

Andreea Paris-Popa*

WILLIAM BLAKE'S URIZEN, ALLEN GINSBERG'S MOLOCH AND THE SHADOWY SLEEP OF DEATH

Keywords: *Urizen; Moloch; shadow; death; sleep; Blake; Ginsberg*

Abstract: *The shadowy realms of William Blake's Urizen (The Book of Urizen) and Allen Ginsberg's Moloch (Howl) entail a conceptual reversal between life and death via 'sleep' imagery. The Biblical association of 'sleep' with 'death' is overturned in the prophetic poems of both Blake and Ginsberg towards a Gnostic and Hermetic perspective upon existence, according to which earthly life is led in forgetfulness and ignorance in relation to the true nature of reality. Consequently life becomes more akin to death. Since William Blake describes the universal man, Albion, as being asleep and Allen Ginsberg's lyrical self is depicted being asleep as well, earthly life takes the shape of a mere shadow, a dream, an imitation of true or divine reality, rooted in a shadowy sleep of death that awaits awakening. This lack of awareness over which Urizen and Moloch (as parts of the human psyche) rule breeds aggression, cruelty and destructive urges so vicious that they can only take shelter underneath the 'shadow' of the mind or what Jung conceptualized to be the darkest corner of the unconscious. Last, but not least, the same obscurity of the mind can be interpreted through the lens of the alchemical process known as Nigredo, which is the necessary blackening step in the process of purification.*

William Blake's Urizen (*The Book of Urizen*) and Allen Ginsberg's Moloch (*Howl*) are both characters intrinsically connected to the notion of sleep. Yet, shrouded in shadows and blinded by darkness, the two are bound by a profound, *shadowy* sleep that is not depicted as healthy, restful or beneficial, but as tumultuous, forgetful, harmful and fatal. The aim of this paper is to analyze the various apprehensions of the concept of shadow, which I perceive as essential in the construction of both characters. In addition, the notion of shadow – which necessarily involves both a source of light and a type of obstruction – will be placed in association with that of sleep and death, which naturally imply both the existence of consciousness and the lack of awareness. I will start with revealing the manner in which Urizen and Moloch are immersed in shadows and entrapped by sleep and I will continue with an interpretation of this state with the use of Plato's cave allegory, the Christian understanding of death as sleep, the Gnostic reconceptualization of the shadowy sleep as life itself, the Jungian, archetypal interpretation of the shadow and its characteristics, as well as the Alchemical embracing of the shadow as a necessary step in the process of transformation and self-improvement.

The Preludium to William Blake's *The Book of Urizen* presents the main character as "Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary" (44). These are the words that author uses to introduce Urizen to his readers and many other epithets belonging to the sphere of darkness are reiterated throughout the poem, so as to establish the terrifying

* University of Bucharest, Romania.

obscurity at the core of this character. From the very first line of the first chapter, the demonic immortal is described as “a shadow of horror” (44), as a figure whose aim is to spread darkness and who is not only too concealed and cryptic to be comprehended, but also too self-involved to allow for interaction with anyone else: “Dark . . . Unseen . . . unknown and horrible, A self-contemplating shadow” (45). There are many instances in this poem in which the division from light is linked to sleep and whether this entails the absence of dreams (50) or the abundance of nightmares (52), it is certain that Urizen’s sleep is a deep, heavy one that endures and encompasses the whole of the world, imposing a long lasting, sorrowful condition upon humanity.

While Ginsberg’s Moloch is not so overtly and avowedly a god of shadows, he is still a character engulfed by darkness and blindness, whose subjects are taken over by sleep. The fact that Moloch’s “eyes are a thousand blind windows!” (Ginsberg 21) creates an ironical image because the multiplicity of the sources of light does not enhance this character’s vision but, on the contrary, it diminishes it to the point of blindness. Because “blind” are also the capitals he rules over (Ginsberg 22), it is easy to assume that, just as in the case of Urizen, the shadows extend to the surrounding reality as well and are not limited to the central figure that produces or advances them. Moreover, the mention of fog, clouds and incomprehensibility adds to the atmosphere’s mystery and alludes to uncertainty and difficulty in finding the right path towards knowledge and light. The second part of “Howl”, which is dedicated entirely to Moloch, is filled with sleep imagery: “Nightmare of Moloch . . . Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog!” (Ginsberg 21), “Moloch in whom I dream Angels” (Ginsberg 22) and finally “Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch!” (Ginsberg 22). The latter imperative is triggered by the conviction that the sleep induced by Moloch is one that is destructive, that obscures reality.

This lack of access to Truth and the difficulty of finding a type of Knowledge that is good and authentic are vividly described in Plato’s famous allegory of the cave, presented in the first part of Book VII of *The Republic*. The dark and enclosed environment provided by the cave conceals the truth about the world and limits the knowledge of human beings. It is no surprise that Blake associates the forming of the human spine with a cavern¹ and the materialization of man’s eyes with two, pitifully small orbs which can perceive nothing but the darkness of their own cave: “Ribs like a bending cavern . . . From the caverns of his jointed Spine . . . two little orbs; /And fixed in two little caves²” (Blake, *The Book* 52). Similarly, Moloch forces its prisoners to live “in the machinery of night” (Ginsberg 9), a metaphor by means of which night itself is seen as an artificial, man-made construction aimed at expanding obscurity. Yet, beyond this darkness, both Blake and Ginsberg show that there is a brighter, truthful, infinite reality and people seem to be unaware of their having been “Cut off

¹ This idea is also rendered in Blake’s illustration for this passage, which depicts the first step in the creation of the first human body as a human skeleton, bended as if in a fetal position inside the womb.

² See also Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790): “For Man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through the narrow chinks of his cavern” (*A Critical* 14).

from life & light” (Blake, *The Book* 55) and deprived of the “kind, king light³ of mind” (Ginsberg 10). However, since “appearance is not identical with reality” (Andersen 42), their oblivion does not affect the existence of sunlight outside of the cave and of “Light streaming out of the sky!” (Ginsberg 22). After all, shadows cannot be delimited in the absence of light and light cannot shine upon something without producing a shadow.

The inertia and passivity of Plato’s cave bound human beings can be paralleled to sleep paralysis and their imprisonment could be understood as their mental inability to conceive of a wider perspective in which they may realize that what they experience is not truthful. The same physical and psychological restriction can be considered in the case of Urizen and Moloch. If the former is seen as being literally bound by chains and nets in terms of both body and mind: “Restless turn’d the immortal inchain’d” (Blake, *The Book* 52), Moloch’s limitation is revealed via reference to prisons. Consequently he is “Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows!” (Ginsberg 21). Urizen and Moloch are false gods, impostors who seek dominion and who seem to thrive in a world blinded by the reliance on the senses and by the illusory progress of technology, respectively, a place in which “the soul . . . limits itself only to organic creation, i.e. acknowledges only the physical world” (Gallant 7), instead of reaching beyond that superficial level. The fact that they are worshiped and obeyed proves how easily people can be made to believe that what is essentially a “theatre of shadows” (Huard 7) is objective, universal truth.

Until they are freed “from the chains of ignorance” (Huard 18), or from “the chains of familiarity” (Andersen 42), Urizen, Moloch and their subjects cannot turn around, “ascent to the light” (Huard 18) and perceive reality, but, instead, they remain bound and obligated to put their trust in the authenticity of the only things they know and see: the shades around them. Because these “misleading shadows” (Huard 8) are merely appearances, they are bound to be simplistic, two-dimensional, colorless copies of reality that, in the act of replacing authenticity and truth with imitation and falsehood, present life as a faded, diminished version of what it truly is.

Plato does not provide an explanation for the origin of “the human condition of being shackled” (Heidegger 22), nor does he hint at who manages to free the first prisoner who afterwards feels compelled to impart his newly-found knowledge with the rest of his fellow human beings. However, in Blake’s perspective, this psychological condition is imposed by society itself. It is humanity who itself who “began to weave curtains of darkness;” (Blake, *The Book* 56) and eventually forgot about this action and took the darkness to be real: “Till the shrunken eyes, clouded over, / Discern’d not the woven hypocrisy [sic]” (62). In this case, the inner vision of human beings is diminished and they are oblivious of the fact that what they witness is actually a lie, a self-made invention, a copy of what things really are. Yet this sleeping state appears to be part and parcel of humanity: “being human *also* means, among other things: to stand within the *hidden*, to be surrounded by the hidden”

³ Ginsberg also connects the notion of light with the teachings of William Blake and distinguishes the latter from the promoters of war and those who teach about the importance of military actions: “Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war” (Ginsberg 9).

(Heidegger 21). It is only with the help of a guide, a philosopher (for Plato's intellectual quest) or a prophet (for Blake and Ginsberg's spiritual quest) that would untie people and show them the way towards the exit of the cave by unblocking the doors of their perception. From the perspective of the lyrical selves of both poems, the situation is seen clearly and lamented. The voices that present the shadowy sleep are themselves awake and can therefore provide that guiding light.

Also, it is important to note that sleeping has long been associated with death. For instance, ancient Greek poet Hesiod perceives Death and Sleep as being siblings and describes them both as children of the Night, as they are both untouched by the rays of the sun, when referring to Tartarus in his didactic poem "Theogony" (c. 700 BC): "Sleep . . . the brother of Death-deadly Night, shrouded in murky cloud. That is where the children of dark Night have their houses, Sleep and Death, terrible gods" (Hesiod 63-65). It is evident that in this case, it is the absence of light that brings sleep and death together in the house of the Underworld, the realm of shadows. This association can be traced back to Egyptian literature (the 22-23 Dynasties, Neolithic burials, Pyramid Texts) and Mesopotamian Literature (McAlpine 136-138).

Christian tradition also makes use of the same sleep-death or rather death-sleep similarity. In the Old Testament, the two concepts share much of the same vocabulary (McAlpine 144) and in the New Testament, the promise of the resurrection of the human body that the figurative meaning of the term 'sleep' entails is one that is repeated fifteen times (Filat, "Why"). As opposed to human beings who undergo sleep and death, the God who has the power to wake them up is, in the Christian perspective an immortal being, without beginning and without end. It follows that He should never succumb to sleep: "he that keepeth thee will not slumber. . . . he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalms 121:3-4).

While the true Christian God never sleeps, false gods Urizen and Moloch lend themselves to heavy sleep and, while being symbols of death themselves, they bring about the physical death of those who worship them: "But Urizen laid in stony sleep,/ Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity./ The Eternals said: "What is this? Death" (Blake, *The Book* 49). The shadowy sleep of this character is one that reflects his own image, which is that of death: "the death image of Urizen" (55) or "Urizen's deathful shadow" (59), "The Immortal endur'd his chains, /Tho' bound in a deadly sleep" (54). Furthermore, when Urizen created mountains and hills to hide from the Eternals after he separated himself from them, he did so until he aged "In despair and the shadows of death" (48). This means that not only does this imitative god fear the repercussions of creating an imperfect world and is forced to run away and hide, but also that his body can be subject to aging and death. Therefore, in Blake's perspective, Urizen brings death to mankind by means of his own sleep and the existence of his own, earthly body.

Moloch too is a god whose sleep implies death and whose body parts are themselves conducive to violence, murder and death: "Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!" (Ginsberg 21). Thus, bringing upon the physical suffering of death is an action that comes as often and as natural to Moloch as using one's fingers would be to a human being. Moreover, standing in stark contrast to the Old Testament God that teaches Moses how to sacrifice animals and bring their breasts as wave offerings of

peace, Moloch's breast requires the sacrifice of another, human, breast, which is not an act of peace, but of war and destruction. In addition, the attempt to lift Moloch to Heaven and the subsequent failure of the endeavor – based in part on Moloch's metaphorical heaviness and in part on a limited perception of Heaven which is considered to be situated above the earth, and not everywhere around it – proves the lack of knowledge, the limitation and shortcomings of Moloch in comparison to the Christian God.

As rulers who do not wish their subjects well, nor feel the need to protect or comfort them, Urizen and Moloch lack the Christian God's benevolence, knowledge and omnipotence and, therefore, they renounce His pledge of resurrection. They sleep and bring sleep upon human beings, foreshadowing death. Yet the induced state of slumber is not temporal, but eternal and hence anything but comforting. Sleep is neither "a gift from God . . . the purpose [of which] is to sustain and heal the body" (Ancoli-Israel 35-36), nor something that people have "no more to fear from . . . than we do from falling asleep" (Elwell, "Sleep") because instead of union with the Creator, Urizen and Moloch promise division and instead of eventually waking up from the sleep of death, their sleep represents a permanent state of "cold solitude & dark void" (Blake, *The Book* 54).

A similar, underlying feeling of pessimism can be found in the philosophy of Gnosticism, where the theme of sleep is widely used as well. Albeit the same sleep-death metaphor is maintained, one crucial difference appears that can be said to topple this long lasting tradition and reconceptualize the notion of death. Consequently, the shadowy sleep of death understood by Christianity primarily as the death of the body is seen by Gnosticism as the death of the soul. This is expressed overtly by Gnostic scholar Hans Jonas in this work *The Gnostic Religion* (2001): "Indeed, we shall find that in gnostic thought the world takes the place of the traditional underworld and is itself already the realm of the dead, that is of those who have to be raised to life again" (68). In this sense, Gnosticism challenges the Christian belief of resurrection and therefore what is dead in the case of most human beings – is not the body, but the soul and figurative sleeping does not imply being physically dead, while keeping the soul alive, but being physically alive, while soul is dead. This death-in-life is reinforced by a negative evaluation of materiality of which human beings are inevitably part and by means of which they remain in the shadows or in "the darkness (the lower, material world)" (MacRae 500).

It follows that sleep and death become representatives of human beings being entrapped in their corporeal existence, the shadows of which render them oblivious to *gnosis*,⁴ the saving knowledge. The type of death expressed in the two poems analyzed here is closer to the Gnostic apprehension rather than the Christian one, since death does not seem to follow life, but equal it instead. Paradoxically, when Urizen creates life and the material world, he actually creates death. Along with the creation of his earthly body, man falls into a deep sleep, since he is no longer conscious of or receptive towards the infinite nature of the universe and the immortality of his being. "And now his eternal life/ Like a dream was obliterated" (Blake, *The Book* 54).

⁴ See "Hymn of the Pearl", from *The Acts of Thomas*.

Spiritual death also seems to be a main characteristic of Moloch. In his case, the sleeping soul has lost all contact with divinity and has turned entirely towards man-made, artificial values: “Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks” (Ginsberg 22). It is noteworthy that the two metaphysical aspects of this god, his love and his soul are rendered as being infinite, yet are decisively material and centered around the greed and lust for power that economic authority and dominance bring about. In a Gnostic interpretation, Moloch’s soul is dead, although his body is alive because he has lost himself in the prison of the physical world of matter and has become overwhelmed by the illusion of financial power, failing to perceive the spiritual light.

In a manner analogous to Plato’s cave dwellers who needed to rise and release their bonds in order to awaken and perceive the true light, Gnostics dwelled on the importance of a call of awakening that would have a similar effect upon those who stood under the shadows of ignorance and unawareness. In *The Book of Urizen*, the call of awakening is given by Orc. He is the child referred to in *The Book of Urizen*, who manages to shake the dead from their sleep: “The dead heard the voice of the child,/ And began to awake from sleep.” (59). Orc’s revolution is necessary for people to renounce convention as well as the passive, careless prolongation of sleep and eventually awaken to the truth of the core, or “root” of their soul’s divine light and love. However, there is much difficulty in hearing this call, as “the unconscious is . . . a veritable infection by the poison of darkness” (Jonas 69) and hence Urizen spreads it “Like a dark waste stretching” (51), in an attempt to impede spiritual revival.

The “Gnostic image of sleep and awakening” (MacRae 505) represents an integral part of “Howl” as well. There are multiple references to the spiritual nature of those whom the speaker refers to as the members of his generation. Whether they are angelheaded hipsters or saintly motorcyclists, they seek “the ancient heavenly connection” (Ginsberg 9), a spiritual, inner consummation that, in a Gnostic interpretation, would be indicative of the “divine spark⁵ in man, deriving from a divine realm” (Barnstone and Meyer 10). These hipsters are beacons of light⁶ in Moloch’s world of shadows, yet they are inevitably part of the same environment and consequently fall into the same sleep as he does. As a result, not only does the lyrical self of “Howl” insist on the importance of waking up in Moloch, but he also talks about this state of sleep as being a near-death experience: “where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls’ airplanes . . . they’ve come to drop angelic bombs” (Ginsberg 26). Apart from the sharp contrast between the brightness implied by electricity and the shadows of a moribund unconscious that is not yet dead and can therefore still be returned to life, it is significant to note that the concepts of souls and angels are associated with bombs dropped out of airplanes because, while

⁵ For Urizen, the divine spark could be the very human heart, created immediately after the cavern-like spine and described in terms of a deeply hidden burning globe: “Down sunk with fright a red/ Round globe, hot burning, deep” (52).

⁶ The illumination of their mind with divine knowledge of humanity’s spiritual core is overtly expressed in “Footnote to Howl”, where the word “holy” is repeated seventy-seven times in reference to all types of people, parts of the body, cities, dreams and even Moloch. This is a reflection of Blake’s strong conviction that all life is holy and that “Everything is eternal” (“Vision of the Last Judgment”, *A Critical*, 37).

the vocabulary that points to the material world is maintained, the driving force behind this idea of violence contradicts it, allowing for an image of humanity that is at the threshold between confinement and freedom, between sleep and awakening, between life and death.

Two aspects that cannot be overlooked in the case of Urizen and Moloch are what would make them very suitable for a Jungian archetypal interpretation: their plane of existence in the human mind and their simultaneous particularity and universality. Urizen and Moloch are depicted as indispensable fractions of a person's inner realm, which falls in line with Jung's belief that "all human experience is psychic" (Gallant 3). While all of the four Zoas, along with other mythological projections of Blake are representative of a journey within, it is Urizen who imposes his extension over the mind and is therefore named "the eternal mind, bounded" (51). The epithet eternal in reference to man and his mind entails that, albeit individual and specific to each person in particular, these deities are common to the primordial human being and, by extension, to all of humanity, just as archetypes "combine the universal with the individual, the general with the unique, in that they are common to all humanity, yet nevertheless manifest themselves in every human being in a way peculiar to him or her" (Stevens, *Jung*). Similarly, Ginsberg's Moloch is a god who has the ability to dwell within people and affect them from within: "Moloch who entered my soul early!" (22). More particularly, he is undoubtedly a mental deity, whose very name is the mind (Ginsberg 21), a characterization which implies, by means of the definite pronoun "the" that replaces the more intimate "my", that he not just a personal, inner protuberance of the speaker, but also an archetypal figure, belonging to the limitless shadow reality of the collective unconscious, whose "identical psychic structures [are] common to all" (Jung, *Symbols* 158).

The concepts of shadow, sleep and the unconscious tackled so far can be infused with new significance in the light of Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytical understanding of the human mind. If Urizen and Moloch are understood not just as being asleep, but as being themselves projections of dreams, they may be associated with unconscious representations that can only surface in a context that is free from the grip of civilization and the restriction of morality. According to Jung, there were four main archetypal components of the human mind that played an important role in the development of the psyche throughout the years: the self (the unconscious foundation for the ego), the persona (the social mask), the shadow (the repressed urges and instincts) and the anima/animus (the contrasexual soul-image). To Jung, "the unconscious corresponds to the mythical land of the dead," (Jung, *Memories* 191) and, therefore, the encounter with one's innermost, hidden thoughts and desires is described as a descent into the world of darkness, into the underworld where light is feeble and the shadow is inescapable. This shadow is reflective of instincts towards sexuality and violence that society would deem blamable and unacceptable and are, thus, hidden away into the darkest, furthest corner of the mind, repressed, denied and remote from everyday reality.

Due to the dark nature of the shadow, it is natural that its encounter be a horrifying one and its recognition as a part of the self be challenging and effortful. In other words, "once we realize we have a shadow, and once we realize that our enemy is within our own heart, then the conflict begins" (Bishop 160). Consequently, Urizen

speaks of struggles, battles and conflicts that are monstrous in nature, yet reside in everyone's mind: "fightings and conflicts dire/ With terrible monsters Sin-bred,/ Which the bosoms of all inhabit" (47). The fact that this conflict is not an external one, but one that tackles the unknown shadow is evident also in passages such as: "For he strove in battles dire,/ In unseen conflictions with shapes" (45). The world that Urizen creates is filled with "Dread terrors, delighting in blood" (60) that sickened even its creator and that take shelter underneath a very deep layer of the human psyche. This proneness towards cruelty and brutality is also a key component in the foundation of Moloch, whose acts represent a manifestation of the shadow "in pathological ways, for example, in the sadism of modern warfare" (Avens 199). Consequently, Moloch is closely connected to the concept of war and suffering and he is synonymous with "the vast stone of war!" (Ginsberg 21), as he makes people sob and fear him so much that they turn towards suicide: "Boys sobbing in armies! . . . they bade farewell! They jumped off the roof!" (23).

However dreadful the interaction with the shadow might be, Jung thought it crucial to accept and integrate it as part of one's unitary psychic wholeness and called this process *individuation*. In order for there to be a "dialectical relationship between consciousness and the unconscious" (Avens 197), there has to be a recognition of the necessary complementarity of these two contrary concepts. Blake's conviction that without contraries there is no possibility for progression or that opposition is true friendship is mirrored in Jung's belief that there are "two halves of a single overriding psychic experience which is our only true reality" (Gallant 6) and "no growth and development of human personality is possible without consideration of them" (Avens 188). The Swiss psychiatrist thought his perspective valid for the cosmic realm as well: just as man needs his negative side in order to be complete, God's nature cannot possibly be all good, without any expression of evil. It follows that he did not agree with the Christian image of perfect divinity and believed, rather, in the equal importance of its dark aspect which is the only way via which Yahweh-Satan or Christ-Antichrist could be reflective of divine wholeness or totality.⁷ Jung's process of individuation seems to observe much of the same main principles that Gnosticism recognizes as intrinsic to its spiritual beliefs. If for Gnostics the existence of human beings was rooted in the duality of the deadly sleep from which people need to awaken by means of inner *gnosis* on the one hand and the divine spark within them that would provide spiritual enlightenment on the other hand, for Jung, every aspect of reality contained its opposite form and therefore no conscious human being could lack an unconscious projection, the exploration of which would be similar to a descend into the underworld and the understanding of which would be possible via the light of self-knowledge that brings into awareness the wholeness of a human being.

Hence, whether interpreted as archetypal shadows of humanity or of the cosmic sphere, Urizen and Moloch have to be reconciled with as they play a role in the transcendence of the one-sided perspective of evil for the purpose of reaching the self-fulfillment of the entire being of which they are part and from which they have been separated. After being fully experienced, the shadow has to be integrated and, in

⁷ In the words of Ann Casement, "The highest God is for Jung one that is not wholly good but evil as well. . . . Wholeness not perfection is the aim" (52).

the case of Urizen, this task rests in the hands of his counterpart, Los, understood as embodying the principle of imagination. Los recognizes Urizen as an evil spirit or demon, but also painfully acknowledges him as a part of himself that is temporarily separated: “Los wept, howling around the dark Demon,/ And cursing his lot, for in anguish/ Urizen was rent from his side” (49). In the case of Moloch, there are only five words in the poem that succinctly yet profoundly touch upon this understanding of a new union. These words are: “holy the Angel in Moloch” (Ginsberg 28). In this sense, Moloch is no longer perceived as the ultimate, Satanic adversary, that is fully separate from the speaker and thus very easy to blame, but as a god whose divine core brings balance to his being and can therefore be empathized with by the hipsters who are able to connect him to their own sacred core. Yet, the element of forgiveness implied by this statement should not be mistaken for submission: “it must be emphasized again, however, that this does not imply an irresponsible surrender to the shadow . . . but a new freedom to act out of one’s inborn wholeness” (Avens 204).

This insistence upon the meeting of contraries, the coming together of two opposite elements that are melted and incorporated for the formation of a new one is also an indispensable principle of alchemy, the Hermetic art of transformation. This union is called *coniunctio*, *hierosgamos* (chemical wedding), royal marriage, royal union or *unus mundus* and finds an equivalent in the Gnostic dual perception of the world, as well as in Jung’s reconciliation with the shadow. In fact, it is in alchemy that Jung believed to have found the historical equivalent of his psychological discoveries or, “in other words, alchemy was a metaphor for individuation” (Stevens, *Jung*).

A mystical endeavor rooted in the Egyptian civilization and believed to have been inspired by the god Thoth, later known as Hermes Trismegistus, alchemy was a dual activity: on the one hand it was a pre-scientific attempt carried out in laboratories with the use of metals and other (mainly secret) ingredients, but on the other hand it was a spiritual process by which the soul would be awoken to another dimension of existence. In both cases, the alchemist would take upon himself a Great Work known as *Opus Magnum*⁸ that involved melting and coagulating substances via the use of physical fire or dissolving old selves in favor of new ones via the use of inner fire and was hoped to culminate with the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone (*lapis philosophorum*) or Elixir of Life, an all-powerful substance with the help of which base metals could be turned into gold (and thus produce infinite wealth) or the self could be reborn into a higher, perfect form (and thus achieve immortality).

The essence of alchemy lies in a process of transforming something of little value such as lead or spiritual death into something of utmost value such as gold or spiritual rebirth. This transmutation was imagined in terms of *solve et coagula*, a well-known alchemical motto. After finding the *Prima Materia*, the first matter from which the material world originated, alchemists would have to melt it by fire in order to be able to manipulate its characteristics and transform its initial properties so as to

⁸ The alchemical *Opus* can be interpreted as an analogy for the creation of the cosmos, as a human attempt to mirror the generation of perfection, since “man was seen as a microcosm, a complete equivalent of the world in miniature” (Levy, “The Sacred”). This view was also supported by their belief in the parallelism between the two realms, evident in their motto: *as above so below*.

coagulate the unformed mass into a new element that is purer and perfected. Many times throughout *The Book of Urizen*, the main character is described in terms of solidity. For instance, in the first age of creation, in which the human spine is formed, the hardening of the bones is specifically mentioned “And bones of solidness froze” (52) and in the second age, when the nervous system is alluded to, it has to make its way around the hardness of the bones once again: “Shooting out ten thousand branches/ Around his solid bones” (52). The insistence on the importance of unchangeability and stagnation for Urizen is further emphasized when the character himself overtly confesses that his aim is to obliterate fluidity in favor of solidity: “I have sought . . . / For a solid without fluctuation” (46). Even before the creation of the human body, Urizen recounts his creation of the material sphere out of natural elements, albeit not in harmony with them:

First I fought with the fire, consum'd
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild, dark, & deep,
Where nothing was, Nature's wide womb.
And self-balanc'd, stretch'd o'er the void,
I alone, even I! the winds merciless
Bound, but condensing in torrents
They fall & fall; strong I repell'd
The vast waves, & arose on the waters,
A wide World of solid obstruction.

Here alone I, in books form'd of metals,
Have written the secrets of wisdom. (46-47)

As Urizen struggles with the elements of nature to create the physical world, what is described is the very *Prima Materia* that was at the foundation of all matter. However, instead of it being formed in conformity with nature, it seems to take shape against it, in an unnatural way, as a rock of obstruction in a sea of water. Based on the same pattern of solidity and impermeability, Moloch is regarded as a sphinx of cement and aluminum (21), as an immense, heavy statue, the solidity and potency of which is underlined also by its “granite cocks” (22). Moloch’s hard surface is also unnatural and is associated with man-made machineries and robot apartments which replace the speaker’s inherent mystical proneness: “who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy!” (22).

Consequently, both Urizen and Moloch are described as very solid bodies that are created contrary to spiritual principles and that require fluidity in order to be manipulated and molded into something else. They are reflective of the “rigid-old-man-negative-father [who] is symbolic of a calcification of consciousness . . . and thus becomes an obstacle to the growth and development of consciousness . . . [and] is in need of being liquefied and desolidified” (Levy, “The Sacred”). While Urizen’s frozen bones and Moloch’s cement and granite portray their inflexibility, it is important to notice a gap in this seemingly unbreakable façade: Urizen’s books of metals and Moloch’s aluminum component offer the promise of malleability and the possibility of being melted by fire, an element that is present in both works. For Urizen, the fire

of the Eternals is seen as a burning, yet dark constituent that pours like liquid over his drought-stricken, solid world: “And o'er the dark deserts of Urizen/ Fires pour thro' the void on all sides . . . But no light from the fires! all was darkness” (48). Although fire liquefies it, it denies the world of obstruction any light at this stage. For the fellow sufferers of “Howl”’s poetic self, fire represents a powerful element that is repeatedly ingested alongside turpentine, a very flammable substance: “who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos night after night (10). Perhaps these were suicidal attempts or perhaps they were desperate experiments aimed to provide an antidote for Moloch and to melt and dissolve the coagulated, Moloch-infested part of themselves in order to purify it.

The shadowy aspect of the two characters is represented in the alchemical process by the stage called *nigredo*, or blackness because it produces a substance that is “black blacker than black, [and] is also an internal experience of melancholia, an encounter with the shadow” (Grossinger qtd. in Miller, “The Holistic”). Although the Great Work has been presented in many ways, many alchemists agree that there are at least three classic stages involved: *nigredo* (blackening), *albedo* (whitening) and *rubedo* (reddening) (Martin 24).⁹ It is the first stage that is extensively presented and dwelt upon in the two works analyzed here. During the *nigredo* or the initial stage, the now dissolved substance becomes very dark and stands for putrefaction, for “spiritual or metaphorical death” (Martin 27), as a first necessary step in cleansing the self and allowing for another beginning. It is often “portrayed as a Death’s Head” (Martin 33) and symbolized by a raven, stressing “the stage of discomfort with the status quo [that] is necessary to initiate the alchemical process” (Miller, “Introduction”). Indeed, the difficulties involved in this process have been discussed and identified as a lot more than discomfort, as tremendous suffering and death brought about by Urizen and Moloch. But what is it that dies and therefore undergoes decomposition? According to the principles of alchemy, “the Body is to be decomposed, that is one shifts one’s awareness to the inner self” (Gillabel, “1.3 Nigredo”).¹⁰ The rotting can sometimes be seen as affecting spiritual death, but since this stage is governed by the element of earth and represents “a purification of the earthly nature in us” (Hamilton, “The Alchemical”), it has to do with the renunciation of human beings’ attachment to earthly, material existence. Both Urizen and Moloch are deeply rooted in the world of the senses and of matter and whether they symbolize the limitation of perception to physicality only or the reliance on money and economic benefits, they represent shadowy elements of dissolution, of darkness and values that should be reconsidered, as well as attachments to superficial, temporal objects that should be severed or at least loosened. In addition, the *nigredo* also incorporates the water element.

The water element symbolises the emotions that we experience in encountering and letting go of such attachments – fear, anger, grief, etc. – emotions we need to encounter and survive, experiencing them in order to become free of them and so move on to the next stage. Thus, it is that when the unconscious earth nature in us is

⁹ Sometimes *citrinitas*, or yellowing is a phase that precedes the *rubedo*.

¹⁰ Although the speaker of “Howl” does mention that in Moloch he is a consciousness without a body, this appears to be seen in negative terms. In this sense, Moloch is depicted as a suppresser of one’s sexual freedom and sensual enjoyment.

Birth, Death, and Rebirth: (Re)Generation as Text

first awakened we initially experience negative thoughts and feelings. Once we have overcome the unconscious identifications, the thoughts and feelings become positive, i.e. the world no longer threatened our real self because we are free of it. (Hamilton, "The Alchemical")

The above mentioned explanation would account for the strongly negative attitude towards Urizen and Moloch, for the anger directed at them, for the fear, struggle and sense of injustice that are woven in their descriptions, but also for the shift in perspective and the realization of their inherent holiness. This latter attitude is what provides the liberation and activation of perception, the awakening and the end of the *nigredo* followed by the break of dawn, of *albedo*, or the discovering of the light that brings about the illumination of the soul.

By way of conclusion, in order to reach the Platonic sun, Christian immortality, Gnostic spiritual awareness/ self-knowledge, Jungian individuation or the Alchemical spiritual gold, the literary worlds envisaged by Blake and Ginsberg have to experience darkness and death in the shape of Urizen's and Moloch's cave-bound shadows, physical death, spiritual oblivion, deep, unconscious shadows of the mind and self-dissolution. All of these aspects are perceived as forms of imprisonment and restriction and are brought to the surface by the abundant imagery related to sleep, as well as chains in *The Book of Urizen* and prisons in "Howl". An interpretation of Urizen and Moloch as being both asleep themselves and projections of sleep allows for the two villains to be perceived as shadows that are indicative of the archetypal negative drives, deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of humanity. Yet, as it has been mentioned, the mere encounter with this type of darkness is not enough, since what leads to its transcendence is the realization of the necessary role it plays as a contrary figure to that of illumination in the formation of a perfect union of opposites that reveals the wholeness of creation. The reconciliation with this indispensable component of the psyche and the transcendence of spiritual passivity that is akin to a sleep of death require awakening and resurrection which are possible because the darkness depicted in both *The Book of Urizen* and in "Howl" – and interpreted through the lenses of Plato's philosophy of shadows, the Christian and Gnostic different perspectives of death as a shadowy sleep, Jung's archetypal construction of the shadow and the alchemical focus on the darkest stage of creation – shelters a deeply hidden luminous nucleus that holds the key to inner awakening and metaphysical regeneration.

Works Cited

- Ancoli-Israel, Sonia. "Sleep in the Biblical Period." *Sleep Medicine: A Comprehensive Guide to Its Development, Clinical Milestones, and Advances in Treatment*. Ed. Sudhansu Chokroverty and Michel Billiard. New York: Springer, 2015. 35-42. Print.
- Andersen, Nathan. *Shadow Philosophy: Plato's Cave and Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2014. Print.
- Avens, Roberts. "The Image of the Devil in C. G. Jung's Psychology." *Journal of Religion & Health* 16.3 (1977): 196-222. Print.

- Barnstone, Willis, and Marvin W. Meyer, eds. *The Gnostic Bible*. Boston, London: New Seeds, 2006. Print.
- Bishop, Paul. *Carl Jung*. London: Reaktion, 2014. Print.
- Blake, William. *The Book of Urizen*. Ed. Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson. London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978. Print.
- Blake, William. *William Blake: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Michael Mason. Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- Casement, Ann. *Carl Gustav Jung*. London: Sage Publications, 2001. Print. Key Figures in Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- Elwell, Walter A. "Sleep Definition and Meaning - Bible Dictionary." *Bible Study Tools*. Web. 05 May 2017. <<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sleep/>>.
- Filat, Vasile. "Why Does the Bible Refer to Being 'asleep' Instead of 'dead' for the Believers Who Have Died?" *Moldova Creștină*. 24 Feb. 2012. Web. 05 May 2017. <<https://moldovacrestina.md/en/christians-dead-asleep-in-christ/>>.
- Gallant, Walter B. "Psychic Wholeness in Blake and Jung." 1973. *Honors Theses*. Western Michigan University, 1972. Print.
- Gillabel, Dirk. "1.3 Nigredo - Blackness." *Soul Guidance: Creative, Spiritual Arts, Healing and Information. House of the Sun*. Web. 20 May 2017. <<http://www.soul-guidance.com/houseofthesun/alchemy%202.htm>>.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Pocket hop, 1956. Print.
- Hamilton, Nigel. "The Alchemical Process of Transformation." *Sufismus*. Web. 20 May 2017. <http://sufismus.ch/assets/files/omega_dream/alchemy_e.pdf>.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Essance of Truth. On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*. Trans. Ted Sadler. London, New York: Continuum, 2002. Print. Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers.
- Hesiod. *Theogony Works and Days Testimonia*. Ed. Glenn W. Most. Vol. I. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard UP, 2006. Print.
- Huard, Roger L. *Plato's Political Philosophy: The Cave*. New York: Algora, 2007. Print.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ed. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull. 2nd ed. Vol. 9, Part. 1. New York: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. The Collective Works of C.G. Jung.
- Jonas, Hans. *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*. Boston: Beacon, 2001. Print.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Ed. Aniela Jaffe. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. Vintage Books Edition ed. New York: Knopf Doubleday Group, 2011. Print.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Symbols of Transformation*. New York: Pantheon, 1956. Print.
- King James Bible Online*. Web. 05 May 2017. <<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>>.
- Levy, Paul. "The Sacred Art of Alchemy." *Awaken in the Dream*. 04 Dec. 2015. Web. 21 May 2017. <<http://www.awakeninthedream.com/the-sacred-art-of-alchemy/>>.

Birth, Death, and Rebirth: (Re)Generation as Text

- MacRae, George. "Sleep and Awakening in Gnostic Texts." *Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio Di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966 ; Testi E Discussioni*. Ed. Ugo Bianchi. Leiden: Brill, 1970. 496-507. Print.
- McAlpine, Thomas H. *Sleep, Divine & Human, in the Old Testament*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987. Print.
- Martin, Sean. *Alchemy and Alchemists*. Harpenden, Herts: Pocket Essentials, 2006. Print.
- Miller, Iona. "Introduction to Alchemy in Jungian Psychology." *Synergetic Qabala*. 1986. Web. 20 May 2017.
<<http://zero-point.tripod.com/alchemy/alchemyclass.html>>.
- Miller, Richard and Ioana. "The Holistic Qabala: A Contemporary Guide to Magick.", 2002. Web. 20 May 2017.
<<http://www.nwbotanicals.org/oak/magick/qbl/sphere10c.htm>>.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Ed. G.R.F. Ferrari. Trans. Tom Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought.
- Stevens, Anthony. *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006. PDF.