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Printed Performance and Reading The Book[s] of Urizen: Blake's Bookmaking Process and the Transformation of Late Eighteenth-Century Print Culture

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UNTIL RECENTLY, CRITICS have considered the textual problems in The [First] Book of Urizen as impediments in their search for a definitive, synoptic edition of the poem. While eight copies of the poem are known to exist, each copy is unique for a variety of reasons, including missing plates, changes in plate order, inconsistencies with chapter and verse numbering, and individual plate alterations. About these difficulties Jerome McGann notes that no editors have been willing to pursue their quest for narrative consistency far enough so as to remove one or another of the duplicate chapters 4. Furthermore, all later editions enshrine the problem of this unstable text in that curious title—so difficult to read aloud—with the bracketed word: The [First] Book of Urizen.... Thus a residue of the text's "extraordinary inconsistency" always remains a dramatic presence in our received scholarly editions. (308)

No matter how much scholars attempt to blend the eight Urizens into one synoptic edition, they are always left with unresolved textual problems that seem to attest to the irresolvability that Blake may have, in fact, built into his "copies." In his remarkable study of Blake's book production process, Joseph Viscomi argues that Blake printed a number of impressions from each of the 28 plates of Urizen and then collated them in various arrangements and orders. As Viscomi explains,

Urizen-as-produced (printed, collated, sold) differed from Urizen-as-written/etched. While the structural differences do not represent different moments in Urizen's initial composition, they do make reading each copy of Urizen a unique experience, in ways not possible with the early copies of Thel, America, and Visions [of the Daughters of Albion]. (286)

McGann suggests that this situation amounts to a Blakean critique of traditional Biblical scholarship:

The textual anomalies are ... part of a deliberate effort to critique the received Bible and its traditional exegesis. To read The Book of Urizen is to discover a Bible one had never known before; it is to learn to read the traditional Bible in an entirely new way. (323-24)

I would like to thank Professor Josephine Ann McQuail for her generous assistance with some of the textual background for this paper.
According to McGann, the work of Alexander Geddes showed Blake that many versions of the Bible existed, and their differences and redundancies rendered any sort of stable or definitive text impossible, thus opening for the reader new avenues for Biblical interpretation (323). The so-called textual problems, then, are devices that Blake employs to critique the construction of "standardized" Biblical texts and to radicalize the experience of reading the Bible.

But Urizen can be seen not only as a critique of the "standard" presentation of the Bible (the Book, with a capital "B") but also as a critique of the potential for authorial power that print technology can foster through its ability to mass-produce exact copies of a text. As Alvin Kernan has argued, the mechanical reproduction of printed texts was, by the eighteenth century, rapidly changing the way that people perceived the written word. Because of print technology's ability to stabilize a text, print began to take on connotations of increased authority, since records and official documents were being produced and stored by mechanically reproduced printing, creating "a generally accepted view that what is printed is true, or at least truer than any other kind of record" (49). As official discourse adopted print as its medium, the medium itself began to take on the authority of truth. Without the messiness and indeterminacy that Geddes and Blake acknowledged in Biblical texts, each copy of any book could be seen as speaking in one voice to all readers, imposing its static "truths" on them. Blake's mechanical method of book production, however, undoes the fixity of traditional printing by making each copy of each book a new version or retelling of the same basic story, a new performance that differs from all other versions. The variations produced in each copy remove the exactitude, the finalization, of the printed work and undermine the authority that the exact duplication of printed texts provides. As readers negotiate the variations and inconsistencies, they then have a greater opportunity to participate in the creative process. By piecing together the variations that Blake's bookmaking practice infuses in The [First] Book of Urizen, readers have the ability to create the story as they interpret it. As authorial power is undermined, it is transferred to the reader.

More than any other of the illuminated books, William Blake's The [First] Book of Urizen is concerned with the process of bookmaking and its effects on readers. In the poem, Urizen retreats from the rest of the Eternals and in solitude produces "books formd of metal" (U 4.24).1 When he reemerges, he then presents these books as containing absolute truth, as asserting "one Law" that seeks to enclose and to systematize the boundlessness and flux of Eternity (U 4.40). Urizen's book production is also pre-
sented pictorially on the title page, where Urizen is shown writing, or perhaps transcribing, his books, and on plate 5, where he presents an opened book to the reader. In commenting on Urizen’s book production, Robert N. Essick writes that Urizen’s “magisterial book” attempts to establish “the ‘one Law’ of univocal meanings as the agency through which ‘One King’ and ‘one God’ can project their rule” (154). Urizen’s book, then, is his tool for enforcing his own perspective as undeniable truth and for coercing others to accept his understanding of reality as univocal. In his isolation from the rest of the Eternals, Urizen authors a fixed representation of Eternity, using the static nature of the book to take control of the discursive process and exclude others from participating in the creation of meaning.

The kind of authorial power that Urizen establishes with his book parallels Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of an extreme monologic approach to authorship:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness and with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme and pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. (292-93)

The monologic author denies all others as responsive consciousnesses and treats them only as objects for his or her contemplation. This rejection of all others amounts to a withdrawal from the world. As Bakhtin notes, “The construction of the authorial world with its point of view and finalizing definitions, presupposes a fixed external position, a fixed authorial field of vision” (52). From his isolated position, Urizen constructs a fixed representation of Eternity devised from his own authorial consciousness and forces Eternity to conform to this rigid framework. The Eternals have no access to the construction of Urizen’s book and become a part of his consciousness as he represents them. In taking control of the discursive process, Urizen gains complete authority over the creation of meaning and denies others any participation in that process.

Since Blake’s own books are also written in solitude and “form’d of metals” through engraving on copper plates, the poem would seem to call into question Blake’s own bookmaking process, as many critics have noted, suggesting that any printed work, even Blake’s own, is somehow Urizenic in that it may seek to yoke others into its own rigid framework. Indeed, in the period leading up to Blake’s day, the printed text had been gathering with it connotations of authority. As Kernan explains,

Print ... fixed the literary text, by giving it an objective and unchanging reality in its own right. In earlier oral cultures there could be no such thing as an exact text, since the particular form something took at any given moment always depended ... on performance. Even in a manuscript culture a work was seldom or never reproduced exactly the same way twice running, and so remained always a process, never becoming a completed, static object. But in a print culture, type makes it possible for the work to exist as a fixed object, infinitely and accurately reproducible, controlling, even “being” as it were, its own form independent of perception or accidents. (51-52)
Bentley Plate 5
By producing a multitude of exact copies of a text, print technology imposes the same text, the same utterance, on every reader, thereby fixing the author's point of view as an organizing force controlling the reader's perception. Since an oral performance or even a manuscript changes with each new retelling or copy, these unfinalizable reproductions blur any concept of a static authorial position. The variations in each performance place more emphasis on the performer than on the original author, a situation that, as Kernan notes, had fostered a tradition of literary anonymity in Europe from the post-classical period into the Renaissance (71). With the gradual development of print, however, the finalization of the text eliminates the performance aspect and establishes the author as the single voice producing the text. The authority that print seems to convey gives the authorial position the power to monologically affirm the "truth" of its utterance and to claim authenticity for its point of view, denying readers an opportunity to respond to the author. Instead of a collaboration of many individuals adding infinite variety and opportunity for interpretation with each performance of a work, a single author and a finalized text limits both participation in the text's production and interpretation in its reception. As a purveyor of truth instead of one of many performers, the author can be seen as speaking from a position of authority that can preempt response. By removing inconsistencies from textual production, print technology finalizes the literary text, enabling it to establish itself as a fixed object independent of the accidents that give oral or manuscript texts variety and also of the individual "perception" of readers. Even in practical terms, the cost of book production alone, a very labor-intensive process which used taxed paper that nearly doubled production costs (Gaull 12), made buying a book an intimidating prospect that gave readers the impression, according to Alan D. Boehm, that books contained "more serious or more valuable subjects and for more exclusive readers" (470). As Marlon B. Ross adds,

"The printed text acquires itself the imprimatur of authority, not only in that it can carry the royal stamp or the stamp of the Stationer’s company, but more importantly because print, even without these legal imprints, becomes the cause of authority. Once printed, the text possesses authority, and the writer, however lacking in knowledge or experience, becomes an author who possesses the authority imprinted in the text, whose words must be attended to because someone saw fit to print them. (242-43)

The materiality of the printed book, in both its mass-produced exactitude and its expense, gave the author of the printed work an authority that had not previously been possible.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the authoritative connotations of books began to erode, giving way to more democratic and liberating connotations. In his discussion of this shift in the American colonies, Michael Warner writes,

The most salient difference between the traditional culture of print and the republican one is a set of assumptions developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. ... The reader now also incorporates into the meaning of the printed object an awareness of the potentially lim-
itless others who may also be reading. For that reason, it becomes possible to imagine oneself, in
the act of reading, becoming part of the arena of the national people that cannot be realized
except through such mediating imaginings. (xiii)

Instead of finding oneself “inscribed in the imperial periphery by a print dis­
course that everywhere recorded its emanation from distant parts,” a reader,
as part of a broad reading public, can begin to see print as an element of
“local and everyday phenomena” (Warner 17). This localization levels class
barriers and undermines the authority of the fixed external position of the
author. Rather than a vehicle for dictating sacred codes, mass-produced
printed works begin to carry the connotation that a book could unite writers
and readers in a collective forum for participatory discourse. These changes
in the connotations of the book were taking place in England as well, leading
Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, to make publishing and typesetting
decisions that ran counter to traditional norms. As Boehm notes, small,
cheaply produced books were beginning to reach broader audiences of all
classes, and the production of the *Lyrical Ballads* participated in this evolu­
tion:

In *Lyrical Ballads*, the reader of 1798 could discern a book that scrupulously rejected costly
engravings, typefaces, and exacting presswork, that conscientiously refused to distin­
guish the public in terms of an affluent, discriminating minority. To Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s way of
thinking, then, *Lyrical Ballads*’ unadorned typography projected a liberal and democratic vision
of the English reading public. (469)

In producing the *Lyrical Ballads* without the costly trappings of traditional
book production, Wordsworth and Coleridge were able to address and com­
municate with a broad audience, enabling otherwise excluded members of
the reading public to participate in the book’s reception. Along with
Wordsworth and Coleridge, many writers of the Romantic period saw in the
elements of book production a potential for undermining the authorial power
of traditional print culture and for enabling greater reader participation in the
social exchange of printed discourse.

Yet the traditional print culture notions of authorial power refused to wane
because other writers saw in the cheap, mass-produced book even greater
potential for authorial power since it could convey the author’s single voice
to so many more readers. While in the late eighteenth century, cheaply
printed books were being used for radical political purposes—such as the
incendiary second part of Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man* produced in a six­
penny version in 1793 for a lower-class audience—they were also being used
in an attempt to control the lower classes—through, for example, the govern­
ment-subsidized propaganda by Arthur Young and William Paley and
Hannah More’s Cheap Repository Tracts (Gaul 47-48). While cheap, mass­
produced books were newly being used to democratize or incite a mass audi­
ence, they were also being used to repress such a reading public. Although
Blake did not mass-produce his work or reach a mass audience in his day, he
nevertheless responds to this cultural conflict by presenting in *Urizen* both
alternative potentialities of print technology. While the story of *Urizen*
describes the potential for print to suppress an audience by establishing a Urizenic authorial position to control the creation of meaning, Blake’s own method of book production disrupts this authorial power by undermining the ways that the print medium aids in the establishment of the Urizenic authorial position. While Urizen uses the static nature of the book to fix and finalize Eternity, Blake’s bookmaking process removes the stasis and fixity of the book by eliminating exact duplication from the mechanical reproduction of a text, thereby disrupting the authorial power that exact duplication fosters.

2

BLAKE’S ATTACK AGAINST the authorial power derived from the fixity of the book can be seen by examining the extant copies of the poem. At present, eight copies of Urizen are known to exist, yet none of the copies are identical.2 Not only are the full-page illustrations placed in different orders in the different copies, but the plates of text also appear in different positions in all but two copies, labeled D and G. And even these copies are strikingly different from each other because the word “first” in the title, The First Book of Urizen, is erased from the title page, “Preludium,” and colophon in copy G, dismissing the notion of a sequential series of books of Urizen and leading modern editors to put the word “first” in brackets. Rather than one book in eight copies, there seem to be, rather, eight different books of Urizen, each with its own, somewhat different version of the Urizen story. As Terence Allan Hoagwood notes,

These irreducible differences, the stubborn material discreteness of each work, and even of each plate, are signs of the materiality of the texts. These differences are, with or without Blake’s intention, signs that art is work—a practice, something done—and not a set of ideas. (100)

Each finished “copy” of Urizen comes to the reader as a separate work of art, a separate retelling, or performance, of the Urizen story. Rather than one version presented to all readers in identically produced copies, a situation that could be seen as consolidating the author’s authority over the presentation and reception of the story, Urizen is told, or performed, uniquely in each “copy,” placing more emphasis on the presentation than on the presenter or the ideas presented. The variations in these performances diminish the author’s monopoly on the production of meaning and afford readers the opportunity to interpret the story of Urizen creatively as they negotiate these variations.

The variations that Blake builds into each copy of Urizen are numerous and striking, altering significantly the reader’s experience of each version of the poem. Much of the critical speculation has focused mainly on the interpretive possibilities provided by the changing positions of the illustrations.3

2. For bibliographical descriptions of Urizen, including variant orders of plates and locations of copies, see Bentley, Blake Books (166-85), Erdman’s textual notes to The Complete Poetry and Prose (E 804), Erdman’s edition of The Illuminated Blake (182), and McQuail (2-4).

3. For the most complete discussion of the pictorial variants, see McQuail (14-40).
In commenting on the order of the illustrations in his textual notes to the poem, David V. Erdman hypothesizes that in later versions, Blake moves the full-page illustrations further away from their simplest textual referents, developing a more sophisticated pictorial commentary on the poem. The picture of Urizen in chains (plate 22 in the standard order), for example, is appropriate to the text on plates 8-13 where Los chains Urizen. This plate follows plate 13 in copy C and precedes it in B. In A, however, the same illustration appears right after the title page and the “Preludium,” foreshadowing the later events of the poem that are the result of Urizen’s books (E 804). As Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson have noted, many of the designs themselves are altered from copy to copy as well. In copy G, the illustration of Los in fire shows him with his eyes open and anguished and his mouth open as if howling, but in copy B, Los’s eyes are narrowed and tearful and his mouth is turned downward into a frown (plate 16), suggesting an association with Urizen in chains whose eyes are closed and mouth frowning (plate 22). This association is further enhanced in copy A, since Los is pictured with a beard, suggesting that Los has become even more like Urizen (Easson and Easson 89-90). As the illustrations appear in different positions with various alterations, they evoke different associations with the text and contribute to the individualized nature of each copy.

More striking than rearrangements of the illustrations, however, are the variations in the arrangement of text plates, an aspect of the poem that has not been adequately explored. Although the plates containing text are often considered as keeping “the same relative order in every copy,” as W. J. T. Mitchell has suggested (137; emphasis added), each variation in text plate arrangement dramatically shifts the emphasis from one element of the Urizen story to others, yet none of the textual variations greatly disrupts the text’s syntactical continuity. These variations do sometimes confuse the chapter and verse numbering, but every copy has some disruption in the chapter and verse number sequence (Easson and Easson 42). The most obvious variation involves the presence or absence of plate 4 in any particular copy’s arrangement of plates. Plate 4, which appears only in copies A, B, and C, contains Urizen’s famous speech to the Eternals and the presentation of his book of laws. At the end of plate 3, the scene shifts with the sound of a trumpet, and as if assembling for Urizen’s address,

myriads of Eternity,
Muster around the bleak deserts. (U 3.44-4.1)

Urizen then makes his pronouncements, and as he unclasps his books to the rage of the Eternals, he unleashes the seven deadly sins to enforce his laws and thwart any response to them:

4. The order of the text plates in the Erdman edition is as follows: 1 (the Title page), 2 (the “Preludium”), 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 28, Plates 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27 are full-plate illustrations and account for the gaps in the text plate numbering. I provide this list as a frame of reference for the following discussion.
But Eternals beheld his vast forest
O'er ages he lay, clad, unknown,
Brooding shut in the deep, all o'er
The petrific abominable chaos

5. His cold horror silent, dark Urizen
Prepared; his ten thousands of thunders
Raged in pianated array stretched out across
The drear world, in the rolling wheels

6. Space of sound, would in his cloud
His hills of stirréd morn, in his mountains
3. Earth was not: nor globes of atmosphere

Bentley Plate 3

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The inclusion of plate 4 places Urizen’s book of law as the main cause for the rupture in Eternity and de-emphasizes his separation as only a prerequisite for the creation of his book. In copies A, B, and C, Urizen’s withdrawal from the community of the Eternals causes some apprehension, but the imposition of his law in plate 4 ignites the Eternals’ rage and creates the unbridgeable gulf between the world Urizen has created for himself and the rest of Eternity.

Without plate 4, however, the emphasis shifts away from Urizen’s laws to his separation and his silence as the cause for the rupture in Eternity. Instead of “All the seven deadly sins of the soul / In living creations appear’d / In the flames of eternal fury. (U 4.49-5.2)5

myriads of Eternity,
In living creations appear’d
In the flames of eternal fury.
(U 3.44-5.2; plate 4 omitted)

With the removal of plate 4, the scene changes from the myriads of Eternity mustering “around the bleak desarts” to hear Urizen speak to the myriads reacting fiercely to his intractable separation (U 4.1). In this sequence, the Eternals respond with rage not to Urizen’s discourse but to his absence from Eternity. Nowhere else but on plate 4 does Urizen speak, and the only reference to his law appears on plate 23, where “he saw / That no flesh nor spirit could keep / His iron laws one moment” (U 23.24-26). Also, the seven deadly sins appear only on plate 4, so obviously they could not factor in the enforcement of Urizen’s law. The only references to Urizen’s book occur pictorially in the title page and plate 5, and without the text of plate 4 to indicate a direct connection to Urizen’s book, the poem seems to emphasize not Urizen’s iron law but his separation and silence as the main cause for the rupture within Eternity and the Eternals’ failure to stop it. The inclusion or exclusion of plate 4, therefore, drastically alters the performance that any individual copy represents in the telling of the Urizen story and radically alters the poem’s reception from copy to copy.

The altering of the Urizen story continues in copies C and J with the manipulations of text plates 7 and 8 (E 804). In copy C, both plates are omitted, and in copy J, plate 7 remains but plate 8 is omitted. Rather than the well-known two Chapters IV, both of these copies contain only a single

5. Erdman notes that the deletion of 3.44 and 5.1-2 might facilitate the removal of plate 4, but these lines are only marked for deletion, yet not deleted, in copy A, a version that contains plate 4 (E 805). These markings in A reinforce the idea of a work unfinalized by mechanical reproduction.
Chapter IV, since plate 8 contains the first Chapter IV in the "standard" order and the other Chapter IV begins on plate 10. In both C and J, furthermore, these text plate omissions change Los's role in the Eternals' reaction against Urizen. In the standard ordering of the plates, a reader sees that as plate 5 ends, the violent upheaval in Eternity has begun with the Eternals sending fire over Urizen's world and Urizen working to keep the fires at bay. Los is sent to keep watch for the Eternals and to confine Urizen. In plate 6, Los is "howling around the dark Demon: / And cursing his lot," suggesting that Los is reluctant to perform his assignment (U 6.2-3). Then Urizen is rent from Los's side, making permanent Urizen's separation from Eternity, and as Urizen lies in "a stony sleep," the Eternals declare that this sleep is the sleep of death (U 6.7). Plate 7 describes Los's astonishment at the separation, and plate 8 shows Los's reaction as he forms "nets & gins" to bind "the changes of Urizen" "[w]ith rivets of iron & brass" (U 8.7, 12, 11). In plate 10, Los continues to labor unceasingly, forging chains to bind Urizen and to divide "the horrible night into watches" (U 10.10). Plates 7 and 8, then, provide a motivation for Los's intense, Urizenic work in that his fear over the separation of himself and Urizen sets him to confining Urizen. Without 7 and 8 in copy C, however, Los appears more as a reluctant servant or agent of the Eternals sent to confine Urizen as ordered and does not seem to operate out of fear. He simply curses his lot and labors to forge chains to confine Urizen. The removal of 7 and 8, then, places the responsibility of binding Urizen on the Eternals since they assign a reluctant Los to perform this task. In copy J, however, Los's role in the binding of Urizen seems more active because the inclusion of plate 7 shows Los agonizing over the separation with Urizen "Till Los rouz'd his fires, affrighted / At the formless unmeasurable death" (U 7.8-9). Then on plate 10, Los is seen chaining Urizen, which rousing his fires would help him accomplish. Although Los's role in binding Urizen is not quite as emphatically portrayed in copy J as it is in other versions that include both plates 7 and 8, the text on plate 7 shows Los to be more active in the binding of Urizen than he is in copy C without either plates 7 or 8. With the manipulations of plates 7 and 8, copies C and J give completely different versions of the events surrounding Los's binding of Urizen, changing the reader's perception of Los and his role in the Eternals' backlash against Urizen. Even though Blake uses a process of mechanical reproduction to produce the books of Urizen, he continues to undermine the authorial position that print technology fosters in copies C and J by creating alternative versions of Los's responsibility in the binding of Urizen.

The textual variants continue in copies B and F with the reversal of text plates 8 and 10 (E 804), altering the reader's perception by showing Los's

6. The omissions of plates 7 and 8 or of plate 8 only do not cause any disruption in the reading of the text. Plates 6 and 7 continue Chapter III and end with complete sentences, and both 8 and 10 begin with the duplicate Chapter IV headings. Chapter III can end on either plate 7 or 8, and 10 begins a new Chapter IV.
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actions as much more clearly Urizenic. In the standard configuration, Los becomes frightened because Urizen has split from Los's side on plates 6 and 7, and he begins on plate 8 to forge chains and fetters that confine Urizen in a body, as we have seen. This process, which runs continuously from 10 through 13 in other copies, is interrupted after plate 10 in B and F by plate 8, which in this reordering serves to reemphasize Los's fright as it parenthetically explains that these fetters are the "nets & gins" associated with Los's backlash against Urizen. The reversal of 8 and 10 reinforces Los's fear and his responsibility for the binding of Urizen because the reader learns of Los's role twice, on plate 7 and again on plate 8 as it follows 10. With this reversal, the reader still receives the impression in plate 7 that Los binds Urizen out of fear, but this impression is doubled when 8 follows 10 instead of 7. In copies B and F, and possibly E (see note 7), the arrangement of text plates seems to implicate Los more strongly as an agent against Urizen, creating a new possibility for interpretation.

A final reordering of the text occurs in copy A where plate 15 is removed from the standard order and placed after plate 18. Although Erdman attributes this arrangement to a binder's error (E 805), the continuity of the text is in no way compromised and, in fact, supports the change easily. In plate 13, Los ceases his labors when he realizes that he, too, has been "[c]ut off from life & light," and he begins to pity Urizen (U 13.42). His pity creates a new division that, at the end of 13, is characterized as "a round globe of blood / Trembling upon the Void" (U 13.58-59). When 15 follows 13 in the standard order, the division of the globe of blood from Los appears directly related to Los's division from Urizen: "Thus the Eternal Prophet was divided / Before the death-image of Urizen" (U 15.1-2). Plate 15 ends with a description of how the Eternals view Los and the divided world: "And now seen, now obscur'd, to the eyes / Of Eternals, the visions remote / Of the dark separation appear'd. / As glasses discover Worlds" (U 15.6-9). Not until the next plate of text, plate 18, does the reader learn that this dividing globe of blood forms Enitharmon, the first female. The reader learns only after the division takes place in front of Urizen that it is not a separation between Los and Urizen but a separation that divides Los from himself. Blake strongly emphasizes the presence of Urizen as this division occurs and only later clarifies the result of the division. In the 13, 18, 15 arrangement in A, however, the reader first sees the division of Los and Enitharmon, followed by the fact that this division occurs in front of Urizen's death-image, a fact that has less to do with the division of Los and Enitharmon than it does in the 13, 15, 18 arrangement in the other copies. In the arrangement in copy A, Blake stresses

7. Erdman indicates that 8 may possibly follow 10 in copy E as well, but he relies on Keynes and Wolf, William Blake's Illuminated Books: A Census, for the plate order in E, and could not verify the order personally as he has done for the other six copies known at the time of his examination (E 804). Erdman, though, has uncovered errors in Keynes and Wolf in copies he has examined. Both 8 and 10 begin with the "Chapter IV" heading, as I have noted, and end in complete sentences with Blake's verse numbers 6. Plate 11 begins with verse 7, so the reversal of 8 and 10 still maintains the text's continuity.
the division of Los and the first female and only later notes that it takes place before Urizen. By reversing 15 and 18 in copy A, Blake creates a new twist that characterizes the creation of the first female as a function of Los's own feelings of pity and not of any direct Urizenic influence. Instead of the division of Los having a specific connection to the separation of Urizen, copy A emphasizes the problem of the divisions that can take place within the individual independent of others' influence. As with the other shifts in the ordering of text plates, the reversal of plates 15 and 18 creates a variation in the Urizen story that makes the reading of the mechanically reproduced text a unique experience and undermines the author's control over the creation of meaning.

3

As an engraver associated with the book production industry, Blake would have been acutely aware of the implications that print technology had for the public and the culture. His training as an artist-craftsman, as Stephen Prickett has noted, readied him for an occupation that was already in a precarious and declining position, since by the 1790s it was threatened by newer, faster, and cheaper technologies of graphic reproduction, making the skills of the individual craftsman obsolete. This circumstance was exacerbated for Blake by the fact that the man to whom he was apprenticed, James Basire, was conspicuously old-fashioned in both his style and his methods (61). Having to compete at a disadvantage with these technological advances probably caused Blake to view new mechanical book production methods with disdain. Blake probably viewed the very terminology of the printing press with a degree of irony, as Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson have discussed. In the vocabulary of the type foundry, each piece of type was called a “body,” and the raised letter on the body was called a “face.” A notch at the other end of the body, called a “foot,” locked the body, along with hundreds of other bodies, in the “justified lines” of a page within a “frame,” and the frame was then placed on the press stone within a “coffin.” These terms evoke the kind of stern, even deadening, regimentation that was required to produce a fixed text (81-82). They also intimate what Blake probably saw as the subordination of many individuals, in both the text’s production and its reception, to the service of one author. Instead of individual performances recreating the text anew, a multitude of individuals here again works to produce thousands of exact copies of a single book mechanically, a single performance by one author and the only performance for thousands of readers to witness. The frame of the type foundry fixes an author’s voice, giving it a potential authority that only print technology could, and at the same time severely limiting the creativity of those individuals involved in the production process as well as that of the readers.

Blake’s own production process, however, responds to this cultural shift and returns the performance aspect to mechanically reproduced texts through the eight different tellings of the Urizen story that the eight different “copies”
represent. In his comments about the necessity of individuality in a work of art, Blake seems to make a parallel suggestion that each version of his books must also be produced as an individual work. Blake writes in his *Public Address*, "There is not because there cannot be any difference of Effect in the Pictures of Rubens & Rembrandt when you have seen one of their Pictures you have seen All.... their Effects are in Every Picture the same Mine are in Every Picture different" (E 579). To follow the course of Rubens or Rembrandt, according to Blake, is to "<turn> that which is Soul & Life into a Mill or Machine." Furthermore, "A Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art it is Destructive of Humanity & of Art" (E 575). The exact duplication of mechanical reproduction, it would seem, would deprive Blake's books, his works of art, of their humanity. As Stephen Leo Carr notes,

Blake's printmaking process ... is ... a form of reproduction that breaks free from simple repetition. The initial invention is always open to an execution that can substantively alter its configurations, to a new articulation that may depart in unpredictable ways from other versions. (196)

As Blake executes each new version of *Urizen*, he thereby turns each copy of the book into an individual performance, producing eight different, original copies under a similar, though not identical, title and undermining the cultural trends that mass-produced book production fostered into the eighteenth century. Blake's bookmaking process reintroduces performance into the experience of reading mechanically reproduced printed matter by making each "copy" of his book a separate telling of the Urizen story. The variations in each retelling reestablish the reader's position as necessary for the creation of meaning in print culture.

With these textual variations, Blake removes the central authority that mechanical printing can provide for the authorial position. Instead of producing a multitude of exact copies univocally asserting the author's "truth," Blake uses his own bookmaking process to undo the possible restraints of mechanical reproduction by creating a new version of *Urizen* with each copy. With eight versions of the same story, no copy contains the complete, "correct" version of the Urizen story, but each contributes a new approach to it as eight different voices, each describing its own version of an event. Instead of a single author making a single performance through exact copies, Blake's "copies" constitute eight different performances and restore to the mechanically reproduced text all the accidents and variation of oral presentation that shift authority away from the authorial position and return emphasis to the performance itself and to the moment of its reception. In doing so, Blake revitalizes the otherwise static book with the kind of dynamic existence that texts enjoy in an oral or manuscript culture. In telling the story of the traditional print culture author, Blake also performs its undoing.
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Works Cited


