

ABSTRACT

Ankarsjö, Magnus. "*Bring Me My Arrows of Desire*": *Gender Utopia in Blake's The Four Zoas*. Göteborg University, English Department, 2003.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that William Blake's unfinished epic poem *The Four Zoas* presents a gender utopia—a vision of equality between the sexes achieved through improved gender interactivity. In contrast to most studies on Blake, it argues that female activity is persistent and positive. In the symbolical process towards gender equality in *The Four Zoas*, female characters have an essential role.

The study first gives an account of the specific obstacles which have confronted readers and critics of *The Four Zoas* throughout the years: the editorial problem of the unfinished manuscript, the disordered narrative structure, the highly unconventional theme. Contextually, the influence of the radical London environment of the late 1780s and the early 1790s on Blake's poetry is emphasized. The main body of the thesis is an analysis of a number of central characters according to the categories of activity and passivity. First, four male-female couples in *The Four Zoas* are examined. It is shown how the poem through increased gender interactivity moves towards a conclusion of apocalypse, gender reunion and partial male-female togetherness. The outcome is that *The Four Zoas* presents a far-reaching reconciliation of the male and female characters, though not a vision of complete gender equality. The same basic analytical method is then used to investigate Blake's two other major epic poems, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, with a focus on how they respond to and develop the gender issues from *The Four Zoas*.

Although it is only in his last epic *Jerusalem* that Blake fully achieves his vision of complete male-female togetherness, *The Four Zoas* has a special significance as the utopian poem in which Blake introduces his main concepts and characters. In this poem, he first develops his two-fold dualistic philosophy into a complex mythological system where mutual gender interactivity is the essential precondition for complete gender equality.

Key words: Blake, gender, utopia, *The Four Zoas*, female characters, gender interactivity, radical context, feminism, gender reunion, male-female togetherness.