectively. The darkness reaches a climax with the Jewish Church, such that by the time Jesus is born into the world, the world had “sunk all the way down into a hellish, diabolical kind of selfhood, through self-love and materialism.”³⁵² The rationality of humanity, like the heel of Adam, becomes infected with the serpent’s venom and humanity loses its ability to save itself.³⁵³ It is in the midst of this interpretation that we find the number quoted at the beginning of this chapter, which describes the snake’s destruction with both Jews and scientists/philosophers. And as the chapter progresses, we find that the ultimate illusion of sensory thinking, according to Swedenborg, is the rejection of Christ. The curse on Adam, that he was to eat bread in the sweat of his face, is linked both to the ancients who were “so degenerate and so immersed in what belonged to their senses and their body that they refused to hear about religious truth or about the Lord’s nature” and to the Jews “whose nature was such that they would not acknowledge heavenly things and did not want any other Messiah than a worldly one.”³⁵⁴ Adam’s soiled bread is compared to the

³⁵² Ibid., 256.

³⁵³ Swedenborg acknowledges the widespread messianic interpretations of the curse in Genesis 3:15, that “He will trample you on the head and you will wound him on the heel” even while defending the details of his interpretation as entirely unique. See *Arcana caelestia*, 250.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 276.

manna rejected by the Jews who were infected with serpents as a consequence in Numbers 21: 6.

The final section of Genesis 3, which relates God's banning Adam and Eve from Eden, is interpreted by Swedenborg generally to concern the issue of profanation. In his summary and initial interpretations he links the biblical narrative back to the fall of the earliest church. But he quickly resumes his exposition of the Jewish Church and writes at some length here on the spiritual ineptitude of the Jews and their propensity for profanation. Genesis 3:22, in which God gives his reasons for the couple's expulsion, triggers this moment in Swedenborg, with its plural pronoun "us" and the pairing of two words for God, *Jehovah Deus*. He also explains the Hebrew word *Elohim* for his audience, with its plural ending.³⁵⁵ As we saw in chapter 3, Swedenborg's explanation of God's plurality is accompanied by the assertion that the Jews have been kept from understanding this mystery. "Here lie two pieces of wisdom. One is that Jehovah God symbolizes the Lord and at the same time heaven. The other is that if those people had learned the mysteries of faith, they would have been destroyed forever."³⁵⁶ Why the revealing of a biblical mystery necessitates such an immediate comment on the inability of Jews to understand that mystery is itself a puzzle. It is especially puzzling given that the "ministry of angels" is the solution to God's plural forms also found in Jewish sources, and we are left wondering if in these two pieces of wisdom we see a defensiveness described by Bloom's anxiety of influence, as discussed above.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 300.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

In terms of the interpretation of Genesis 3, it is the second part of verse 22 that Swedenborg relates directly to the Jews. God's words "now perhaps people will put out their hand and take from the tree of life as well, and eat, and live forever" indicate that the other tree in the garden was in danger of the same violation the Tree of Knowledge endured. In Swedenborg's terms, Divine Love would be violated the same way Divine Wisdom was, were the sinners not driven out. Likewise, in order to protect the inner most senses of scripture, which speak of Divine Love, the Jews were prevented from their access.

This was the reason why mysteries of faith were never revealed to the Jews. Being what they were they were not even explicitly told that they would, nor explicitly told that the Lord would come into the world to save them. Indeed they were kept in such ignorance and stupidity, and are so still, that as a result they did not know and still do not know of the existence of the internal man, or of anything internal at all. For if they had known it then, or were to know it now, so as to acknowledge it, they would profane it and in so doing would have no hope at all of salvation in the next life.³⁵⁷ This is what the Lord meant in John, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and are converted and I heal them." John 12:40. Also, the Lord spoke to them in parables, and without explaining any to them, 'lest seeing they might see, and hearing they might hear, and understand', as He declares in Matthew 13:13.³⁵⁸

Adam and Eve were kept from profaning the Tree of Life, and the Jews, in this interpretation, were kept from profaning the Divine Love tucked behind the words of the Bible, lest they be "destroyed forever."³⁵⁹ The above number is especially noteworthy for

³⁵⁷ Despite the reference to the salvation of Jews in the next life, Swedenborg does not hold to the view, more or less traditional in Christendom, that Jews will collectively convert at the end of days. The conversion and/or salvation of Jews in the next life is described as an individual, rather than collective, event. He describes, in places, the locations in the other world where "better" and "worse" sorts of Jews live eternally, as for instance in *Arcana caelestia* 941.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

its repeated move from past to present: that they “they were kept in such ignorance and stupidity, and are so still” and “if they had known it then, or were to know it now. . .” The link between the Jews of history and the present day Jews is especially unfortunate given his view of the Jewish Church in history.

The exegetical material in this chapter ends with a reflection on the nature of the fall. Swedenborg summarizes how his view of the fall is different: that we can’t trace all of humanity’s sin to one historical individual. He describes the sins of the first few generations as a whole, and how it has corollaries in the present: but we do not inherit their sin according to the traditional view. Swedenborg clarifies that he does believe in inherited sin, that evil can be passed from one generation to the next, but he puts a distance between the events of the first humans and the sins of the present.³⁶⁰ This sets him up to be able to reject Lutheran atonement theology, or rather to put an entirely new spin on an old theme. Jesus came into the world, not to atone for the sin of Adam and Eve, but to address the darkness that enveloped humanity collectively during the reign of the Jewish Church. Jesus “fought against the hells” which had gained too much power and created an imbalance between goodness and evil.³⁶¹ Swedenborg therefore shifts the timing and location of humanity’s darkest hour, from the primordial garden to first century Israel.

Conclusion: Swedenborg’s Fall

³⁶⁰ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 313.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9937.

It is worth noting, in conclusion, that Swedenborg criticizes the Christian Church in his commentaries on Revelation in terms similar to his criticism of the Jewish Church. Christian profanation and the imbalance of faith over charity in the church are symbolized in elements of the Apocalypse and signal the end of that church's era and the coming of the New Church. Swedenborg joins Joachim of Fiore, Dante and others, in critically applying an interpretation of Revelation against the church authorities of his day. His claims about the spiritual corruptibility of Jews as a whole, then, are in turn lodged at Christendom.³⁶² The relocation of humanity's fall to the time of Christ's birth is emphasized in his early commentary in *Arcana coelestia*, but a subsequent "fall" receives greater attention in his later work.

The overall move in Swedenborg's chapter on Genesis 3 in *Arcana coelestia*, from a focus on materialism and intellectualism to a focus on Jews, all the while telling the story of the first generations of humanity, gives an indication of Swedenborg's conceptions about where threats against biblical spirituality were located. The first kind of pitfall associated with the serpent, that of empiricism or trusting one's own sense perceptions, is both universal and personal for Swedenborg: anyone can fall prey to it, as he himself did. The second pitfall is neither universal nor personal at the surface level. It applies to the Jews (and later to Christians who profane like the Jews), and Swedenborg wasn't one of them. If, however, we read Swedenborg's interpretation as an indication of the "anxiety of influence" as discussed in the previous chapter, it becomes very personal

³⁶² Peter Olivi, in Joachim's wake, made a similar move in applying traditional interpretations of carnal Israel to carnal Church, forcing a self-critical reading of traditional tropes about the Jews (as blind and carnal). See Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers*, 73.

indeed. It is precisely in the places where Swedenborg's work shared the most meaningful hermeneutical horizons with Kabbalah in its various forms that he drew on old stereotypes of Jews as literalists, from Augustine, Luther and others. In working out an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 3 in an age that increasingly associated allegory with Jews, Swedenborg inserted an indissoluble divide between himself and Jews: one that underscored his own access to the Bible's secrets, while insisting on the limits of Jewish interpretation.

Finally, in concluding part two of this study, it is worth asking the question whether Swedenborg's condemnation of those who seek knowledge through the senses, those symbolized by the serpent of Genesis 3, is contradictory, given that it is precisely through things "seen and heard" in the spiritual world that Swedenborg derives his authority to interpret scripture. Swedenborg resolves this contradiction, as we saw in chapter two, by claiming to leave behind the empiricism of science in favor of a spiritual empiricism. And yet his readers are asked to rely entirely on his sense-based observations, spiritual or otherwise, while being warned off the experiential reports of other men. In one sense then, his attack on *sensualia et scientifica* can be understood as resulting from another kind of anxiety of influence; the attack marks his religious experience as distinct from the natural sciences, which rely on the familiar mechanisms of observable sights and sounds but are nevertheless limited and unreliable.

PART III
PERSPECTIVES ON SWEDENBORG AND ALLEGORY: THE DISCOURSE
ABOUT *ARCANA COELESTIA*

CHAPTER 5: RECEPTION IN PHILOSOPHY AND IMMANUEL KANT'S ANXIETY OF
INFLUENCE

Part three of this dissertation will consider the role of allegory in the work of those who read and responded to Swedenborg's biblical commentary. Swedenborg's reception in philosophy, theology and the arts and literature, will be taken up in turn over the course of three chapters. Like those whose commentaries we considered in part one, the figures treated in this section are responding to challenges to biblical hermeneutics lodged from the frontiers of the new sciences as well as to the tides of anti-Judaism and Christian Kabbalah that shaped eighteenth-century Christian self-identity. Unlike those in our first chapter, however, the individuals discussed below are also responding to particular approach to interpretation found in Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences. Criticism of Swedenborg, among the figures studied here, ranges from those who accuse him of heresy and fanaticism, to those who dismiss him as too attached to Christian institutions and outdated symbols of orthodoxy. His followers, likewise, range from those who view his interpretations as linked to an ancient and hallowed inner sense tradition, to those who view his exegesis as something entirely novel, ringing in a new era of true understanding. For many of these figures, however, their estimation of Swedenborg is decidedly mixed, reflecting the ambiguity towards allegory that characterizes this

century. It is this latter opinion that best characterizes the viewpoint of Immanuel Kant, our first subject in this study of Swedenborg's reception.

If we limit ourselves strictly to the field of philosophy, or to those who would place themselves and their work in that category, the reception of *Arcana coelestia*, and of Swedenborg's work in general, more or less begins and ends with Kant. Kant had the last word on Swedenborg in certain circles, for while his assessment was far from unequivocal, it was enough to discourage further investigation among his followers. As we will see, Swedenborg's philosophical influences after Kant are limited to a few fleeting moments in the countercurrents of idealism and romanticism, such as we find in the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Swedenborg's secular influence was far greater in literature and the arts than in academic philosophy and this is due largely to Kant's evaluation of him.

Kant is important to this study for a number of reasons. First, it was *Arcana coelestia* in particular, among Swedenborg's writings that he purchased, read and wrote about. Second, Swedenborg's system of correspondences, or the assertion that spiritual realities appear in the form of symbols and representations in the physical world, is a point that Kant wrestled with as he drew new borderlines around the field of metaphysics. And finally, Kant's approach to biblical interpretation has much in common with Swedenborg's despite his dismissal of the exegetical material in *Arcana coelestia*. It may be going too far to say that his engagement with Swedenborg caused his "critical turn"³⁶³

³⁶³ For examples of this argument, see Helmut Böhme and Gernot Böhme, "The Battle of Reason with Imagination," in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*,

but Kant's interest in Swedenborg did come at a time when his ideas about metaphysics were shifting, a time when he began to subject his interest in incorporeal things to rational critique. *Arcana coelestia*, for better or worse, takes its place in the course of Western Philosophy, in part at least, as a footnote to Kant's redefinition of metaphysics. This chapter will consider the diverse ways Kant's reading of *Arcana coelestia* impacted his philosophy relevant to the themes that presently concern us, namely: shifting ideas about science, religious identity and the allegorical interpretation of scripture.

Kant read and responded to *Arcana coelestia* at a turbulent time for German metaphysics. Frederick Beiser describes the tumultuous context:

[The] problem arose when the old Aristotelian metaphysics, which had dominated German intellectual life in the seventeenth century, was thrown back on the defensive by the growth of the new sciences. The geometrical method of Cartesian physics, and the inductive-mathematical method of Newton, had undermined both the concepts and methods of the old Aristotelianism. The scholastic forms had been banished from physics as so many occult qualities and the deductive method of syllogistic reasoning was dismissed as fruitless. Metaphysics, it therefore seemed, was doomed to extinction, the legacy of a moribund scholasticism.³⁶⁴

Opposing responses to this crisis, from Leibniz and Wolff on one hand, and the Pietists on the other, further muddied the waters. Kant's own equivocation on matters related to knowledge of God, providence, and the immortality of the soul, arises, therefore, amidst contexts that were very much in flux on these matters. Kant engaged

ed. James Schmidt, 426-452 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Constantin Rauer, *Wahn und Wahrheit: Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Irrationalen*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007).

³⁶⁴ Frederick Beiser, "Kant's Intellectual Development: 1746-1781," in *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 27.

with and responded to Swedenborg, both positively and negatively, during various stages in the development of his thought, as we will see.

I have argued that the case of Emanuel Swedenborg, and his ambiguous relationship to Jews and Judaism, is best understood as the result of what Harold Bloom terms an “anxiety of influence.” I will maintain that a similar anxiety appears in the work of Immanuel Kant, whose critical philosophy subsequent to reading *Arcana coelestia* demonstrates an affinity to many of Swedenborg’s key concepts, at the same time that he questions the veracity of Swedenborg’s visions and even his sanity. That his sharpest attack on Swedenborg comes in a chapter titled “Anti-Kabbalah” will further allow us to wade through the mud, so to speak, of eighteenth century scholarly rhetoric concerning Jewish mysticism. It will allow us to investigate a web of associations around mysticism, religious identity, spirituality and corporeality, and the implications of these associations on ideas about which individuals, which traditions, and which schools of thought were qualified to comment on the true nature of things.

Kant’s anxieties concerning Swedenborg appear in two general areas of his thought, one that is fairly broad ranging and pervades his work, and one that is more marginal. The first is epistemological, and concerns the limits of what we can know through the use of reason. This question requires, for Kant, the bracketing of areas of metaphysics that consider the existence and nature of spiritual realities, and centers on what our senses and mental faculties can reasonably demonstrate with certainty. The second area is exegetical and thereby concerns questions of the proper place for and interpretation of scripture. The state of the conflict between theology and philosophy

comes into play here, as it is the unique capacity of the latter to reveal true, moral, religion in scripture and to avoid the pitfalls of outdated and self-serving methods of interpretation (i.e. allegory) that Kant wishes to demonstrate. Kant frames his guiding principles in these areas of investigation in terms of reason and morality. His aim is practical and sensible, even if his style is notoriously opaque. However, in both instances his conclusions reveal more of a reframing of problematic categories rather than outright rejection. His continued interest in the *intelligible world* and the *community of spirits*, despite his demarcation of reason's limits within the sensible world, is accompanied in several places with abridgments of Swedenborgian thought. And while he rejects Swedenborg's allegorical methods, his alternative of a "moral sense" involves a familiar uncovering of wisdom hidden within the text and amounts to a reformulated *geheimen Sinn*.

An analysis of Kant's relationship to Swedenborg will consider these two areas of thought further below. It will be necessary first to summarize Kant's handling of Swedenborg's ideas throughout his work. This chapter will conclude with a section comparing Kant's treatment of Judaism and the Old Testament to Swedenborg's, and finally with a section on the response to Kant's philosophy relative to Swedenborg from German idealism in the work of Schelling. Swedenborg's brief representation in the deliberations of eighteenth-century German philosophy can be explained on the one hand by his own indebtedness to Leibniz and Wolff. More than that, however, it was his visions of the world of the dead that seemed to have captured the imagination of Kant, Schelling and others and to have been deemed relevant to discussions on the limits of

science and reason.³⁶⁵ Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, with its familiar Leibnizian tenor and its ostensible application to science, to life after death and to biblical hermeneutics, resonated in thinkers such as Kant and Schelling, though not without triggering the anxieties of an enlightenment age fixated on reason and certainty.

Overview of Kant's Interest in Swedenborg

Through his private correspondences, his university lectures, and his published writings we learn of Kant's fascination with Emanuel Swedenborg. In a letter to Charlotte von Knobloch, written early in his career,³⁶⁶ Kant describes his skepticism of tales of miracles and clairvoyance, but writes that his position changed when he heard the stories coming from Sweden.³⁶⁷ Kant summarizes, at the request of von Knobloch, the findings of an investigation he organized into the facts surrounding three incidents, two involving Swedenborg's communication with people who had died (one being the brother of

³⁶⁵ On Swedenborg's reception among German intellectuals, including Johann Goerg Hamann, Johann Caspar Lavatar, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, see Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant*, 109-113; Ernst Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland: F. C. Oetingers und Immanuel Kants Auseinandersetzung mit der Person und Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs, nach neuen Quellen bearbeitet* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1947); Ernst Benz, "Swedenborg as a Spiritual Pathfinder of German Idealism and Romanticism," trans. George Dole. In two parts: *Studia Swedenborgiana* 11:4 (March 2000): 61-76 and 12:1 (December 2000): 15-35. Max Morris, "Swedenborg im Faust," *Euphorion* 6:491-501, 1899; Rolf Christian Zimmermann, "Goethes Verhältnis zur Naturmystik: Hermetische Tradition im wissenschaftlichen Fortschritt," ed. Antoine Faivre and Rolf Christian Zimmermann, 333-363 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1979). 1969; Michael Heinrichs, *Emanuel Swedenborg in Deutschland: Eine kritische Darstellung der Rezeption des schwedischen Visionärs im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter D. Lang, 1979); Ulrich Gaier, "'Könnt' ich Magie von meinem Pfad entfernen': Swedenborg im magischen Diskurs von Goethes *Faust*," in *Emanuel Swedenborg 1688-1772: Naturforscher und Kundiger der Überwelt*, ed. Horst Bergmann and Eberhard Zwink, 129-139 (Stuttgart: Württembergische Landesbibliothek, 1988).

³⁶⁶ The dating of this letter is unclear. See the discussion in Tafel, *Documents*, vol. II, 620-625, where it is argued that the letter was written after *Träume eines Geistersehers* in 1768. Gregory Johnson puts it at 1763, before the publication of *Träume*, see *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, (Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 183, note 2.

³⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, "Letter to Charlotte von Knobloch," as translated by Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 68.

Sweden's Queen Louisa Ulrika at her request), and a third involving Swedenborg's knowledge of a distant fire in Stockholm. Kant sent a friend to investigate the events, to interview witnesses and to speak directly with Swedenborg, and reports on the collected evidence in positive terms. He mentions his frustrated attempts to correspond directly with the Swede, and that he awaits "with longing" the publication of a forthcoming book by Swedenborg out of London. For, rather than respond to Kant's inquiries directly, Swedenborg had indicated that the answers to all of Kant's questions would be answered in the book. "I have made every provision for receiving it as soon as it leaves the press,"³⁶⁸ writes Kant. This enthusiasm on Kant's part is not sustained, or if it is, his public rhetoric about Swedenborg takes a very different tone, as we will see.

Kant also discusses Swedenborg in his university lectures, the notes from which we have from his students, including Johann Gottfried Herder. Swedenborg's name arises in the lectures when Kant is discussing the possibility of communication with spirits, and he encourages his students to neither outright reject nor accept naively Swedenborg's visions. For "to dismiss all, must deny soul or state after death—phantoms have fooled us 99 times out of 100. Thus one inclines not to believe the probability of the majority of cases; but do not dismiss all of them summarily! Do not call liar, but rather *non liquet* [not proved]."³⁶⁹ And elsewhere on Swedenborg "[his] sensations indeed on the whole could be true, but are in part never certain."³⁷⁰ His lectures and letters therefore reveal a

³⁶⁸ Tafel suggests the book was *De Commercio Animæ & Corporis* (Interaction of the Soul and the Body, 1769). See note 3 above.

³⁶⁹ Johann Gottfried Herder, "Excerpts from Herder Metaphysics and Herder Supplements (1763-1764)," as translated by Johnson and Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 74.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

certain equivocation and curiosity, and center on the question of communication with spirits and the connection between physical and spiritual realities. The fact that Kant went on to write an entire book on Swedenborg, however, challenges the perception that this was a fleeting or peripheral interest of his.

Kant's most famous and controversial engagement with Swedenborg comes in his short work, anonymously published, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (*Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, 1766). An in-depth survey of Kant's *Träume* is an appropriate place to begin our study of the reception of *Arcana coelestia*, as it was, for so many European intellectuals, their first introduction to Swedenborg and in many cases the last word on his relevance, or irrelevance, to the concerns of the day. Furthermore, the location of *Träume* in the development Kant's critical philosophy, that it comes at a time when his views on the role of metaphysics and the limits of reason were radically shifting, makes it relevant to the study of Swedenborg's place in philosophical discourse, and it will be necessary to spend some time here unraveling it.

Contents of Träume

Any analysis of Kant's *Träume* must grapple with its many inconsistencies in both content and style. Friedemann Stengel summarizes the problem faced by generations of readers:

These ambivalent statements of Dreams, which vacillate between appropriation, sharp rejection and transformation; between satire and psychiatric diagnosis at the same time, were not named in order to provide a stringent and consistent interpretation of the text in regard to the 'actual' intention and the 'true' content. It will be difficult to present a non-

ambiguous interpretation of *Dreams* that would lead, through a plausible harmonization or dissolution of the verbal and structural contradictions to a unified image with a clear overall message. This is not least due to the fact that the ambivalence of the individual chapters is also reflected stylistically. Ironic diatribes and ridicule against the spirit-seer and rationalist philosophy alternate with considerations in indirect language, with personal positionings through indicative clauses set in the first person, and with powerful rejections, whose objects can no longer be readily gleaned from the flow of the text. Through this complex rhetorical procedure, Kant's intentions remain obscured, especially where his concrete adversaries remain in the dark. Often, it is not clear which sections correspond to one another or if Kant is perhaps even having several people speak.³⁷¹

We will consider the effect of these inconsistencies on Kant's readers, and their effect in turn on Swedenborg's reception, once a preliminary summary of the book's structure, method, and argument is in place. The book is divided into two parts. The first, "Which is Dogmatic," and the second, "Which is Historical," deal respectively with universal questions of metaphysics and the particular case of Swedenborg. In an introductory "Preliminary Report Promising Very Little Before the Actual Treatise" Kant wonders at the proliferation and success of other-worldly tales, of "Hypochondriac emanations, fairy tales and convent miracles."³⁷² Should a philosopher admit even one of these tales? Or should such things be rejected categorically? Kant, seeking to balance dogmatism with skepticism, answers that it is just as foolish to discount them all as to believe without discernment, and admits to his own credulity: "the author of this treatise tried to avoid the former prejudice and thus allowed himself to be somehow led astray by the latter. Thus he admits with a certain humility that he was naive enough to undertake an investigation into the alleged truth of some of the stories of the kind mentioned. He

³⁷¹ Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 647. Translated by Suzanne Schwarz Zuber.

³⁷² Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. John Manolesco, 29.

found, as is the case when one has nothing to look for, he found . . . nothing.”³⁷³ In defense of writing a book on this topic, Kant writes that he spent much time, money and effort on reading “a large work” (*Arcana coelestia*) and this should not be wasted. Anticipating the bewilderment that readers would face, he concludes: “Out of these circumstances arose the present treatise which, as we flatter ourselves, ought to satisfy the reader fully regarding the nature of the subject, with the result that he will not understand the noblest part, will disbelieve the bulk and simply laugh at the remainder.”³⁷⁴ Given the confused reviews and responses to his book, summarized below, Kant succeeded in this goal.

Kant’s initial judgement on *Arcana coelestia*, that in it he found nothing, is more complicated than it first appears. One who is familiar with Swedenborg will note immediately a hidden tension in this preface, where Kant puts forth a third solution to the problem of whether to believe or not believe. The third solution is to simply not engage “such idle and useless questions” and to hold fast only to what is useful. Placing spirit stories in opposition to *what is useful* contradicts the thrust of *Arcana coelestia*, where spirit stories intermingle with a theological system singularly aimed at a life of useful service. Swedenborg replaces the Protestant emphasis on *sola fide* with his own emphasis on usefulness – that faith and charity are meaningless until they are applied. The theme of usefulness pervades *Arcana coelestia*, where the Kingdom of God becomes *regnum usuum*, and all knowledge and understanding that is not put to use is lost when a person

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

dies and enters the spiritual world because it contains nothing of spiritual substance.³⁷⁵ This emphasis would have been attractive to Kant, whose philosophy was so guided by principles of morality and pragmatism. How are we to interpret Kant's opposition between what is useful and spirit seeing in light of the fact that Swedenborg demands such a presence in both categories? Does Kant intend to use *Arcana coelestia*'s emphasis on usefulness against itself? This is a tension that returns wherever Kant discusses Swedenborg, especially in the last chapters of *Träume*. For, the purported uselessness of Swedenborg's work is belied by Kant's reluctance to give up on hope for a world of the numinous with remarkably specific features.

The first chapter of *Träume* sets up a series of questions about the connection between the body and the spirit and about the nature, substance and location of the spiritual realities. Throughout, Kant repeats his general opinion, that while he is "inclined to affirm the existence of immaterial beings in the universe" including his own soul,³⁷⁶ definitive answers to such questions are beyond the reach of our understanding. Thus, while he "cannot say whether or not spirits exists" or what "spirit" even means, he can compare the experiences different people report concerning spiritual realities, and by observing which of these reports align with his own imperfect perceptions and which run counter, something can be clarified.³⁷⁷

With this methodology in place, Kant moves on in the second chapter, titled "A Fragment of Occult Philosophy to reveal Our Community with the Spirit World," and

³⁷⁵ See, for instance, Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 5527, 6073, 6917, 9103 [3], and 8939.

³⁷⁶ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 30.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

presents a description of the spirit world very much resembling Swedenborg's reports, though he does not yet name Swedenborg. He considers a reality where the human soul is simultaneously linked to two worlds, the physical world and the spiritual world, and the human individual thereby stands in relationship to two communities. When a person dies, relationships of the natural world cease, but the individual continues in his/her spiritual relationships, which are formed in accordance with the moral life developed while living in the body. It is through community with spirits that a person is able to receive influx from the spiritual world, and on occasion to have insight into this process. Such a view aligns seamlessly with descriptions in *Arcana coelestia*, where we read for example:

Man is altogether ignorant that he is governed of the Lord through angels and spirits, and that with everyone there are at least two spirits, and two angels. By spirits man has communication with the world of spirits, and by angels with heaven. Without communication by means of spirits with the world of spirits, and by means of angels with heaven, and thus through heaven with the Lord, man could not live at all; his life entirely depends on this conjunction, so that if the spirits and angels were to withdraw, he would instantly perish.³⁷⁸

Furthermore, Kant's descriptions of influx from spirits align with Swedenborg's correspondences. Insights from the spiritual world come in the form of symbols or representations, which take on different configurations with different people, according to their "different constitution." The heterogeneity of representations is an obstacle for us in understanding spiritual realities, but not too great an obstacle. "In this way it is not improbable that spiritual impressions could penetrate into our consciousness if they were to stimulate images in our imagination which are somehow co-related to them. In this

³⁷⁸ Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 50

way, ideas communicated under the influence of spirits tend to take concrete shapes in the signs of language which is customarily spoken . . .”³⁷⁹ With this more or less positive summary of a dualistic universe looking very much Swedenborgian in place, Kant ends the chapter with a warning of cases where imagination and mental illness enter the mix to the detriment of one’s ability to sort truth from fiction. Fantasy and distorted representations can have their origin in genuine influence from spirits, but it can be difficult or impossible to sort out pure visions from falsified ones. He ends with a warning to metaphysicians, echoing the fabled words of Tycho de Brahe’s coachman who advised him not to plan his rout by the stars “my dear Sir, you may be knowledgeable in heaven, but on earth you’re a fool.”³⁸⁰

The third chapter, titled “Antikabbalah: A Fragment of Common Philosophy Dissolving the Community with the Spirit World” takes on a very different tone, and reduces spirit seeing to malfunctioning of the brain. In explaining this new authorial voice, Gregory Johnson argues that Kant is here influenced by the style of Rousseau, and structures his argument as a dialectic.³⁸¹ The voice in chapter three is not his own, argues Johnson, but is that of the “enlightened skeptic” and serves as a parody of French philosophers such as Voltaire and Diderot and of the German *Popularphilosophen*.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 55-56.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸¹ I would like to note here that while Johnson’s scholarship has made important contributions to my own work and to the work of many scholars of Kant and Swedenborg, I oppose the direction his work has taken subsequently in the strongest possible terms. Given the topic of my dissertation, which, among other things, is aimed at bringing to light the nature of early modern anti-Judaism, Johnson’s efforts on the part of the alt-right and white nationalist movements is especially disturbing, and highlights the importance of understanding this history.

³⁸² Gregory R. Johnson, “A Commentary on Kant’s *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*,” PhD diss. (Catholic University of America, 2002), 185-213.

Kant's cue to the reader is to misquote Aristotle at the start, imitating the tendency for enlightenment thinkers to misuse classical sources for their own cause. This would be convincing if the misattributed quote wasn't used elsewhere by Kant without irony³⁸³ and wasn't so in line with the concern expressed many times in the book: "When we are awake, we have a common world, but when we dream, each has his own."³⁸⁴ For indeed, according to Kant, the truth must be consistent. Our experiences are best confirmed by similar experiences in other people, our judgement by the collective judgement of humanity, by the *sensus communis*. So, while Kant does adopt a new tone in voicing a skeptical explanation for spirit seeing in chapter three, it is not clear that the voice is not also Kant's voice.

In chapter three Kant explores scientific explanations for spirit seeing. Drawing on Descartes, he points to the internal activity in the brain that occurs when one is engaged in a fantasy or waking dream. Nerve activity that incorporates the senses outside the brain allow a person to engage objects that are outside of themselves. In a person who is mad, there is confusion between these two, and objects of fantasy are perceived as objectively real. In this way, ghost stories and spirit seeing can be explained as mental illness.

The chapter ends by reflecting on one inconvenience brought about by these considerations: "they render superfluous the deeply-thoughtout conjectures in the

³⁸³ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), 63.

³⁸⁴ Rather than a quote from Aristotle, it is a paraphrase of Heraclitus, see Johnson, *Kant on Swedenborg*, note 60, 170.

previous chapter. Furthermore, no matter how ready a reader might have been to give some assent to the idealistic approach contained therein, he will now undoubtedly prefer a hypothesis which allows more ease and brevity in arriving at some definite conclusion, and also one which promises a greater degree of approval.” If at the end of chapter three Kant seems to be suggesting the skeptical path is the lazy way out of a difficult problem, this is enforced by the contents of chapter four, in which the two approaches so far laid out are weighed on a “scale of understanding.” The credulous voice of chapter two is balanced against the skeptical voice of chapter three, and Kant admits he is a believer.

This is a defect which truly speaking I cannot remove, nor do I want to remove it ever. I do admit, therefore, that all the stories which I have heard about the apparition of departed souls or other spirit influences, and all the theories about the alleged nature of spiritual beings and their alleged relation to us, humans, weigh a great deal more in the tray of the scale, marked “Hope,” whilst in the other tray marked “Speculation” the arguments do not appear to weigh more than air.³⁸⁵

His bias in favor of the viewpoint of chapter two is destabilizing. He cannot shake his attraction to such things, and he utilizes skepticism to safeguard against imprudent naiveté. The two viewpoints, when combined, create a parallax effect, speculation balanced with hope is the only way of preventing optical illusion. “Nothing is more sacred to me, nothing more important right now than to find the path to truth in a calm, open-minded attitude, regardless of whether it will or will not confirm or rebut my previous judgements, regardless of whether it will leave me decided or undecided.”³⁸⁶ We sense the urgency with which he tests his credulity with criticism.

³⁸⁵ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 68

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

Kant's description of the scale of understanding is autobiographical, and he understands it to be so. Readers should make up their own minds, he writes, which brings him to the question of ultimate concern: what we can know scientifically. If belief is personal, epistemology is communal. And here the limits are more clearly delineated. Philosophy simply cannot answer questions about the nature of spirit, nor should it attempt to. Curiously, he ends part one of his book by washing his hands of spirit seers, even as part two delves more deeply into the particular case of Emanuel Swedenborg. "And now I lay aside this whole subject of spirits, a remote part of metaphysics; I treat it as finished and done with. In the future I shall display no further interest in it."³⁸⁷ Perhaps, rather than putting the subject to bed, this statement marks the end of his personal confessions, for the thrust of remainder of the book is to create a distance between his own ideas and those of Emanuel Swedenborg, who he finally addresses by name.³⁸⁸

Kant begins part two by noting that there is nothing more harmful to a philosopher's reputation than being accused of credulity. He then presents the three famous stories surrounding Swedenborg's clairvoyance with an attitude of indifference,

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 71.

³⁸⁸ Commentators have in the past described Kant's spelling of Swedenborg's name, "Schwedenberg" as derogatory. However, Stengel demonstrates a wider use of this spelling, indicating a tendency among German writers to spell his name phonetically, rather than a deliberate misspelling. The adoption of this spelling by Mendelssohn and Herder is in imitation of Kant. However, as Stengel shows, others independently produced creative versions of Swedenborg's name, and with no ill intent. Johann Georg Hamann writes of "Schwedenberg" as *Arcana caelestia's* author as early as 1764. Oetinger alternated between "Schwedenberg" and "Swedenborg," and occasionally even "Schwedenburg" or "Suedenborg," and Justus Christian Hennings noted in 1780 "that one sometimes writes Swedenborg, other times Schwedenborg." See Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 640. Kant uses the "Schwedenberg" spelling throughout *Träume*, though he did use the correct spelling in his letter to Charlotte von Knobloch. My quotations from *Träume* will follow translator John Manolesco's lead in spelling the name correctly.

unlike the tone of his letter to Charlotte von Knobloch, which treated the same subject. Why should a philosopher report on stories about Swedenborg, “the arch-spirit seer of all spirit seers”? Kant’s answer builds a comparison to metaphysicians, who weave fairy tales of a similar sort. Philosophy should either accept or reject both together.³⁸⁹ But is Kant suggesting Metaphysics in its present form has no place in philosophy or that spirit seeing does have a place? His answer in favor of rejecting them both unfolds in the last two chapters, though not without further contradictions.

Part two formally introduces *Arcana coelestia*, as “eight quarto volumes of sheer nonsense,” a line Mendelssohn would repeat in his review.³⁹⁰ Kant dismisses the allegorical content of Swedenborg’s commentary with one line: “His discoveries are often applied exegetically to clarify the secret meaning of the first two books of Moses, and similar new interpretations are devised for the whole of the Holy Scriptures.”³⁹¹ Kant’s interest lies elsewhere, he writes, in the memorable relations and in descriptions of the interaction between physical and spiritual things. The style of *Arcana coelestia* is dull, but this, Kant writes, is actually a fact in Swedenborg’s favor. It counters the suspicion that Swedenborg writes to deceive his audience. He cannot be called a liar, but the question of his sanity is left on the table.

Chapter two of the second part pleads with the reader, with more stress than one might deem necessary, not to draw comparisons between Kant and Swedenborg.

I state as bluntly as possible: when it comes to such comparisons and insinuations I have no sense of humor, and I declare herewith emphatically:

³⁸⁹ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 76.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

either there is a great deal more wisdom and truth in Swedenborg's writings than we may have thought at first glance, or the fact that his ideas agree with my own system is a mere coincidence, just as is the case with some poets, who, when they race in frenzy, as they themselves profess, utter prophecies, prophecies which now and again come true.³⁹²

If Swedenborg got anything right it was by accident, Kant seems to be saying; don't use this as a reason to connect Kant's ideas to spirit-seeing. This petition is followed by a description of some of Swedenborg's key ideas that do appear most similar to Kant's. Swedenborg claims that each individual has two memories, an internal memory and an external one. Likewise, each has two kinds of senses, outer senses and inner senses.³⁹³ Time and space are perceived differently by the inner senses: proximity in this sense is determined by likeness rather than physical location.³⁹⁴ We are interiorly "close" to spirits who are like us, even if they are spirits whose bodies are from another continent.³⁹⁵ And the primary theme in Swedenborg, according to Kant's reading, is that bodies cannot exist without spirits, or that material beings exist by the power of the world of spirits. It is the totality of all spirits, or the community of spiritual beings that a person belongs to interiorly, that gives a person life.³⁹⁶ Furthermore, the parts of the body are mutually related according to physical laws, but body parts also receive animating powers from the soul. This "inner meaning" is not known to man, but is also true for everything in the visible world. Each thing has two meanings, a minor, material meaning,

³⁹² Ibid., 81, see also 89.

³⁹³ Ibid., 84.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 85.

³⁹⁵ From Kant's first lecture in *Metaphysics*: "[a person] is already in this world in community with all righteous and well-meaning souls, be they in India or Arabia; only he does not yet see himself in this community, until he is freed from sensuous intuition." As translated in Johnson, *Kant on Swedenborg*, 91-92.

³⁹⁶ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 86.

and an inner meaning: the former being a mere symbol of the later.³⁹⁷ With a second nod to the exegetical implications of all this for Swedenborg, Kant writes: “This is the reason why Swedenborg tried to give a new interpretation to the Bible.”³⁹⁸ The outer meaning of the Bible, like the human body “is a mere shell.”

Kant repeatedly expresses his concern that readers might suspect he is trying to convince them about the veracity of Swedenborg’s ideas. This concern is expressed at times explicitly³⁹⁹ and at times in the form of ridicule: “I am tired of copying the wild vagaries of the words of all dreamers or of continuing with his descriptions of the state after death.”⁴⁰⁰ He worries that by giving Swedenborg so much attention, readers, especially pregnant women or more poetically, those pregnant with idealism, will be misled.⁴⁰¹ It is an anxiety that stretches across the chapters of *Träume* such that one wonders if he is more concerned about his readers’ credulity or his own.

If Kant’s *Träume* expresses an internal struggle, however, it is not without purpose. The major thrust of the book is to take the ridicule directed at spirit seers, and redirect it towards metaphysicians, or those “brainless sophists who needlessly add to the bulk of our quarterly journals.”⁴⁰² These “dreamers of reason” are not unlike the mystics, or “dreamers of sense” in their lack of grounding or lack of critical reason. If both are deceived though, the quality of the deception is worth examining. The first type of

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 87.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 87.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁰¹ Elsewhere he states that women are especially prone to believing these things: see Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 77

⁴⁰² Ibid., 82-83, 90

dreamers allow deception of reason, a common enough and well understood problem.

Less clear is deception of the senses, and this interests Kant, for whom the experience of the senses is so fundamental to the ability understanding anything.

By the end of the book, Kant has replaced an idealistic metaphysics, “with whom my destiny made me fall in love hopelessly”⁴⁰³ with a critical metaphysics. The first, which answers questions concerning the hidden nature of things, sets its sights too high and tends to disappoint. The second, which determines which problems can be resolved with human reason and which cannot, “becomes a true science tracing the limits of human understanding.”⁴⁰⁴ He therefore sets the course for a true philosophy aimed at determining these limits, a project that would motivate his subsequent work and most importantly his three critiques: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 1790, and *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790. And so it would appear that this has been the goal all along: to redraw the borderlines of metaphysics and to exclude all activity that can’t be either explained by physical laws or corroborated through mutual experience. “Human reason was not meant to try and part the highest clouds in heaven or lift from our eyes the curtains in order to reveal to us the secrets of other worlds.”⁴⁰⁵ With that, Swedenborg’s *Secrets of Heaven* is decisively bracketed and removed from philosophical discourse. Or so it would seem. In actuality, Swedenborg’s removal from Kant’s thought and public discourse was not so absolute. Below, we will briefly consider the two areas of Kant’s thought, mentioned in the introduction, which continued to

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 90

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 98.

overlap with Swedenborg after the publication of *Träume*: metaphysical speculation and allegorical interpretation of the Bible.

The above summary and interpretation of *Träume* is not intended to clarify Kant's position or resolve its contradictions: there is no way around them. Rather, it is intended to shed light on *Arcana coelestia*'s place in eighteenth century discourse about the correspondence between nature and spirit, the relationship between mysticism and rationalism, and about the interpretation of scripture, by considering one very influential interpretation of it. The influence of *Träume* was marked sharply, however, by a sense of confusion over how to interpret it, a confusion that impacted how Swedenborg was read and understood by his early readers. The reception of *Arcana coelestia* was therefore very much linked to the reception of *Träume*.

Reception of Träume

That readers can't seem to agree on whether the greater part of Kant's estimation of Swedenborg in the book stems from admiration or ridicule, is perhaps because Kant himself was conflicted and, at least some of the time, intentionally vague and contradictory in this regard. In a 1766 letter responding to Moses Mendelssohn's "consternation" regarding the tone and ambiguity of the book, Kant writes "it was difficult for me to devise the right way to clothe my thoughts so as not to expose myself to mockery. It seemed to me most advisable to forestall others by first of all mocking myself, a completely honest procedure since my own mind was conflicted on this . . ." ⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁶ Immanuel Kant, "Letter to Moses Mendelsson," April 8, 1766, as translated by Johnson and Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 83-84.

That his own mind was conflicted is clearest from the contents of *Träume* explored above. This did not, however, soften the blow to Swedenborg's reputation.

Swedenborgian historian Robert Kirven describes the "long shadow" of Kant's attack in *Träume*, and the devastating blow it had on perceptions of Swedenborg in the eighteenth century, so much so that even three hundred years later "the mere invocation of the name of Immanuel Kant is sufficient to permit complete dismissal of the viewpoint, experience, and reasoning of Emanuel Swedenborg."⁴⁰⁷ This shadow is epitomized in a review by Herder, who advised those who were curious to read Kant's book in place of *Arcana*: "A reader who does not want to spend eight pounds sterling to read through a mass of enthusiasm in the original will find an excerpt here, which the author culled not merely from the writings, but from the spirit of the enthusiast, and which is here amusing when it could have cost effort."⁴⁰⁸ However, as a brief survey of the responses to *Träume* will show, if there was indeed a shadow cast, it was as much the result of the confusion about how to interpret Kant's book as it was a judgement on the value of Swedenborg's work.

The confusion over Kant's intended message was immediate. In the same year of its publication, Moses Mendelssohn wrote "The joking pensiveness with which this little work is written leaves the reader sometimes in doubt as to whether Herr Kant intends to make metaphysics laughable or spirit-seeing credible."⁴⁰⁹ Mendelssohn was intimately

⁴⁰⁷ Robert H. Kirven, "Swedenborg and Kant Revisited: The Long Shadow of Kant's Attack and a New Response," in *Swedenborg and His Influence* (Bryn Athyn, PA The Academy of the New Church, 1988), 103.

⁴⁰⁸ Johann Gottfried Herder, "Review of Dreams of a Spirit-Seer: March 3, 1766," as translated by Johnson and Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 115.

⁴⁰⁹ Moses Mendelssohn, "Review of Dreams of a Spirit-Seer: 1767," as translated by Johnson and Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 123.

familiar with Kant's work on metaphysics. Three years earlier, he narrowly came in first to Kant's second in an essay competition for the Prussian Royal Academy.⁴¹⁰ The two corresponded subsequently, the contents of which reveal an intention, on Kant's part at least, to work together on creating "a new era" for metaphysics.⁴¹¹ Kant's response to Mendelssohn's confusion is quoted above, and does little to clarify his personal feelings towards spirit-seeing such as that of Swedenborg, which in the same sentence he describes as "mere delusions" and then qualifies that "I myself would try to defend it if someone were to argue it impossible."⁴¹²

Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, likewise, wrote in his review of *Träume*, "After reading through these pages, we have become doubtful whether they were written in jest or in earnest; at any rate both are almost always together."⁴¹³ And in a letter to Swedenborg about Kant's book, theologian Friedrich Christoph Oetinger writes that "the author lifts you on high with praises, as much as he pushes you down with accusations lest he be regarded as a fanatic."⁴¹⁴ Whether Swedenborg read the book or what his

⁴¹⁰ Kant's second-place essay responded to the Academy's prompt: "'Whether the metaphysical truths in general, and especially the first principles of natural theology and morals, are capable of the same degree of proof as geometrical truths, and if they are not capable of such proof, what is the nature of their certainty, and to what degree can they achieve it, and is such certainty sufficient for conviction?'" Kant's response was titled: "Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral" (Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality).

⁴¹¹ See Kant's discussion of this possible collaboration in letter to Mendelssohn dated April 8, 1766, in Johnson, *Kant on Swedenborg*, 84-85.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴¹³ Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, "Review of Dreams of a Spirit-Seer: September 23, 1766," as translated in Johnson and Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 120.

⁴¹⁴ Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, "Letter to Emanuel Swedenborg: December 4, 1766," as translated by Johnson and Magee in *Kant on Swedenborg*, 122.

reaction was, we don't know. But the confusion it generated about his own work would certainly create immediate obstacles for his readers.

Nineteenth and twentieth-century readers of Kant, even as they are more able to place *Träume* in the full context of his life work, have come no closer to a consensus on his motivations. In the bibliography to his 2001 dissertation on the topic, Johnson cites 27 German, French and English scholars that argue for what he terms “the received view:” that Kant’s tone is primarily skeptical and satirical, and that whatever influence Swedenborg had on Kant it was primarily negative. These sources include Kuno Fisher, Willi Goetschel, Monique David-Ménard, and Martin Schönfeld. Johnson then cites 46 authors who challenge the received view, including Ernst Benz, Carl Du Prel, Keith Ward, and Carl Jung, leaving one to wonder what exactly is received about the received view. Johnson adds his name to the challengers, and in the introduction to his 2002 translation of *Träume*, he argues for six aspects of Kant’s mature philosophy that resemble Swedenborgian thought: 1) Swedenborg’s dualistic universe in which individuals simultaneously inhabit the spiritual and material worlds is like Kant’s “dual aspect” metaphysics in which all beings exist in phenomenal and noumenal worlds. 2) Kant’s ideality of time and space compare with Swedenborg’s descriptions of time and space in the spiritual world. 3) Swedenborg believed the moral law of the spiritual world enters the consciousness via influx, and Kant similarly points to the origins of moral law in the noumenal. 4) Kant’s identification of moral law with a “kingdom of ends” (*Reich der Zwecke*) is anticipated in Swedenborg’s *regnum finium*. 5) Swedenborg’s correspondences resonate with Kant’s interpretation of both history and scripture through

“signatures” of the noumenal “as phenomenal intimations of a transcendent, intelligible world.” And 6) Kant’s conception of the moral and practical core of wisdom was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and by Swedenborg.⁴¹⁵ The following section will consider the congruencies that relate to the themes that concern us.

The Limits of Reason: A Porous Boundary

In his 1770 Inaugural Dissertation, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* (On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible Worlds), Kant distinguishes between two powers of cognition that perceive reality in two distinct worlds: the understanding perceives the intelligible world and sensibility perceives the sensible world. Here, Kant presents his pre-critical view of understanding, that as pure reason it accesses to the numinous, or the world of moral perfection. This optimistic view echoes his earlier faith in the principle of determining ground, in which one can access, through reason, a chain of causes that originate in the “necessary being.” As such, his Inaugural Dissertation appears to backtrack on critical theories worked out in *Träume*. Beiser finds it “indeed extremely puzzling, to find that in August, 1770, Kant appears to revive speculative metaphysics in his inaugural dissertation. . . . The conception of metaphysics that Kant outlines in this work seems to be the complete negation of that in the Dreams. The aim of metaphysics is not to determine the limits of reason, but to give us a rational knowledge of the intelligible world.”⁴¹⁶ Beiser explains this apparent contradiction by tracing the development of Kant’s thought in the years between 1746

⁴¹⁵ Johnson, *Kant on Swedenborg*, xvii-xix.

⁴¹⁶ Beiser, “Kant’s Intellectual Development,” 47.

and 1781 through four phases of his “unhappy love affair” with metaphysics. Earlier “infatuation” turned to a period of disillusionment and skepticism, such as we see in *Träume*. However, the Dissertation marks a subsequent phase of “partial reconciliation” in the 1770s before Kant entered the fourth phase of “divorce” from metaphysics all together, beginning in 1781.

If Beiser’s four phases are accurate, they explain Kant’s more positive engagement with Swedenborg in his lectures on Metaphysics (L1) in the 1770s.⁴¹⁷ “The thought of Swedenborg is in this quite sublime” we read from Kant’s lecture notes.⁴¹⁸ The matter at hand is the immortality of the soul, the relationship of the soul to the body and the nature of the soul’s domain after the death of the body. This phase is only a partial reconciliation, as Beiser notes, and Kant holds to assertions about the limits of reason, qualifying the optimism demonstrated in the Inaugural Dissertation: “we can comprehend no more through reason than that such spirits are possible.” But the field of psychology allows us nevertheless to consider such things at length “in order to purify the concept of the spiritual nature of the soul.”⁴¹⁹ Particular affinities with Swedenborgian thought in this lecture include: the subjectivity of space and time in the spiritual world; that a person’s spirit is in community with other spirits “now” – even as the person is alive in their physical body; and that the makeup of this community is determined by the moral quality of a person’s action in the world. In other words: a person’s spirit is

⁴¹⁷ On the problem of dating these lectures, see the introduction by Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon in Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xxx-xxxiii.

⁴¹⁸ Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. Ameriks and Naragon, 105.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 105

proximate to and in community with like-minded spirits.⁴²⁰ This positive summary of Swedenborg's views is moderated with the assertion, again, that such things cannot be observed directly, for we are limited in this world to our "sensuous intuition" and will have "spiritual intuition" only after the death of the body. It is impossible to see spiritual realities with the physical eyes, and what Swedenborg claimed to have seen is impossible (even if it is sublime). He concludes that providence has closed the door on the world of the spirit's future, and the chief matter before us is how to live righteously in the present. This line of reasoning presents a logical paradox: that Swedenborg's experiences are impossible, or worse, useless, and yet they produce descriptions that Kant finds somehow intuitively truthful. We have in the metaphysics lectures a snapshot into how Kant's encounter with Swedenborg merged with his thinking on the limits of reason. Kant is interested in articulating a border beyond which human reason cannot penetrate. But as we see here and elsewhere, this border is a porous one. Spiritual intuition is inaccessible while a person lives in the body, and yet how could an *embodied* person have the idea of a spiritual intuition without some entry point? We see how Kant's thinking during this period was shifting and searching for new ground upon which to establish a new era of metaphysics, a project he eventually abandoned.

As Kevin Hector demonstrates, Kant's thought evolved subsequently from this pre-critical view. As he lost faith in stable principles of understanding, his faith in a necessary being and in the non-arbitrariness of our beliefs was threatened as well. His subsequent focus on the principles of cognition, over and above physical and

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 103-106.

metaphysical laws, was an attempt to overcome the instability that this disillusionment brought. For Kant, this required an understanding of human reason that drew on principles of empiricism. As Hector writes of Kant's shift: "The cure for what ails metaphysics, therefore, is simple: instead of drawing endless inferences from abstract definitions, metaphysics should derive their principles strictly from empirical data."⁴²¹ Therefore, eleven years after his Inaugural Dissertation, Kant would change his position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and argue that both understanding and sensibility are limited to knowledge of the sensible world, that our knowledge of reality is interrupted by a disunity between subject and object, and that the intelligible world is unknowable.⁴²² In all of this, we recognize questions and categories that Kant wrestled with in *Träume*, aimed ultimately at redefining the function of metaphysics: to determine the perimeter of what we can know. Swedenborg, whose visions of heaven's secrets he found to be alluring early on, was an example upon which he could build an argument about such a perimeter, or at the very least the obligation of metaphysicians to seek its location.

Several scholars have considered Swedenborg's role in the development of Kant's thought in the decade prior to his first Kritik. In his 2007 *Wahn und Wahrheit: Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Irrationalen (Delusion and Truth: Kant's Discussion of the Irrational)*, Constantin Rauer argues that Kant's struggle with Swedenborg was a driving force of his first Kritik, but a negative one: or that Kant's philosophy subsequent to his

⁴²¹ Kevin W. Hector, "Giving Oneself the Law," in *The Theological Problem of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness* (Oxford University Press: 2015), 38.

⁴²² See Hector, "Giving Oneself," 43-45. The *mundus intelligibilis* is identified with Swedenborg's spiritual world in Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 105.

engagement with Swedenborg is aimed at combating illusions and delusions such as those he read in *Arcana coelestia*. It need not be the case, however, that Kant's negativity towards Swedenborg prohibited occasions of intersection later on. Friedemann Stengel rebuts Rauer's argument in his 2014 German language study of Swedenborg, citing Rauer's omission of the positive references to Swedenborg in lectures and publications that came after *Träume*, and even after his Critiques. For example, Kant's eschatology, in Stengel's view, is a "partial appropriation" of Swedenborg's in that it similarly rejects the notion of a final day of judgement, and is concerned with self-judgement and the eternity of the moral worlds (heavenly or hellish) one creates for oneself through moral or immoral action. This view is most clearly expressed in his 1794 *Das Ende aller Dinge* (The End of All Things).⁴²³ In addition to his eschatology, Stengel identifies several elements of Kant's mature philosophy of religion and his moral philosophy that are "modifications" of ideas available to him in *Arcana coelestia*.⁴²⁴ These include: his ideas on original sin and the doctrine of Justification, which emphasize freedom and self-responsibility of individuals over grace and external procedures for the cleansing of sin; his conception of Judaism; his hermeneutics; and his emphasis on the requirement of an intelligible world for moral philosophy, an intelligible world present with the individual here and now, and not merely one experienced after death. References to Swedenborgian thought, therefore, appear in Kant's work during various phases of his development. He

⁴²³ Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 669. William Blake also had this in common with Swedenborg. See the section on Blake in chapter seven below.

⁴²⁴ Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 673.

is at times repulsed by and at times attracted to Swedenborg, and this exchange should be understood in light of Kant's own vacillations concerning metaphysics.

Allegory: Rejected or Redefined?

As we have seen, Kant's argument for the unknowability of the spiritual world is occasionally punctuated with digressions into the nature of the spiritual world – a curious combination and one that reveals something of his own weakness for things beyond. We see a parallel anxiety in how he thinks about the true meaning of scripture, and here again Swedenborg is a jumping off point. In his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht abgefaßt* (Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, 1798) Kant is careful to dissect a nuanced difference between Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences and his view of the relationship between true religion and religious symbols:

To say, with Swedenborg, that the real phenomena of the world present to the senses are merely a *symbol* of an intelligible world hidden in reserve is *fanaticism*. But in exhibiting the concepts that are the essence of all religion – concepts (called Ideas) that belong to morality and so to pure reason – it is *enlightenment* to distinguish the symbolic from the intellectual (public worship from religion), the temporarily useful and necessary husk from the thing itself. Otherwise we exchange an *Ideal* (of pure practical reason) for an *idol*, and miss the final end. It is an indisputable fact that all peoples on earth have begun by making this mistake and that, when it came to the question of what their teachers themselves really meant in composing their sacred writings, the interpretation had to be *literal* and not symbolic; for it would be dishonest to twist the teacher's words. But when it is a question not merely of the *truthfulness* of the teacher but also, and indeed essentially, of the *truth* of his teaching, then we can and should interpret these writings as a merely symbolic form of representation, in which established formalities and customs accompany those practical Ideas. For otherwise the intellectual meaning, which is the final end, would be lost.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁵ Kant, *Anthropology*, 65. This section of the book considers various cognitive powers, such as making associations, having foresight, having imagination, and dreaming. For each of these powers he considers the range of their expression from those that are favorable (using reason, inner sense, and experience)

Here, Kant begins with a distinction between enthusiasm and enlightenment, in which Swedenborg's idea of the correspondential relationship between spiritual and natural things is rejected in favor of a more conventional view of symbols. However, as we read on, the true culprit for misreading symbols is identified, not with the fanatic Swedenborg, but with biblical literalists. Those who make an idol out of Pure Ideas are readers who miss the true teaching of the scripture and focus instead on ways these ideas are represented in forms of culture and language. In this instance, Kant does not address Swedenborg's exegetical methods as much as his ontological view of a dualistic universe, and where he does address biblical interpretation he seems to be siding with a non-literal reading, one that rejects the husk for the kernel within.

Elsewhere however, he does address Swedenborg's use of allegory directly and in negative terms. For instance, in his *Der Streit Der Fakultaten (The Conflict of the Faculties, 1798)*, Swedenborg is associated with a kind of mystical and typological reading that runs counter to reason. The conflict between the faculty of theology and the faculty of philosophy, specifically around biblical interpretation, demonstrates the kinds of interdisciplinary arguments that interest Kant. The biblical theologian bases their interpretation on ecclesiastical faith, which Kant describes as "laws proceeding from another person's act of choice."⁴²⁶ The rational theologian, on the other hand, bases their

and those that are fanatical, or arise from madness or self-deception. This section considers the power of using signs.

⁴²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 61.

interpretation on “inner laws that can be developed from every man’s own reason.”⁴²⁷ With this distinction in hand, Kant presents the principles of interpretation that should guide a philosophical approach to sacred texts, each of which flies in the face of ecclesiastical tradition in the strongest terms. These principles of interpretation revolve around the idea that there is only one religion and it is morality. There is no merit in faith, but only in deeds. Any interpretation of scripture should have this end in mind: a true reading is a moral one.⁴²⁸ The doctrine of the trinity, of the resurrection and of the dual nature of Christ, that he is both God and man, are all things that have no practical relevance at all until they are interpreted with a moral end in mind, and in many cases this requires a non-literal reading.

He considers the resurrection as an example and rejects outright the belief in the immortality of the body. “For who is so fond of his body that he would want to drag it around with him for eternity, if he cannot get along without it?” Such an assertion strains reason. The apostles, who spoke of a bodily resurrection “must have meant only that we have reason to believe Christ is still alive and that our faith would be in vain if even so perfect a man did not continue to live after (bodily) death. This belief, which reason suggested to him (as to all men), moved him to historical belief in a public event . . . failing to realize that, apart from his moral belief, he himself would have found it hard to

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ This appeal to a moral interpretive methodology resembles Augustine’s approach. In discussing when to read literally and when to read figuratively, Augustine also appealed to morality: “anything not related to good morals or true faith is figurative.” Kant goes further than Augustine in rejecting the narrative of the Bible in favor of an ethical kernel, but there is a similarity of emphasis. See Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford University Press, 2008), 75.

credit this tale.”⁴²⁹ Christ’s death, according to Kant’s interpretation, inspired in his followers a sense of longing for immortality, or a conviction that he must still be alive spiritually. This intuition was then expressed in terms available to the apostles in that time, and we are required to translate their words forward to the standards of our day, independent of ecclesiastical tradition and according to reason. It is noteworthy that here Kant associates a “moral purpose” with a sense of the immortality of the soul, as morality and belief in an afterlife are a troublesome pair for the philosopher – appearing elsewhere in his writing to be mutually exclusive.⁴³⁰

Another example of Kant’s biblical interpretation is in his treatment of the Garden of Eden story found in his essay *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (“Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” 1786). Here, as with Mendelssohn, the individual development of the human being is compared to the journey of the first man. Kant offers an interpretation of Genesis 3, in which he traces Adam’s transition through four stages of reason. For instance, Genesis 3:2-3 describes the first stage, in which man’s discernment is determined by his senses rather than his intellect; the eating of permitted and forbidden fruit signifies the animal-like instincts of someone who chooses food based solely on the basis of taste and smell.⁴³¹ The story as a whole, then, refers to

⁴²⁹ Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, 69.

⁴³⁰ For instance, in his Metaphysics lectures: “In general we still allege *that it is not at all suitable here to our vocation to worry much over the future world; rather we must complete the circle to which we are here determined, and wait for how it will be with respect to the future world.* The main point is that we conduct ourselves well at this post, righteously and morally, and attempt to make ourselves worthy of future happiness.” Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 106.

⁴³¹ Immanuel Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. Pauline Kleingeld, trans. David L. Colclasure (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 26.

the “transition from the brutishness of a merely animal creature to humanity, from the leading reins of instinct to the direction of reason, in a word, from the guardianship of nature into the state of freedom.”⁴³² Adam’s story is the story of human history, and also the story every human who progresses through the stages Kant describes in order to achieve moral agency.

Biblical interpretation then, according to Kant, must distinguish between the things belonging to pure religion and things related to the mere vehicle of ecclesiastical faith. The latter is not religion, but a tool for arriving at religion, properly understood.⁴³³ He then anticipates the objection, from theologians and philosophers alike, that this is nothing more than allegory. But, he argues, the opposite is true! For the theologian, who mistakes the husk, or the vehicle, for the thing itself, *he* is the one who is forced to use allegory. To the hypothetical accusation that Kant’s biblical interpretation is allegorical, he writes: “My reply is that the exact opposite is true. If the biblical theologian mistakes the husk of religion for religion itself, [it is he who must interpret the scriptures allegorically;] he must explain the entire Old Testament, for example, as a continuous allegory (of prototypes and symbols) of the religious state still to come—or else admit that true religion (which cannot be truer than true) had already appeared then, making the

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 29. On comparison with Maimonides’ interpretation of Genesis 3, and the difference between Kant and Maimonides with respect to their view of nature and morality, see Heidi Ravven, “Maimonides’ Non-Kantian Moral Psychology: Maimonides and Kant on the Garden of Eden and the Genealogy of Morals,” *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2012): 199-216.

⁴³³ This distinction has parallels with Maimonides, who, in book III, Chapter 28 of his *Guide for the Perplexed* distinguishes between rational, or true beliefs, and necessary, or traditional beliefs. When applied to the Bible, references to anthropomorphic traits of God in the text are interpreted as necessary rather than true. The reliance of both Kant and Maimonides on Aristotle’s semiotics may account for this similarity. On Kant and Maimonides, see Michael Zank and Hartwig Wiedebach, “The Kant-Maimonides Constellation,” and other essays in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2012).

New Testament superfluous.”⁴³⁴ And here, in his explicit rejection of allegory, Kant associates the husk with the Old Testament and with Judaism. The theologian is compelled to connect the Old Testament and the New Testament by means of typology, but in doing so binds himself to outdated Jewish tenets that “can well make us moan.”⁴³⁵

In the section on objections to allegory, Kant counters the anticipated charge that his interpretation is mystical, by distinguishing his methods from Swedenborg’s:

As for the charge that rational interpretation of Scriptures is mystical, the sole means of avoiding mysticism (such as Swedenborg’s) is for philosophy to be on the lookout for moral meaning in scriptural texts and even to impose it on them. For unless the supersensible (the thought of which is essential to anything called religion) is anchored to determinate concepts of reason, such as those of morality, fantasy inevitably gets lost in the transcendent, where religious matters are concerned, and leads to an Illuminism in which everyone has his private, inner revelations, and there is no longer any public touchstone of truth.⁴³⁶

The winds of mysticism are barred by the stronghold of practical morality. As noted above, Kant’s stated opposition between morality and Swedenborgian mysticism is curious given Swedenborg’s own emphasis on usefulness. Like Kant, Swedenborg repeated emphatically that moral action replaces faith as the factor determining the quality of one’s religiosity. Furthermore, Swedenborg, like Kant, rejects certain creedal traditions such as the trinity, the bodily resurrection and the final judgement day.⁴³⁷ Given Kant’s exegetical principles outlined above, Swedenborg’s offense is not his appeal to the immortality of the soul, nor his rejection of ecclesiastical faith, nor even his

⁴³⁴ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 79.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-81. Kant’s designation of things “mystical” and “fantasy” echo statements made in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in which he sorts expressions of human cognitive powers in to categories of reasonable expressions and unreasonable ones. See note 430 above.

⁴³⁷ In Swedenborg’s view, while Christ’s body did rise to heaven, the bodies of humans do not.

doctrine of correspondences, if by correspondences we limit ourselves to the idea that the biblical narrative points to a deeper truth by means of symbols. Swedenborg's offence, in terms of Kant's principles, is his stubborn reliance on the Old Testament. This attitude towards the Hebrew scriptures explains, in part, Kant's reaction to reading *Arcana coelestia*, in which he digests the memorable relations but pays little to no attention to the exegetical material, relying as it does, so heavily on the text of the Old Testament. The general principle of looking for higher wisdom behind or within the plain sense was not objectionable in itself to Kant, despite his dismissal of allegorical interpretation as *schwärmende Auslegungen* (swarming interpretations).⁴³⁸ The problem was that Swedenborg made "the mistake of including Judaism" in his reading.⁴³⁹

Antikabbalah

In his 1793 *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone), Kant lays out his argument that while Christianity is concerned with what is moral, Judaism is concerned merely with what is statutory. He writes that originally, Judaism was no religion at all, but a political entity concerned with externalities, legalism, rewards and punishments.⁴⁴⁰ If the first Christians found it necessary to ground themselves in Jewish texts, over time this has had the negative effect of magnifying the legalism of Church councils and the like, and perpetuating the drive to

⁴³⁸ See Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 642; Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Manolesco, 82.

⁴³⁹ Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 65.

⁴⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene & Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 116.

“seek religion without and not within us.”⁴⁴¹ In a telling footnote to the second edition of the book, Kant discusses Mendelssohn’s reasons for not converting to Christianity. Mendelssohn’s argument is that Christianity is founded on Judaism and to convert would be, in Kant’s words, to “demolish the ground floor of a house in order to take up his abode in the second story.”⁴⁴² Kant provides his parenthetical commentary to this notion, writing that “(Actually nothing would then be left but pure moral religion unencumbered by statutes.)” The books of the Jews should be preserved, he concludes, not for the benefit of religion, but for the value of scholarship only.

In Kant we see an important similarity to and an important distinction from Swedenborg’s treatment of Judaism. For Swedenborg, the Old Testament and the Hebrew language are uniquely conducive to creating correspondential connections to spiritual realities. For Kant, the Old Testament is an outdated hindrance to true religion. Yet, while their assessments of the value of Hebrew scriptures differ markedly, their characterizations of Jews themselves are alike in drawing on stereotypes of Jews as materialistic. *Arcana coelestia* therefore, while challenging Kant’s prejudice against Old Testament religion, would have confirmed his prejudice against Jews. As Stengel writes, for both men the stereotype is put to use in distinguishing true, *internal* religion from the empty, external symbols of religion:

This tendentious construction of Judaism in Kant already pervades the *Secrets of Heaven*, although one must add, of course, that Kant would also have had, particularly on this subject, recourse to an expansive tradition of literary anti-Semitism. However, the reasons that led Swedenborg to his view of Judaism do not diverge from those of Kant. What makes them conspicuous

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 154 n.

is that they fulfill a similar function within his overall concept: in Swedenborg's work, as well, the focus is on morality and on the relationship between external faith and the internal – moral – attitude.⁴⁴³

However, while Kant clarifies his stance on Jews and on Old Testament religion in his writings, his opinion of Kabbalah is less clear. Kant's use of the term "Antikabbalah" in titling his harshest critique of the spirit seeing of Swedenborg, like so much of *Träume*, is ambiguous. He does not explain the wording of this chapter title and Kabbalah is mentioned nowhere else in the book. The chapter appears, in part, to be criticizing the philosophy of the Leibniz-Wolffian school, which Kant interfaced with regularly by lecturing on Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's textbook on metaphysics. As discussed above, the chapter draws a connection between "dreamers of reason" and "dreamers of sense," thereby ridiculing metaphysicians and mystics all at once. The connection between Swedenborg and Kabbalah does reappear in his metaphysics lectures, where theurgy and Neoplatonism enter the discussion on the possibility of contact with departed souls.⁴⁴⁴ Swedenborg and Kabbalah are not explicitly linked here, but are part of the same train of thought. Swedenborg's opinion on the presence of spirits in the thoughts and representations in us is followed by an attack on the visions and fantasies associated with third century theurgical practices: "Theurgy is the entire art of entering into the community of spirits, magic, cabala, and whatever else there was. It is not worth the trouble to speak of it any further. –All matter is lifeless, this is the principle of physics, without this there is no natural science at all." In each of these cases, in the

⁴⁴³ Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 680. Translated by Suzanne Schwarz Zuber.

⁴⁴⁴ Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. Ameriks and Naragon, 295, 353.

lectures and in the Antikabbalah chapter, whatever else is at stake, the end goal is the demarcation of the limits of scientific reasoning. The discourse about Kabbalah is, for Kant, less about Jewish esotericism, and more about including certain forms of rational metaphysics in broad categories of fanaticism that can be wholly disqualified from commenting on scientific matters.⁴⁴⁵

In Kant's thought then, Judaism is useful in negatively defining pure religion, just as Kabbalah (however vaguely conceived) is useful in negatively defining practical reason. Swedenborg is also used discursively – as a negative foil for describing the limits of reason. And yet in both Kant's treatment of Judaism and of Swedenborg, something of the anxiety of influence can be discerned. As we have shown, Swedenborg's concepts of the spiritual world resonates with Kant's philosophical system, often in quite specific ways, such as the subjectivity of time and space. And in the case of Judaism, some of his harshest criticisms are also in areas that overlap with his own thought. Sidney Axinn demonstrates this dynamic in arguing, for instance, that Kant asserts the impossibility of knowing concretely about the spiritual world or life after death, but criticizes Jews for centering their ethical system on concerns for this life rather than the hereafter.⁴⁴⁶ He denounces the Old Testament as lacking in moral substance, but also cites the ten commandments as essential to moral religion. And his anti-anthropomorphism is not

⁴⁴⁵ Stengel does not think Kant is referring to Swedenborg with the term "Antikabbalah" but argues from Häfner's *Macht der Willkür* that he may be alluding to the masonic order Elus Coëns, founded in 1754 by the Portuguese Christian kabbalist Jacques Martinès de Pasqually, Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 666, note 150.

⁴⁴⁶ Kant writes, for instance: "Furthermore, since no religion can be conceived of which involves no belief in a future life, Judaism, which when taken in its purity is seen to lack this belief, is not a religious faith at all." From Kant, *Religion within the Limits*, 117.

unlike that of the Judaism he denounces.⁴⁴⁷ All of this affirms our thesis that criticism, even in its harshest forms, does not imply lack of positive overlap, and in many cases it is in fact an indication that investigation into possible resonances of thought will be rewarded. Both Kant and Swedenborg serve as examples of eighteenth century Christian thinkers whose anti-Jewish rhetoric contradicts aspects of their own work. The same can be said of Kant's rhetoric about Swedenborg himself.

Countering Kant: German Idealist Philosophy

While Kant had the last word on Swedenborg for the majority of philosophers who followed him, given his vast and weighty influence on the future course of western thought, moments of positive reception of Swedenborg do appear in idealist/romantic philosophy. In Schelling we find an example of this countercurrent, and his reading of Swedenborg is useful as we conclude this treatment of Kant, especially because he responds directly to the criticism found in Kant's *Träume*.

Friedemann Horn's work on Schelling points to his sources in German translations of Swedenborg's work available at the time, including *Arcana coelestia*, in acquaintances interested in Swedenborg such as G. H. Schubert, and in secondary sources indebted to Swedenborgian thought such as Johann Lavatar's *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (Insights into Eternity, 1768-1778) and Jung Stilling's *Szenen aus den Geisterreich* (Scenes from the Spiritual Realm, 1797).⁴⁴⁸ Schelling had "no epistemological difficulties

⁴⁴⁷ Sidney Axinn, "Kant on Judaism," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 59, no. 1 (July, 1968): 11-17.

⁴⁴⁸ Friedemann Horn writes: "anyone who made an effort could gain access to virtually all the works of Swedenborg at that time." See Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism*, trans. George F. Dole (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 1997), 32-34. See also Ernst Benz,

in his encounter with Swedenborg” because of his rooting in the mystical-theosophical traditions of his Swabian homeland. These traditions were at home with the ideas of a vibrant afterlife and a knowable world of spirits.⁴⁴⁹ It was the death of his beloved wife Caroline, however, that elicited Schelling’s most open engagement with the ideas the “Swedish spirit-seer” in his work *Clara. Oder über den Zusammenhang der Natur- mit der Geisterwelt* (*Clara: Or, on the Connection of Nature to the Spirit World*, 1810c).⁴⁵⁰

Clara is an unfinished work, following a discussion between four characters through four seasons of a year, set initially amidst a graveyard celebration of All Souls Day. Each of the characters represents an opinion on the spirit world and its relationship to the human soul and to the natural world. The dominant opinion, the opinion interpreters have identified with Schelling’s, is that of the Doctor, who believes humans do have access to knowledge about the spirit world but only to the degree that they understand the natural world. “A tree that draws strength, life, and substance into itself from the earth may hope to drive its topmost branches hanging with blossom right up to heaven.”⁴⁵¹ The work therefore takes up the same issue that Kant addresses in *Träume*, namely the question of our ability or inability to know an intelligible world, and Schelling draws the opposite conclusion to Kant’s.

"Swedenborg und Lavater. Über die religiösen Grundlagen der Physiognomik," in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*. Dritte Folge VIII, 57 (1938): 153-216.

⁴⁴⁹ Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg*, 3.

⁴⁵⁰ On the question of dating, see Fiona Steinkamp’s introduction to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Clara, or, On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp (Albany : State University of New York Press, 2002), xiii-xvii.

⁴⁵¹ Schelling, *Clara*, 5.

Schelling's Clergyman character is the Kantian voice, maintaining that the two worlds are completely separate and the dead are inaccessible to the living. Evidence of the immortality of the soul is to be found only in the human conscience, and a moral life does not concern itself with worlds and spirits that are inaccessible to our physical senses. The other three characters hold some version of an opposing view to the Clergyman, and through their discussions, an anti-Kantian viewpoint emerges: "Thus, one shouldn't suspect those seeking certainty of knowledge, even in the most spiritual objects, of fanciful imagination or of trying to lead people to so imagine; rather, one should suspect those who work against that certainty, even if they should do so with the pretext of having a sense that supersedes science itself." The work supports the idea of contact with the spirit world, of access by means of dreams, visions, and rare cases of clairvoyance. References to Swedenborg as exemplar appear twice in the work, though neither time by name. The first reference is in the context of those who understand the diversity in the spirit world, or the infinity of shades between heaven and hell. He is "that Swedish visionary" who, rather than deriving his knowledge by returning from death, "had his inner being opened to him in some other way so that he could look into that world."⁴⁵² The second time Swedenborg is "the northern visionary" with insights into the nature of revelation on different plants, and summaries of ideas on this topic found in *Arcana coelestia* are presented.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Ibid., 56.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 77. See Swedenborg, *Arcana coelestia*, 9358 and 9360. On the popularity of Swedenborg's ideas about alien religion in romantic circles, see Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg*, 28.

It is telling that the philosophical reception of Swedenborg's ideas found its most positive expression in a more literary format. As we will see in chapter seven, poets and authors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were inspired by a variety of Swedenborg's concepts, especially those related to language and symbolism. Schelling's *Clara* is the only example of his philosophical writing to take such a narrative format, and the fictional setting and characters are perhaps what allowed him to explore the fantastic descriptions of other worlds found in Swedenborg's writings. However, if the content of *Clara* is fanciful in its depiction of supernatural realities, it nevertheless responds seriously to the philosophical debates of the time. Swedenborg passes between Kant and Schelling as a major example of a kind of knowledge under dispute. Schelling responds to Kant, using concepts found in Swedenborg that Kant bracketed, and insists on the capacity of spiritual realities to be known by the same faculties that know things *scientifically* – an argument Swedenborg brought to the fore of his own work. It speaks to the relative success of Kant's efforts over Schelling's that western philosophy has by and large continued in the direction away from metaphysics.

Conclusion: Angels and Allegory

In their chapter on "The Battle of Reason with Imagination," Hartmut Böhme and Gernot Böhme explore one facet of Kant's interest in Swedenborg that is helpful in our present study in so far as it concerns the figurative aspects of human language. Böhme and Böhme are among those who make the case that Kant's critical turn is in large part

due to his engagement with Swedenborg.⁴⁵⁴ They write: “We presume that in Swedenborg Kant perceived a sort of twin brother, a counterpart, from whom he found it vitally important to distance himself.”⁴⁵⁵ The example they use from Swedenborg to make this argument is the idea of the language of angels. Swedenborg’s angels communicate thought in speech, but it is an unmediated speech – a way of presenting ideas without social convention or pretense. A single uttered sound communicates pure thought without any rhetorical elements, and nothing can be withheld or hidden. Kant would have been attracted to this concept, concerned as he was with *pure reason* and *pure religion*, but he ultimately sided with the usefulness of “civilizing external gloss” as Böhme and Böhme put it. A representational theory of language “essentially contains the possibility of deception and falsification”⁴⁵⁶ but civilized behavior and civilized speech are nevertheless art forms indispensable to good human relations and good education, Kant believed.⁴⁵⁷

In a certain sense then, Kant, in siding with language’s indispensable feature of masking inner thought with outer words, was highlighting the very principle of interpretation that both he and Swedenborg found so important to biblical interpretation. Sacred text, like human speech (and unlike angelic speech), conceals its true meaning behind the literal sense of the words. In fact, this interpretive question regarding the nature of language, written or spoken, gets at the heart of social and epistemological

⁴⁵⁴ Stengel criticizes Böhme and Böhme for their emphasis on Kant’s negative response to Swedenborg, though he agrees with their assessment of Swedenborg’s importance for the development of Kant’s critical theories. See Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 636.

⁴⁵⁵ Böhme and Böhme, “The Battle of Reason,” 437-438.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁴⁵⁷ A view developed in Kant, *Anthropology*.

conditions of the eighteenth century, whereby language is “by its very nature mediation, and the idea of unmediated language is an absurdity.”⁴⁵⁸ This puts the early modern interest in biblical literalism in a new light. If the language of the Bible is true and immediately accessible, as so many insisted with increasing confidence at that time, it is then unique from other forms of language. It is like Swedenborg’s angelic speech – wholly different and uniquely holy. Between Kant and Swedenborg and the biblical literalists such as William Whiston, a common set of concerns can be discerned: is divine speech different from human speech, and is this difference marked by varying degrees of immediacy? Does the Bible, as holy Word, mask its true meaning, or is its truth immediate? Neither Kant nor Swedenborg bothered with historical critical methods, which they had access to. And both men reacted negatively to forms of biblical literalism of their time. Both sought an inner meaning concerned with morality, or with right action over and above right belief and both looked for wisdom hidden within the figures of speech.

For Kant, especially after his critical turn, the idea of angelic speech is ultimately wrapped up in a set of concepts that must remain theoretical and even banned from philosophical discourse. The philosopher no longer orbits a spiritual sun, but a natural one. His is the “Copernican revolution for philosophy” as Hanegraaff puts it.⁴⁵⁹ His public rejection of Swedenborg marked a larger moment in the history of science. That Swedenborg himself would be used as a tool in finally separating religion from science,

⁴⁵⁸ Böhme and Böhme, “The Battle of Reason,” 449.

⁴⁵⁹ Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant*, 97.

metaphysics from physics, is tragic given his own efforts to keep them intertwined. The irony with which this separation is made however, such as that found in the pages of *Träume*, is highlighted by the continued presence of key Swedenborgian concepts in Kantian philosophy and in the sometimes irreverent and often countercultural influences of artists and poets who playfully adopted aspects of Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Before considering the reception of *Arcana coelestia* among such artists, however, something of their reception in religious institutions and among theologians must first be explored.

CHAPTER 6: THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO *ARCANA COELESTIA*

As discussed in chapter 4, in Swedenborg's understanding, the books of the Bible with an internal sense are limited to 34 in number. Among other things, he excludes all the epistles of Paul, stating that only five New Testament books contain an internal sense: the four gospels and the book of Revelation. As for Paul, Swedenborg writes in his *Spiritual Diary* that he "indeed spoke from inspiration, but not in the same way as the prophets, to whom every single word was dictated but that his inspiration was that he received an influx, according to those things which were with him, which is quite a different inspiration, and has no conjunction with heaven by correspondences."⁴⁶⁰ Paul's lack of correspondential connection to heaven, in Swedenborg's view, is curious given Paul's role in establishing allegory as a mode of Christian interpretation. Indeed, Swedenborg's interpretation of Sarai and Hagar in Genesis 16 is not wholly dissimilar from Paul's famous allegorical interpretation of the matriarch and her slave in Galatians 4.⁴⁶¹ Why then, would Swedenborg sever alliances with his strongest biblical reference point for interpreting the Bible according to the "spirit" rather than the "letter?"⁴⁶² One answer lies in the particular doctrines Swedenborg wishes to eliminate from *true Christianity*, doctrines that are more clearly articulated in Paul's epistles than in the Gospels, such as salvation by faith, Trinitarianism and the atonement. But another reason

⁴⁶⁰ Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary*, 6062.

⁴⁶¹ See Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia*, 1895-1896, where Hagar represents the "exterior man" with "affectionem scientiarum" and Sarai the internal, or truth conjoined to good. Swedenborg's Hagar therefore has much in common with the serpent of Genesis 3, as discussed in chapter 4.

⁴⁶² See 2 Corinthians 3:6.

emerges, in light of Swedenborg's relationship to the Bible. Discounting Paul in this way disconnects Swedenborg from the long tradition of allegoresis, and allows him to claim absolute originality – that his is a new understanding, given through him from a new heaven to a new earth.

Swedenborg's treatment of Paul's Epistles was a point of controversy among his early readers as we will see.⁴⁶³ And the related question of whether Swedenborg's interpretations were in line with or worked against tradition, whether his allegorical exegesis was heretical or authentically Christian, dominated theological discussions among his critics and followers alike. This chapter will explore these various positions. We will see, for instance, how among Swedenborg's followers, those who were interested in forming a separate church body tended to emphasize Swedenborg's exegesis as distinctive, while those interested in theological or cultural assimilation often emphasized his connection to a spiritual sense tradition. His critics also used Swedenborg's exegesis to defend their positions. John Wesley was concerned with highlighting the many ways Swedenborg contradicted the literal sense of scripture, and with its traditional doctrines of justification and the Trinity, and Johann August Ernesti accused Swedenborg of fraudulently applying allegory to further a naturalist agenda and lead Christians astray.

⁴⁶³ For an early Swedenborgian response to criticism regarding Swedenborg's treatment of Paul, see Robert Hindmarsh, *A Vindication of the Character and Writings of the Honourable Emanuel Swedenborg: Against the Slanders and Misrepresentations of the Rev. J.G. Pike, of Derby: Including a Refutation of the False Reports Propagated by the Late Rev. John Wesley, Respecting the Same Pious and Illustrious Author* (Manchester: H. & R. Smith, 1821), 66-74.

The question of whether and how to compare Swedenborg's exegesis to patristic and medieval sources was answered in a number of ways, exposing the theological concerns of various readers and reviewers and shedding light on the diversity of early modern attitudes toward pre-modern hermeneutics. We see this, for instance, in the very first review of *Arcana coelestia*, published in 1750 by an anonymous author in the German journal *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*. Since *Arcana coelestia*'s authorship was still unknown at the time, the reviewer makes an assumption based on the mystical and allegorical nature of the commentary that the author is a Roman Catholic: "If the readers look through it only a little bit, they will quickly discover that, without a doubt, the work was written by some person from among the blackcoats, who has written it in a state of trance."⁴⁶⁴ The reviewer goes on: "The entire book belongs in the centuries of scholasticism, when people tormented their senses with such futile thoughts, while neglecting the truth of Scripture."⁴⁶⁵ The identification of *Arcana coelestia*'s author with Catholicism and scholasticism brings to the fore a tension that would persist in the reception of Swedenborg's work concerning his departure from the plain sense meaning of scripture and his relationship with earlier forms of allegorical interpretation.

This chapter will consider several of the influential early theological responses to Swedenborg's commentaries. It will be organized as a geographical tour, and will explore, in turn, Swedenborg's reception in Sweden, England, and Germany. Differing legal and ecclesiastical structures impacted the currents of religious thought in each of

⁴⁶⁴ Review of *Arcana coelestia* in *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen*, as translated in Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant*, 61.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

these locations such that organizing our study this way will help to contextualize our sources. However, there was no single, unified response in any of these places, and we will survey variations on positive, negative, or mixed receptions in each country. And, as we have highlighted in previous chapters, we will see that the discourse about Jews (both their supposed carnality and their mysticism) and the discourse about science (its use in either dismantling or sustaining a true understanding scripture and faith) continue their entanglement with the plight of allegory among those influenced by *Arcana coelestia* in the long eighteenth century, either positively or negatively.

Swedenborg in Sweden

In 1770, the Supreme Council of the State of Sweden initiated an official investigation into the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg presided over by the King himself. The investigation was triggered by the emergence of a circle of Swedenborgian followers among the clergy and university faculty in Gothenburg. The publication of reviews and sermons based on Swedenborg's interpretations of the Bible, by Gabriel Beyer and Johan Rosén in particular, raised the suspicion of the local Consistory who were alarmed by the many challenges in Swedenborg's writings to Lutheran orthodoxy. Swedenborg's theological writings were deemed by the Consistory's leader, Olaf Ekebon, to be "*corrupting, heretical, injurious*, and in the highest degree to be *rejected*."⁴⁶⁶ Ekebon lists six theological objections to Swedenborg: 1) the undermining

⁴⁶⁶ Olof Ekebon, letter concerning the teachings of Swedenborg, privately circulated and included in a letter to Swedenborg from Peter Hammarberg in May, 1769. Translation from *Letters and Memorials of Swedenborg*, trans. and ed. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955), 662.

of the literal sense of scripture through the doctrine of correspondences; 2) the rejection of a trinity of three persons in one God; 3) the rejection of atonement theology; 4) the rejection of justification by faith; 5) a symbolic interpretation of the holy supper; and 6) inflammatory comments made in conversation with deceased Protestants in the world of spirits.⁴⁶⁷ This list would foreshadow the objections to be made by prominent theologians in other countries, including John Wesley and Johann August Ernesti, who would accuse Swedenborg of promoting a religion that was fundamentally opposed to biblical theology and biblical tradition.

In his written response to the Supreme Council, who had mandated an explanation, the accused Beyer summarizes Swedenborg's work and defends Swedenborg's reputation as a scholar and Christian. He justifies Swedenborg's hermeneutic as, on the one hand, fully in line with the "fundamental rule" of the church that no doctrine can contradict the literal meaning of the Word and, on the other hand, as the perfected expression of the long-standing tradition of uncovering an inner sense: "With regard to the interpretation of Scripture; we are soon able to discover, that what with Origen were mere obscure traces, what Coccejus attempted to guess at, and what several God-fearing and learned theologians saw through a veil, has been manifested in clear daylight in the *Arcana coelestia* and especially in the 'Apocalypse Revealed,' which have been published by Assessor Swedenborg."⁴⁶⁸ In so framing the issue, Beyer also foreshadows the reception of *Arcana coelestia* in other countries, but this time among

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 662-664.

⁴⁶⁸ "Dr. Beyer's Defense," in Tafel, *Documents*, vol. II, 332.

Swedenborg's defenders and followers, who tended to either devalue instances of early Christian allegory or ignore them completely.

Beyer cautions that there will be many who misunderstand Swedenborg and many who will be unqualified to judge his writings, including: dogmatists, the unlearned who are “not grounded in philology and the sciences,” those who are distracted by worldly lusts, and those “who cleave to the letter, like the Jews.”⁴⁶⁹ We have, in this list of disqualified readers, an echo of Swedenborg's own catalogue of people who are incapable of interpreting scripture,⁴⁷⁰ but with one important distinction. While Swedenborg warned of the consequences of placing too much value on scientific learning, Beyer warned of the consequences of its absence. Swedenborg, having left behind his own scientific and philosophical career, was on guard against the skeptics and deists of his day. Beyer, and with him so many of the first Swedenborgians, saw the utility in highlighting Swedenborg's reliance on the principles of physics, chemistry, and astronomy, for instance, in his exegesis, marking his as a form of allegorical interpretation uniquely suited to modernity. The phrase “science of correspondences,” while heavily associated with Swedenborg, is not one he uses to refer to his own hermeneutics, but has been the standard way of referring to Swedenborgian methods since the time of his first followers.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 328-329. The reference to the Jews is edited out in the version printed as a missionary pamphlet in 1829 by the *London Missionary and Tract Society of the New Jerusalem Church*.

⁴⁷⁰ See chapter 4.

⁴⁷¹ See, for instance, C.A. Tulk, *The Science of Correspondency*, ed. Charles Pooley (London: James Speirs, 1889). The phrase does occur in Swedenborg's work, for instance in *Arcana caelestia* 10407, where he speaks of the ancient Egyptian knowledge of *scientia correspondentiarum*, but he doesn't use the phrase to describe his own methods. He does occasionally refer to correspondences as the “science of sciences” but this has the effect of elevating it above natural science.

Swedenborg himself was traveling at the time of the investigation in Sweden, and refused to defend himself when the trouble was brought to his attention, citing his trust in God's providence to provide for the appropriate dissemination of his books. He was, however, working on his final publication at the time of the trial, and readers of *Vera Christiana religio* (True Christian Religion, 1771) have long interpreted the two-volume work as a response to doctrinal objections lodged against him by the Swedish Lutheran Church in 1770. The end result of the trial was minimal, owing at least in part to Swedenborg's family connections to Swedish aristocrats and clergymen.⁴⁷² Swedenborg was not himself persecuted, and his books were not deemed officially heretical, though they were banned from publication in Sweden and Beyer and Rosén were removed from their positions.⁴⁷³

The banning of Swedenborg's books, while a milder outcome than the alternative of heresy charges, had a noticeable inhibiting effect on Swedish Swedenborgianism. While a small *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society* was formed in 1786 to translate and publish Swedenborg's work in Swedish (via printers in Denmark),⁴⁷⁴ his legacy has been associated more with a sense of cultural heritage than religious heritage in Swedenborg's native land.⁴⁷⁵ To get a fuller sense of the theological responses to *Arcana coelestia*, both

⁴⁷² See Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 513.

⁴⁷³ The ban was lifted in 1809 when liberty of the press was officially instated in Sweden, but Swedenborgians were still forbidden from organizing into a sect.

⁴⁷⁴ Siven Lilcenrants, "Annals of the New Church," in *New Jerusalem Magazine or a Treasury of Celestial, Spiritual, and Natural Knowledge*, (London: London Universal Society for the Promotion of the New Church, 1790), 25.

⁴⁷⁵ For more on early Swedenborgianism in Sweden, see Marguerite Beck Block, *The New Church in the New World: A Study of Swedenborgianism in America* (New York : Swedenborg Pub. Association, 1984), 52-55.

negative and positive, it will be necessary to focus outside of Sweden, for it was in England and Germany that Swedenborg's work triggered the most robust theological discussions in the decades following *Arcana coelestia*'s publication. It was in England that readers of Swedenborg fully organized themselves into an ecclesiastical body that would ordain their own clergy and meet in their own sanctuaries, though Swedenborg himself never intended such an arrangement. And while German readers of Swedenborg did not organize this way, they engaged each other and their critics in the public arena, the results of which reflect a turbulent theological landscape involving many of the themes that concern us here.

Swedenborg in England

1) John Wesley

One of Swedenborg's most famous contemporary critics was John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of Methodism. Like so many others, Wesley's views of Swedenborg were conflicted, ambiguous, and changed over time. According to the testimony of a Rev. Samuel Smith, his conversion from Methodism to Swedenborgianism was due to a series of remarkable letters between Swedenborg and Wesley that he personally witnessed. As one of Wesley's preachers, he was present in February of 1772, when Wesley received a letter from Swedenborg stating that he had been informed in a vision that Wesley had a "strong desire" to speak with him. Apparently Wesley admitted to his eagerness to meet with Swedenborg and responded suggesting a meeting in six months' time, when he would return to London. Swedenborg replied that a meeting in six months would be impossible, since he would pass finally into the spiritual world on March 29th – which he

did.⁴⁷⁶ A second account, also transmitted through the chain of early followers of Swedenborg, quotes Wesley in 1773 stating: “We may now burn all our works of Theology. God has sent us a teacher from heaven; and in the doctrines of Swedenborg we may learn all that is necessary for us to know.”⁴⁷⁷ While we cannot know the true mind of Wesley regarding Swedenborg in the 1770s from these accounts, given the anecdotal nature of the evidence, the accounts speak to the fact that many of the first English Swedenborgians were associated with Wesley’s inner circle. Wesley and Swedenborg themselves traveled in some of the same circuits: both had close ties to London Moravians and were involved to some degree with the Moravian community on Fetter Lane in the late 1730s and early 1740s. In temperament and calling, however, the two men could not be further apart: the one a charismatic public preacher and the other a private philosopher turned mystic with a speech impediment that kept him from speaking publicly.

It is difficult to determine the movement of Wesley’s judgement on Swedenborg up to the 1770s. In February, 1779 he wrote a friend, Elizabeth Ritchie, that “although Swedenborg’s tract is majestic, though in ruins, still, he had strong and beautiful thoughts, and may be read with profit by a serious and cautious reader.”⁴⁷⁸ That same year, he wrote in a journal entry “his ideas are low, groveling, just suiting a Mahomedan

⁴⁷⁶ See “John Wesley’s Testimony Concerning Swedenborg in 1772, and 1773,” in Tafel, *Documents*, vol. II, 564-566.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 568.

⁴⁷⁸ John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, A. M., ed. John Tolford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), VI, 340.

paradise.”⁴⁷⁹ Such ambivalence is familiar to us from Kant, and we will see more of it in such figures as Friedrich Christoph Oetinger and William Blake. Wesley’s ambivalence, however, is not lasting, and he soon turns his efforts concerning Swedenborg to an unequivocal series of attacks.

Whatever more positive impressions Wesley may or may not have had earlier in his career, the interest in Swedenborg among Wesley’s followers prompted him to publish a series of scathing reviews in his *Arminian Magazine* after Swedenborg’s death. These reviews tell us something about the discourse about Swedenborg as a seer and biblical commentator in the eighteenth century, but also about eighteenth century discourse about the Bible itself. In particular, Wesley’s 1783 “Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg” addresses Swedenborg’s exegetical methods and his relationship to biblical theology. Wesley’s central argument in the piece is that Swedenborg’s writings are wholly contrary to the biblical message literally understood: “In all this jumble of dissonant notions there is not one that is supported by any scripture, taken in its plain, obvious meaning.”⁴⁸⁰ Swedenborg’s allegorical methods are “ploughed with the heifer of Jacob Bohmen”⁴⁸¹ and “utterly absurd.”⁴⁸² He then presents a series of specific heretical interpretations to be found in Swedenborg’s commentary, as evidence of how far the Baron strays from the truth on the page.

⁴⁷⁹ John Wesley, “Rev. J. Wesley’s Journal,” in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, John Emory, ed. IV (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 506.

⁴⁸⁰ John Wesley, “Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg,” in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, John Emory, ed. (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), XII, 430.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 427.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 428.

Among Swedenborg's many errors, according to Wesley, is his insistence that God is never angry. "Then the scripture is full of blasphemy for it continually ascribes anger to God." Wesley, whose atonement theology required reconciliation with a Father estranged from the time of Eden, is concerned with the preservation of a particular narrative arrangement of the Old and New Testaments that relies on descriptions of an angry God. Likewise, Swedenborg's rejection of a theology of "three persons" is a bother to Wesley who finds that anti-trinitarianism "stares you in the face, almost in every page" of *Arcana coelestia*.⁴⁸³ That Trinitarian and atonement theologies are manifest in scripture, however, is an assumption with roots in Patristic interpretations that relied heavily on typological and allegorical methods.⁴⁸⁴ The insistence that these tenets are backed by a literal interpretation alone is a turn characteristic of Reformation hermeneutics, whose success into modern times can be at least in part attributed to Wesley's efforts.

Wesley has objections to Swedenborg on other topics as well. Swedenborg makes claims regarding the past and the future that he deems non-biblical. He presents Swedenborg's interpretation of the apocalypse, that it does not describe actual future events of the physical world, but present-day spiritual tribulations of the church. According to Swedenborg, the dragon described in Revelation symbolizes the fallacy of justification by faith; and this interpretation is itself blasphemy of the worst kind, by Wesley's estimation. He also points to Swedenborg's notion of an "ancient Word" that

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ The ransom theory of atonement, for instance, has its roots in the work of Origen. See footnote 57 above.

predates the Old Testament, which Wesley believes cannot be true since there was no form of writing before the two tablets delivered by God on Mt. Sinai. Also regarding heaven and hell: he outlines heresies contrary to scripture, such as Swedenborg's assertion that angels and spirits are deceased humans from earth and other planets. But the most dangerous of all Swedenborg's heresies is his idea of hell, in which evil souls are not forced to suffer but are permitted to indulge in their own lusts. Wesley is especially scandalized by the pleasures described in Swedenborg's hell, a hell without terror and whose inhabitants, Wesley writes, encounter "harlots instead of fire."⁴⁸⁵

Wesley had many objections to Swedenborg on theological and exegetical grounds. But his attacks grew more vigorous when his own followers started converting to Swedenborgianism. Six of his ministers converted, including Rev. James Hindmarsh, father of Robert Hindmarsh who would go on to found a separate New Church movement in England. It was in the churches, coffee houses and street corners of England that the New Church movement took root, and a brief study of the positive reception of Swedenborg's ideas in England will shed light on how many of his first followers framed Swedenborgian hermeneutics against the theological contexts of their day.

⁴⁸⁵ Wesley, "Thoughts," 440. In addition to these theological attacks, Wesley published a detailed report of a 1743 incident intended to expose Swedenborg as a madman, ironically titled "An Account of a Very Great Man," in *Arminian Magazine*, IV (1781): 46-69. The report, from Rev. Aaron Mathesius, says he ran naked into the streets delirious from fever, and spoke to his landlord about heading to the synagogue to tell the Jews he was the messiah come to be crucified for their salvation. Swedenborg's earliest followers put a great deal of effort into denouncing this report, such as we find in Hindmarsh, *A Vindication*. See the discussion of this matter with comparison to Swedenborg's own journal entries at this time in Lars Berquist, *Swedenborg's Dream Diary*, 52-59.

2) The English Swedenborgians

In a preface to his 1778 English translation of Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, Thomas Hartley laments the hostile reception of Swedenborg in his homeland, and expresses hope for a better outcome in England: "But, to the honor of our constitution, we can as yet call the liberty of the press (and a liberty within the bounds of decency may it always be) the privilege of Englishmen, and therefore may reasonably hope for better success to our author's writings in this land of freedom; not that we expect any encouragement on their behalf from our Pharisees and bigots of any denomination, for they are the same everywhere."⁴⁸⁶ It was indeed because of the religious tolerance in England that Swedenborg did so much of his publishing there, and his ideas found their greatest public following in England for the same reason. Soon after his death, reading circles and societies formed, which were publicly advertised and attracted a following among enough influential clergy and prominent citizens that a movement took hold. While the New Church in England remained relatively small, it nevertheless generated moments of lively activity, attracting artists such as William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and initiating missionary activity onto the New World, where Swedenborgianism would acquire its most influential voices. Much has been written on the history of the New Church in England and America, and its influences on the arts, psychology, transcendentalism, religion and spirituality, and there are many areas of

⁴⁸⁶ Thomas Hartley, preface to *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell: And of the Wonderful Things Therein, as Heard and Seen by the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg*, trans. Thomas Hartley (London: W. Chalklen, 1789), xl.

reception that are beyond the scope of this study.⁴⁸⁷ We will limit ourselves here to the rhetoric about Swedenborg's biblical interpretation in the decades after his death.

As we saw, sharp criticism emerged from Wesley and others on theological grounds. But the positive reception of Swedenborg's theology was not itself without controversy. Conflict arose among readers of Swedenborg almost immediately, between those who wanted to separate and form an ecclesiastical body and those who wanted to remain integrated into existing church structures. The non-separatists were headed by the Rev. John Clowes, an influential Anglican cleric in the Manchester area. The separatists, based in London, were led by the young, formerly Methodist, Robert Hindmarsh, who eventually procured a Dissenter's License for the movement. Under Hindmarsh's leadership, the movement's members would come to teach from their own catechism, sing from their own hymnals, pray in their own churches and ordain their own ministers, dressed in their own ecclesiastical vestments. Each group had its own disagreements and occasional splintering factions, but by and large we can trace the direction of the two in distinctly different directions. Hindmarsh's group, made up largely of disenfranchised Baptists and Methodists, maintained their separation from "Old Church" Christianity, founding their own schools, requiring rebaptism, and in 1799 officially declaring their belief in the divinity of Swedenborg's writings. Clowes' Manchester group rejected such

⁴⁸⁷ For a history of Swedenborgianism in America, see Block, *New Church*. See also Eugene Taylor, *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999); and Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Voices from Spirit-Land," in *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*, 199-245 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

moves towards orthodoxy, and instead experimented freely with other spiritual trends of the day such as animal magnetism, communication with angels, and vegetarianism.⁴⁸⁸

This division can be seen, to some extent, in the various ways followers of Swedenborg talked about his biblical interpretation; whether Swedenborg's exegesis was part of an ancient and hallowed tradition, or was something entirely new. Thomas Hartley, for instance, who was an early follower and friend of Swedenborg's, writes in his preface about the ancient knowledge of the science of correspondences, mentions Clement and Origen and quotes Hermes Trimegistus by way of introducing Swedenborg's system of interpretation: "All things which are in the heavens are also in the earth in an earthly manner; and all things which are in earth are also in the heavens in a heavenly manner."⁴⁸⁹ Hartley's view of Swedenborg, as part of a tradition with ancient roots, was bolstered by his interest in mysticism by way of Bohme and William Law and demonstrates a kind of free-association available to non-sectarian Swedenborgians.

In contrast, we see more of the dissenter's mindset reflected, for instance, in the work of one of the first men to be ordained a New Church minister, the Rev. Joseph Proud. In his 1808 *A Course of Lectures in the Fundamental and Most Essential Doctrines and Subjects of Christianity*, Proud leaves aside any discussion of the history of allegorical interpretation, and discusses only the Christian Church's complete failure to grasp the internal sense of scripture. Proud argues that the internal sense would have been

⁴⁸⁸ See Block, *New Church*, 61-72. As Block points out, this division of Swedenborg's followers in two directions – one towards orthodoxy and the belief in the divinity of Swedenborg's writings, and one tending towards a kind of liberal Protestantism and/or spiritualism – continues today.

⁴⁸⁹ Hartley, preface to *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell*, xli.

opened to Christians, had they lived into the moral perfection of Christ's teaching. But the fallacies introduced by the church fathers, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, barred them from the Word's true meaning.

[Had Christians] continued in the pure truth and holy doctrine, taught them by Jesus Christ and His apostles, they would have elevated their understanding into spiritual light; because in that case, their hearts would have been principled in heavenly love. But the Christian world, with its leaders and great men, too soon departed from the pure truths Jesus taught them; because, they departed from pure love, principles, and life of genuine Christianity; in consequence of which, their understandings were darkened to the Holy Word, and they invented doctrines suited to the impure state of their own hearts, the perverted state of their understandings, and the disorder of their lives.⁴⁹⁰

Hindmarsh, likewise, writes in his *A Vindication of the Character and Writings of the Honorable Emanuel Swedenborg*, that while early Christians may have had some superficial conceptions about allegory, "it does not appear from any of their writings, which have reached our times, that they were at all acquainted with the science of correspondences, which is the true key to the spiritual sense of the Word; and consequently they have left unexplained a thousand difficult passages, which the pious and well-disposed members of the church in all ages have been desirous of understanding."⁴⁹¹ As James Lawrence articulates, this approach would become normative within sectarian Swedenborgian circles, where reference to earlier Christian (or Jewish) spiritual sense traditions was, and still is today, extremely rare.⁴⁹² This tendency to overlook earlier allegorical traditions is best understood in the post-

⁴⁹⁰ Joseph Proud, *A Course of Lectures in the Fundamental and Most Essential Doctrines and Subjects of Christianity* (London: Peacock, 1808), 210.

⁴⁹¹ Hindmarsh, *A Vindication*, 65

⁴⁹² Lawrence, "Speaking of Something Else," 72.

Reformation context of New Church movement at its start. It was the ability of Reformed Christians to disregard medieval allegorical commentaries and traditions that created an environment in which readers of Swedenborg might see the interpretive methods found in *Arcana coelestia* to be evidence of a new dispensation, a new way of knowing and of receiving revelation. And so they did in most cases. One exception to this trend is in the work of Rev. Samuel Noble, whose 1825 *The Plenary Inspiration of Scriptures* is worth consideration for its study of the history of allegory in Christianity, even if the end goal of Noble's study is to reinforce Swedenborg's distinctiveness.

Noble was an ordained minister of the New Church, having joined Proud's congregation as a young man in the 1790's. His *The Plenary Inspiration* is, however, written for a non-Swedenborgian audience and never mentions Swedenborg by name. The book drew on public lectures he gave at Albion Hall in London, in an attempt, as Lawrence puts it "to present to the public a radical thesis for scripture in as neutral and inoffensive tones as possible."⁴⁹³ While the book is quite specific in mapping out Swedenborg's interpretations of the Bible, Noble avoids using the term correspondences, referencing "analogies" or the "doctrine of spiritual interpretation" instead. His is an apologetic for a Swedenborgian approach to the Bible that avoids insider language that might be off-putting. He begins with a critique of trends in biblical interpretation in his day, calling out Protestants, Catholics, Deists and skeptics alike for various assaults on revelation: for increasingly crediting human authorship over Divine inspiration. Noble argues first from scripture, that the text itself points to an inner meaning, and then

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 73-74.

presents a century-by-century outline of the history of Christian allegory in order to counter his contemporaries who would stop at the literal sense of the text.

What regard is to be had to the doubts of a few moderns, when opposed to the unanimous decision of all antiquity,--to the unvarying acknowledgement of so many ages? Although, through part of its course, the doctrine of spiritual interpretation may have been rendered less clear by the foulness of the channel through which it flowed; and although it has, in modern times, been made less distinguishable by a mixture of other waters; it has unquestionably had its rise in the virgin days of Christianity: Unless then it is to be contended, that the farther from the fountain, the purer the stream, it must be admitted, that the doctrine of the spiritual interpretation is the pure doctrine of the Christian Church.⁴⁹⁴

Noble is therefore very much aware that he is swimming against the tide in arguing that the only truly Christian way to read the Bible is to read beyond the literal sense. In presenting this history, Noble makes lengthy references to Johann Lorenz Mosheim's *Institutiones Historiae Ecclesiasticae Antiquae et Recentioris* (1755, translated into English in 1806 as *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern*). Noble's use of Mosheim is complicated and polemical. He rightly finds in Mosheim's history a bias against allegory and a position in favor of "the golden rule" of modern interpretation, that the one and only sense is that of the letter. For instance, he notes Mosheim's avoidance of Paul, who, Noble writes "decidedly favored the practice of drawing from the plain words of Scripture, not, indeed, insipid and forced allegories, but weighty and just ones."⁴⁹⁵ He then flips Mosheim's intended interpretation of this history. Rather than telling a progressive history in which literal interpretation eventually

⁴⁹⁴ Samuel Noble, *The Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures Asserted, and The Principles of Their Composition Investigated, with a View to the Refutation of all Objections to Their Divinity* (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1825), 103-104.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

triumphs, as Mosheim would have it, Noble's version shows a steady decline, or a misguided rejection of the true meaning. This history traces the great allegorists from Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Isidore of Seville, the venerable Bede, Anthony of Padua, Hugh of St. Cher and many others. That he glosses over important distinctions between these authors and their interpretive methods (Jerome himself harshly criticized the allegorical methods of Origen, for instance) is due to Noble's desire to paint this history as consistent and steadfast. He writes: "Indeed, no truth in history is more certain than this; that for at least fourteen or fifteen hundred years, few who received the Scriptures at all, ever thought of denying that they contained mysteries in their bosom which do not appear upon the surface."⁴⁹⁶ Noble does mention a few exceptions dismissively, such as Nicholas of Lyra, but these literalists merely reinforce his thesis that those on the right side of history were reading beyond the letter.⁴⁹⁷

In contrast to this view, he quotes Mosheim disparaging allegory. In Mosheim's words: "It must be acknowledged, that even in [the first] century several Christians adopted that absurd and corrupt custom, used among the Jews, of darkening the plain words of the Holy Scriptures by insipid and forced allegories, and of drawing them violently from their proper and natural signification, in order to extort from them certain hidden and mysterious significations."⁴⁹⁸ The quotation from Mosheim highlights the difference with Noble's position regarding the history of allegorical interpretation, but it also inadvertently highlights another difference. Mosheim's derogatory reference to

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁹⁸ Cited by Noble, *Plenary Inspiration of the Bible*, 91-92.

Jewish allegory is in line with the discourse about Jewish exegesis in the eighteenth-century, as we saw in chapter one: comparable, for instance, to William Whiston's assertion that allegory is an archaic and essentially Jewish way of reading texts. Noble does not comment here on the mention of Jewish allegory by Mosheim, nor does he elsewhere acknowledge Jewish non-literal exegetical practices. He does, however, dedicate a considerable amount of time to discussing the role Jews played in creating the biblical text, which follows and surpasses Swedenborg in emphasizing their externality. According to Noble, the events described in the Bible, while pointing symbolically to a higher truth, nevertheless literally happened in history. "If the Bible-history had been a pure allegory throughout, destitute of a foundation in actual occurrences, it would long ago have been rejected as a mere fable."⁴⁹⁹ The revelation contained in the inspired text required a grounding in historical events. The Jews, argues Noble, were selected as "mediums of representing" the truth of scripture because of their nature and disposition. He lists a curious set of traits that made the Jews best suited for this role: they substitute ritual for moral reasoning, they are not inwardly principled, and they are uniquely suited to being manipulated, openly controlled, or "constantly overruled" by Providence.⁵⁰⁰ In this way, the requisite events could take place in the world that would provide for all the right allegories in God's sacred text, without impinging on the free will of the Israelites, since it was in their nature to "multiply ceremonial observances beyond what was required."

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁵⁰⁰ See Noble's section on the Jews, 431-444.

Now this disposition of that people to neglect essentials and to cleave to formalities, if it disqualified them from constituting an interior church themselves, eminently adapted them to be made the representatives of such a church, and to have their affairs overruled, so as to be subservient to such representation. Nor is there any room to object, that such control was incompatible with their free agency and moral responsibility, when this their gross temper and superficial disposition is regarded.⁵⁰¹

Noble here takes Swedenborg's description of the Jews as a merely "representative church" to another level – stating that the Jews, lacking a will of their own, were compelled to act in a certain fashion for the sake of the inner meaning of the text that would describe them. In support of this argument, Noble includes an appendix summarizing the contents of Buxtorf's famous *Synagoga Judaica*, to provide examples of how Jews find "in almost every text of Scripture, an authority for some trifling ceremony or custom."⁵⁰² Thus, he argues, one can look to the irrational customs of modern-day Jews for evidence of their superficial and submissive nature in biblical times. All of this, Noble puts to the service of his argument that a truly Christian interpretation of scripture is, and always has been, an allegorical one.

While Noble connects his hermeneutics to a long history of interpretation of an inner sense, he nevertheless argues that modern Christians finally have access to a "Universal Rule" that can bring rational certainty where before there was only intuitive perception. This rule is a reformulation of Swedenborg's correspondence between degrees, or levels: "Such a rule, then, it is conceived, is afforded in the Mutual Relation which exists by creation between things natural or material, spiritual or moral, and

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 438

⁵⁰² Ibid., see Appendix no V. liii

divine; which is such that the lower order of objects answers to the higher.”⁵⁰³ The study of mathematics and natural philosophy, he argues, have finally provided the framework into which the ancient tradition of the spiritual sense can be applied. Now the Bible will be interpreted with the light of science. And as Lawrence points out, it is this element in particular, rather than reference to earlier Christian allegory, that gets highlighted in Swedenborgian apologetics going forward: “It will be Noble’s establishment of a ‘scientific’ framework for discovering the inner sense meanings of the Bible that will have a long reach into future discourse much more than the tactic of featuring the allegorical tradition as an apologetic tactic for a defense of Swedenborg’s biblical hermeneutic.”⁵⁰⁴ Noble’s work was, as we said, apologetic. His non-Swedenborgian audience is implied by the lack of reference to Swedenborg by name, or to language unique to Swedenborgianism. And yet, his work addressed a need within the community of Swedenborg’s early followers, to understand Swedenborg’s place in the history of Christian exegesis, and to pronounce his as the finally “scientific” culmination and crown of this history.⁵⁰⁵ The emphasis on earlier Christian allegorical exegesis served, not simply to demonstrate Swedenborg’s traditionalism, but that his New Jerusalem descended onto a well-laid foundation.

Swedenborg in Germany

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁰⁴ Lawrence, “Speaking of Something Else,” 77.

⁵⁰⁵ His *Plenary Inspiration* generated significant enthusiasm within the Swedenborgian movement, and private individuals and printing societies funded its advertisement after it was published. See Lawrence, “Speaking of Something Else,” 74.

1) Johann August Ernesti

As in Sweden, the status of Lutheranism as the state religion in Germany prohibited formal development of the kinds of Swedenborgian movements we see arising in England. Germany did have its prominent converts, such as Abbé Pernety, Prussian Court Librarian, and Immanuel Tafel, Professor and Librarian the University at Tübingen and German translator of Swedenborg. However, the early criticism by Kant and censorship of Oetinger, which will be examined below, inhibited public admiration for Swedenborg. *Arcana coelestia*, in particular, was reviewed critically by the influential Johann August Ernesti (1704-1781) in 1760. Ernesti was a philologist, theologian and professor of literature and rhetoric at the University of Leipzig. His lengthy and scathing review of *Arcana coelestia* was printed in the first volume of his own *Neue Theologische Bibliothek*, without naming *Arcana coelestia*'s anonymous author.⁵⁰⁶ Swedenborg is mentioned by name, however, in a second attack by Ernesti in a review in the eighth volume of the same journal. Ernesti's reviews were widely read and responded to by those interested in Swedenborg from various sides, and Swedenborg himself responded in a most unorthodox manner, with the inclusion of a memorable relation in his *Vera Christiana religio*, in which the spirits associated with Ernesti in the other world engage Swedenborg in theological debate, and lose.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ Ernesti claims to know Swedenborg's identity in the review, but does not name him. An English translation of the review can be found in *J. C. Cuno's Memoirs on Swedenborg to which is Added Dr. J. A. Ernesti's Libelous Attack and its Refutation* trans. Claire E. Berninger and Alfred Acton, ed. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, The Academy Book Room, 1947), 139-153. While Cuno mentions the review, Tafel and Berninger include the full review with notes.

⁵⁰⁷ Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion*, 137.

In his reviews, Ernesti accuses Swedenborg of calculated fraud: of using allegory and mysticism with the intent of promoting a naturalist agenda. It is a curious combination of charges, in which the materialism of Epicurus and the allegory of Coccejus ostensibly intermingle, with the intent of deliberately leading readers astray.

One sees without difficulty that, under this fanatical form, the author wishes to bring forward materialism and his own philosophical opinions, and that this is a novel of a new kind which may perhaps be compared with Klimm's subterranean journey, except that the latter fiction is harmless, while the former in its misuse and distortion of Holy Writ, under the guise of the above mentioned inner sense, is highly worthy of punishment.⁵⁰⁸

Ernesti's two-fold attack on Swedenborg's allegory and his materialism is a complicated pairing, and one that betrays the anxieties that characterize eighteenth-century debates about biblical religion. As we have seen in the work of William Whiston and others, the preference for literal interpretations on one hand, and the search for scientific explanations of biblical narratives on the other, created unfamiliar challenges to Christian orthodoxy. Ernesti found plenty of heretical material in *Arcana coelestia* to object to, but he framed his criticism in terms that reflected the particular hermeneutical challenges of his environment. Elsewhere Ernesti writes: "it is clear that, like the crude *Fanatici*, he is a naturalist, and that he hides his naturalism under cover of Biblical expressions, or changes the Biblical theology into a *naturalismum* as, in a different way, do the Socinians."⁵⁰⁹ The Socinians were known for their rejection of Trinitarian doctrine and of substitutionary atonement: a likeness to Swedenborg whose connection to naturalism is not immediately clear, but underlies Ernesti's fears about the corrosiveness

⁵⁰⁸ Ernesti, "Review of *Arcana caelestia*," in *J. C. Cuno's Memoirs*, 152.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

of those threatening Christian orthodoxy. These anxieties, which were lodged as attacks against Swedenborg, were also Swedenborg's anxieties, as we have seen. In his own, unusual, response to Ernesti, Swedenborg lodges a similar criticism against his reviewer: "that in writing as he did against the worship of our Lord and Savior, he at the same time robbed the Lord of His Divinity, contrary to the orthodoxy of his church, or allowed his pen to plough a furrow in which he thoughtlessly sowed naturalism."⁵¹⁰ The charge of naturalism was lodged back and forth between Swedenborg and Ernesti, revealing not so much either man's avowal of naturalist principles, but a climate of suspicion amidst challenges to biblical religion, or the concern over science's infringement on revelation.

2) Oetinger's Geistleiblichkeit

The Lutheran theologian and theosopher Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702 – 1782), was important to the reception of Swedenborg in Germany in a number of ways. Like others we have studied in this dissertation, Oetinger's initial enthusiasm for Swedenborg was later tempered with concern and even criticism. Oetinger's case is different from Wesley's and Kant's, however, in that his early admiration for Swedenborg was published, widely read, and led to his official censure the same year as the publication of Kant's *Träume*. His later falling out with Swedenborg, which was, like Wesley, over theological issues grounded in biblical interpretation, was met with the additional difficulty of having his reputation so closely tied to Swedenborgian heresies.

⁵¹⁰ Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, 137

Oetinger held positions as superintendent of the churches in Weinsberg and in Herrenberg, and as prelate at Murrhardt. Like Schelling, therefore, he was moved by theosophical currents sweeping south western Germany. He was both admired and disparaged for his theological eclecticism, which incorporated the theosophy of Jakob Böhme, the end time predictions of biblicist and Greek scholar Johann Albrecht Bengel, and the cosmology of Lurianic Kabbalah. His interest in Kabbalah began while he was a seminarian at Tübingen, where he writes that he was “possessed of a great desire to think like an ancient Jew.”⁵¹¹ He later sought out experts in Jewish and Christian Kabbalah in Frankfurt and Halle and studied, among other sources, the Zohar, the *Kabbalah denudata* and the Lurianic *Eitz Hayyim*.⁵¹² As Ernst Benz writes, during his earlier career Oetinger looked to three men in particular, Luria, Böhme, and Swedenborg, as “principle witnesses of spiritual knowledge.”⁵¹³

Oetinger was a reader, translator and commentator on Swedenborg’s writings and corresponded personally with Swedenborg in the 1760s. He translated several of Swedenborg’s theological works into German including *De Nova Hierosolyma et Ejus Doctrina Coelesti* (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine) in 1772, *De Commercio Animæ & Corporis* (Interaction of the Soul and the Body) in 1772, and the popular *De Caelo et Ejus Mirabilibus et de Inferno* (Heaven and its Wonders and Hell) in

⁵¹¹ Ernst Benz, *Christian Kabbalah: Neglected Child of Theology*, trans. Kenneth W. Wesche and ed. Robert J. Faas (St. Paul, MN: Grailstone Press, 2004), 19.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 19-20, 43.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

1774.⁵¹⁴ However, it was his partial translation of, and commentary on, *Arcana coelestia* in his 1765 book *Swedenborgs und anderer Irdische und Himmlische Philosophie* (Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy of Swedenborg and Others) that got him into trouble with church authorities.

Swedenborgs und anderer speaks with highest praise about Swedenborg's insights. In the preface to the work he uses Swedenborg's background in math and philosophy to justify his message, an emphasis similar to Noble's in England some sixty years later: "The infidelity which is rife now in the world, has induced God to make use of a celebrated philosopher in order to communicate to us heavenly information. Mathematics have checked the imagination of this philosopher; wherefore it will not do to say, that he reports mere imaginations. Experimental facts (*standhafte Erfahrungen*) are not imaginations. These experiences are due to the influx of heavenly intelligences by the command of the Lord."⁵¹⁵ In this preface, Oetinger compares Swedenborg to the apostles, who received the Holy Ghost, and validates Swedenborg's experiences with his devotion to the Bible: "Does not Swedenborg place the Scripture higher than anyone else?"⁵¹⁶ The combination of exegetical and visionary material in *Arcana coelestia* clearly made an impression on him. However, the fact that his book included translations of Swedenborg's memorable relations only, and not his exegesis, demonstrates an initial bias against Swedenborg's approach to biblical interpretation that would, in time, become

⁵¹⁴ As late as 1777 he also translated and discussed the section headings from Swedenborg's *Deliciae sapientiae de amore conjugal* in his anonymously published *Freimüthigen Gedanken von der ehelichen Liebe* (Frank Thoughts on Conjugal Love).

⁵¹⁵ As translated in Tafel, *Documents*, vol. II, 1028.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1029.

a matter of great concern and ultimately lead him to openly criticize Swedenborg in later publications.

Oetinger's book was reviewed positively and negatively, but it was Ernesti's virulent attack on Oetinger in particular that drew the attention of Württemberg Consistory, and in 1766 the book was confiscated, he was ordered to submit future publications to the Consistory for censure, and he was forbidden from seeking further audience with Swedenborg. He continued to write and publish prolifically, however, either pseudonymously or through channels outside of Württemberg.⁵¹⁷ In reference to this censorship, Tafel calls Oetinger the "first martyr for the New Church,"⁵¹⁸ and while Oetinger never formally subscribed to Swedenborgianism, he certainly suffered for his attraction to Swedenborg's writings. Oetinger penned a lengthy and steadfast defense of his book to the Duke of Württemberg, but in a letter to Swedenborg he admits to weakening: "The affection I entertain for you threatens to become lukewarm amid the many reproaches showered upon me; it must be refreshed. You can scarcely believe how much I have still to suffer on your account. The Consistory treats me in a most violent manner." Oetinger summarizes the Consistory's ten questions, but follows with his own nagging concern: "It is a fixed purpose in my mind to write a defense of your books with one sole exception, that, contrary to your principles as to the literal sense, you take away the internal sense of the Pauline Epistles; and that you explain the city of God as meaning

⁵¹⁷ Pricilla Hayden-Roy, *A Foretaste of Heaven: Friedrich Hölderlin in the Context of Wurttemberg Pietism*, (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), 38.

⁵¹⁸ Tafel, *Documents*, vol II, 1027.

the church, with an abandoning of the literal sense and in contradiction to the words of Christ: Behold, I make all things new.”⁵¹⁹

The objection Oetinger raises in his letter to Swedenborg has two layers to it, which say a great deal about his thoughts on biblical interpretation relative to Swedenborg’s commentary. On the one hand he is troubled by Swedenborg’s explicit removal of Paul’s letters from the spiritual sense canon. On the other hand, Swedenborg’s allegorical interpretation of the Holy City in Revelation invalidates the literal sense of the apocalypse and denies an actual descent of an actual New Jerusalem on earth, as promised in the Bible. Oetinger is troubled that Swedenborg denies an internal sense for part of the New Testament and denies a literal sense for another part. Or perhaps it is the implication of Paul’s diminished status relative to the gospels that bothers Oetinger, rather than the idea that they contain no heavenly secrets. Either way, Swedenborg’s treatment of New Testament texts poses difficulties for Oetinger’s theological reliance on Paul for the doctrine of justification and on Revelation for his hope in Christ’s return. It is worth noting that Oetinger does not raise objections to Swedenborg’s typological interpretations of the Old Testament, a point we will return to below. In the same letter, Oetinger gives his opinion of the two different genres of material included in *Arcana*. “I wish that you yourself would acknowledge that your explanations of Scripture are quite as worthy of belief as your visions and revelations from heaven.”⁵²⁰ Going forward, Oetinger would continue to draw inspiration from Swedenborg’s descriptions of the

⁵¹⁹ Letter from Oetinger to Swedenborg (Stuttgart, December 16, 1767), as translated in Acton, *Letters and Memorials*, 639. Also in Tafel, *Documents*, vol. II, 1033.

⁵²⁰ Letter from Oetinger to Swedenborg in Acton, *Letters and Memorials*, 640. Tafel, *Documents*, 1035.

spiritual world and the mechanism of its connection to the physical world, but he would also grow more and more critical of Swedenborg's exegesis.

In both his attraction and his repulsion to *Arcana*, Oetinger grounds himself in the concept of *Geistleiblichkeit*, or "spiritual bodiliness." According to this concept, the descent of the divine into the world constitutes a "baptism" of material things. The created world and physical bodies are made holy, not by the mercy of some transcendent reality, but by the corporeal presence of the divine. Oetinger's *Geistleiblichkeit* combines threads from his sources of influence, including the biblical realism of Bengel, father of Württemberg pietism,⁵²¹ and the incarnational theology he read into the sefirotic system of Kabbalah. According to his Christian kabbalistic reading, the upper three *sefirot* made up the Trinitarian godhead, and the lower seven, or the "seven spirits," manifested God's physical presence in creation.

We can see how a partial adaptation of Swedenborg's correspondences would work for Oetinger, especially with Swedenborg's interest in the mechanics of the human body and the physical universe as a reflection of heaven. But Swedenborg's figurative reading of the apocalypse in particular offended Oetinger's sense of the importance of Christ's *Geistleiblichkeit*, for it leads to "the result that Christ has not come in the flesh."⁵²² And here is the heart of Oetinger's confusion over Swedenborg, who held fast to an incarnational Christology – to Christ's coming in the flesh initially – but who believed Christ's return to earth would occur in logos rather than in body. In a 1771 letter

⁵²¹ Hayden Roy, *Foretaste of Heaven*, 25-34.

⁵²² As quoted in Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant*, 78.

to an instructor at the University of Tübingen, Oetinger summarizes his concern regarding Swedenborg's correspondences:

His matters might be mended, if he would but purge a little all he has said, and if he would not obtrude his hieroglyphics in such a shallow manner. Yet all he says is foolish. I am troubled at his writing in so silly a manner. According to Swedenborg the Second Coming of the Lord does not take place in person, but it is effected in the Word, through a man, before whom He has revealed Himself, and whom He has filled with His Spirit. The glory of Jehova is to be revealed, and all flesh shall see it (Isa. X, 3.5). How very presumptuous he is, thus to diminish the force of the sense of the letter!⁵²³

Hanegraaff argues that Oetinger initially sees Swedenborg as an ally against the allegorical methods used by philosophical idealists such as Leibniz and Wolff, but turns against Swedenborg upon realizing his allegiance to the opposition.⁵²⁴ While it is clear that Oetinger rejects an allegorical or figurative interpretation of the apocalypse, to say that he rejects allegory all together, or that he first mistook Swedenborg to be a biblical literalist, is misleading. As Stengel demonstrates, Oetinger used allegorical/typological methods of interpretation himself when they suited his interests, particularly in prefiguring Christ's second coming through the stories of the Old Testament.⁵²⁵ Oetinger's preference for biblical realism is inconsistently applied, and is aimed primarily at a literal end of days matching biblical accounts. Swedenborg's allegorical approach to the Bible is impossible to miss from the first pages of *Arcana*, and Oetinger's own exegesis has much in common with Swedenborg's. Oetinger's particular iteration of the emblematics tradition, which he terms "*theologia emblematica*," as well as the *signature*

⁵²³ Tafel, *Documents*, vol II, 1060.

⁵²⁴ Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant*, 71.

⁵²⁵ See Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 616-622.

rerum of his regular interlocutor Böhme, are not wholly dissimilar from Swedenborg's correspondences.⁵²⁶ Oetinger's view, in short, is that scripture uses emblems to accommodate truth to the minds of humans; the descent of God into the world required the use of symbols. Priscilla Hayden-Roy describes Oetinger's emblematics in the following way: "the plethora of emblems generated by biblical concepts is an expression of the drive of the spirit to specify itself in a manifold of physical forms."⁵²⁷ This is a careful rejection of historical literal interpretations but also a rejection of docetism, the denial of Christ's physicality, that Oetinger saw as the "satanic doctrine" at the heart of Leibnizian idealism.⁵²⁸ Oetinger's emblematics is therefore distinguished from Swedenborg's spiritual sense primarily in reference to the bodily return of Christ, while in other areas of scriptural interpretation, as well as the interpretation of nature, he embraces the inner meaning revealed by the faculties of the *sensus communis*.⁵²⁹

In focusing on the area of apocalyptic realism, Oetinger was responding to a schism he saw emerging among German Christians of his time. On the one hand, rationalist and neologian scholars such as Johann Salomo Semler and Wilhelm Abraham Teller undermined a literal apocalypse by contextualizing the text of the New Testament. On the other hand, the spiritualization of the text, such as that found in Swedenborg, denied the return of Christ on entirely different grounds.⁵³⁰ Such a de-corporealized messiah seemed not only contrary to the foundational truth of the incarnation, it offended

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 583-584. See also Hayden-Roy, *Foretaste of Heaven*, 44-46.

⁵²⁷ Hayden-Roy, *Foretaste of Heaven*, 44.

⁵²⁸ See Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, and Kant*, 77-78.

⁵²⁹ See Hayden-Roy, *Foretaste of Heaven*, 46-47. The *sensus communis* appears again in Kant's aesthetics. See chapter 5.

⁵³⁰ See Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 586, 599, 634; and Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland*, 112.

Oetinger's Böhman and Lurianic interpretation of a *Geistleiblichkeit*. Counter to both these influences, Oetinger urged doubters to hold fast to a realistic Judgement Day, and followed Bengel's prediction of an 1836 apocalypse.

Swedenborg's problematic interpretations of the apocalypse aside, Oetinger was attracted to many aspects of Swedenborg's descriptions of a spiritual world and felt it important to verify and then circulate the memorable relations. In his pursuit of evidence, he repeatedly asks Swedenborg for a sign from heaven of the truth of his visions, a request Swedenborg refuses as one more "hostile murmur" asking for a miracle.⁵³¹ Nevertheless, several key points about Swedenborg's idea of heaven and hell make their way into Oetinger's thinking despite his doubts, and evidence of Swedenborg's influence can be seen even in Oetinger's last publications.⁵³² He recast's Swedenborg's spiritual world as a temporary state, where deceased souls await the Last Day – navigating the realism of Swedenborg's visions with a rejection of his figurative apocalypse.

As Stengel demonstrates, Oetinger canonized aspects of Swedenborg's thought, along with Kabbalah, Böhme, and alchemy, and Swedenborgian influence on his thought persists in his writing long after he stops referencing Swedenborg by name. Readers, such as Shelling, were able to detect the "subcutaneous implantation," as Stengel puts it, of

⁵³¹ See 1766 exchange of letters, Acton, *Letters and Memorials*, 623-630; *Tafel, Documents*, vol II, 252-260; also Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland*, 111-114. Swedenborg's memorable relation of hearing voices asking for a miracle so they can believe is found in *Conjugal Love*, 535, written shortly after this exchange.

⁵³² See Stengel's discussion of Swedenborg in Oetinger's 1777 *Freymüthige Gedanken von der Ehelichen Liebe*, in *Aufklärung*, 622. Stengel finds five points of agreement between Oetinger and Swedenborg on life after death: that heavenly and hellish states are self-inflicted; that heaven is organized into classes and grades; that people have gendered bodies after death and join in marriage; that there are correspondences between the visible and the invisible worlds; and that there are inhabitants of other planets present in the afterlife, 633.

Swedenborgian ideas in Oetinger's later work.⁵³³ Therefore, while Oetinger's criticism was far less hostile than Kant's, we see a similar dynamic in that Oetinger and Kant both openly reject Swedenborg after an initial period of admiration, but also demonstrate the assimilation of certain Swedenborgian ideas about the spiritual world in their later work.

3) Johann Adam Möhler

So far, this study has focused on Swedenborg's reception among Protestant readers. An important Catholic treatment of Swedenborg's *Arcana coelestia* is found a generation after Oetinger, in an influential German-language book published in 1832 comparing Catholic and Protestant theologies. In his *Symbolik*, Catholic theologian Johann Adam Möhler dedicates an entire chapter to Swedenborg, citing him as a case of anti-Protestantism gone too far. Like Oetinger, Möhler points to Swedenborg's rejection of Paul as a vehicle for his rejection of key doctrines, such as original sin and bodily resurrection. Möhler is not opposed to Swedenborg's exegesis in principle, though he uses the more derogatory designation "mystical sense" to describe Swedenborg's tendency to apply a "boundless scope to the play of an irregular fancy" leading to grave errors of interpretation.⁵³⁴

Unlike *Arcana coelestia*'s anonymous first reviewer, who associated Swedenborg's allegorical methods with Catholicism, here Swedenborg's non-literal interpretation is said to be motivated by a critique of the doctrines of the Reformers from within. However, in

⁵³³ Stengel, *Aufklärung*, 629.

⁵³⁴ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings*, trans. James Burton Robertson (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), 466-467. On Swedenborg's own use of the term "mystical sense" applied negatively to Jews, see chapter 3.

taking down the doctrines of the Trinity, of Adam's fall and of the vicarious death of Christ, writes Möhler, Swedenborg subverts the very foundations of Christianity.⁵³⁵ Möhler especially criticizes Swedenborg's "presumptuous ignorance" of the history of allegorico-mystical interpretations of the Bible in Christian and in Jewish traditions. Swedenborg's charge that the Jews are too carnal to understand scriptures hidden senses and that the early Christians too simple, offends Möhler on historical grounds, and he bemoans Swedenborg's lack of positive reference to the likes of Valentinus, Origen, Gregory the Great, Alcuin, Richard of St. Victor, and Thomas Aquinas. Möhler also includes a direct comparison to the four senses of Kabbalah: "He insists, that it was only by a special revelation he was made attentive to it, or at all events favoured with the true key for its right use. But what is his distinction between the various senses of Holy Writ, other than Sod (body), the Derusch (soul), and the Phaschut (spirit) of the Cabala—senses which themselves correspond to [those] of Philo."⁵³⁶ Möhler would be able to forgive Swedenborg his ignorance of these traditions, which bear such resemblances to his own, had he not claimed direct revelation from God as the source of his interpretations. Möhler does not explicitly denigrate Jewish interpretive abilities in his criticism of Swedenborg here, but it is interesting that he chooses to align Swedenborg's senses to those of Philo and Kabbalah, rather than the medieval quadriga. His comparisons to Christian exegetes are less specific, revealing something of a desire distance Swedenborg from this heritage.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 449-450.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 468.

Möhler 's comparison to Jewish allegory is followed by a critique of Swedenborg's vivid and fanciful descriptions of how the Bible appears in the spiritual world. That scripture appears in the other world as a shining star, engulfing those who touch it in a brilliant fire, is too literal a description where metaphor would have been more appropriate:

Had these descriptions been mere allegorical representations, to point out to sensual men the effulgence of divine light, wherewith a soul is filled . . . we should then have commended the aptness of such illustrations. But such is not Swedenborg's meaning; he here designs to state positive facts. For our part, we here discern an idolatry manifested to the dead word of Scripture, which exceeds all that the slavishness to the mere letter has ever exhibited, and has perhaps no parallel in history, except in the controversy among Mohammedans, whether the Koran be created or uncreated. Yet even the rational Moslem will reply, that the ideas, indeed, of the sacred book are eternal, but by no means the form wherein they are set forth.⁵³⁷

By Möhler's estimation then, Swedenborg's use of allegory demonstrates an inexcusable ignorance of the tradition, and his lack of awareness of the symbolic potential of his visions is equally foolish. Swedenborg's biblical interpretation is allegorical in all the wrong ways and his mysticism is disturbingly literal. All of this, according to Möhler, comes from Swedenborg's overzealous opposition to Lutheran doctrine of Justification. Given the overall polemical tone of *Symbolik*, Swedenborg represents for Möhler the folly of Protestantism turned against itself.⁵³⁸ Therefore, we see in the response from both Protestant and Catholic theologians that allegory is utilized as a point around which to build criticism of *Arcana coelestia*.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 469.

⁵³⁸ Due to Protestant reaction against his book, Möhler published several defenses and revised editions in the years after its first publication. See Introduction, xi.

Conclusion: Perspectives on Influence and Allegory

The memoirs of the Dutch John Christian Cuno, merchant, poet and personal acquaintance of Swedenborg, tell the story of the attacks from Ernesti and Kant from the sidelines. Cuno describes engaging Swedenborg in friendly exchanges about his critics, and defends the character and intentions of his comrade, even if he shares many of the theological objections of those highlighted in this chapter. Cuno, like others, was alarmed by Swedenborg's spiritualized apocalypse, his assertion that angels and devils are deceased humans, his exclusion of the Epistles from the biblical canon, and that his "new doctrine contradicts the old."⁵³⁹ He nevertheless pleads with Swedenborg to defend himself against his public critics, as did Oetinger and Beyer. And on several occasions Cuno notes his surprise that Swedenborg isn't more persecuted than he is, given the nature and content of his writing.⁵⁴⁰ He concludes, reasonably, that the amount of censorship aimed at Swedenborg correlates with the level of his influence: that so few refute him simply because his writing has born so little fruit.⁵⁴¹

What Cuno's conclusion fails to grasp, however, is that the difficulty in assessing the extent of Swedenborg's influence, philosophically, theologically or otherwise, is due to the fact that the transmission of his ideas was accomplished by his critics as often as his followers. Tracing the life of Swedenborg's religious and intellectual contributions is as complicated and overdetermined as tracing the ideas that influenced him. A more useful analysis looks, not at the extent of his influence, which is impossible to quantify,

⁵³⁹ Cuno, *Memoirs*, 135.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-52, 98-99, 110, 117.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

but at the discourse that accompanies the discussion of his ideas. In this approach, the discourse about allegory is particularly productive, as we have seen.

Allegory is at the heart of the discourse about *Arcana coelestia* among its earliest responders. Those who attacked Swedenborg on theological grounds, did so in defense of the literal sense of the Bible; those followed him did so by espousing the spiritual sense of the Bible, either as part of the time-honored wisdom of true Christianity, or as a new and scientific way of understanding the true content of revelation. At stake in each of these responses is the nature of God's Word. Does it communicate truth directly or through the use of symbols? Does it accommodate to the different technologies and epistemologies of different ages, or is its message unchanging? Is the language of God and of angels transparent or opaque? A related set of questions can be applied to the realm of human expression. We will see in the early reception of Swedenborg among artists and poets a renewal of symbolic and allegorical techniques, and an increasing interest in the multivalence of language and of art. Like his reception in philosophy and theology, however, Swedenborg's influence among artists comes with as much criticism as praise.

**CHAPTER 7: ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS:
THE LANGUAGE OF CORRESPONDENCES IN BLAKE, COLERIDGE AND BALZAC**

The thrust of this dissertation has been the argument, through the example of Emanuel Swedenborg and his interlocutors, for the persistence of allegorical interpretations of the Bible into the eighteenth century, despite post-Reformation trends in favor of literalism, even in areas pervaded by a sense of scientific awakening. Part three of this dissertation has so far explored philosophical and theological responses to Swedenborg's interpretive methods, and how those responses are tied up with notions of allegory: either its rehabilitation or its demise. We have encountered several figures who demonstrate a degree of ambivalence towards Swedenborg, or who change their opinion of him over time, such as Immanuel Kant, John Wesley, and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. We have also encountered a great deal of ambivalence towards biblical allegory among Swedenborg's critics, despite the persistence of non-literal interpretations of various sorts. This double ambivalence, towards Swedenborg and biblical allegory, materializes in the arts and literature as well and coincides with the emergence of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century.

Those who tell the history of hermeneutics often point to a semantic preference for "symbols" over "allegories" in the Romantic period. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, allegory became "aesthetically suspect" as Hans-Georg Gadamer writes; it was identified with dogmatic restrictiveness, bound to tradition and fixed in meaning. Symbols were a more organic, liberating alternative, Gadamer explains.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 79.

Samuel T. Coleridge (1772-1834) exemplifies this trend, and argues in his “The Statesman’s Manual” that symbols are tautegorical, or express the same meaning as their referent, while allegories are a mere abstraction: “Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into picture language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of senses,” but the symbol “always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative.”⁵⁴³ Symbols participate in the reality of thing they represent and therefore impart meaning through aesthetic impressions rather than grammatical technicalities. As Gadamer and others have demonstrated, however, this is a semantic distinction that belies a great deal of continuity with an allegorical heritage. “Is not the symbol-making activity also in fact limited by the continued existence of a mythical, allegorical tradition?”⁵⁴⁴ Jon Whitman suggests that the Romantic distinction between symbol and allegory was a shift in the meaning of the terms, a shift which was itself an “historical event,” and that, in fact, Coleridge’s symbols had a great deal in common with Paul’s use of allegory in the first century. Paul and Coleridge both reinterpret events in history through biblical themes for the sake of emancipation from old paradigms.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³ Samuel T. Coleridge, “The Statesman’s Manual,” *Complete Works: With an Introductory Essay upon His Philosophical and Theological Opinions*, ed. W.G.T. Shedd (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), 437f.

⁵⁴⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 81.

⁵⁴⁵ Whitman, “From the Textual to the Temporal.” Elsewhere, Whitman argues that the Romantic distinction should be understood in light of the polemic, started in the late Middle Ages, against “speaking otherwise.” He points to the trend made popular in the fourteenth century by Nicholas of Lyra to disclose meaning once deemed allegorical, within the literal or apparent sense of scripture. Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory*, 18. Whitman and Gadamer both demonstrate the rehabilitation of allegory and the displacement of symbolism in contemporary criticism. See also Knaller, “A Theory of Allegory.”

Coleridge's familiarity and engagement with Swedenborg, which will be explored below, is especially useful in exploring the Romantic discourse about symbol and allegory, because Swedenborg's correspondences are a kind of middle-way between modes, as he defines them in "The Statesman's Manual." The system of correspondences laid out in *Arcana coelestia* is allegorical in Coleridge's sense, in that it connects alternative, abstract meanings to the words of scripture. It is also symbolic in Coleridge's sense, in that every element of the natural world connects *in essence* to realities on other levels of existence; the Bible simply participates in this interconnectedness in ways other texts do not.⁵⁴⁶

This chapter will consider examples of artists and authors of the long eighteenth century whose creative manipulation of biblical symbols and whose engagement with Swedenborg's correspondences will help us explore the ambivalence towards allegorical interpretation that characterizes this age. By going outside the genre of traditional biblical commentary, we will explore interpretations of the Bible that reject doctrinal, or traditionally determined readings, and work instead to claim personal and social locations via the use of biblical symbols. In eighteenth century England, for instance, biblical themes are put to the service of revolutionary movements by poets such as Blake, Coleridge and Shelley, who reference biblical exile and "the wandering Jew" to address political perspectives of their time.⁵⁴⁷ Lord Byron expresses his nationalism through

⁵⁴⁶ See chapter 2 for a description of Swedenborg's doctrine of series and degrees and its relationship to correspondences in both the natural world and in sacred text.

⁵⁴⁷ Stuart Peterfreund, "Enactments of Exile and Diaspora in English Romantic Literature" in *Romanticism/Judaica: A Convergence of Cultures*, ed. Sheila A. Spector (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2011), 13-29. Peterfreund writes: "Not surprisingly, during the era of English Romanticism, which bore witness to its share of revolutions, rebellions, and widespread social disruption, the personal of the Jew as

identifying with the ancient Israelites in his *Hebrew Melodies*: “And where shall Israel lave her bleeding feet? / And when shall Zion’s songs again seem sweet?”⁵⁴⁸ In French literature, biblical allusions persist, sometimes for the sake of criticism of religious structures of thought, but often exhibiting the Bible’s positive influence such as in Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*.⁵⁴⁹ And in America, landscape artists drew parallels between the New World and the biblical Promised Land.⁵⁵⁰ Swedenborg’s influence among artists in these various contexts (English Romanticism, French literature, and American landscape painting) speaks to an artistic interest in the function of language and symbol, in biblical correspondences, or in the connection between earthly and spiritual realities.⁵⁵¹ Like his reception among philosophers and theologians, his reception among artists, novelists and poets was decidedly mixed. Nevertheless, his hermeneutical approach was suited to the creative sensibilities of those who sought to reimagine their

diasporic victim and witness, not merely as a fiendish other, had a role in the literature of the period,” 14-15. Jeffrey Robinson argues that this fact is partially what drew twentieth-century Jewish literary critics to the Romantic lyric, such as Harold Bloom, Lionel Trilling, M.H. Abrams, and Geoffrey Hartman. See Jeffrey Robinson, “Jewish Critics of Romanticism: Formal Predispositions” in *Romanticism/Judaica: A Convergence of Cultures*, ed. Sheila A. Spector, 183-199 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2011).

⁵⁴⁸ George Gordon Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron: Embracing His Suppressed Poems, and a Sketch of His Life*, (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1854), 519.

⁵⁴⁹ See Abraham Avni, “The Bible and *Les Fleurs du mal*,” *PMLA* 88, no. 2 (Modern Language Association, Mar., 1973):299-310. Avni uncovers traces of biblical influence on *Les Fleur du mal*, including allusions to biblical characters, close parallels to biblical diction, and echoes of biblical phrases and idioms.

⁵⁵⁰ John Davis explores ways that nineteenth century American national identity was linked to “Holy Land consciousness” in the work of landscape artists such as Miner Kellogg, Edward Troye, James Fairman, and Frederic Church in, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵⁵¹ On Swedenborg and Baudelaire see Wilkinson, *Dream of an Absolute Language*, 217-248; on Swedenborg and English Romanticism, see Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); on Swedenborg and American landscape artistry, see Eugene Taylor, “The Interior Landscape: William James and George Inness on Art from a Swedenborgian Point of View,” in *Archives of American Art Journal* 37 (1997): 2-10. See also forthcoming, Devin Zuber, *A Language of Things: Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination* (UVA Press, 2017).

national and religious identities in visionary ways. These artistic expressions constitute Swedenborg's greatest impact outside of the sectarian Swedenborgian movement. This chapter will consider just three artists from the long eighteenth century whose work contributes in this way.

I have chosen Blake, Coleridge and Balzac because of their relevance to the particular themes of biblical interpretation, correspondences, scientific enlightenment, and Jewish and Christian identity. Of the three, Blake and Coleridge have a great deal more in common, being English, Romantic poets of the same generation. In addition to their many religious and national commonalities, they also knew each other through their mutual Swedenborgian contact Charles Augustus Tulk, politician and founding member of Hindmarsh's Theosophical Society in London. We also have the written annotations of both Blake and Coleridge on several of Swedenborg's works, providing us with direct insight into their personal views. Balzac, who will be this dissertation's final subject, is most often categorized as a realist rather than a romantic, though it is noteworthy that his "Swedenborgian novels" *Séraphîta* and *Louis Lambert* depart from his usual style with their fantastic settings and supernatural characters. Balzac, like Blake and Coleridge, is interested in Swedenborg for the symbolic and visionary potential his work inspired. Unlike Blake and Coleridge, however, Balzac underscores Swedenborg's scientific genius, idealizing a unification of science and spirit that Swedenborg represented. Our English romantics maintain a suspicion of this side of Swedenborg's work, which is related to their ambivalence towards naturalism and deism, as we will see. In both Balzac's *Séraphîta* and Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg appears

as a fictionalized character, while Coleridge's explicit engagement with Swedenborg is relegated to his annotations. None of these three joined a Swedenborgian church, though the extent of their confessional identities as Swedenborgians varies between them and over the course of their individual lives. We will consider them in turn chronologically.

The Visions and Poetry of William Blake

In a move similar to Coleridge's distinction between symbol and allegory, discussed above, William Blake (1757-1827) distinguishes between *vision* and allegory, the latter being a "totally distinct and inferior kind of Poetry." In his notes on interpreting the last judgement, he writes: "Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really and Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is formed by the Daughters of Memory." By associating allegory with memory, Blake is defining it as interpretation of the past, formulated and artificial, while vision is an immediate impression of the divine. The Bible, Blake writes, is no allegory, but "Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists."⁵⁵² Blake's categories are not mutually exclusive, it is worth noting, for "Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision."⁵⁵³ It was indeed Swedenborg's visions that drew Blake to the seer. What part of Swedenborg Blake would come to see as visionary versus allegorical, however, is a complicated question, and one that reveals a complicated reception of Swedenborg's work. It would be convenient if the two kinds of material found in *Arcana coelestia*, biblical commentary on the one hand and

⁵⁵² William Blake, "A Vision of the Last Judgement," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed., David Erdman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 544.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

“memorable relations,” or accounts of interactions with angels and spirits in the other world, on the other, fit into Blake’s categories of allegory and vision. But, as we will see, Blake mocks outright both Swedenborg’s memorable relations and his exegesis, while also drawing inspiration from each. Swedenborg, like many of Blake’s sources, is mined for his visionary potential, while simultaneously critiqued and distorted in Blake’s poetic work.

Blake is often one of the first to be named when the question of Swedenborg’s early reception arises, and with good reason. He and his wife signed as attendees at the first official gathering of the Swedenborgian General Conference in 1789 in London. He read and annotated several of Swedenborg’s works. He mentioned and responded to Swedenborg in a number of his own writings, most notably his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). And he closely associated with several early Swedenborgians, especially Tulk and the English sculptor John Flaxman. But Blake’s relationship to Swedenborgian thought is far from unequivocal: Jorge Luis Borges, for instance, called Blake “Swedenborg’s rebellious disciple.”⁵⁵⁴ Scholars who engage the question of Blake’s relationship to Swedenborg tend to describe an early enthusiasm that later turns to denigration and distancing, but that near the end of his life Blake’s criticism softens and positive connections and references are discernable.⁵⁵⁵ A few points should be made that

⁵⁵⁴ Borges, “Testimony to the Invisible,” 8. Here Borges is contrasting the general credulity concerning the visions of Ezekiel and Saint John of the Cross, “but we do not believe in William Blake, Swedenborg’s rebellious disciple, or in his master, still near us in time. . . . Exactly when did true visions cease and apocryphal ones begin?”

⁵⁵⁵ For instance, see Hazard Adams, *Blake’s Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 28-29; Morton D. Paley, “A New Heaven is Begun: Blake and Swedenborgianism,” in *Blake and Swedenborg: Opposition is True Friendship*, ed. Harvey F. Bellin, Darrell Ruhl, George F. Dole, Tom Kieffer and Nancy Crompton, 15-34 (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985).

moderate the contours of this arch. First, Blake's early, and brief, support of the English New Church movement should be understood in the context of his overarching rejection of organized religion rather than the opposite. Many of the movement's propositions and resolutions, which were voted on over the course of the four days of the Conference he attended, were aimed at public separation from the "Old Church" and emphasized spiritual liberty and rational inquiry.⁵⁵⁶ Further to this point, his later criticism of Swedenborg should be read in light of the perception of the encroachment of a new kind of orthodoxy on Swedenborgianism itself.⁵⁵⁷ Secondly, despite the variations in his attitude toward Swedenborg over the course of his life, a few points of connection remained consistent, namely: the aforementioned critique of present day ecclesiastical structures and dogma, and the heavy reliance on biblical symbols. We also find similar forms of anti-Judaism in Blake's work as well as the striking resemblance to Kabbalah. The scholarly debates over Blake's exposure to Kabbalah mirror in some ways those regarding Swedenborg and Kabbalah, as we will see. The following will explore these factors by briefly considering two of Blake's poems, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Everlasting Gospel*. First, a word on Blake scholarship – the debates over his sources and how to categorize his methods – is in order.

A survey of scholarship on William Blake demonstrates an inherent difficulty in determining his place within the various movements and traditions of his time. Kathleen Raine and George Mills Harper, for instance, place Blake firmly within the tradition of

⁵⁵⁶ See Raymond H Deck Jr., "Blake and Swedenborg," PhD diss. (Brandeis University, 1978), 300-310.

⁵⁵⁷ Rix makes this last point in *William Blake*, 121, 132.

Neoplatonism, with its eighteenth-century hermetic and kabbalistic proclivities.⁵⁵⁸ E. P. Thompson rejects this view, and places Blake instead among the dissenting sects, such as the Muggletonians, of the English Reformation.⁵⁵⁹ Laura Quinney argues that opposing popular and esoteric sources in the way Thompson does obscures the fact that these movements were intertwined and that Blake freely appropriated and misappropriated from a variety of sources.⁵⁶⁰

If we look at scholarly opinions on Blake's relationship to the allegorical tradition, the thesis for continuity comes from Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, who draw a connection between Blake's symbolism and medieval Christian allegorists, writing that his was "no mere freak of an eccentric mind, but an eddy of that flood-tide of symbolism which attained its tide-mark in the magic of the Middle Ages."⁵⁶¹ Sheila Spector challenges Ellis and Yeats' comparison, and asserts that Blake was in fact rejecting the methods of earlier Christian exegetes and adopting the "wholly incomparable" framework of Kabbalah.⁵⁶² And finally, Robert Rix points to Blake's use of Swedenborg's correspondences to explain key symbols and themes.⁵⁶³ We will discuss

⁵⁵⁸ Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968); George Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).

⁵⁵⁹ E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York: New Press, 1994).

⁵⁶⁰ Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 55-58.

⁵⁶¹ Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, "The Preface," in *The works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, eds., Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats (New York, AMS Press, 1973) Vol. 1, x.

⁵⁶² Sheila Spector, *Wonders Divine: The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Myth* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 23. See also, Sheila Spector, "*Glorious Incomprehensible*": *The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Language* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶³ Rix, *William Blake*.

several of these positions further below. My position will be similar to Quinney's, in arguing that the assertion, such as we find in Spector, that Blake's kabbalistic myth making is wholly distinct from Western thought seriously misrepresents both Blake and Kabbalah, whose influence by and on Western thought is far more intricate than she allows. Blake's poetic imagination rejects the very question of adaptation versus denial of traditional forms of symbolism. Swedenborg is a helpful interlocutor here, as Blake uses his visions and his doctrine of correspondences in very specific ways, both in formulating ironic twists that mock Swedenborg and church, but also in ways that harmonize variations on biblical, ecclesiastical and Swedenborgian themes. Satire and reproach mingle with imitation and positive adaptation of key concepts in Blake's use of Swedenborg, as with his use of the Bible.

Blake's "misprision" of Swedenborg, to borrow Bloom's term, is nowhere more apparent than in his *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a lengthy and elaborately illustrated poetic satire on Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*. Specifically, we can trace Blake's inspiration for the poem to number 588 in Swedenborg's work, in which we find the following line: "In regard to the number of the hells, there are as many of them as there are angelic societies in the heavens, since there is for every heavenly society a corresponding infernal society as its opposite."⁵⁶⁴ Blake was enamored with the concept of a corresponding heaven and hell, and annotated this number with the following interpretation of it: "under every Good is a hell, i.e. hell is the outward or external of

⁵⁶⁴ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 588.

heaven & is the body of the lord, for nothing is destroy'd."⁵⁶⁵ To borrow Spector's terminology, Blake saw in Swedenborg an "obversive" relationship between good and evil. The idea that heaven and hell were two sides of the same coin exploits a tension in Swedenborg's work, where traditional notions of sin and evil are matched with the idea of hell's necessity for the sake of cosmic equilibrium and human free will. Furthermore, in Swedenborg's hell, the residents are there by their own choice, and are permitted to indulge their desires and delusions, a point which scandalized John Wesley as we saw in the last chapter. Blake found the idea compelling and took it to an extreme never intended by Swedenborg.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Angel and Devil take on untraditional personae. The angels are rule makers and enforcers, spoilers of pleasure and free expression under the pretext of reason, virtue, and humility: "Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion."⁵⁶⁶ The Devil is hero of the story, replacing the errors of the Bible with the Proverbs of Hell, and preaching that true love of God consists in "Honoring his gifts in other men" rather than vain devotion to God alone.⁵⁶⁷ Swedenborg, for his part, appears at the poem's start as the angel at the tomb, "his writings are the linen clothes folded up." It is worth noting that, according to Swedenborg, clothing in the Bible corresponds to the outer husk of scripture – the literal

⁵⁶⁵ William Blake, annotation on Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, London Second Edition, 1784, as found in William Blake, *Complete Writings: With Variant Readings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 929.

⁵⁶⁶ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 8, line 1 in *Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, ed. Clark Emery (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1963).

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, plate 22.

sense.⁵⁶⁸ In making Swedenborg's writings the clothing left behind without a body, Blake may be using Swedenborg's own doctrine to suggest his work is empty at its core: that Swedenborg's poetic impulse was frustrated by his stubborn adherence to old forms. Further on we read: "Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime—but no further."⁵⁶⁹ Robert Rix points to other uses of Swedenborg's correspondences in the poem, even in the very symbols employed in the Proverbs of Hell, such as in the line: "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."⁵⁷⁰ Tigers, in Swedenborg's system, correspond to lust and horses to doctrine. Swedenborg, in this instance, helps Blake in his expression of the triumph of passion over dogma.⁵⁷¹

The piece both mocks and engages with Swedenborg's work in other ways. It contains five "Memorable Fancies" or descriptions of encounters with places and beings in heaven and hell, imitating Swedenborg's "memorable relations" first published as part of *Arcana coelestia*.⁵⁷² In one of these, Blake is taken by an angel to see his eternal resting place in hell, which first appears as a dark and gruesome cave infested with spiders and monsters. When the angel parts from him, however, he sees the landscape in its true light, as a moonlit river with a harpist on its banks producing sublime melodies.

⁵⁶⁸ For example, see Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, 215: "things that are good and true in the Word's literal meaning are like vessels or clothing for the naked goodness and truth that lie hidden in the Word's spiritual and heavenly meanings." This has parallels in the Zohar, where clothing is compared to the outer layers of Torah, as discussed in chapter 3. As Rix demonstrates, Blake was especially influenced by Swedenborg's *True Christianity* while writing *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Rix, *William Blake*, 122.

⁵⁶⁹ Blake, *The Marriage*, plate 22.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, plate 9, line 5.

⁵⁷¹ Rix, *William Blake*, 132.

⁵⁷² See chapter 4 where Swedenborg's Memorable Relations are described.

He accuses the angel: “All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics.” This story plays on a theme found in Swedenborg’s memorable relations, where residents of hell appear beautiful to themselves and appear to reside amidst splendid surroundings until exposed as wretched by the light of heaven.⁵⁷³ Blake’s story mischievously suggests that Swedenborg misunderstood what he witnessed in hell, and that heaven’s was in fact the false light.

A Swedenborgian theme that plays out in the illustrations of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is the presence of conjugal relationships in the afterlife. It was an idea that sparked significant controversy at the time, both within and without the New Church movement, and it was one aspect of Swedenborg’s thought that Blake embraced without equivocation. The figurative marriage of heaven to hell, however, brought this theme to a most unexpected conclusion. The poem earns its title both from the image on the cover page, in which a resident of heaven and a resident of hell embrace in the nude, and in the poem’s last lines: “Note: This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend; we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well. I have also the Bible of Hell, which the world shall have whether they will or no.”⁵⁷⁴ The two Bibles then, one heavenly and one hellish, document this extraordinary union.

⁵⁷³ For instance, after describing the grotesque appearances of places and spirits in hell, Swedenborg writes: “But it must be understood that this is the way infernal spirits appear in the light of heaven, while among themselves they appear as men. This is of the Lord’s mercy, that they may not appear as loathsome to one another as they appear before the angels. But this appearance is a fallacy, for as soon as any ray of light from heaven is let in, their human forms appear changed into monstrous forms, such as they are in themselves.” *Heaven and Hell*, 553 [4].

⁵⁷⁴ Blake, *The Marriage*, plate 24.

Reading the Bible according to an “infernal sense” of course taunts those such as Swedenborg, who claim unique access to the “internal sense.” The Bible of Hell, on the other hand, boasts a kind of open access and immediacy, which is curious given the enigmatic nature of hell’s Proverbs quoted earlier on. The confusion over the accessibility of Blake’s two Bibles reflects something of an aesthetic preference for hermeneutic inconsistency. The Bible, like Swedenborg, is both object of ridicule and provider of powerful symbols and visions. And the Bible, like Swedenborg, requires an unorthodox, even diabolical, interpretation in order to draw out a fuller genius and relevancy. This is not to say that Swedenborg and the Bible were functionally on par in Blake’s world, far from it. But Swedenborg’s interpretation of the Bible continued to inspire Blake’s poetic imagination to the very end, as we see in his last poem ever written, *The Everlasting Gospel*.

Blake, like Swedenborg, experienced recurring visions of people who had died and passed into the spiritual world, and like Swedenborg he was immersed in the study of the Bible from a young age, making biblical symbolism an especially effective means for theological and poetic expression. It is Blake’s apocalypticism, however, which may be the most fruitful area for comparison. Blake’s *The Everlasting Gospel*, for example, a poem wedged into empty margins of his notebook near the end of his life, reveals an affinity to Swedenborg’s concept of a spiritual apocalypse in the present day, even if Blake’s biblical iconoclasm is at odds with Swedenborg’s earnest tone. Both Blake and Swedenborg use the book of Revelation, not to predict an impending divine judgment or the bodily return of Christ to earth, but as a means to critique the Christian Church of

their day, to call Christians away from blind allegiances to clerical authority, and to urge their readers to wake up and realize a new potentiality for spiritual freedom and enlightenment.⁵⁷⁵

The Everlasting Gospel is an exercise in contradictions. Blake's simultaneous reliance on and overturning of the biblical narrative has confused both novice readers and seasoned Blake scholars alike. His Jesus is at once forgiving and vengeful, meek and unapologetically proud, chaste and impure, violent and gentle, fully in the flesh and fully transcendent. Nevertheless, while Blake's Gospel is dissonant and at times light-hearted, it is by no means unserious. His concerns are ultimate ones, his message urgent. This is made evident by the poem's dependence on the imagery and language of the biblical book of Revelation: the promised final judgment on humanity. Blake's work, the product of English utopianism, does not describe the end of time, or any literally chronological scheme of events. Rather, his "end" is in the present tense. His Last Judgment is the event of being awakened from a deep sleep. His prophecy announces a new consciousness. Kathleen Raine describes Blake's apocalypse as a "destruction of a texture of illusion."⁵⁷⁶ "To Blake," she writes "the Last Judgment is enlightenment, it is the opening of our inward sight which enables us to see things as they really are. That is why it is 'last'; for it is absolute, no further possibility remains for opinion or speculation."⁵⁷⁷ The wrath of

⁵⁷⁵ This interpretive thread goes far back into the history of Christian readings of Revelation. Peter Olivi, for example, used interpretations of the apocalypse to critique the church. See Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, 73

⁵⁷⁶ Kathleen Raine, *Blake and the New Age* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 64.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

God promised with this event, is not the literal punishment of the wicked or the reward of the righteous, but the revelation of our true nature.

When considering Blake's choice of a title for the poem, some scholars have pointed to the use of this phrase among dissenting sects in nineteenth-century England. "The Everlasting Gospel" referred, in the context of such movements as the Ranters and Muggletonians, to a new revelation of the true meaning of scripture, which was to usher in a new "Age of the Holy Spirit." The accompanying antinomianism was certainly an aspect of Blake's worldview, and his alternative gospel can be interpreted in light of the spirit of reinterpretation that such groups inspired. However, for Blake the dangers of authoritarianism were too great a risk to align himself with the creeds of any organized movement. His influence by and ultimate rejection of the New Church movement of the English Swedenborgians demonstrates this dynamic. However, Swedenborg serves as an interlocutor for Blake especially on the topic of the Last Day, and Swedenborg's vision of an apocalypse that unveils itself in the process of individual spiritual regeneration and in the shifting consciousness of humanity as a whole, provided a productive theological and visionary basis for Blake's present-day eschatology. Importantly, the "everlasting gospel" is a phrase Swedenborg used in one particular section of *The True Christian Religion*, a work that was especially influential on Blake.⁵⁷⁸ In this number, Swedenborg

⁵⁷⁸ Rix catalogues Blake's allusions to Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* in *The Marriage*, and argues that in relying so heavily on this text in particular, Blake was targeting a specifically Swedenborgian audience with *The Marriage*. True Christian Religion (True Christianity in the translation cited elsewhere in this dissertation), was widely used and referenced by Swedenborgians as an introduction and summary of their beliefs. Rix, *William Blake*, 122, 128-134.

is engaged in a heated debate with none-other than Martin Luther, in the spiritual world, on the timing and nature of the apocalypse.⁵⁷⁹

A cursory study can be made of just one section of this lengthy poem. Section k⁵⁸⁰ begins with the simple question: “Was Jesus Humble or did he / Give any Proofs of Humility”? Such a question anticipates the obvious answer of Christianity, whose messiah arrived as a helpless baby, born in a stable one silent night. However, Blake makes the contrary argument, drawing out all the evidence he can of Christ’s disobedience to authority, including his own parents, and of his destructive wrath. Caiaphas, his priestly accuser, returns throughout the poem and reflects the satanic “accuser” of the apocalypse (Rev 12:10), Caiaphas’s role as antagonist accentuates Jesus’ defiance. “He did not die with Christian Ease / Asking Pardon of his Enemies / If he had Caiaphas would forgive / Sneaking submission can always live.” A humble Christ would have deferred to Caiaphas, but in doing so, would have been an “Antichrist Creeping Jesus.” Blake associates such an antichrist with the elders and priests of the community, alluding to the “Synagogue of Satan” from Revelation 3:9. For Blake, the synagogue and its scribes, the Temple and its priests, are all figures for corrupt, authoritarian religion.

However, a second answer is given to the opening question. Christ refrained from humbling himself before his accuser, but in doing so, succeeded in humbling himself to God. Against the backdrop of a negative humility avoided, this positive humility brings on the apocalyptic moment: “Then descended the Cruel Rod.” Like the iron scepter of

⁵⁷⁹ See Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, 796.

⁵⁸⁰ According to the arrangement in Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry*, 518-520.

Revelation 2:27 this rod inaugurates the terrors of Judgment Day. The sun and moon darken angels cry out souls await, buried in the earth. The remainder of section k marries apocalyptic imagery with the gospel story of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane the night before his own end. Blake's "Revenge at the Last Day" ambiguously refers to both Jesus' last day in the flesh, and the last days of all humanity. He makes use of the paired themes of wakefulness and sleep, darkness and light, drawn from both biblical accounts. Echoing the admonishment to the church of Sardis in Revelation 3, Blake commands: "Awake arise to Spiritual Strife / And thy Revenge abroad display / In terrors at the Last Judgment Day." The section ends with the comparison of sleep to the negatively depicted states of humility and doubt, each relating a certain spiritual darkness. "born in a night to perish in a night / When the Soul slept in the beams of light."

While Swedenborg was, for Blake, something of a sparring partner rather than a prophet to be followed uncritically, we can see in Blake's work meaningful traces of Swedenborg's spiritualized interpretation of the book of Revelation. In *True Christianity* numbers 753-790, for instance, Swedenborg describes the apocalypse as the end of the old era and the beginning of a new one: "So everything is born and wastes away, and is born again, so that creation may continue in existence." And that Christ comes again in the present day to those who are awake to spiritual realities: "He cannot appear to any man unless the eyes of his spirit are first opened." As Rix notes, Swedenborg's view of the apocalypse manifesting as the coming of Christ in the religious life of the individual resonated with those in Blake's social and religious context: "in setting individual

illumination as the desideratum of True Religion over the control of priests, Swedenborg unwittingly gave confidence to those in English society who felt disempowered under the traditional ecclesiastical institutions.” Thus, though Blake’s ironic twists and narrative upending of the biblical account is in many ways at odds with Swedenborg’s reverent commentaries, his message of awakening and freedom from structures of authority and religious coercion were indebted, to some degree, to a Swedenborgian hermeneutic.

As in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, we find in *The Everlasting Gospel*, Blake’s two Bibles and two heavens: one used to oppress and one to liberate. “The Vision of Christ that thou dost see / Is my Vision’s Greatest Enemy.”⁵⁸¹ “Thy Heaven’s doors are my Hell’s Gates.”⁵⁸² “Both read the Bible day & night / But thou read’st black where I read white.”⁵⁸³ Here, and elsewhere in Blake’s work, Judaism is associated with the oppressive potential of religion. Judaism becomes an unfortunate symbol for everything he loathes in his own religious tradition: legalism, moral superiority, hypocrisy, and the abuse of religious authority. Blake’s discursive use of the figure of the Jew stands on the shoulders of countless Christians before him, including Swedenborg, but nevertheless stands out against the backdrop of his liberalism. Karen Shabetai, who considers “The Question of Blake’s Hostility Toward the Jews” points to Blake’s failure to live up to his own humanitarian standards. Examples from publications of his day, which critique hostile depictions of Jews and Judaism, demonstrate alternatives available to Blake, and as Shabetai concludes, his anti-Jewish rhetoric exceeds what is “necessary to make his

⁵⁸¹ William Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel*, in Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry*, [e]:1-2, 80.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, [e]:8, 524.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, [e]:13-14, 524.

more positive argument.”⁵⁸⁴ As Harold Bloom laments of his otherwise beloved poet: “Though he caught the prophetic spirit of Amos and Isaiah so precisely in most respects, he was incapable of freeing himself from the traditional Christian misinterpretations of Pharisaic religion, and adopted the absurd and simplistic dialectic which opposes the supposed legalism of the Jews to the presumably greater spirituality of their offspring and rivals.”⁵⁸⁵

Like Swedenborg, Blake’s anti-Judaism intermingles with similarities in content with some forms of Kabbalah. His knowledge of Kabbalah is evident from his *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion*, in which we find the line referencing *Adam kadmon* addressed “To the Jews:” “You have a tradition, that Man anciently contain’d in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth.”⁵⁸⁶ Readers of Blake find plenty to compare with Kabbalah in the cosmic themes of his mythic poetry and prose, though it is difficult to prove definitively when his sources are kabbalistic in nature. Spector, for instance, elaborates an intricate kabbalism in Blake’s work, not only in his choice of words, symbols, and narratives, but in the very structuring principle of his modality. She argues that Blake mapped four levels of consciousness in his major prophecies, corresponding to the four kinds of soul and the four worlds of Kabbalah.⁵⁸⁷ She traces his own development as an artist through four phases of awakening that likewise correspond. Her analysis is itself poetic, but contributes little to what we know about Blake’s engagement

⁵⁸⁴ Karen Shabetai, “The Question of Blake’s Hostility Toward the Jews,” in *English Literary History* 63.1 (1996), 139.

⁵⁸⁵ Harold Bloom, *Blake’s Apocalypse* (New York: Anchor Books), 1965, 433-434.

⁵⁸⁶ William Blake, *Jerusalem*, Plate 27, in Keynes, ed. *Complete Writings*, 649.

⁵⁸⁷ Spector, *Wonders Divine*, 19-21.

with kabbalism, Christian or Jewish. The most we can say from his work, such as in *Jerusalem*, is that he marries concepts that are useful to him from Kabbalah with satirical attacks on the people who produced it: a move entirely consistent with his use of biblical and Swedenborgian themes as we have seen.⁵⁸⁸

One last point is relevant to our study, and that is Blake's view of science. His condemnation of the oppressive structures of religion did not come with the heralding of scientific reasoning, as it did for the English Deists—quite the opposite. He addresses a segment of his *Jerusalem* “To the Deists,” which begins: “He never can be a Friend to the Human Race who is the preacher of Natural Morality or Natural Religion.”⁵⁸⁹ Blake associates Deism and natural religion with the Biblical figures of Rahab, Babylon, and the Synagogue of Satan.⁵⁹⁰ And the great Albion is kept from his awakening by the spirits of science: “For Bacon & Newton sheathed in dismal steel their terrors hang / Like iron scourges over Albion.”⁵⁹¹ The problematic elements of religion are not, for Blake, the irrational or the mythical, but the rational and the oppressive: the remote and mechanical God of Deism. Therefore we see in Blake a similar caution to Swedenborg's, against the pitfalls of intellectualism. Unlike Swedenborg, however, who attempted to systematize his doctrine of correspondences according to the principles of logic and mathematics, Blake's symbolism was consciously unsystematic. As we read from the Proverbs of Hell: “Improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked roads without Improvement, are

⁵⁸⁸ For more on Blake's esoteric sources, see Raine, *Blake and the New Age*. E. P. Thompson argues, in *Witness Against the Beast*, against his reliance on Neoplatonism, hermeticism and Kabbalah, and points instead to his participation in the radical, dissenting sects of the English Reformation.

⁵⁸⁹ Blake, *Jerusalem*, Plate 52, in Keynes, ed., *Complete Writings* 681

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 682.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Plate 15, ln. 11, 635.

roads of Genius.”⁵⁹² While Swedenborg’s disciples were promoting the “science of correspondences,” Blake promoted his own unscientific version. The frustration with Swedenborg’s adherence to logic and method over artistic expression, as well as the attraction to Swedenborg’s mystical insights into biblical symbols, was a combination shared by our next poet.

The Symbolism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.⁵⁹³

These lines, which conclude the poem *Kubla Khan* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), describe a dreadful creature: an anti-Christ who drinks up the Holy Land’s milk and honey. Isaiah 7:14-16 describes an omen in the form of a child, who will eat butter and honey and who will signal the devastation of two neighboring kingdoms. The verses have long been interpreted by Christians as a prediction of the Christ child, and it is precisely these verses that Coleridge cites in his notebook as an example of biblical images with an inner sense. The notebook entry in question, written in 1827, considers the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and posits an inner sense tradition that links these otherwise disparate texts. He writes, that if he could uncover such an inner sense in the Prophets, for instance, he would embrace certain labels others find

⁵⁹² Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 10, Line 6-7, in Keynes, ed., *Complete Writings*, 152.

⁵⁹³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1912), Vol. 1, 298.

detestable: “the invidious epithets of Swedenborgian and Cabalistic, would not frighten me.”⁵⁹⁴ Whether or not Coleridge was able to discern an inner sense of the sort he attributed to Swedenborg and to Kabbalah, he clearly was able to successfully harness the poetic potential of biblical themes, as we see in *Kubla Khan*.

The notebook entry reveals Coleridge’s awareness, on the one hand, of a hermeneutical point of connection between Swedenborg and Kabbalah, and on the other, the ambivalence that both Swedenborg and Kabbalah provoked among his contemporaries and the potential danger of associating with them too hastily. Both Swedenborg and Kabbalah, however, played key roles in Coleridge’s religious thought and its translation into his poetry. His knowledge and interpretation of them each will be taken up here in turn.

⁵⁹⁴ Coleridge’s notebook entry from November 1827 reads: “I am desirous to understand the Old Testament, especially the Psalms and Prophets, on the especial motive of the passage in the Gospels, in which our Lord is said to have opened out the sense of the prophecies to the Apostles after his Resurrection and to have shewn them how they all applied to *him*. It is certainly an overwhelming Proof of the perishable nature of all unwritten truth, that Tradition has not preserved an Item of this momentous Exposition! And yet the apparent literal Sense, taking text and context, seems so remote from the Events, to which they are by orthodox divines referred / ~~or~~ and the Sense itself is often so obscure, that I grope like a blind Man—for instance, Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to choose the good &c--& how this could be a *sign* to think of the approaching downfall of the Kings of Syria & Israel / --I dare not say, nay, I do not think, that the truth is divided between the Protestants and the Romans (i.e. decatholicized) Catholics; but I think that on several momentous points there is a Truth, from which both are nearly equal distances—and if (we) ~~are~~ are bound to believe the relation above-mentioned of the three first Gospels, and other similar declarations attributed to our Savior respecting the intention of the Prophecies; and it can, of course, be only ~~in~~ to a *very* limited extent, too limited to be of any efficacy in the removal of difficulties, that the hypothesis of accommodation can be rationally applied to the Interpretati~~on~~ve References of the Apostolic Writers; then, I confess, that the Opinion of an interior & spiritual sense, in the mind of the Prophets themselves, preserved for a time in the old Schools of the Prophets, and still discoverable by a spiritual Light would be full of comfort to me, & remove difficulties which I at present see no other means of overcoming or even of escaping—if only I could be sure, it was more than an opinion./ The invidious epithets of Swedenborgian and Cabbalistic, would not frighten me.” From *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, vol. 5, 1827-1834, Text*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Anthony John Harding, (Princeton University Press, 2002), entry 5667.

Coleridge's interest in Kabbalah was due in part to his adherence to the common misattribution of the texts associated with Jewish mysticism to an ancient wisdom predating the New Testament and validating a Trinitarian perspective. He read such Trinitarian references, for instance, into the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which describes the grouping of the three "mother letters" associated with the three highest *sefirot*, "a doctrine which must have been very early indeed in the Church, because we find a clear reference to it in the beginning of the Apocalypse" according to Coleridge.⁵⁹⁵ This reading of *Sefer Yetzirah* as informing the content of the book of Revelation, is confirmed by Christianized translations and commentaries on the Zohar available to Coleridge in the *Kabbalah denudata*. As Tim Fulford demonstrates, Coleridge's dating and interpretation of kabbalistic texts was also informed by his relationships to a number of influential movements and figures in his life, including the Cambridge Platonists, the German biblical scholar J. G. Eichhorn and the French historian Basnage de Beauval, whose work incorporated Targumic and rabbinic studies.⁵⁹⁶ Coleridge had Jewish interlocutors as well, the most important of which was his friend and teacher Hyman Hurwitz. Kabbalah was therefore not a fleeting interest of his, but a sustained object of study, and it was one that informed his poetic interpretations of the biblical themes.

⁵⁹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed Kathleen Coburn (London: Pilot Press, 1949), 299.

⁵⁹⁶ Tim Fulford, "Apocalyptic and Reactionary?: Coleridge as Hermeneutist," in *The Modern Language Review* 87.1 (1992), 24-25.

Fulford argues that Coleridge's interpretation of the Bible, while presenting an alternative to both biblical literalism and to historical criticism, should not be viewed as reactionary.

Coleridge's extensive knowledge of the Kabbalah was developed as he struggled to find a new status for scripture. In making this struggle, he was at the forefront of contemporary scholarship, and was certainly not a reactionary in his intellectual interests. Aware of German biblical criticism, as most of his contemporaries were not, Coleridge knew that scripture was not directly dictated or inspired by God. In accepting, after Eichhorn, its historical and local nature, its bias and flaws, Coleridge also accepted that a new understanding of its truth was necessary.⁵⁹⁷

This new understanding was informed by the latest in biblical scholarship, but required a poet's hermeneutic. For Coleridge, the Bible was "the most perfect specimen of symbolic poetry." "The Apocalypse is a poem," he wrote, "and a poem composed by a Hebrew poet after the particular type of Hebrew poetry."⁵⁹⁸ According to Coleridge's reading, the poetic soul of Kabbalah inspired the biblical authors, who encoded their message in rich images and narratives and also initiated a tradition of exploring the sense within. With such an understanding of the nature of the biblical tradition as his base, Coleridge made a point of seeking out other thinkers and traditions that he saw as allied with this position, Swedenborg being a particularly fascinating case.

Coleridge was a student in residence at Christ's Hospital in London the same years that Robert Hindmarsh was organizing the first Swedenborgian meetings in nearby locations, and was associated with Tulk, as discussed above. Circumstances of time and

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 26

⁵⁹⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (London: Routledge, 1976), 139. Quoted in Fulford, "Apocalyptic and Reactionary?" 26-27.

place therefore brought him in contact with Swedenborg's writings, but in them he found both resonance and discord with ideas about language and biblical interpretation that occupied him from a young age. Coleridge wrote about Swedenborg and annotated several of Swedenborg's books, some of which were published in the an 1841 volume of the *Monthly Magazine*, and many more of which we have recorded in his private notebooks and most recently compiled in a 1954 dissertation by Leonard Martin Edmisten.⁵⁹⁹

Coleridge's commentary on Swedenborg includes some of his scientific and philosophical writings. His notes on *Regnum Animale*, for instance, show admiration for Swedenborg's more sublime insights, but also frustration at the spoiling of these insights with the language of naturalism and logic.

De Anima Humana—How near to—yea in actual contact, only that he touches it with the back of the hand,— is this great mind with the very truth. At one moment he has his hand on it; he pauses a moment and feels a fruition of the truth. This is to be brought forward from the center to van, and spread out in the light of conscious and communicable distinctness. This he seems to effect by conceptions, and by the mechanism of conceptual logic—and the truth is gone!⁶⁰⁰

Coleridge voices similar viewpoints on Swedenborg's biblical exegesis: support for the general principle, but disappointment with the results. For instance, he comments on *Arcana coelestia* no. 7933, in which Swedenborg writes of the biblical text that “not a single expression, nor even a single iota, in its original language, can be taken from the literal sense of the Word, without an interruption in the internal sense.” Coleridge is put

⁵⁹⁹ Leonard Martin Edmisten, “Coleridge's Commentary on Swedenborg.” PhD diss., University of Missouri, 1954.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

off by such hyperbole: “In Heaven, perhaps; but on Earth? And which Edition, for even the printed Bibles differ according to the different MSS. from which they were printed? That there is some grand Arcanum in this Intuition of Sw. I am inclined to think: because a similar Sense is every where recurring in Behmen . . . But neither B. nor Sw. appear to me to have mastered it.”⁶⁰¹ Both Bohme and Swedenborg were rightly guided by the intention to read into biblical symbols, in his view, but neither produced the kinds of interpretations that captured the poetic spirit of the text. Elsewhere in his comments on *Arcana*, Coleridge encourages Swedenborgians to mine the truth from Swedenborg’s work and put aside the rest: “Swedenborg’s Meaning is the truth—and the duty of his followers is, to secure this meaning to the Readers of his works by collecting from his numerous Volumes those passages, in which this meaning is conveyed in terms so plain as not to be misconceived.”⁶⁰² Coleridge here seems to be suggesting an inner sense to Swedenborg himself, or at least that his work requires a creative reinterpretation by his readers. Indeed, elsewhere Coleridge is inspired by the vivid imagery of Swedenborg’s descriptions of heaven and hell, not for their presentation of the facts of the afterlife, but for their symbolic potential. In Swedenborg’s concept of the Maximus Homo, he writes, there is a confusion between the active principle of an idea and the shape it produces in the world of senses.⁶⁰³ Such figures as the “gastric devils” Swedenborg finds in hell, strike Coleridge as filled with poetic potency, but fail when taken literally.⁶⁰⁴ Rather,

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 249

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 242-243. This is a comment on Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, 59.

⁶⁰⁴ H. J. Jackson, “‘Swedenborg’s *Meaning* is the Truth’: Coleridge, Tulk, and Swedenborg,” in *In Search of the Absolute: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), 6.

readers would do better to understand his accounts of travels through the spirit world “as the Account of a Series of allegorical in part & in part symbolical Visions, some of which the gifted Seer had misinterpreted.”⁶⁰⁵ Coleridge scholar Heather Jackson writes: “It may be some mitigation of Coleridge’s presumptuousness (maintaining that Swedenborg did not know what he was saying while he, Coleridge, did) to remember that he would have said the same of the prophets of the Old Testament and the Evangelists of the New, and would expect to have said it of himself by more advanced thinkers in the course of time.”⁶⁰⁶

Coleridge’s criticism of Swedenborg extended beyond the realm of hermeneutics. Theologically, it was Swedenborg’s challenge to the doctrine of justification by faith and the doctrine of the Trinity, which invited Coleridge’s harshest attacks. In this, he shared the concern expressed by Wesley and Oetinger, discussed in the last chapter, though unlike Wesley and Oetinger, Coleridge didn’t associate these heresies with a rejection of the literal sense of scripture on Swedenborg’s part. Coleridge was also alarmed by Swedenborg’s rhetoric regarding various categories of non-Christians. In one place he briefly corrects Swedenborg’s assertion that the Jews worship Abraham, Moses and David, though he does not otherwise seem to be bothered by Swedenborg’s discourse about the Jews. Coleridge himself gave voice to many of the stereotypes about Jews from his environment and spoke of the necessity of their conversion, even though he also

⁶⁰⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980-2001), V, 465.

⁶⁰⁶ Jackson, “Swedenborg’s *Meaning*,” 10.

spoke out against their persecution.⁶⁰⁷ On the topic of other peoples, Coleridge was particularly offended by Swedenborg's more positive report of "heathens" in the afterlife, that they often enter heaven more easily than Christians.⁶⁰⁸ Coleridge believed polytheism, or the "atrocities of Hindustan and China" automatically classified them as morally inferior (a view that reinforces the anti-Christ interpretation of *Kubla Khan*), and he concluded that Swedenborg's descriptions of heathens in heaven "speaks volumes in proof of the entire Subjectivity of these Sights and conversations."⁶⁰⁹ As satire, he writes, Swedenborg's descriptions would have been effective, but they simply cannot stand as literal travel accounts of an explorer to heaven's shores. In Coleridge's assessment, Swedenborg's search for the inner sense of scripture might have been more productive if he had understood the poetic quality of his own visions and experiences.

Like Blake, Coleridge was no stranger to the symbolic potential of language and to the potential of biblical language in particular to evoke powerful responses. Fulford writes: "The symbolism of Coleridge's inner sense can, I suggest, be read as an endorsement of a liberating linguistic practice, in which men and women are encouraged to realize that they make the world through words."⁶¹⁰ And like Blake, this celebration of the creative and liberating power of language was a point that drew him to the work of Swedenborg. In the Bible-inspired visions / delusions of this mystical scientist, both poets

⁶⁰⁷ See Chris Rubenstein, "Coleridge and Jews." Published online: <http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/membersonly/cb24/12%20CB%2024%20Rubinstein.pdf>. Accessed September 4, 2016.

⁶⁰⁸ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 324-326

⁶⁰⁹ Edminston, "Coleridge's Commentary," 256. Coleridge argues that Swedenborg has been influenced by the romanticized views of the east among "Theorists and Philosophers" but suggests he consult the "authentic accounts" of missionary Claudius Buchanan who reports on the moral inferiority of Hindus.

⁶¹⁰ Fulford, "Apocalyptic and Reactionary?" 29.

found material that spoke to their Christian faith, but also their penchant for the playful exploitation of traditional symbols. Coleridge found in Swedenborg a productive madness: “Oh thrice happy should we be if the learned and the teachers of the present age were gifted with a similar madness. A madness indeed celestial, and flowing from a divine mind.”⁶¹¹ Ironically, Swedenborg made more sense to Coleridge as a madman. But to take Swedenborg at his own word, in his view, or to take him literally is a mistake leading to folly of an unproductive sort.

Honoré de Balzac and the Swedish Castle

Finally, our study of Swedenborg’s early reception in the arts and literature requires an investigation into the work of the French novelist Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) whose lengthy and explicit references to Swedenborg’s thought system inform his handling of scripture, language, science, and mysticism. Balzac’s references to Swedenborg, primarily in his two novels *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphîta*, depict the “Swedish prophet” as one who sees with the two eyes of science and spirit, and as one who understands the hidden truth of scripture and religion. Unlike Blake and Coleridge, whose romanticism countered enlightenment era confidence in human reason and scientific inquiry, Balzac integrated a more positive view of the sciences, even in his “Swedenborgian novels” whose fanciful characters and settings stand out against the realism of his other work. In this, Balzac reflects his context, as we will see.

⁶¹¹ Edminston, “Coleridge’s Commentary,” 235.

Lynn Wilkinson argues in her work on Swedenborg and French literary culture that the intermarriage of esoteric and scientific explanations was relatively uncontroversial in French contexts, and that Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, which exemplified this pairing, allowed for "complex interactions between popular and elite culture."⁶¹² Swedenborg's thought comingled, in many cases, with the ideas of mesmerism and freemasonry in a context in which the all wisdom of the ages, scientific, religious, or otherwise, was applied to the longing for political and social transformation.⁶¹³ Wilkinson demonstrates that Swedenborg's influence in France, while still marginal, was not limited to figures or movements that stressed mystical explanations over scientific ones, but it was precisely the rationalist underpinnings of Swedenborg's work, his reliance on Descartes and Leibniz, that French authors were attracted to.

Wilkinson's work responds to Foucault's assertion that the language system of correspondences was an *episteme* that died in the seventeenth century, with the disentanglement of language from nature.⁶¹⁴ Rather, she argues, belief in, or hope for, a

⁶¹² Wilkinson, *The Dream*, ix.

⁶¹³ Wilkinson points to "a widespread perception of certain broadly based similarities" between Swedenborg and Mesmer in France, who were often associated with each other in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. These perceived similarities, she writes, result from their common project to explore the limits of speculative psychologies of their day. The connection to Freemasonry comes from the early Swedenborgians in France who were themselves Freemasons, claimed Swedenborg to have been one, and looked to Swedenborg to help, as Wilkinson puts it, "construct idiosyncratic symbolic systems that not only assumes cosmological proportions, but also provided a language for an individual's initiation into and understanding of his—and very occasionally, her—place within a community of equals." The symbolic systems of antiquity that these movements evoked were part of a general universal theory of language employed as part of the dream for a transformative politics and an ideal social order. See Wilkinson, *The Dream*, 6-14.

⁶¹⁴ See Wilkinson's discussion of Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* in *The Dream*, 66.

universal language of nature with representational potency persisted into the nineteenth century, and Swedenborg's name often accompanied it. Wilkinson writes that in France, this universal language of nature took on a uniquely ahistorical character, pointing to the unchanging and stable relationships between words and their referents, especially in nature, while in England and Germany the study of languages tended to emphasize historical and national contexts.⁶¹⁵ This ahistorical quality was applied variously with differing outcomes, but resulted in a shared attentiveness to utopian potential of language and symbols. Swedenborg's system, in which innate, organic corresponding relationships exist between nature and spirit, and between the words of scripture and divine wisdom, suited this utopianism. "Successive interpretations of Swedenborgianism, especially the theory of language known as the doctrine of correspondences, provide a red thread through a complicated context." This "red thread" can be detected, for instance, in the poem "Correspondences" by Charles Baudelaire, in which the natural world communicates through the language of symbols.

Nature is a temple whose living colonnades
 Breathe forth a mystic speech in fitful sighs;
 Man wanders among the symbols in those glades
 Where all things watch him with familiar eyes.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶¹⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, ed. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews, trans. Richard Wilbur (New York: New Directions, 1989), 12. Much has been written on Baudelaire's use of Swedenborg, though there is little consensus concerning the nature of the influence. See Wilkinson, *The Dream*, 217-248; Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement* (New York: Random House, 1967), 12-52; Gary Lachman, "The Spiritual Detective: How Baudelaire Invented Symbolism, by way of Swedenborg, ETA Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe," in *Philosophy, Literature, Mysticism: An Anthology of Essays on the Thought and Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2013), Kindle Edition. Wilkinson cites: Anne-Marie Amiot, *Baudelaire et l'illuminisme*; Paul Arnold, *Estoerisme de Baudelaire*; Marc Eigeldinger, *Le platonisme de Baudelaire* and Lloyd James Austin, *L'univers poetique de Baudelaire*.

There is some debate among scholars regarding the extent of Balzac's knowledge of and loyalty to Swedenborg's works. In her articles on Swedenborg and Balzac, Margaret Hayward minimizes Balzac's reliance on Swedenborg, citing the fact that Swedenborgians have tended not to count him as one of their own as well as his own denial of, as Hayward puts it, "the most important articles of New Church faith," namely the divinity of Christ and the inerrancy of the Bible.⁶¹⁷ However, to designate Balzac's relationship to Swedenborgian thought this way fundamentally misunderstands his context. While there were a small handful of Swedenborgians gathering regularly by the 1820s and 1830s, the presence of Swedenborgianism in France was far less an organized church movement with declared articles of faith, than it was the circulation of certain visionary ideas.⁶¹⁸ As in England, where Swedenborg's writings were influential in non-sectarian contexts they were incorporated as one part of a multifaceted and eclectic set of ideas on any number of subjects. This was explored in chapter 6, with the example of the Swedenborgians based in Manchester who, unlike their counterparts in London, experimented with communication with angels and animal magnetism. For Balzac in particular, Swedenborg, creatively interpreted and without concern for a non-existent New Church orthodoxy, represented a utopian vision for the unifying of all religions. In an 1837 letter to Madame Honska, his future wife, he wrote: "Swedenborgianism, which

⁶¹⁷ Margaret Hayward, "The Myth of Balzac's Mysticism: His Father's Mesmerist Ideals," in *History of European Ideas* 27 (2001): 275. See also Margaret Hayward, "Plagiarism and the Problem of Influence: Pauline Bernheim, "Balzac und Swedenborg," in *Australian Journal of French Studies* 29 (1992): 41-51.

⁶¹⁸ See Wilkinson, *The Dream*, Introduction; and Block, *The New Church*, 58-61.

is but a repetition of ancient ideas in a Christian sense, is my religion, lifted by the incomprehensibility of God.”⁶¹⁹ Swedenborg, the enlightenment allegorist, had himself become an emblem for some grand and universal theory. For Balzac, the theory that Swedenborg embodied was the realization of the fundamental harmony between science and religion, as we will see.

We know that Balzac owned at least eight volumes of Swedenborg from his book-binder’s bill, and his writing either directly quotes or paraphrases books by Swedenborg that were available to him in translations by Jean-Pierre Moet, royal librarian to Versailles. These include: *Du Ciel et de ses merveilles, et de l’Enfer* (Heaven and its Marvels and Hell); *La Sagesse angélique sur le divin amour et sur la divine sagesse* (Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom); *L’Apocalypse révélée* (The Apocalypse Revealed); *De la Nouvelle Jérusalem et de sa doctrine celeste* (The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines); and *La Vraie Religion chrétienne* (The True Christian Religion).⁶²⁰ And while some of his quotations were likely taken from an abridgement of Swedenborg’s writings by Daillant de La Touche, especially his quotations from *Arcana*, which was not yet translated into French,⁶²¹ there is sufficient evidence to show that he had immersed himself directly in Swedenborg’s writings during the 1830s. Wilkinson’s assertion that Balzac was both influenced by and contributed to a “literary myth of Swedenborg” may be true, but it was a myth backed by something of an

⁶¹⁹ As translated by Saori Osuga, “Balzac and Swedenborg,” in *Philosophy, Literature, Mysticism: An Anthology of Essays on the Thought and Influence of Emanuel Swedenborg*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2013). Kindle edition.

⁶²⁰ For a full discussion of Balzac’s Swedenborg sources, see Osuga, “Balzac and Swedenborg.”

⁶²¹ As originally demonstrated by Pauline Bernheim in *Balzac und Swedenborg: Einfluss der mystik Swedenborgs und Saint-Martins auf die romandichtung Balzacs* 16. (Kraus Reprint, 1967).

immersion in Swedenborg's published works, resulting in a relatively faithful presentation of Swedenborg in his novels, though not without significant interpretive liberties.

In a letter written to his sister while he was working on *Louis Lambert* (published in 1832), Balzac confessed that he believed the concepts he was formulating for the novel would someday contribute to the advancement of science. He believed it necessary to put these concepts into the format of a novel, as scientists of his day were not yet ready to receive them: "Some day perhaps it will direct science into new channels. If I had made of it a purely scientific work it would have attracted the attention of thinkers, who now will not cast their eyes over it."⁶²² The fictional setting of the book therefore belies a serious message, and also an autobiographical one. Balzac is himself the narrator, telling the story of a childhood friend from boarding school, Louis Lambert. The story mirrors Balzac's own childhood in many respects, though the events of Lambert's life, and especially his tragic end, are fictional.⁶²³

The book revolves around several related themes, including: the sometimes harmonious but often discordant relationship between one's body and one's mind; the discovery that spiritualism and materialism are two sides of the same thing; the two "generating agents" of all human activity in *will* and *thought*; the nature of heaven and angels; and the secret meaning of scripture. Swedenborg's writings are themselves a kind of character in the novel, and a major focus of Lambert's obsessive study of the true

⁶²² As quoted in the introduction by George Frederic Parsons, Honoré de Balzac, *Louis Lambert* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), vii.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, Introduction.

nature of things. Lambert records his findings from Swedenborg and others in his “Treatise of the Will” which is confiscated by a school headmaster, sending Lambert into a downward spiral of depression that he never fully recovers from. Swedenborg figures centrally in each of these themes, and is heralded at one point by Lambert as the “Buddha of the North” who “gathers to him all religions, or rather one religion of Humanity.”⁶²⁴ A longer study would draw out the many Swedenborgian elements in Louis Lambert, but it is the theme of scripture’s hidden meaning and its relationship to science that will concern us here.

Lambert is described as a child genius who read and digested whole libraries of books in his youth, and read the Old and New Testaments before the age of 5. This fact sets the stage in the book’s first paragraph, which asks:

Did his infantine imagination comprehend the deep mysteries of Scripture? Could it already follow the Holy Spirit in its path through the universe? Or, was it merely fascinated by the romantic charms which abound in those poems of the Orient? Did the child’s soul in its finest innocence sympathize with the sublime piety which hands divine have shed within the book? To some readers the following narrative will answer these questions.⁶²⁵

One book in particular changes the course of Lambert’s life. His future prospects are limited by his family’s poverty, but one day he is discovered by the infamous Madame de Staël reading Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, and she is so taken by the boy in conversation about the book that she promises to underwrite his education.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

Lambert's early intimacy with books is presented as a testament to that advancement of his soul. An extended digression on the cosmic potential of words occupies the book's first pages. We read that every word has a body, a motion, and a soul, echoing Swedenborg's natural, spiritual and celestial senses. Aside from its immediate meaning, each word carries with it a history that spans the ages, bearing traces of its use in various places by various peoples. And in addition to this historical character, human speech also has hidden within it a "mysterious spirit." "All [words] are instinct with a living power derived from the soul which they send back to its source the mysterious force of a marvelous action and reaction between word and thought,--like, as it were, a lover drawing from the lips of his mistress as much love as he presses into them."⁶²⁶ Furthermore, Lambert's character is especially interested in the traceability of words, or thoughts, through physical phenomenon. He is ever in search of the pulse of either electricity or fluid that accompanies the action and reaction of ideas and volitions in humans, as expressed through words.⁶²⁷ Inspired by mesmerism, the electric component of ideas and volitions goes against Swedenborg in one sense, whose abandonment of the search for the soul's material effects was replaced by a correspondential relationship that didn't require physical evidence. In another sense though, Balzac's understanding of language is in line with Swedenborg's, in that the physical and metaphysical realms are connected by words, or the Word, *la Parole*, the externalized expression of internal processes.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

And while it is human speech that bears this depth, rather than divine speech, scripture represents a kind of apex, or perfected sample of such mystery-laden words. The Apocalypse, for instance, “is ecstasy written down.”⁶²⁸ Further, in *Louis Lambert* we find a view of scripture that is not limited to the Bible, but consists of a “trilogy of literature” including the Bible, Greek mythology and Hindu scriptures. Each has a unique tone and message, but together they contain all the thoughts of man, and carry “the secret of the untold grandeur of their languages and their myths.”⁶²⁹ Scripture is described as poetry: as magic making with words. Swedenborg’s writings themselves take on an almost scripture-like quality, being “full of poetry,”⁶³⁰ and “drunk with the essence of the divine”⁶³¹ despite the diffuse and obscure language. “He alone enables man to touch God.”⁶³²

All of this is, of course, set within the narrative of the life of Lambert’s character, who is eventually driven to a state of oblivion by his search for celestial realities through books and ideas. In a fit, he attempts to castrate himself the night before his wedding, and enters an almost catatonic state for the remaining years of his life, attended to by his beloved Pauline, despite their having not consummated the relationship. Pauline’s character is an allegory in itself. She is the granddaughter of a Jew, who was left matchless despite her beauty and inherited wealth because of her mixed heritage. She is described as having “scriptural innocence” and “Jewish beauty in its utmost purity.” Her

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 98-99.

skin is white, like the robes of the Levites.⁶³³ A perpetual virgin, Pauline embodies a romanticized Hebrew innocence, like a sacred text not yet unveiled. Her narrative role is to remain loyal to Lambert, believing in his sanity to the end, despite the obvious appearance of madness. The novel's narrator agrees with her, seeing his as a bewildered ecstasy resulting from his awareness of, and presence among, higher realities. His mind simply advanced before his body. Of the many major themes that resonate with Swedenborgian thought in *Louis Lambert*, therefore, several stand in contrast, including the elevation of virginity and the neglect of the body in service of spiritual advancement, as well as a strictly positive (if overly romantic) Jewish character. We will see many of the same themes, both those in line with Swedenborg and those that differ, in Balzac's *Séraphîta*, published two years later.

Swedenborg shows up as a fictionalized character in the book *Séraphîta*, the cousin of the main character's father. *Séraphîta*'s parents were able to cultivate a state of near spiritual perfection through their study of Swedenborg, and consequently gave birth to an angel. *Séraphîta* appears male to some and female to others, but keeps all would-be lovers at bay, meeting their desirous pleas only with extended orations on the quality and purpose of natural and spiritual realities. The novel's third chapter includes over thirty pages describing the life and theology of Swedenborg, including many quotes from his theological writings, all by way of explaining the life of the angel *Séraphîta*: "to explain the birth of that being it is absolutely necessary that I disperse the clouds which envelop the most obscure of Christian doctrines. It is not easy to make myself clear when

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 100-102.

speaking of that incomprehensible revelation,--the last effulgence of faith that has shone upon our lump of mud. Do you know Swedenborg?" Part of this lengthy summary of Swedenborg's life and theology includes a discussion of the difference between the natural sciences of men and the divine science of correspondences. The following precedes quotations and summaries from *Arcana coelestia*:

The man of science as the world goes is purely external like his knowledge; his inner being is only used to preserve his aptitude for the perception of external truths. The Angelic Spirit goes far beyond that; his knowledge is the thought of which human science is but the utterance; he derives that knowledge from the Logos, and learns the law of Correspondences, and covers an esoteric or spiritual meaning, which according to the science of Correspondences, cannot be understood.⁶³⁴

The novel's most explicit summaries of Swedenborg's life and thought, such as this quotation, come from the character Monsieur Becker, a pastor who, while well acquainted with Swedenborg's writings, is nevertheless skeptical. Swedenborg's presence in the book extends well beyond the digressions of the bookish pastor, however, and we find many variations on Swedenborg's ideas throughout the novel, both symbolic and explicit, especially regarding heaven and angels and the nature of true scientific inquiry. We will conclude, however, with two examples in which Swedenborg figures as part of an expression of the power of allegorical or symbolic representation.

In the novel's opening pages we read an expansive and enchanted description of the Norwegian coastline. Its cliffs and fiords are described as a kind of hieroglyphics, their jagged and jarring edges etching figures, such as the spine of a fish, that tell something about the soul of the place. The reader is directed to an isolated valley along

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

the coast with some two hundred houses, cut off from its neighbors by the fiords, rivers and cliffs that surround it. Balzac introduces Swedenborg's character briefly in pondering what kind of genius it would have taken to connect the town to the world around it: "The village of Jarvis might perhaps have communicated with the interior of Norway and Sweden by the river Sieg; but to do this and to be thus brought into contact with civilization, the Strom-fiord needed the presence of a man of genius. Such a man did actually appear there,--a poet, a Swede of great religious fervor, who died admiring, even reverencing this region as one of the noblest works of the Creator."⁶³⁵ While it is not true that Swedenborg died in Norway, it is true that he had been involved in engineering a system to transport boats and galleys over a piece of land that connected Sweden and Norway, from Stromstadt to Iderfjol. Swedenborg's role as connector of peoples across difficult topographies is used by Balzac to prefigure his role as connector of people between heaven and earth.

Swedenborg's presence in the novel is also represented by the "Swedish castle" in which Séraphîta and her caretaker live. The abode is no castle, but derives its name from the fact that it is made from stone, while every other house in the village is made from wood.⁶³⁶ At one point the allegory of the Swedish castle is openly analyzed, and through it Balzac expresses a connection between poetry and mysticism. The characters all stand outside the castle, each experiencing his or her own moment of epiphany after having

⁶³⁵ Honoré de Balzac, *Séraphîta*, trans. Katherine Prescott Wormeley (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 6.

⁶³⁶ According to Swedenborg's correspondences, stone corresponds to truth and wood to goodness. The joining of truth and goodness is the joining of the two divine faculties of wisdom and love.

realized something of Séraphîta's true nature. "To them, in their several ways, the Swedish castle had grown to mean some gigantic representation, some spectacle like those whose colors and masses are skillfully and harmoniously marshalled by the poets, and whose personages, imaginary actors to men, are real to those who begin to penetrate the Spiritual World."⁶³⁷ By encountering the castle as a representation of some greater reality, the characters each enter into a mystical/poetic trance and are transported to heaven. The castle becomes not only a means of interpretation or knowing, but the very act of interpreting it becomes a mystical experience. It is in this mode that Swedenborg is elsewhere characterized as an exegete with supernatural abilities: "Dante's poem seems but a speck to the reader submerged in the almost Biblical verses with which Swedenborg renders palpable the Celestial Worlds, as Beethoven built his palaces of harmony with thousands of notes, as architects have reared cathedrals with millions of stones."⁶³⁸ Stones feature again, as the building blocks of a heavenly structure, recalling perhaps Swedenborg's interpretation of biblical symbols in which stone corresponds to truth.⁶³⁹ The castle and the cathedral, heavy with stone and fixed on the earth, are nevertheless vehicles for journeying to the spiritual world, when understood in the poetic sense.

Balzac does not voice the same semantic distancing from "allegory" that we find in Blake and Coleridge. Though he does employ the language of *symbol*, *representation*, and *vision*, these and related terms are not in contradistinction to *allegory*. His

⁶³⁷ Balzac, *Séraphîta*, 116.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶³⁹ Examples are numerous. See Swedenborg, *Arcana caelestia* 1298, 3720, 3773, 6426, 9494, and many others.

appreciation of allegory is not only evident in the way he uses allegory in his novels, such as the Swedish castle, as a mechanism for mystical enlightenment, but in his allusions to Dante Alighieri, the self-identified allegorist, who interpreted his own poetry in the fourfold-manner of the medievalists in his *Convivio*. Balzac's mystical novels come in a collection titled *La Comédie humaine*, a clear reference to Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Dante also appears as a character in another novel in the collection, Balzac's *Les Proscrits*. In the following passage from *Les Proscrits*, spoken by Dante's teacher, we hear of different Words, or scriptures, that correspond on six different levels.

According to him, the divine Word nourished the spiritual Word, the spiritual Word nourished the living Word, the living Word nourished the animal Word, the animal Word nourished the vegetable Word, and the vegetable Word expressed the life of the sterile Word. These successive transformations of the chrysalis which God imposes upon our souls, and this species of infusorial life which from one zone to another is communicated with ever increasing life, spirituality, and perception, explained confusedly, but perhaps marvelously enough for his inexperienced auditors, the movement impressed by the Most High upon Nature. Supporting himself by numerous passages from Scripture, which he used as a commentary upon himself, to express by actual images the abstract arguments he was unable to produce, he waved the Spirit of God like a torch through the depths of creation . . .⁶⁴⁰

We recognize the concept of six corresponding levels of reality from Swedenborg's work on series and degrees, discussed in chapter 2. Elsewhere, Swedenborg describes three Words: the Word of the Celestial kingdom, the Word of the Spiritual kingdom, and the Word of the natural world, which is the Bible, which interact by means of *influx*.⁶⁴¹ We have in *Les Proscrits*, therefore, a variation on the

⁶⁴⁰ Honoré de Balzac, *The Exiles*, in *Seraphita*, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley, (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 253-254.

⁶⁴¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *De verbo*, 36-40.

Swedenborgian concepts of series and degrees, correspondences and scripture, all beheld by Dante, “the Father of Poetry.”⁶⁴² We find in the above passage something akin to allegory, according to Coleridge’s definition of the term, where concrete images are used to express abstract concepts. We also find something of an immediate, organic, non-linguistic process akin to Coleridge’s understanding of symbol. Balzac makes no distinction: it is all poetry. Balzac has much in common with the English Romantics, especially in his creative exploitation of the ideas of Swedenborg and of the symbols of the biblical tradition, for the sake of his art. *La Comédie humaine* is a bridge between Realism and Romanticism, where his efforts to reach into realms beyond the mundane requires the unreserved engagement with language’s symbolic potential.

Conclusion: Swedenborg’s Future in Art and Poetry

Similar to Blake and Coleridge, Swedenborg was one of many influences on Balzac’s writing. And like Blake and Coleridge, it would be a mistake to credit Swedenborg as the sole inspiration for Balzac’s use of biblical symbols or his reliance on concepts and methods similar to Swedenborg’s correspondences. Swedenborgian ideas intermingled with those of Mesmer and Bohme, with Neoplatonism and Kabbalah as we have seen. These threads are nearly impossible to separate, especially in the work of artists who celebrate nonconformist and unsystematic ways of articulating their views. However, Swedenborg’s acknowledged presence in the work of these men, as well as their evident and ongoing wrestling with his work, highlights the continued relevance of

⁶⁴² Balzac, *The Exiles*, 273.

Swedenborg's interpretive methods in post-enlightenment thought. His was a form of allegory that made its way successfully into the consciousness of these culturally notable figures, even if it sustained a fair amount of criticism along the way.

As we see in the work of Blake, Coleridge, and Balzac, Swedenborg's concept of correspondences, coupled with his descriptions of dreams and visions in all their fantastic detail, found future life in the world of art and poetry, where language and imagination were celebrated without abandon. One common element in the treatment of Swedenborg found in Blake, Coleridge and Balzac is the insistence that his work also be read non-literally. The poetic soul of Swedenborg's interpretations would be annulled, according to this reading, if his visions were interpreted to be concrete descriptions rather than literary, or even allegorical, perceptions. Swedenborg is mocked and derided for taking himself too seriously, especially by Blake and Coleridge, but their own work nevertheless involved his thought systems and experiences in significant ways. By interpreting Swedenborg forward, by initiating variations on his theological and symbolic systems, by *misreading* him, these artists in fact paved a way for the continued relevance of his visionary theology. As Robert Rix writes of those influenced by Swedenborg in this way: "his visions are reclaimed as literary iconography whose teleology is personal transformation."⁶⁴³ It was Swedenborg's visions and their application to the interpretation of the Bible that put off Kant and his followers in philosophy, but artists and novelists

⁶⁴³ Robert Rix, "Emanuel Swedenborg, Transpersonal Psychology and the Literary Text" http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/rix-emanuel_swedenborg_transpersonal_psychol accessed September 4, 2016.

were able to carry forward Swedenborg's correspondences in new terms. As Devin Zuber recently articulated:

Kant's 1766 *Dreams* bears witness to a mid-eighteenth century hermeneutic crisis that Swedenborg's esoteric interpretation of the Bible helped to catalyze in the exegetical work of Johann Ernesti, Johann Bengel, and Friedrich Oetinger; the appearance of William Blake's *Marriage* twenty-seven years later after the so-called 'hermeneutic turn' in Protestant theology shows how Swedenborg's allegorical exegesis, built on esoteric theories of correspondence, could slip and slide into modes of artistic productivity after being banished by the academy.⁶⁴⁴

It is precisely those areas that Kant excised from academic discourse that Blake and Coleridge find especially powerful: the other worldly visions and experiences. However, as with Kant, the anxieties associated with both Swedenborg and with allegory persist in the arts, and as with Kant these anxieties betray a level of influence. The ambivalence we find concerning the work of Swedenborg in Blake and Coleridge does not preclude significant areas of positive overlap. Therefore, we find that semantic distancing from allegory rides side by side with the heralding of language's symbolic potency, especially sacred language.

⁶⁴⁴ Devin Zuber, "Visionary Discontent: Swedenborg and the Problem of Romantic Esotericism," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, 2016, Berkeley, CA, 3-4.

CONCLUSION

In a 1970 essay on Swedenborg, the Argentinian poet Jorge Luis Borges largely praises the rigorous and intellectual form of mysticism found in his work, and includes a poem in Swedenborg's honor.

He would see
That which earthly eyes do not see:
The fierce geometry, the crystal
Labyrinth of God and the sordid
Milling of infernal delights.⁶⁴⁵

Borges is unimpressed, however, with Swedenborg's biblical commentary and compares it to Kabbalah:

[Swedenborg], like Spinoza or Francis Bacon, was a thinker in his own right who made an awkward mistake when he decided to adapt his ideas to the framework of the two Testaments. This happened to the Hebrew Cabalists, who were essentially neoplatonists when they invoked the authority of the verses, words, and even letters and transpositions of the letters in Genesis to justify their system.⁶⁴⁶

Borges makes the connection here between Swedenborg and the great philosophical thinkers of early modernity but faults Swedenborg for applying his ideas to the interpretation of the Bible. Like the kabbalists, he seems to be saying, Swedenborg's interpretations became allegorical and arbitrary, tarnishing his philosophical genius. Borges was an admitted admirer of Jewish mysticism, and borrowed kabbalistic motifs for his own writing, so the connection to Kabbalah is not itself deprecating.⁶⁴⁷ His criticism is in regard to the "awkward mistake" shared by Swedenborg and Kabbalah of

⁶⁴⁵ Borges, "Testimony to the Invisible," 16

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9

⁶⁴⁷ See Elliot Wolfson, "In the Mirror of the Dream: Borges and the Poetics of Kabbalah," in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 104, No. 3 (Summer 2014): 362–379.

insisting on an alternate meaning embedded in the very grammar of Scripture, a meaning that is precise and fixed, or “The disturbing suspicion that we are ciphers and symbols in a divine cryptography whose true meaning we do not know . . .”⁶⁴⁸ Borges’ comparison is fair, given the assertion in Swedenborg’s commentaries that even the shape of the individual Hebrew letters of scripture contain *arcana*, or divine secrets, a theme common in Kabbalah. Nevertheless, Borges’ disapproval of biblical allegory is curious given his own deeply symbolic writing style, and his own indebtedness to biblical themes.⁶⁴⁹ Borges calls allegory “an aesthetic error,” yet, as one critic put it, “he surely remains one of the most allegorical of contemporary writers.”⁶⁵⁰ In some sense, then, Borges shares an ambivalence toward allegory that we find expressed at times throughout the history of biblical interpretation, as we have seen.

The example from Borges demonstrates, on one hand, the success of allegory in literary contexts despite this ambivalence towards allegorical interpretations of the Bible. It also demonstrates that eighteenth century notions about allegory, specifically its negative relationship to scientific reasonableness and its association with Jewish mysticism, endured well into modernity. Indeed, the success of allegory in the arts and literature, relative to more formally theological or philosophical settings, is a turn characteristic of the long eighteenth century, as we have seen. Swedenborg’s own biblical allegory was most impactful, outside sectarian Swedenborgianism, when expressed through poetry and art.

⁶⁴⁸ Borges, “Testimony to the Invisible,” 14.

⁶⁴⁹ See Richard Walsh and Jay Twomey, eds, *Borges and the Bible* (Sheffield : Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015).

⁶⁵⁰ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” *October* 12 (Spring, 1980): 67. See also Kate Jenckes, “Allegory, Ideology, Infamy: Borges and the Allegorical Writing of History,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 11 (March 2002): 47-64.

As articulated in the introduction, this dissertation argues, via the example of Emanuel Swedenborg, for the persistence of biblical allegory in eighteenth century Christian thought, and its entanglement with both the developments of the scientific revolution and the figured discourse of Jewish and Christian religious identity. My argument is not that Swedenborg is somehow responsible for allegory's survival into modernity, but that his is an example of biblical allegory noteworthy for the way it responds to contextual factors that others point to as the cause of allegory's demise, such as naturalism, science, and the Protestant Reformation,⁶⁵¹ and for the attention it garnered among leading figures in thought and culture. Swedenborg also serves as an example of a broader Christian anxiety regarding Jewish sources and the Jewish heritage of Christian texts. In line with Nirenberg's findings, anti-Judaism more often serves as a constitutive idea in Christian thought, rather than a commentary on relations with actual Jews. The anti-Judaism woven into Swedenborg's commentaries is, on the one hand, familiar to us from centuries of Christian Hebraism, echoing the work of Jerome, Augustine, Nicholas of Lyra and countless others. On the other hand, his trope of the carnal/literalist Jew stands in contrast to the appearance of kabbalistic ideas and hermeneutical techniques in his work, in an era when Kabbalah, and with it Judaism, was increasingly associated with allegory or non-literal interpretation. This aspect of Swedenborg's approach to biblical interpretation rises to the surface once we understand something of the nature of biblical studies and Jewish and Christian identity in the eighteenth century.

Part one of this dissertation explored eighteenth century ideas about the function

⁶⁵¹ See the discussion of Peter Harrison's argument in the introduction, and Harrison, *The Bible* as well as Frei, *The Eclipse*.

of language and interpretation through four biblical commentaries, two Jewish and two Christian, in order set the stage for a reading of Swedenborg's own commentary, *Arcana coelestia*. We looked at examples of biblical allegory contemporaneous with Swedenborg's, such as that of Johan Kemper and Menahem Nachum, both heavily indebted to Kabbalah while drawing very different conclusions regarding the ability of Jews to access the secrets buried in the text of the Bible. We also investigated a commentary singularly aimed at producing a non-allegorical reading in the work William Whiston, who believed the new sciences could help investigate the corruption of biblical manuscripts by allegorizing Jews. Moses Mendelssohn's reliance on medieval rabbinic exegesis for his commentaries came with a philosophical articulation of a theory of language, to justify reading multiple levels of meaning into biblical texts. These commentaries are radically different in content, form, and intention, and highlight a variety of approaches to allegory in the eighteenth century. However, together they illuminate allegory's multifaceted relationship to enlightenment era hermeneutics as well as the assimilation and antagonism between Jews and Christians that accompanied those approaches.

Part two surveyed Swedenborg's biblical commentary in light of the themes analyzed in part one: enlightenment epistemologies, Christian, Jewish, and kabbalistic hermeneutics, and the Christian discourse of the Jew. The interpretations of Genesis and Exodus found in *Arcana coelestia* demonstrate an affinity with ideas Swedenborg developed in his scientific and philosophical career, concerning the corresponding relationships that exist between levels of reality. As such, his commentary demonstrates that a coherence between allegorical interpretations of scripture and nature was possible

post-Reformation. We also explored Swedenborg's persistent reference to Jewish literalism in *Arcana coelestia*, and to his descriptions of the spiritual darkness of the "Jewish Church," against his striking similarities to Kabbalah and against a history of Christian exegetical reliance on the supposed carnality and externality of Jews.

I do not align myself with those scholars who believe Swedenborg borrowed heavily from Kabbalah, nor with those who have argued for his independence from Kabbalah. Indeed, the similarities, summarized in chapter three, are hard to dismiss, but the sources of Swedenborg's influences, kabbalistic, Neoplatonic or otherwise, are overdetermined. My argument is that Swedenborg was *influenced* by Kabbalah in Bloom's sense of the term – that on some level he was *troubled* by Kabbalah. Given the philosemitic environment of his University days and his close relationship, both familial and intellectual, to Kabbalah enthusiasts, he certainly would have been aware of the potential connection his readers would make. Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence helps us to understand defensive strategies at play in Swedenborg's treatment of Jews and Judaism. Swedenborg exploits well-worn anti-Jewish tropes from those in his religious genealogy, such as Augustine and Luther, despite, or rather because of, significant positive overlap with Jewish sources. Elliot Wolfson makes a similar argument when he writes concerning examples of incarnation in Jewish and Christian sources: "This is not to deny the adverse portrayal of Christians by Jews and Jews by Christians. However, the rejection of the 'other' does not mean the other has no impact on the formation of one's own sense of self; on the contrary, condemnation of the other bespeaks contiguity with

the other.”⁶⁵² Indeed, in the example of Swedenborg, condemnation of the other bespeaks contiguity rather than severance. One only builds a fence with a neighbor.

Swedenborg’s reception, explored in part three, was decidedly mixed. His confessional followers were small in number, and the rebuke from centers of learning and centers of ecclesiastical power was clear and steady. He was, however, studied deeply by poets, novelists, philosophers, and theologians, many of whom also exploited biblical symbols in ways that would be culturally significant and have lasting influence. We have seen that difficulty in assessing the nature of Swedenborg’s influence, philosophically, theologically or otherwise, is due to the fact that the transmission of his ideas was accomplished by his critics as often as his followers. We find, therefore, that the anxiety of influence that Swedenborg exhibits in his treatment of Jews and Judaism is present again in Swedenborg’s reception. His critics include Blake, Oetinger, Coleridge and even Kant. Each of these men were *influenced* by Swedenborg, again, to the extent that they were *troubled* by Swedenborg, and they each in their own way align with and even disseminate Swedenborgian concepts while also openly denouncing Swedenborg’s hermeneutics.

In addition to exploring the fate of allegory in the eighteenth century, therefore, this has been a study of the nature of influence. The transmission of ideas, and in this case of hermeneutics, is accomplished by both friendly and hostile subjects. Bloom writes: “Meaning swerves, enlarges oppositely, vacates, drives down so as to rise up

⁶⁵² Elliot Wolfson, “Textual Flesh, Incarnation, and the Imaginal Body: Abraham Abulafia’s Polemic with Christianity,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History*, ed. David Engel, Lawrence H. Schiffman and Elliot R. Wolfson, 189–226 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 190.

again, goes outside in the wan hope of getting itself more on the inside. . .”⁶⁵³

Swedenborg denied borrowing his interpretations from allegorists before him, both Jewish and Christian. Yet this denial comes amidst evidence of erasure, such as the omitted lines about Jewish figuration in his notebook, or the sudden reversal of his opinion on the “mystical sense” of scripture, which he had embraced in earlier publications, but rejected in *Arcana coelestia* in favor of the safer “internal sense.” If Bloom’s description of influence is to be trusted, these moments of erasure are precisely what allow Swedenborg to articulate allegorical interpretations that at once echo the wisdom of the ancients and herald a new age and a New Church.

We opened this dissertation with a description of the supposed demise of allegory in the eighteenth century found in the work of Peter Harrison and Hans Frei. Such a view of the plight of allegorical interpretation aligns with Foucault’s sketch of epistemic rupture in the seventeenth century, wherein Western thought and culture are no longer organized around the study of *resemblance*. Foucault writes:

Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.⁶⁵⁴

Foucault goes on to describe a fundamental reorganization in the seventeenth century, whereby resemblance disappears from the “sphere of cognition.”⁶⁵⁵ Comparison

⁶⁵³ Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 46.

⁶⁵⁴ Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 17.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

shifts to a study of differences rather than similitudes. Using *Don Quixote* as a case study, Foucault posits the undermining of signs from this moment on; traditional symbols come to be viewed as vehicles for deception and fantasy rather than ordering principles.

How might we situate Swedenborg and his doctrine of correspondences into Foucault's *epistemes*? Foucault's description above of the old, classical era ordering of knowledge aligns in many ways with Swedenborg's correspondences. Furthermore, Foucault's use of Kant as a key moment in the rupture of classical epistemology is backed by a study of Kant's break with Swedenborg during his turn to critical metaphysics.⁶⁵⁶ The overturning of biblical and Swedenborgian symbols in Blake's poetry compares with the irreverence in *Don Quixote* and reveals a similar playful rejection of classical signs and systems of thought. Is Swedenborg to be understood, then, as simply a hold-over from an earlier era, a late comer to the scene, not yet informed of the critical turn witnessed and embraced by his contemporaries?

Lynn Wilkinson uses Swedenborg and his reception to critique Foucault's rendering of history, noting that "Swedenborgianism was intimately linked to a theory of language, the theoretical underpinnings of which were worked out in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but which came to exercise widespread fascination over many aspects of French culture in the nineteenth."⁶⁵⁷ Wilkinson's is just one of many perspectives presented in this dissertation that point to continuities between pre-modern and early modern theories of language and interpretation. The Age of the Enlightenment certainly brought challenges to existing epistemologies and resulting shifts in the use of

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁵⁷ Wilkinson, *The Dream*, x.

symbols, biblical or otherwise. But the logic of representation and correspondences did not disappear. It persisted, for instance, in Neoplatonic and kabbalistic explanations of nature and texts, where the echoes between worlds above and below still reverberated. The ironic rendering of classical symbols, such as we find in *Don Quixote*, may tell of an epistemic disruption, as Foucault would have it, but this is only part of the story. The example of Swedenborg and his reception in theology, philosophy and the arts, demonstrates that the thread of biblical allegory wove its way through the diverse range of interpretive modalities found in the eighteenth century.

This dissertation has attempted to provide evidence for the persistence of allegory as a mode of biblical exegesis in the eighteenth century, but also to explain this persistence. Unprecedented challenges were lodged against biblical religion at this time. The scientific veracity of the Genesis accounts of creation as well as the logic of typology relating Old Testament prophecies to New Testament accounts, were met with a new skepticism. The preference for literalism that arose with religious reform movements left Christian exegetes unprepared to address these challenges. William Whiston's attempt to produce an original and uncorrupted biblical manuscript that would testify, without recourse to allegory, to a scientifically reasonable creation story and prophetic tradition was a failure, and exposed what to some was a fundamental weakness of the Christian tradition. The ironic application of Kabbalah to Whiston's predicament by Anthony Collins is just one example of how the traditional discourse of Jewish literalism was turned on its head, and how Kabbalah provided an inroad to allegory for Christians still intent on uncovering the Bible's hidden secrets.

The commentaries of Emanuel Swedenborg exhibit an eighteenth-century

response to and engagement with scientific advancements, and also something of Christian appropriation of and hostility towards Jewish hermeneutics. Swedenborg serves, therefore, as a case study in allegory's persistence at a time when ambivalence towards allegory was especially high, and in a way that demonstrates the complexities of a Christian discourse concerning Jewish interpretive abilities. Swedenborg's anxiety of influence stems from his uneasy relationships both to the sciences and to Jewish textual traditions. It is precisely this anxiety that fuels his allegorical interpretations at key moments in his commentary, grounding his insistence that the Bible is saying *something else*. As Bloom writes: "We are nourished by distortion, and not by apostolic succession."⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

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EDUCATION

Expected 2017 | Ph.D., Boston University, Graduate Division of Religious Studies,
Boston, Ma.

Track: Texts and Traditions

2002 | Masters of Theological Studies, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Ma.

Focus: World Religions

2000-01 | Graduate Year Program, Rothberg International School, Hebrew University of
Jerusalem, Israel

1998 | Bachelor of Arts, Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pa.

Double Major: Psychology and Religion, *Summa Cum Laude*

RESEARCH INTERESTS

History of biblical interpretation, hermeneutics, Jewish and Christian mysticism,
Jewish-Christian relations, eighteenth century intellectual culture, Christian
Hebraism, comparative religious studies.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

The Helen G. Allen Humanities Award and the Angela J. and James J. Rallis
Memorial Award, Center for the Humanities, Boston University, (2015)

Dean's Fellowship, Boston University (2011-2015)

Graduate Writing Fellow, Center for Writing, Boston University (2014)

Outstanding Teaching Fellow Award, College of Arts and Sciences, Boston
University (2014)

Harvard-Hebrew University Fellowship, Harvard University (2000-2001)

POSITIONS HELD

Lecturer in Sacred Texts and Traditions
Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Ca,
May 2016-present

Scholar in Training
Swedenborgian House of Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Ca,
2011-2016

Tutor and Intensive ESL Tutor
Boston University Center for Writing, Boston, Ma, Fall, 2014

Teaching Fellow
Boston University, Department of Religion, Boston, Ma, 2011-2014

Content Contributor: Annotations for Critical Edition of Emanuel Swedenborg's
Marriage Love for the Swedenborg Foundation, Summer-Fall 2012

Coordinator of Educational Programming
Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge,
Ma, 2002-2011

COURSES TAUGHT AT THE CENTER FOR SWEDENBORGIAN STUDIES AND THE GRADUATE
THEOLOGICAL UNION

Swedenborgian Biblical Spirituality (co-taught), January Intersession, 2016

Incarnational Theology, Fall, 2016

Upcoming: The Greatest Stories Ever Told: Doctoral Seminar in Sacred Texts and
their Interpretation, (co-taught) Spring, 2016

Upcoming: History of Biblical Interpretation, Spring 2016

COURSES TAUGHT AS A BOSTON UNIVERSITY TEACHING FELLOW

Introduction to Religion: RN100

The Bible: RN101

Religions of the World, Eastern: RN103

Death and Immortality: RN106

PUBLISHED ARTICLES

“A Fusion of Two Worlds: The Tabernacle of Israel in Jewish and Swedenborgian Imagination” in *Studia Swedenborgiana*, (Spring 2005)

LECTURES

Respondent: Panel on “Blake’s Esoteric Discontents.” Annual Meeting of the The North American Society for the Study of Romanticism. August 11, 2016.

“The Gospel According to William Blake: On the Use of Biblical Apocalyptic Imagery in ‘The Everlasting Gospel.’” Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, History of Interpretation Program Unit, November 21, 2015.

“The Demise and Ascent of Allegory: Science and Scripture in the Eighteenth Century.” Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, History of Interpretation Program Unit, November 25, 2013.

“Chaos and Order: On Living at the Threshold, With Another Person.” Discussion on interfaith marriage for staff and faculty members of the Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, May, 2011

“The Tabernacle of Israel in Jewish and Christian Religious Imagination.” Lecture, Glencairn Museum, April 2002