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**From Honest Indignation to Aged Ignorance: The Creation and Subversion of Law  
through Printing in the Works of William Blake**

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Abstract of the Thesis

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The thesis explains how William Blake saw the printed word as the main proponent of the oppressive reign of state religion. In Blake's mythology, printing is an integral part of the creation and fall of mankind. I argue that while Blake saw the printed word as something that will spread aged ignorance he also knew that it was what can free mankind from it. I will support my argument by analyzing the use of printing in *The Book of Urizen*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Europe: A Prophecy*. I will also examine the deluge of printed material that was surging through London in the 1790s, while Blake was writing his prophecies, which caused subversion of the English church and government. I end my argument by showing how Blake used his own method of printing to make *The Book of Urizen* a book with no definite form, the opposite of the solid laws of God. Blake uses printing, both his own method and the knowledge he gains from the availability of new works, in order to subvert a system that was created by printing.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Honest Indignation and the Production of Law.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Narrowing Perception in the Printing House in Hell.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Aged Ignorance and the Rise of Honest Indignation.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Subversion through Print in the 1790s.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Causing the Solid to Fluctuate.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>37</b>

## **Introduction**

William Blake's *The Book of Urizen* shows how mankind came to be oppressed by the limiting system of state religion. The first thing created, which allowed this system to proliferate, was a book. The act of printing is what takes the infinite that is allowed to mankind through our minds and narrows it into finite words on pages. Urizen creates his book of laws after he has a moment of honest indignation. Honest indignation is when a person's mind is cleared of the earthly perceptions that cloud our senses and the infinite can be viewed; this view allows us to sense what some may call "the voice of God." It is through this voice of righteous anger that people will speak out against injustice and claim that they know the right way to live. Urizen feels honest indignation and wants to guide people on how to live, but he does not simply speak, he writes. It is clear that Blake believed the solid, written word was what caused the oppressive system of Urizen to spread, but it is also the written word that frees mankind from that system. Man's perceptions are narrowed by print, but also expanded. This can be seen by looking at the creation of the law in *The Book of Urizen*, the printing house in Hell in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the spread of the system and the rise of its opposition in *Europe: A Prophecy*, and how printing was used to subvert the church and government of England during the 1790s. Blake displays the cycle of mankind's perceptions: we move from earthly and narrow, to heavenly and infinite, and back to narrow. This cycle is fueled by the transmission of knowledge, which is dependent on print.

## Honest Indignation and the Production of Law

*The Book of Urizen*, while a parody of Genesis, reinventing the story of creation and the fall, answers a specific question:

... what Demon  
Hath form'd this abominable void  
This soul-shudd'ring vacuum? (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 3:3-5)

The void in question, the “shadow of horror” that has “risen in Eternity,” is the Net of Religion, which Urizen weaves and casts over humanity at the end of the book. The narrative tells of creation and fall in order to explain how the oppressive forces of state religion and tyrannical government regimes gained dominance. Jon Mee states that many Blake critics cite *The Book of Urizen* as a “retreat from politics” and that they attempt to “evacuate politics from the texts” (Mee 2). Mee disagrees with this reading: “The experience of reading the poem is rather different if we recognize the centrality of the Bible to the Revolution controversy.” The poem is not simply a retreat from politics into the realms of myth and metaphysics. It is the exploration of how the politics of Blake’s time came into existence, their reason for being and how the system of the British government is built. By subverting the God of Genesis and his laws Blake points out the oppression that has proliferated through organized religion, which then came to dominate politics.

Urizen, as the figure of the law-making god, is not the only one responsible for this oppression. After Blake asks his initial question in Chapter I he then answers:

... Some said  
'It is Urizen.' (Blake, *Urizen* Pl 3:5-6)

The fact that only “some said” the void was made by Urizen brings a doubt whether this is true or not. It is possible that other imagined people in Blake’s world would say another of the

Eternals made the shadow of horror. The most obvious choice would be Los, since he is the only other Eternal identified, and because of the various actions he takes throughout the book. Urizen creates the solid laws, which come to be the commandments of state religion, but Los fashions the definite body of Urizen, anthropomorphizing him, and limiting the human form to a body; this body is in contrast to the expansive, indefinite form of Eternity, which is the ideal state of mankind. Los pities Urizen after creating his body and Enitharmon, Los's wife and the embodiment of Pity, is born. He becomes so consumed with keeping Enitharmon for himself that he abandons his sanctioned mission of watching over Urizen. When Urizen is stuck in a stony sleep the cries of Los's son, Orc, wake him up, allowing him to continue propagating his laws. Orc is seen as the fire of revolution, the one who will eventually fight against Urizen's tyranny, but Los and his wife breed other children. In Blake's earlier prophecies, specifically *Europe: A Prophecy* and *The Song of Los*, these children are portrayed as the ones who maintain Urizen's system on earth. Prophecy literally begets the oppression of priest-craft and monarchs. It is because of the Eternal Prophet that the Primeval Priest's reign becomes so powerful.

After he states that some say Urizen has formed the shadow of horror Blake continues:

...unknown, abstracted,  
brooding secret, the dark power hid. (6-7)

In the literal sense we know that it is Urizen who physically builds the net of religion, but, since the dark power responsible is hidden, there remains the possibility that it is not Urizen who has created the shadow. "Abstracted" can refer to both Urizen and/or Los. They are the only two abstracted from Eternity in the poem; the other Eternals remain a singularity who are never mentioned individually. This abstraction is two-fold: it is their fall from Eternity, becoming separate entities, but it is also the ability to identify them while still part of Eternity. The

physical division from Eternity does not take place until Chapter III when Urizen is rent from Los's side. Before this moment they are recognizable as themselves while the other myriads of eternity simply remain the nameless Eternals, and this identification persists through the entirety of the work.

Abstraction is not the only aspect that these two figures share. The fact that this hidden, dark power is brooding gives them another common attribute. Saree Makdisi writes that "The Urizen books are concerned with one thing and one thing only: production—the production of time; the production of space; the production of worlds, of earth, of animals, of humans, of organs, of organisms, of language, of religion, of images, of meaning, of books; the production of production; the production of life itself" (Makdisi 263). This central theme of production, with all of its various products, shows that the adjective "brooding" can be connected to Urizen and Los as well. Urizen broods through self-contemplation, internal conflict with his own desires. This strain of thought causes him to write his laws and give birth to the "wide world of solid obstruction" (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 4:23). Los broods through creation. One of his first actions is to coalesce the disparate pieces of Urizen into a definite, bodily form, literally birthing him. He also creates a large family throughout the poem. His emanation, Enitharmon, splits from Los's body and then gives birth to Orc. Enitharmon is also said to have given birth to an "enormous race" (Pl. 20:45). Los broods throughout the poem by begetting this family. Ambiguity is built as to who has raised the shadow in Eternity by the lines stating:

...Some said  
'It is Urizen,' But unknown abstracted,  
brooding secret, the dark power hid. (Pl. 3:5-7)

The relationship of Urizen and Los is natural given the close connection between prophecy and priesthood. Los is a poet, the power of the imagination; this is what makes him the

Eternal Prophet, as opposed to Urizen who is more concerned with setting limits, imposing law and maintaining order. The imagination is what connects people to the divine, allowing them to see the eternity that is available to them through vision. This is expressed by Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* when the narrator dines with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. Blake asks them how they can dare say that God spoke to them and Isaiah answers, “I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover’d the infinite in every thing, and I was then perswaded, & remain confirm’d, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God” (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 12). It is through the imagination that the finite boundaries of the senses can be broken and Eternity can be viewed. The ability to speak out in favor of the rights of mankind and against injustice is the true voice of God. For Blake this skill comes from the Poetic Genius of man. Los represents this human faculty and he expands the organic senses. The ability to tap into the Poetic Genius is not inherent in all people; it is allocated to the prophets and poets. One may be able to see Eternity and the infinite, but most people continue to have their senses firmly rooted in the ground, only able to perceive the earthly. The prophet may begin with honest indignation, expressing the vision of the infinite, but this can ultimately lead to oppression: the expansion of the Urizenic system.

According to Isaiah, prophecy becomes an act of persuasion. The voice of God, honest indignation, becomes an argument to sway people to believe that something is true. Blake asks Isaiah if “a firm perswasion that a thing is so, makes it so?”, and Isaiah answers that poets believe that it does. Solid, immovable truth is not the goal of prophecy; rather it is a way to change the opinion of the people. In doing this the perception of one man becomes certitude; it becomes what Urizen strives to create: “a solid without fluctuation” (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 4:11). The righteous anger of the prophet becomes deified, and what was once Poetic Genius becomes

God. Prophecy turns into state religion, and it becomes the duty of the followers of that religion to persuade others around them that their perception is correct. The prophet Ezekiel expresses this to Blake when he says:

It was this that our great poet King David desired so fervently & invokes so pathetically, saying by this he conquers enemies & governs kingdoms. And we so loved our God that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled. From these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the Jews.

This... like all firm persuasions, is come to pass, for all nations believe the Jews' code and worship the Jews' god, and what greater subjection can be?  
(Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 13)

What begins as the ability to view the infinite becomes the source of war, hatred and tyranny.

Various peoples with different interpretations of the Poetic Genius come to be at odds with each other. The proliferation of the Judeo-Christian system becomes the greatest form of subjection because of its laws, which restrain human desire, and because it limits the expression of the Poetic Genius to one, omnipotent God. By writing in the form of prophecy Blake is breaking away from the Judeo-Christian view while communicating his own honest indignation.

Blake's prelude uses the epic invocation of the muse to set up *The Book of Urizen* as a prophecy. Rather than Blake calling to the muses he writes, "Eternals, I hear your call gladly" (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 2:5). He is contacted by them. The Poetic Genius, the voice of "honest indignation," is propelling Blake to recite the genesis of the Net of Religion. Blake describes the "call" he is getting as "dark visions of torment" (7). His claim that this prophecy is a vision is in contrast to the constant reminder that what is going on is unseen and unknown. The chapter begins with a question, attempts to answer it with by saying that some say "It is Urizen," but then reminds us that the answer is "unknown" because the dark power is hidden. The actions

taken by Urizen in this chapter are obscured as well, such as when Urizen divides time from space:

Times on times he divided, & measur'd  
Space by space in his ninefold darkness,  
Unseen, unknown... (Pl. 3:8-10).

The activity happening in non-sensory Eternity is described as being:

unseen in tormenting passion  
an activity unknown and horrible. (19-20)

This persistent repetition of unseen/unknown connects to Isaiah's comments in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. While Blake claims that the poem is a received vision it is easily recognizable that there is nothing visual about it. Like Isaiah, Blake sees and hears nothing, but is speaking with honest indignation.

While Isaiah says that he saw nothing, but only experienced honest indignation, Blake has the same feeling; the first chapter of *The Book of Urizen* is unseen, but Blake adds to the prophetic act by etching the designs that accompany the verses. The title page of the book presents Urizen calmly and blindly copying his own laws, but the rest of the book presents us with images of torment, of fires raging and figures prostrate and curled in fetal positions. Edward B. Hungerford says, "The function of the poet is to set down, as from a divine dictation, the visions which enter the imagination. But since words are inadequate and faulty in the depiction of a vision, the artist supplements the poet by drawing or painting the visions exactly as they appear" (Hungerford 37). The images that appear in *Urizen* are not meant to be direct representations of the events that are taking place within the poem. They are meant to reinforce that what we are reading is the account of violent, flaming indignation, both from Urizen and from the Eternals. If the plates do not contain figures being tormented in flames than they are

being bound by chains or within caverns. Blake provides us with images of the flames of indignation, equal to his own resentment of the oppressive system that he is speaking out against, or images of the binding that this system causes. The designs on the plates are meant to underscore that what we are seeing is torment that leads to the oppressed existence that we have on earth.

Blake is highly aware of the possible consequences of prophecy, and how the expression of honest indignation has come to affect the world. It would be expected that Los, as the Eternal Prophet, would be the first to speak out in this way, but he is not; the first to speak is the Primeval Priest, Urizen. He claims that he has created these laws through “fightings and conflicts dire” (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 4:27). His psychological battle allows him to identify sin, desire, which he feels plagues all of the Eternals. The invention of the law is not meant to be malicious; it is not a hateful act of conquest, through which Urizen can appoint himself supreme ruler of the universe. He has legitimate, sincere concerns for the well-being of the Eternals. He asks:

Why will you die O Eternals?  
Why live in unquenchable burnings? (12-3)

The thought of living with “unquenchable burnings” is the equivalent of death to Urizen. He wants to keep them alive and safe; his “conflicts dire” are for the good of all Eternity. This sentiment is consistent with Isaiah’s notion of prophecy in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; Urizen is speaking with honest indignation against the desires that burn through all of Eternity. But Urizen takes it too far; he believes that his perception is the ultimate truth. This leads him to his decree at the end of Chapter II:

One command, one joy, one desire,

One curse, one weight, one measure  
One King, one God, one Law. (38-40)

As Ezekiel states in *The Marriage*, what began as righteous resentment quickly turned into a system of oppression, and, like Isaiah, Urizen “cared not for consequences but wrote” (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 12).

Urizen’s disregard of the consequences is made clear on the title-page of *The Book of Urizen*. Mee describes the plate: “Urizen is a figure associated with the process of transcription and the written law, most obviously on the title-page of *The Book of Urizen*, where he is shown as a blind scribe copying from one book to another without seeing what he writes” (Mee 103). The image of Urizen blindly transcribing shows how little concern he has for what he is writing. He is certain about the validity of his laws and his own authority as their creator; there is no need for him to contemplate further that which he has already set in stone. The only action left is to copy his books blindly in order to insure their proliferation throughout the world, which he does not see while engaged in his task of transcription. This depiction of Urizen also makes him into the archetype of the priest and king. The same action is taken in *Europe: A Prophecy* when Blake mentions that these codes of law are the same ones “that Kings & Priests had copied on Earth” (Blake, *Europe* Pl. 11:4). As the Primeval Priest, Urizen blindly copies his own laws in the same fashion as his followers do on earth.

The writing of the laws is the most significant act of production in the poem. The law is the first product that leads to the formation of the Net of Religion. Urizen frequently states that he has done this writing by himself, as if there is a reason to doubt this fact. He first introduces his new set of laws by saying:

Here alone I in books formd of metals  
Have written the secrets of wisdom. (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 4:24-5)

He then forces his laws on the newly formed world and once again states that these laws were “written in my solitude” (33). This continual stress of being the sole author of these laws shows Urizen boasting as much as it shows his reassuring himself; he has a need to proclaim his dominance over the world and to show that he alone is responsible for bringing the order that he feels is so necessary. But the notion that the holy law comes before the vision, the priesthood before the prophecy, does not fit. It is important to remember that at this point Urizen has not fallen yet; he is still a part of Eternity. There is no true solitude for him to retreat to since the Eternals remain a singularity.

The production of the laws is not a solitary act; it does not matter how many times Urizen claims to have produced them alone. As stated above, the creation of the Urizenic system is as prophetic as it is priestly. Following Makdisi’s definition of Eternity as “a state in which thought and life, body and mind, are unified and coextensive, strengthening and reaffirming each other” (Makdisi 262) it is clear that there are multiple forces at work during Urizen’s production of law, since Eternity has not yet split. Given the prophetic aspects of Urizen’s conflicts, his ability to speak with honest indignation, it is consistent that the assistant in this production be Los.

Los’s part in the forging of the laws can be seen in Urizen’s description of his conflicts. He comes to create and dominate the world through a systemic and specific order. He says:

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. (*BoU* Pl. 4:14-23)

There are three important aspects to this conflict. 1) By conquering fire, wind, water and earth Urizen has managed to dominate the four classical elements that make up the world. He has become the master of the physical universe. 2) These four elements also make up the four humors—blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm—which were believed to be the four substances that maintain equilibrium within the human body. Since the first book that Urizen writes is the “Book/ Of eternal brass” (32-3), the book of sociology, as S. Foster Damon defines it, control over these substances is vital to Urizen’s plan. Urizen wants to form “a solid without fluctuation,” the ability to stabilize the four humors means that he can create beings that are static: maintaining evenly formed, healthy bodies and personalities. 3) All four of these elements are necessary for blacksmithing. It is in this third aspect that Los enters the picture (Damon 424).

Within Blake’s mythology, Los is identified as a blacksmith. He is commonly imagined with his hammer in hand and as “a manual labourer at his forge whose struggle to overcome Urizen is protracted and sometimes even counter-productive” (Mee 185). Los as a blacksmith plays a vital role in the creation of Urizen’s system before the struggle between Urizen and Los even begins. Makdisi says, “In laying claim to ‘Nature’s wide womb,’ Urizen lays claim to the foundation of production itself—the *fons et origo* of all makings, the primal factory of life as production” (Makdisi 268). By taking control of all forms of production Urizen has made himself master of the forge, even though it is where Los’s work is done. The depiction of Urizen’s conflict, as cited above, shows the metallurgic process through which he has made his laws, a process that is normally identified with Los.

Urizen first takes control of fire, necessary for heating metal. The next step is conquering wind, which Urizen says he condenses into torrents. This image is equivalent to a smith’s

bellows, condensing air in order to fuel the flames. The water is then used to cool the shaped metal, and from this water arises a newly formed solid object. Not only does Urizen's conflict suggest the process of metallurgy, but also that his laws are written in a book of brass. He does not use a single, pure metal; he specifically uses an alloy, a combination of two metals. In order for Urizen to create the substance on which his laws are written, and to create world, it is necessary that a forge be used. Los, as the blacksmith, is integral to the production of the Urizenic system. It is by use of the tools of the prophet that the priest can create the system that will give him control over humanity, and it is by printing that his control is solidified.

## Narrowing Perception in the Printing House in Hell

In conjunction with Urizen's mode of production, it is important to look at Blake's own ideas about the printing of books. As seen above, prophecy can be molded into the tool of the priest, used to create a system that imposes limitations and attempts to create order. The prophecy begins as one person's connection to the infinite, the ability to perceive that which exists outside of the earthbound senses. This expression of honest indignation is then perceived as the voice of God, written down and codified into a system of rules. The transformation from oral expression of emotion, meant to persuade people to act or think a certain way, into the written Word solidifies what was once without form and limitless.

Another "Memorable Fancy" from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* expresses Blake's thoughts on the process of printing. We can also see that metallurgy is an important part of this process as it was to Urizen when he creates his book of brass. Blake's narrator states that he was in a "Printing house in Hell & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation" (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 15). The first aspect of the printing house that we are given is the transmission of knowledge to future generations. Experience itself is not necessary if all the collective knowledge of the ages can be passed down through printing. The acquisition of knowledge is nothing more than reading what has been set down in type.

Blake continues to describe the production of books by segmenting the printing house into six chambers. The first is inhabited by a "Dragon-Man, clearing away the rubbish from a cave's mouth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave." The first step leading to the transmission of knowledge is to clear away all of the "rubbish" that blocks perception through the senses. June Singer calls this the "debris of materialism" (Singer 133). Singer explains that the other dragons that hollow the cave are "creatures of fancy" that continually

expand the imagination, allowing much more to be taken in through perception. This echoes Blake's earlier statement in *The Marriage* that "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 14). The first chamber of Hell's printing house is a cavern which needs to be cleansed of all the rubbish that blocks perception. That which was once a narrow chink becomes expanded through the transmission of knowledge.

The second chamber contains a viper that wraps itself around the chamber while other serpents are "adorning it with gold, silver, and precious stones" (Pl. 15). It is necessary that Blake use the figure of the serpent when discussing the transmission of knowledge since in Genesis it was the serpent that first began this process by tempting Eve with the apple from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Since all that has been cleared away within the printing house thus far is the rubbish that prohibits perception, the serpent would also necessarily be the second step because the senses would still be rooted to the earth. As Singer puts it, "The lower wisdom of mankind lurks in the chthonic depths, bound to earth and unable to free itself. The snake is in continuous intercourse with the earth mother, ever penetrating her and ever emerging from her caverns—thus symbolizing the primal instincts of man" (Singer 133). Singer continues to state that the serpents that adorn the cavern with jewels are there only to tempt people with material treasures, continuing to keep people rooted to the ground with the treasures of the earth. In this case those treasures are knowledge, the knowledge available through the finite senses. Perception becomes expanded within these first two chambers but continues to be narrow; it is in the third chamber that the greatest expansion takes place: the expansion of the infinite.

The third chamber is the chamber of air, inhabited by an eagle that causes "the inside of the cave to be infinite" (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 15) This chamber is where prophecy becomes part

of the transmission of knowledge, the ability to perceive the infinite that is outside the cavern of man's perception. Singer explains that this chamber is where "the power of imagination" is "embodied in the great bird: it surpasses time and space and reveals that which is beyond the limit of man's experience" (Singer 134). Not only does this chamber signify man's utilization of the Poetic Genius, but it is also a particular anthropological movement: the historical progression from primitive chthonic gods to the Olympian gods. The ability of the eagle to erase the walls, which had been circled by the serpent, is a necessary action within most mythologies in order for the god of the heavens to gain control over the earth.

This movement from the low, earthly perceptions to a high, heavenly and infinite perception is a common mythological motif, utilized by Blake in his description of the transmission of knowledge. Joseph Campbell describes the different uses of this theme throughout various mythological systems. Blake's description of the coiled serpent elicits the possibility of a distinct image: the ouroboros, the circular image of a snake biting its own tail. This image springs from the ability of the serpent to shed its own skin, giving it the apparent ability to recreate itself. The ouroboros is the representation of the cosmic forces of birth, preservation, destruction and rebirth. The snake seems to embody all these universal forces within one form, making it the master of earthly life. Although Blake does not specifically depict the viper as biting its own tail, the image of a serpent wrapped around an area does bring this image to mind, especially because this chamber represents man's primal state while perception is narrow and only concerned with the riches that can be obtained on earth. The serpent reigned as the dominant figure of the powers of life until the perceptions of mankind changed and began looking upward, to a power that held all dominion over life, death and rebirth (Campbell 9-10). Blake uses this mythological motif, but the printing house in Hell does not end when mankind's

senses reach the infinite, nor does Urizen's reign become solidified because he has conquered the earthly elements.

It is clear that Urizen has gained control over the physical universe when he conquers the four elements, which enables him to create the world; he has become the heavenly god by controlling what is low and earthly. But, even as creator of the world and master of the elements, there are still forces for which he cannot account. This notion can be seen in his inability to form his "solid without fluctuation." The universe cannot be maintained if it is to exist as a static form; in fact, it is impossible for there to ever be a moment of stasis in the universe, whether regarding a small piece of it or the universe as a whole. The continual proliferation of life is regulated by continual movement, as Makdisi puts it, "Even when it inevitably falls short of the Urizenic absolute, however, life in the fallen world is, or threatens to become, regulated life. For the basis of all power in this fallen world (including the very power that constitutes Urizen) is the regulation of life itself" (Makdisi 261). The regulation referred to is the cycle which is symbolized in the ouroboros: destruction and regeneration. Urizen comes to this realization in Chapter VIII of *The Book of Urizen* when he observes that "life liv'd upon death" (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 24:7). The solid form that Urizen wants to create cannot be made. A force regulates the universe, and in order for something to be created, and preserved, something else must be destroyed.

Makdisi says that this regulating force is an aspect of life in the fallen world, but it is most likely an aspect of the universe as a whole. How eternal was Eternity? The creation of the world begins when fire, desire, is devoured:

...consum'd  
Inwards, into a deep world within:  
A void immense, wild, dark & deep,  
Where nothing was, Nature's wide womb. (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 4:14-7)

The process of creation begins when fire is consumed and taken into a womb. Fire is destroyed in order for something new to be born. The fact that Urizen's split from this perfectly balanced state of being was even possible shows that a "solid without fluctuation" is impossible in any world. Urizen's fluctuation within Eternity is what causes him to attempt the forging of such a creation. But Urizen's world, and the laws which he forces upon it, cannot halt the law that had already been put into place. Makdisi says, "Blake's books do not claim to lead to chaos or formless anarchy... but rather to a way of being with which an imposed logic of regulation would be incompatible, unnecessary, redundant: a form-of-life which does not recognize the existence of the law" (Makdisi 262). This is what Urizen realizes when he sees:

...no flesh nor spirit could keep  
His iron laws one moment. (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 24:25-6)

It is useless to impose a set of laws on forms of life that are already governed by something else. The world is made of a constantly shifting stream of energy. Urizen's attempt to halt this flow is futile, but that does not mean that he had no effect on it. After realizing that life feeds upon life, Urizen forms the Net of Religion, and continues his transmission of knowledge.

In the same way that Urizen's struggle for control does not end when he has conquered the earthly elements, the transmission of knowledge does not end in the printing house in Hell after the eagles manage to make the cave infinite. The fourth chamber in the printing house of Hell is filled with "Lions of flaming fire raging around & melting the metals into living fluids." At this point we move to the fifth chamber where "Unnam'd forms... cast the metals into the expanse" (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 15). The jewels which adorned the viper's cavern, the bits of knowledge that man once coveted, are now transformed into liquid. This fluid can be molded into any shape; in the case of the printing house they are molded into letters. In this fifth

chamber what was infinite again becomes finite in the form of type, literally metallic words. After this stage it is possible to make multiple copies of one document, one piece of knowledge, and distribute that knowledge to the world. These solid forms are then passed into the sixth and final chamber where these metals are received by men. These materials then become books and are “arranged in libraries.”

The process of printing began with the finite, narrow senses of mankind. The only available knowledge was that which can be perceived on earth, the experiences of mortal life. It then moved to the infinite, the ability to use the power of the imagination to perceive things that existed far beyond the earthly realm. These infinite experiences are then taken, fashioned into solid metallic pieces, copied onto pages and bound. The entire process is that of going from finite, to infinite, and then back to finite. But the final, finite stage is not that of organic perception, it is transmitted knowledge. There is no more need to learn through one’s own experiences at this point. Anything that can be known can be found bound inside of a library. This is the static nature of the printed word. Someone can set the type of the printer, push out multiple copies of one book and allow the proliferation of inflexible knowledge to begin by entombing these books within a library. These static words are made into something holy, as is Urizen’s book of brass; they are something to be revered, collected, and placed within a temple of knowledge. The set printing is the blind copying of Urizen; it is the deification of the solid Word. The print has been set, and will never need to change.

But if the Word is the Word of God, then why would this be considered the printing house of Hell? It is because the serpent, identified traditionally as Satan, originally tempts mankind with knowledge. When Adam and Eve take the apple, and acquire the knowledge of good and evil, mankind is placed under the eternal dominion of God. Original sin is the product

of the transmission of knowledge. The need for laws, the commandments, is to tell people what is good and what is evil. This knowledge that condemned mankind to Hell is the same knowledge that will lead mankind to salvation. In the case of Urizen, when he creates his laws:

...all seven deadly sins of the soul  
In living creations appear'd  
In flames of eternal fury. (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 4-5: 46, 1-2)

It is only through the knowledge of good and evil that the holy and the sinful come into life. After Urizen's internal battle he claims that his laws were written in "the eternal abode in my holiness" (Pl. 4: 7). The conclusion that Urizen has come to through his own internal debate is that what he affirms of himself is holy, and that what he denies of himself, and fights against, is sinful. Leslie Tannenbaum is correct in saying that "this disintegration of the divine psyche is also emphasized in Blake's reversal of the traditional Christian debate over men's salvation. With the triumph of Justice over Mercy, Blake is asserting that the world was created by a fragmented, imperfect being for the sole purpose of accusing man of sin" (Tannenbaum 210).

The process of printing that Blake wrote of in the *The Marriage* is the same process by which Urizen creates his laws. Before Urizen makes his declaration regarding the creation of his laws, Blake tells us:

The will of the Immortal expanded  
Or contracted his all flexible senses. (Blake, *Urizen* Pl. 3:37-8)

This statement echoes the printing house in Hell because of its movement from contraction to expansion of the senses. Urizen begins as self-closed, his senses are contracted as much as they can be; he only perceives himself while he clears away what he believes to be the rubbish of his own mind. From this point Urizen then has his moment of honest indignation; his senses expand to the infinite, as described by Isaiah in *The Marriage*. Contraction happens again when he

finally writes his laws. He casts the wisdom he has collected in his holiness into the flames and forges a finite solid, the book of eternal brass. This book is then blindly copied on earth by priests, and the transmission of knowledge is complete. Urizen's perception moves from narrow, to infinite, and then quickly back to narrow, finite and solid. All of this is done through processes that can be associated with the Eternal Prophet, the blacksmith, Los. But, the printing house is constantly working, and mankind's perception will turn back to the infinite when the third chamber is reached again.

## Aged Ignorance and the Rise of Honest Indignation

The transmission of knowledge works in a cyclical pattern. Urizen and Los have different roles in this cycle: Los represents the expansion of the senses to the infinite and Urizen represents the contracting of the senses back to a narrow perception. This cycle becomes clear in Blake's poem *Europe: A Prophecy*. When Los first appears in the poem it states:

Again the night is come  
That strong Urthona takes his rest,  
And Urizen unloos'd from chains  
Glow's like a meteor in the distant north. (Blake, *Europe* Pl. 3:9-12)

Unlike the actions in *The Book of Urizen*, the events of *Europe* are happening in Blake's own time, but this particular moment is further in the past, representing a time when mankind would have been closely connected to Eternity, experiencing the infinite and composing the prophecies that would soon come to be the foundation of Urizen's system. Urthona is the prelapsarian form Los. The pure embodiment of the imagination, in the form of Urthona, has come to rest. The time of prophecy and mankind's connection to Eternity has passed, and now Urizen comes to reign. The cyclicity of this moment can be seen from the first word of the lines, "again." In the same fashion as the printing house in Hell, the cycle of Urthona and Urizen can be seen as the constant shifting of expansion and contraction. Urthona rules the day, when there is light to guide mankind, while Urizen rules the night, when the senses are dulled.

When Urizen comes to rule after Urthona has gone to rest, Los, the fallen Urthona, rises to call his son, Orc:

Arise O Orc, from thy deep den,  
First born of Enitharmon rise!  
And we will crown thy head with garlands of the ruddy wine;  
For now thou art bound. (Pl. 4:10-3)

Los attempts to call Orc, the fire of revolution, to fight against the tyranny of Urizen, but this move is foiled by Enitharmon's interruption. Rather than Orc being roused to combat the Urizenic system, Los's other children are called upon to enforce it. Enitharmon calls:

Arise O Rintrah thee I call! & Palamabron thee!  
Go! tell the Human race that Woman's love is Sin:  
That an Eternal life awaits the worms of sixty winters  
In an allegorical abode where existence hath never come;  
Forbid all Joy, & from her childhood shall the little female  
Spread nets in every secret path. (Pl. 5:4-9)

Rintrah is referred to as the "furious king" (Pl. 8:12) and Palamabron is the "horned priest" (3). The two children of the Eternal Prophet are the two figures most closely related to the spread of the Urizenic system, the priest and the king. Enitharmon calls upon them so that they may tell man that "Woman's love is Sin." She wants to hinder mankind from following their desires, in the same way that Urizen's main reason for writing his laws was to rid the world of desire. Urizen sought for a "joy without pain," but now Enitharmon states that they should "Forbid all Joy." Hell is referred to as "an allegorical abode where existence hath never come." Blake makes the point here that there is no Hell, it is simply a place used to explain the pain that one may feel by pursuing their desires. This is akin to Urizen's belief that the Eternals will die by living with "unquenchable burnings."

The children of prophecy are the ones sent out to spread this message. Urizen's book of laws is the book "that Kings & Priests had copied on Earth" (Pl. 11:4). This copying aids in the proliferation of the Urizenic system. The Net of Religion is preserved by Rintrah and Palamabron. The text states:

The youth of England hid in gloom curse the paind heavens, compell'd  
Into the deadly night to see the form of Albion's Angel,  
Their parents brought them forth & aged ignorance preaches canting

On a vast rock, perceived by those senses that are clos'd from thought. (Pl. 12:5-8)

What was once seen as honest indignation has grown over the years into aged ignorance. There is now opposition to the Urizenic system. A new generation, the youth of England, now hide from this system, attempting to break away from the aged ignorance which was being canted through the streets of England.

During the time that the Urizenic system was being spread, Enitharmon had been asleep. She wakes at the end of the prophecy, not realizing that she had slept, and continues to call upon others in order to continue the proliferation of the system of oppression. But the night has ended and “morning ope'd the eastern gate” (Pl 14:35). While Orc had been called by Los at the beginning of the Prophecy, he had been held back by Enitharmon's calls to her other children, but now that the sun is rising he can no longer be restrained. Blake writes:

But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,  
Shot from the heights of Enitharmon;  
And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light of his fury.  
(PL. 14-15:37,1-2)

The prophecy began with the spread of the Judeo-Christian religion, the Urizenic system, and now ends with the start of the French Revolution. The aged ignorance that was being copied by kings and priests on earth during the night of dulled senses is now being challenged during the morning by Orc. The prophecy comes to a close, saying:

Then Los arose; his head he reard, in snaky thunders clad:  
And, with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,  
Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood. (Pl. 15:9-11)

Urthona had gone to rest and Urizen came to reign, but now that the morning has come Los picks up his head and brings war to the oppressive system of kings and priests.

## **Subversion through Print in the 1790s**

This final scene in *Europe* brings us to the 1790s, when Blake was writing his prophecies. Blake was writing during a time when the oppressive system that he resented was challenged. The French Revolution had become controversial throughout England, and for many Englishmen it showed the possibility that they too could free themselves of the monarchy and the church that kept them from obtaining the liberty that they wanted. It was apparent that the subversion of a powerful government was no longer something confined to dialogue, but could actually be put into action. One of the major forces behind the English people's ability to rise up was the proliferation of print, which gave the lower classes of England the ability to engage in discourse out of which they had once been kept (Altick 69).

Even before Blake's time, the ability to print multiple copies of a text was fundamental to changing society. When the printing press was first invented the Church thought that it was a machine sent to Christendom as a gift from God. It gave church officials a new way to spread propaganda that could debase the Turks and incite people into a crusade against them. The printing press itself was seen as the proof of Western superiority over the infidel Turks. But that view changed when the printing press came to be the main instrument that made the Protestant Reformation possible. Without the printing press it would not have been possible to spread vernacular translations of the Bible that were integral to the ability of the common man to read the Bible without the need for a priest's interpretation. The Reformation shook the foundations of the Church's authority, and without it the status quo would have remained the same. The availability of printed material weakened the oppressive reign of the Catholic Church. In Blake's time it was the ability to publish material cheaply that made it possible for the lower class to become literate. In the same way that the printing press gave people a way to challenge

the power of the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation, it also aided people in subverting the power of the church and the government in England during the 1790s (Eisenstein 303-10).

Blake's poems and prophecies were never part of the deluge of print that came over England during the eighteenth century. He resented the way the publishing industry was run and made the choice to stay out of it, opting to produce his own material. The literary market itself was controlled by publishers and printers. The publishers were the ones who decided what texts had marketability; they determined the subject matter, the form (prose or verse), the length and the final design of the product itself. The creativity of the author was stifled by supply and demand. A publisher's decision to produce a book would depend on whether there was a potential readership. The creation and distribution of literature was not in the control of the author. Writers with money, who did not depend on their work in order to live, were able to fight for their creative independence. The printers played a large part in the content that would be published as well. It was the printers who would be held legally responsible for any blasphemous or seditious literature that was printed. The lawfulness of a text would ultimately be determined by the printer, who would decide if the courts would consider something unlawful. The printer would then request that changes be made before a final product could be produced (St. Clair 160-77).

Blake maintained his independence by printing his own works. The cost of producing his illuminated books was paid for by his commercial work within the publishing industry during the 1790s (Viscomi 39-40). G.E. Bentley writes that Blake "had been fascinated by the problems of printing and selling books without being dependent upon conventional typesetters and booksellers. For authors and artists whose interests were primarily in glory and beauty rather

than gold and fame, the troublesome obsession with cash exhibited by composers and publishers was often crippling” (Bentley 100). Blake was more concerned with communicating his own thoughts about the political situation in Europe during his time than he was with meeting the marketing expectations of a publisher. Blake’s determination to avoid “conventional typesetters and booksellers” could also have come from the commercial failure of the few works he did have available through publishers. *The French Revolution* was supposed to be printed and sold, but was aborted before the product was ever completed, and the available copies of *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* had sold very little (109-10). Blake’s solution to this problem was not to change his work, but instead to print it himself with the money that he made from his other work within the publishing business. This way Blake had sole control over his material: the content, the design and the public’s access to his work. It was not possible to obtain Blake’s work through a third party; a buyer would have to go to him directly, giving Blake control over distribution.

While Blake remained independent of the dominant print market because of the crippling effect that it could have on an author, it was this same market that powered social changes. Marilyn Butler says that Blake’s early prophecies “emanate at a particular time from a society which believes it is seeing the end of an old world and the coming of a new dawn” (Butler 43). The deluge of print that came from the ability to mass produce books and the spread of literacy reciprocally nourished each other. Richard D. Altick, in *The English Common Reader*, tells how Robert Raikes developed the idea of starting Sunday schools in order to “guarantee the town’s peace” during the one day that low-class children would not be at work while simultaneously giving “them a socially useful occupation” (Altick 67). The ability to educate the “lower orders” was available because of the cheap cost of books and printed materials in general. While the

education that these children received was not extensive it did give them a small foundation of literacy. This same education was what allowed the lower classes to rise up during the controversy over the French Revolution. Altick says, “To the horror of the well-intentioned people who had started thousands of Sunday schools, and to the sardonic satisfaction of those who had warned against such foolhardiness, the chickens hatched in the schools had come to roost wearing liberty caps” (73).

The spread of print allowed the once illiterate lower classes to enter the political discourse of London. One of the main stimulants was Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man*. When the pamphlet was first published in 1791, the price was 3s. At this price the ruling classes would have thought that it was expensive enough to be kept “out of the hands of people who had no business reading it,” but through the availability of print and the assistance of the London Constitutional Society it was distributed to the common citizen. This pamphlet that could possibly do harm to the status quo of England was no longer only available to those who could afford it. After the publication of the second part of *The Rights of Man* in 1792, Paine was brought up on charges of sedition, which only made his work more popular (69-71).

The government’s response to the spread of these seditious writings was to “silence the press that spread the inflammatory alien doctrine of ‘natural rights’” (Altick 72). While laws were passed which attempted to maintain England’s stability, the notion of ‘natural rights’ gained popularity with the people. By announcing such laws the government was simultaneously advertising the writings that it wanted to suppress. While one piece of writing can be made illegal, it was impossible for the government to remove the literacy that the lower class had gained, and their new found principles of liberty. The “threat of internal subversion” became the greatest threat to the kingdom (73).

This move to suppress the transmission of knowledge throughout the lower class was not simply political; the ideology of the time was equally religious since the King was the head of the church. There was no separation between state and church (Ryan 151). The “coming of a new dawn,” which Butler mentions, is the internal subversion that was happening in England. The church and the government became the symbols of an oppressive system that could not be maintained within the rapidly changing world. This is the stance that Blake’s prophecies take. Robert Ryan says, “Blake’s usual religious posture... is not submission but protest; his poetry is a sustained prophetic denunciation of the cruelties, mental and corporeal, everywhere perpetrated in the name of God by those who claim to be doing his will” (150). According to Blake, the cause of man’s fall is the creation of the Urizenic system. Mankind’s redemption does not come from submission to this system, but rather from the subversion of it.

## Causing the Solid to Fluctuate

The creation of the Urizenic system began as a prophetic act of honest indignation. Through the same type of act the system is overthrown. Printing was Urizen's first method of solidifying his laws, and printing becomes mankind's way of rejecting them. Blake chooses mythology and prophecy as his genre to invert the Urizenic system. Ryan writes, "To repair the damage done by the fall of humanity, then, would entail transforming religion back into poetry. Blake's strategy resembled what twentieth-century theologians would call demythologization—the practice of detaching the Christian faith from the mythical world picture of the first century so that it could be reimagined in more modern terms" (Ryan 155). Blake does not simply detach the Christian faith from mythology, but rather makes a mythological system where the institution of the Christian church and its code of moral laws are what cause the continuing fall of man. Stephen C. Behrendt says, "If myth may be pressed into service to enhance history and historical consciousness, so also may history function to enhance myth. Outfitting modern phenomena—whether strictly contemporaneous or not—with the trappings of myth updates that mythological context, lending it increased and particular modern relevance" (Behrendt 20). Behrendt's reading unfolds Blake's reason for rewriting the story of Genesis with his own mythological figures. *The Book of Urizen*, as the story of creation, has relevance for Blake's time. Only after people have been oppressed under the Urizenic system can the origin of the system be questioned. Genesis becomes somewhat of a palimpsest for Blake; the story of creation must be erased to make room for a new version.

When writing a creation story, Blake takes certain measures within the production of his myth to challenge the authority of the received Bible. Blake uses his own mode of printing as a way to invert what he believes was the cause of mankind's fall. In the same way that Los, as

blacksmith, was integral to the production of Urizen's book of brass, a smith is also vital to Blake's production of his books. The pieces necessary to Blake's books were the copper plates on which he would engrave his images and his poems. These plates would be bought from a coppersmith and then Blake "planed plates on an anvil with a hammer (the tools of Los in Blake's mythology), and then, with water, oil, and various grinding stones, polished the surface to a mirror-like finish" (Viscomi 42-3). Blake's mode of production begins with a smith. This is equivalent to how Urizen would not have had the necessary materials to make his books without Los. But, as Viscomi shows, Blake does not simply take the material and force his words upon it; he also molds the copper plate to his use, assuming the same role of smith as the person from whom he purchased it.

Even though both Urizen and Blake print their wisdom on metal plates, Blake's work does not maintain the solidity of Urizen's. Urizen takes the knowledge that he has gained through his solitary, psychological battle and imprints it onto a piece of metal; Blake takes his knowledge and burns that metal away. He considers this "printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid" (Blake, *Marriage* Pl. 14). If Urizen's desire was to create a "solid without fluctuation," then Blake's desire is to take that same solid and make it fluctuate. In this sense, with *The Book of Urizen* Blake is taking centuries of Christian doctrine, melting the apparent surface, and displaying a new vision of the fall of mankind. The medicinal purpose of this melting is seen when Blake's narrator writes, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks in his cavern." The purpose of *The Book of Urizen* is to show that it is possible to read Genesis differently. The story of Genesis that has proliferated throughout

centuries can be burned away, man's senses can be cleansed and the oppression that this one story has been the cause of can be brought to an end.

Blake's method of printing his plates, the melting effect of the corrosives which he uses, is only one part of his inversion of Genesis. The format of *The Book of Urizen* and the way in which he prints varying copies of it add to the fact that Blake is purposefully making a solid with fluctuation. Mee says, "The 'radical variability' of Blake's work prevented it from taking a fixed or final form" (Mee 106). The various copies of the poem do not allow any one copy to be claimed as an authoritative text. There is no original text of the *The Book of Urizen*, and all of the different copies available contain variations within the ordering of the plates, the images, the visible structure of the poem and the text itself. All of this is done by Blake to avoid the possibility of an authoritative text.

This idea of the non-authoritative text stems from the Biblical scholarship that was circulating during Blake's time. The distinctions between the Jahwist and Elohist versions of the story of Genesis were being formulated between 1779 and 1783 in Germany by J.G. Eichhorn. While Blake did not know German and would not have read these texts, Jerome J. McGann explains that Blake would have been familiar with the work of Dr. Alexander Geddes. Geddes was one of Joseph Johnson's authors, and Blake worked for Johnson as an engraver. The majority of the German biblical scholarship by scholars such as Eichhorn was reviewed by Geddes in the *Analytical Review*, a periodical associated with Johnson's circle. Given Blake's association with Johnson's circle he would have been aware of the arguments surrounding the J and E strands of Genesis (McGann 158).

For Blake, the work of Geddes and the biblical scholars of Germany would have formed a foundation to build his Bible of Hell. The most significant feature of *The Book of Urizen* is

that it is printed with double columns and separated into chapter and verse; none of Blake's prophecies before this book were formatted in this way. The only other of Blake's works to be designed like *Urizen* were *The Book of Ahania* and *The Book of Los*, which make up the rest of Blake's Bible of Hell. As McGann says, "The physical appearance of these three works, that is to say, was intended to recall the typical format of those Bibles of Heaven owned and read by everyone" (153). The columned formation of the text on the plates causes an instant recognition that the poem is meant to be read as if it is a biblical scripture.

The variability of Blake's Genesis can be seen in how Blake orders the plates in the different copies of *The Book of Urizen*. In most copies, the designs that accompany the poem are displayed in different orders. The visual pieces of the prophecy differ from version to version. Unlike the Bible, which would have been the same in every copy, no two readers who purchased Blake's book would have had the same experience with the poem. The order of the plates reflects the disorder that dominates the text, which varies as well. *Urizen* is in constant conflict with the rest of the Eternals. His want to establish order is always hindered by the actions of the Eternals and the nature of the universe. The inability to maintain order is one of the main themes of the text, and the plates reflect this notion. Six copies of *Urizen* have a chapter IV and a chapter IV(a). The latter chapter contains the story of Los building *Urizen*'s body; each piece of *Urizen* is constructed over seven ages of woe. Rather than the world being created in seven days, the anthropomorphic body of God is created. If a reader purchases a copy of the book which has had this chapter omitted, the experience of reading the text would be vastly different from a copy which contains it. In addition, an authoritative order of the plates would narrow the perception of the text; this narrowness would be in conflict with Blake's use of prophecy. If Blake is writing a book that shows his connection to the infinite, then making the book take on a

solid form would be in opposition to his prophetic method. It was the solidification of prophecy into the printed word that proliferated Urizen's system; Blake avoids this possibility by giving *The Book of Urizen* a varying order (155-7).

If the Bible is the Word of God, then Blake's version of Genesis, with its multiple variations, is doubly challenging. Blake could have based the structure of *The Book of Urizen* on the newly formulated theories of the differing authors of Genesis. Divine revelation in the Bible is the amalgamation of different revelations by different people. The knowledge that this one narrative was the combination of different stories would have supported Blake's contempt for the idea of one law to govern all people. John Beer says, "Everything is reduced to standardization, in hope of imposing permanence. Blake, by contrast, believes the human quest for permanence to be mistaken. In a world of life, fixity is impossible to achieve; the task of human beings is to learn how to live in a world where changes, shifts and transformations are part of the essential process" (Beer 16). This is equal to Urizen's discovery that his "solid without fluctuation" was impossible in Chapter VIII of *The Book of Urizen*. Permanence is not part of human life, nor is it a part of divine existence, as seen in the poem. This idea of the non-permanence of all existence can be connected to the Bible by Mee's statement, "For Blake the notion of a single, authoritative text of divine revelation was anathema" (Mee 106). Urizen's divine revelation leads him to form a system where there is only "One King, one God, one Law." The notion of a singular law is challenged by the varying copies of the poem; this variety is in direct comparison to the different strands of narrative within Genesis.

*The Book of Urizen* inverts God's laws by portraying the creator of the laws as a psychologically divided being, but also by using the Biblical scholarship of the time and Blake's own method of printing in order to display a divine revelation that is always in flux. There is no

scriptural authority because there is no singular scripture. Urizen's laws are written on metal plates; Blake subverts these laws by using a new method of printing that will allow him to melt away that same metal, revealing that man's fall is caused by the creation of God's laws. It is also because of the spread of print that Blake was able to know the current scholarship that brought the authority of the Bible into question. Blake modernizes religious revelation by utilizing the new theories about the composition of the Bible and his own method of print. It is possible for humanity to be saved from its fallen existence through print, which was also the cause of mankind's fall.

## Conclusion

Printing is a double-sided blade to Blake. Urizen's laws would have remained abstract within the expansive, infinite realm of Eternity, but he managed to solidify them by printing. This act was the first instance of printing and the main proponent in the spread of the oppressive Urizenic system. The printing of the solid law represents the narrowing of mankind's perception. The imagination, Poetic Genius, allows people to see the eternity that exists beyond the narrow confines of earthly perception. We limit our mental abilities when we narrow the Poetic Genius to the perception of one man. When this perception is solidified as the written word it becomes scripture, and from that it develops into the oppressive Net of Religion. Blake stated that the feeling of honest indignation is the voice of God; eventually that same indignation will turn into aged ignorance when it is passed down through generations. Printing allows aged ignorance to remain static through time; the Word never changes and the tyranny of state religion remains intact. But, the movement from expansion to contraction is cyclical. While it was the narrowing of the view of the infinite that created the oppressive system of state religion, the expansion of the senses does occur again. New moments of honest indignation come to people, and printing is then used to subvert the aged ignorance that has been transmitted through generations. Blake shows us that printing, the limiting of mankind's perceptions and experiences, can trap us within our own narrow senses and also be used to set us free. The spread of print in Blake's time aided the lower class in breaking loose from the chains of a religious system that kept them bound for so long. The ability to mass print allowed new honest indignation to spread, speaking out against the aged ignorance that was not fit for modern experience. *The Book of Urizen* explains how Urizen's system was built with the act of prophecy and the solidification of law, and how that same law can be subverted by never

allowing the law to stay solid. Life exists in constant flux, and Blake shows us that knowledge does as well. Whether attempting to create order or trying to subvert it, the written word is an integral piece of mankind's existence, and Blake understood how crucial it is.

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