A R T I C L E

"Bound ... by their narrowing perceptions": Sympathetic Bondage and Perverse Pity in Blake's *The Book of Urizen*

By Sarah Eron

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The Eye sees more than the Heart knows[1]

1 *THE Book of Urizen* as a rewriting, or reinterpretation, of the Genesis myth has long been important to Blake studies in terms of understanding the very crux of Blakean mythology and the nature of what has come to be known as Blake's bible.[2] By essentially reading the act of "genesis" (what one might normally associate with an establishment of order and origin) as a kind of reverse creation myth, Blake suggests in *Urizen* that the birth of humanity emerges at the moment of its fall. Hence, what was once a story of creation out of chaos becomes for Blake a visionary apocalypse. I use the term "visionary" here not simply because *Urizen* acts as Blake's artistic vision of man's genesis, but because, for Blake, the nature of our origins as apocalypse is dependent upon the fall of our perceptions, on a collapse of both human and divine vision. If the Blakean fall predates an exile of humanity from paradise, then it becomes divine in origin, stemming from acts of godly creation. Blake's radical mythology essentially can be read as a critique of aesthetics and of our standards of both divine and artistic creation. We know from the original Genesis myth that divine creation arises out of God's command "Let there be light." However, Blake's anti-Genesis begins and ends in obscurity, in a world devoid of light that remains in darkness throughout all of Urizen's acts of creation. Therefore, we can read *The Book of Urizen* as a story of blindness, or of the relationship that emerges between man and God as both lose their ability to perceive fully.

2 Of course, Blake's preoccupation with sight extends beyond his biblical poems. In turning to an analysis of *Urizen*, we might recall the opening epigraph on the title page of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, "The Eye sees more than the Heart knows." Here, Blake plays with our concept of vision by destabilizing the traditional association of sight with knowledge. If the language of prophecy is dependent upon foresight, a knowledge that stems from visionary perception, then the eye's perceptions might dictate the knowledge of the mind or heart. However, in *Visions* Blake suggests that we see *more* than we know, or, in other words, we never internalize all of our perceptions. This is a phenomenon that can be explained through the narrative of Urizenic genesis, a myth that seeks to unfold the story of man's emergence into a world of "narrowing perceptions." More importantly, in the epigraph for *Visions*, it is not the *mind* that knows, but rather it is the *heart* that becomes the primary organ of thought. Thus Blake associates feeling with thinking. Ironically, the heart, an organ that comes to represent feeling as thinking, also fails to feel and/or think adequately through acts of visionary perception. Why then does Blake perceive the heart as blind? This is a question that can be explained in light of *Urizen*.

3 Once we understand *The Book of Urizen* as dependent upon a narrative of thwarted perceptions, we note the immediate connection between Urizen, or "your reason," and a critique of En*light*enment thinking. At the center of Blake's dark conception of the Enlightenment lies an eighteenth-century preoccupation with sentiment, and thus we begin to see how Blake's critique of reason ties into matters of the heart. Moreover, we begin to associate *Urizen*, a book that links allegorical reason to divine creation and thereby to ideologies of genesis and origin, with eighteenth-century philosophies of the self. Both the ontological and aesthetic implications of the poem shed light on Blake's ongoing desire to expose the hypocrisy of eighteenth-century theories of sensibility, a topic that a number of Blake critics, James Chandler and Stephen Cox in particular, have begun to explore in their work.

4 I would like to argue, more specifically, that we can read *The Book of Urizen* as Blake's commentary on the moral and structural failings of sympathy, a phenomenon associated

1. Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, title page (Johnson and Grant 70; all citations of Blake's poems are from this edition, unless otherwise specified).

2. See, in particular, David Worrall's introduction to *The Urizen Books*. He describes *The Book of Urizen* as Blake's effort to ask "when, why and how man's ideas of God and religion came into existence" (10).

with philosophies of sensibility and one that Blake sees as an identificatory process that tricks the imagination into false perception. Hence, we can account for the strong relationship in the poem between sight and the cognitive dissonances that arise out of a Blakean conception of pity. In particular, I would like to read Blake's critique of pity in *The Book of Urizen*, which critics such as Cox have connected with issues of division in the poem, as standing in direct opposition to eighteenth-century theories of sympathy found in Humean and Smithian moral philosophies of subjectivity and aesthetic judgment. In other words, for Blake, sympathy as a sentiment that distorts or tricks our real perceptions is perverse in that it creates only imagined, or illusory, union. By striving for conformity, sympathy ultimately blinds us, creating only division and solipsism where it seeks to unite. Thus Blake's world of "narrowing perceptions" at the end of the poem is the result not only of Urizenic genesis but of a kind of creation that arises out of man's distorted perception, out of a paradoxical "pity" that Blake reads as man's perverse desire to seek for himself in others by simultaneously likening himself to and distancing himself from them.

5 Ironically, the identificatory desire to unite to another subject results for Blake only in a doubling of the self, in a mimetic self-reproduction reliant on projection. Blake's Urizenic world is founded upon sympathy, upon the mirrorings of the self, which seeks to find itself, reproduce itself, in everything. Although the Urizenic world is one that begins in isolation, with the creator brooding on his own, Urizen ultimately creates a society founded on the laws of "unity," "pity, compassion, [and] forgiveness" (4.34-35). Thus Urizen's world defies the Blakean ideals of individualism by seeking for itself in others, by imagining unity where none exists, and thereby creating only nonproductive mimesis and division.

6 Critics have long acknowledged Blake's critique of pity in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*: "Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor" ("The Human Abstract").[3] An anxiety about the repression of sensory perception also pervades the *Songs*, most particularly "To Tirzah," which shares with *Urizen* the apocalyptic fear that emerges from a binding of the senses. Nevertheless, my focus in this essay will be on *The Book of Urizen*, for two reasons. First, critics have focused less on the topic of sympathy in *Urizen* than in Blake's other poetry, and, second, *Urizen* as Blake's rewriting of the Genesis myth specifically critiques theories of sympathy because of their connection to mimetic models of thinking, perceiving, and creating.

7 In this manner, Blake's critique of sympathy in *The Book of Urizen* most likely arises out of the aesthetic and subjective issues that stem from eighteenth-century conceptions of sympathy and the self. His critique focuses upon both the social consequences of sympathy and the philosophical rhetoric and structure that empiricists use to describe acts of sympathetic identification. If we turn, for example, to some of the major philosophies of sympathy in Blake's time, we see that at the heart of this discourse lies a larger implication for both aesthetics and the psychology of the individual, an implication that stands in direct conflict with some of Blake's own moral preoccupations. One of Blake's greatest issues with sympathy as theorized in the late eighteenth century is that it is founded upon a false sense of unity, on an imagined, as opposed to a real, psychological bond.

8 Most importantly, this imagined connection relies upon a restriction of the senses, or rather a relationship in which thought, or reason, supersedes sensory perception. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume foregrounds his commentary on the imaginative work of sympathy by discussing the relationship between sensation and reason, or what he calls "impressions" and "ideas":

> All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning …. (7)

For Hume, an "impression" is a kind of perception that is also a sensation, an act of vision that instantly gives rise to a bodily, emotional reaction. An "idea," on the other hand,

3. The other representation of pity that has occupied Blake critics over time is the color print *Pity*, which is analyzed by David Bindman in *William Blake: His Art and Times*. The design has been interpreted as illustrative of the following lines from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind.

Bindman relates the conceptions of pity in *The Book of Urizen* to the allegorical design, arguing that in both pity appears as a negative emotion, which in *Urizen* arises out of Los's pity for Urizen. Pity causes Los's division (into the two sexes) and the consequent separation of Enitharmon and Los (115-16).

not only becomes a conceptualization, or a memory, of our impression, but also a mimesis of this impression. "When I shut my eyes and think of my chamber," Hume writes, "the ideas I form are exact *representations* of the impressions I felt …" (8). Therefore, for Hume, there is something inherently mimetic about thinking; our ideas are replicas of our reality, and what is real is primarily based upon both sight and sensory experience. Moreover, Hume states that "in sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea into an impression" (208). Thus Hume illustrates a chain of mimetic responses in which impressions become ideas and ideas become impressions. Affections such as sympathy, he argues, rely less upon an immediate sensory experience than they do on the faculties of our memory and imagination. Sympathy as a kind of affection becomes a function of the imagination. We feel sympathy, argues Hume, not through direct sensory experience but from a faint mimesis, a recollection, of our former sensations. This is to say that sympathetic bonds arise not from sensory perceptions but from the reproductive, mimetic work of the mind.

9 Smith explains the imaginative nature of sympathy through a similar rhetoric. Here, we can further grasp why sympathy as an affective bond with another being must rely upon the mimetic faculties of the mind rather than upon any direct or immediate sensation:

> Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 11-12)

We cannot, according to Smith, directly experience the emotions of another person. In order to experience those emotions in acts of sympathy, we place a map of our former impressions and sensations onto another subject.[4] Smithian sympathy is necessarily reliant on imaginative projection; the sympathizer tries to conform the experiences of the sympathetic object to his own in order to establish a sense of likeness. Such a case would point not to an imaginative transport *into* the object but rather to a kind of imaginative projection *onto* the object of one's pity. For Smith, not only is sympathy a function of the imagination, but it acts as a repetition of the self; it relies on mimesis. We can see how for Blake this mimetic aspect of sympathy might appear solipsistic. If we were to read Smith via, or in conjunction with, Hume, then sympathy might look like a doubly mimetic process; in sympathy, we take an idea, a replica of an initial impression that we experienced in the past, in an attempt to mimic the unknown sentiments of another. Thus the sympathetic bond describes an act of mimetic mapping; a doubly reproduced sensation creates an illusory connection. In contrast to the image-making faculties of Blakean creation or thought, eighteenth-century theories of sympathy thereby define the imagination as something that never creates but only reproduces or copies sensation. This notion seems to highlight the generally solipsistic nature of a work like *The Book of Urizen*, which is, as many critics have argued, dependent upon narcissistic forms of reproduction, on "a continual reproduction of selfhood," as Paul Mann states.[5]

10 For Blake, it is the mimetic properties of sympathy, along with its connection to the mind, the imagination, and the self, that violate an artistic code of originality and a moral paradigm of individualism.[6] The threat of a Humean or Smithian conception of sympathy connected to the mimetic faculties of the imagination could only disturb any

4. According to Chandler in "Blake and the Syntax of Sentiment," *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* argues that to sympathize with a person is "*not* to feel what that person feels," but "rather to feel what we ourselves should feel in a like situation." In this manner, sympathy relates to performance. When we sympathize, we "feel what it would be *like* to be that person," and thus we enter into that person's state or situation by way of imitation (106). However, Chandler argues, to put oneself into the case of another "requires a … remediation of oneself in relation to all that is not oneself" (107). This includes one's body. When we pity, we imagine a virtual set of circumstances with which to identify; thus pity becomes "an act of disembodiment and (at the same time) of virtual reembodiment." "Thus to become an object of sympathetic identification," Chandler writes, "is to have one's experience mediated in two related senses" (107), between "the universal and the particular," and "rendered" so as to admit "virtual" and imaginative experience. For Blake, Chandler claims, sympathy is not a matter of sympathetic imagination, i.e., of putting oneself into the case of another, or imagining what it would be like to be them. Rather, he argues that for Blake sympathy becomes a matter of characters "metamorphosing into one another" (112). According to Chandler, Blake attempts to "denaturalize the level of habitual reflection and exchange that marks the sentimental" (116).

Here is where I wish to depart from Chandler's analysis. His model seeks to establish a Blakean ideal for sympathy, whereas I read *Urizen* as an outright argument against the evils of sympathetic identification. There is no need, Blake seems to say, to eradicate difference, a desire that seems to lie at the heart of the late eighteenth-century's preoccupation with sensibility. *The Book of Urizen*, I argue, rejects Smithian sympathy as a form of self-doubling or projection.

5. Mann 56.

6. This vision of sympathy for Blake as an "imagined" or "thought-constructed" act that gives rise to division where it intends to unite becomes further emphasized in his use of the term "pity." Pity as a type of sympathy only emphasizes a need for difference as well as hierarchy in order to produce an illusory feeling of likeness. See Smith's definition of pity as closely aligned with the nature of sympathy, but exclusive to feelings of sorrow or misery (Smith 13). According to Smith, therefore, we can read pity as a mere subclassification of sympathy, which is how I intend to use this term with regard to Blake. Finally, note also Hume's definition of pity (Hume 238-40). For Hume, pity, like sympathy, functions as an imaginative faculty, not a real bond or likeness, which is (as in Smith's analysis of sympathy) triggered by *sight* and therefore connected to our powers of thought and perception.

Blakean ideals of originality and individual subjectivity as seen in both his poetry and his method of printing.[7] Thus Blake represents sympathy in *The Book of Urizen* as a reproduction of the self that breeds division in its attempt to unite. Moreover, the Urizenic mind must reproduce its own past sensations, must essentially form a double of itself that is then projected outward, *divided* from the self, in order to create the sympathetic bond.

11 Late eighteenth-century philosophers of sympathy link it to spectatorship, arguing that sight always triggers sympathetic reactions; thus our perceptions become a key aspect of all acts of sympathetic bonding. Hume classifies "impressions" and "ideas" as "perceptions of the … mind" and therefore suggests that sympathy acts as a hybrid idea-impression, as a function of the imagination and as a kind of perception. For Smith, the sympathetic plight of the spectator arises out of a visual perception of a situation that triggers an emotional response that intends to capture or mimic the would-be emotions of the sympathetic object. Blake acknowledges this aspect of the sympathetic discourse when he places recurrent emphasis throughout *The Book of Urizen* on images and acts of perception. Even the very first word of the poem (after its Preludium) serves as a perfect introduction to the importance of sight in the narrative of Urizen's material genesis: "*Lo*, a shadow of horror is risen / In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific?" (3.1-2; emphasis mine). "Lo" here, of course, can mean "low" as in something base, dark, and obscure rising upward. However, we could also read "Lo" as a kind of elided articulation of the phrase "lo and behold."[8] Thus the poem immediately asks us to see, to behold, this vision; it places Urizen in the position of something viewed, an object awaiting sympathy. To some extent, Urizen already loses a kind of individual agency here, even as a divine power. Not only does Blake figure him in the first stanza as a spectacle that calls forth our attention, but he also describes Urizen as essentially "unknown." Urizen becomes known only to the extent that he is called "Urizen": "Some said / 'It is Urizen'" (3.5-6).

12 In this initial act of naming, Blake emphasizes our desire, or the desire of the Eternals, to comprehend Urizen through a strained act of perception. Here, Blake acknowledges the assumption that seeing is knowing, and that an assumed piece of knowledge always leads to a secondary desire: one of naming, defining, and incidentally *confining* the unknown. This points to the very predicament of the original Genesis myth, in which speaking and naming (in terms of both God's declarative *fiat lux* and Adam's status as he who names all things) become essential to the process of material creation. The paradox here, of course, lies in Blake's and the Eternals' asking us to see something that has no material form, for at the opening of the poem the concept of Urizen exists in a pre-Genesis state of chaos. Urizen is unshapen, a void, an essence, something, therefore, "unseen" and "unknown" (3.10), which already indicates our desire to "see," to "know," and to sympathize with him. Los becomes in the poem the "Eternal Prophet" and thus the ultimate "seer." Incidentally, it is Los too who as seer, and as craftsman or creator, will play the role of the quintessential sympathizer, reproducing, producing, dividing, and creating throughout his continual acts of pity. Hence, the opening of the poem poses a threat of perception, which foreshadows a subsequent threat of sympathetic bondage for Blake.

13 Notably, we exit the pre-genesis state of Urizen and fall into materiality only when he introduces "Laws of peace, of love, of unity" into creation,[9] an act that Blake describes as a darkness unfolding (4.31-35). Hence, sympathy becomes an event of false enlightenment, a Miltonic fall into "darkness visible." Stanzas 8 and 9 of chapter 3 connect this notion of sensual bondage to sympathy with the introduction of Los, a formerly silent bystander who intervenes and emerges in accordance with his role as the sympathetic spectator:[10]

> And Los round the dark globe of Urizen
> Kept watch for Eternals to confine
> The obscure separation alone;
> For Eternity stood wide apart,
> As the stars are apart from the earth.

7. See Joseph Viscomi's article "Illuminated Printing" from the *William Blake Archive*, in which he describes the unique process behind Blake's method of printing. For the aesthetic implications behind Blake's artistic process, see also note 29.

8. "Lo" can also be read as a pun on the name and figure of Los in the poem. In "The Meaning of Los," Edward J. Rose argues that "Los" should be interpreted as the "traditionally shortened form of the interjection, 'lo.'" In this sense, we should read the name of Los, who fittingly becomes the figure of the prophet in Blake's *Urizen*, as meaning to "'look' or 'behold'" (10).

9. Cox reads Urizen's desire to put into effect "Laws of peace, of love, of unity: / Of pity, compassion, forgiveness" as Urizen's establishment of the rules of sensibility. He argues that Los's attempt to limit Urizen involves him in a Urizenic excess of sensibility. When Los observes Urizen, pity divides his soul. Blake, states Cox, is "aware of the overcompensating element in the eighteenth century's ability to generate an ethic of sympathy from its fear of solipsism." Thus, when Los experiences sympathy for Urizen, this creates a division, an anguish of being rent from Urizen's side. Sympathy in *The Book of Urizen* thus acts as a "failed attempt to use feeling for others to recover from a perceived absence of those others" (153-54).

10. According to Harold Bloom, pity enters into *The Book of Urizen* through the character of Los, whose dismay at the disaster suffered through Urizen's solipsistic intellect prompts him to action. Urizen, when contemplating his creation, "weeps hypocritical tears of abstract pity." His weeping is thus akin to the mercy of a destructive God. "As in 'The Human Abstract,'" Urizenic pity "breeds monstrous growth," argues Bloom (174).

Los wept howling around the dark Demon:
And cursing his lot; for in anguish,
Urizen was rent from his side. (5.38-41; 6.1-4)

Los's immediate perception, or prophecy, arises from his role as Urizen's guardian. (We might compare Los here to the Miltonic angel or demon who keeps watch.) This initial perception both predicts and reifies Urizen's confinement. In the horrifying spectacle of Urizen's creation,[11] his markedly demonic and solipsistic separation, Blake introduces Los as the perpetuator of separation and division in the poem. Los's "pity" for Urizen separates the two. Just as Urizen's laws of pity force him to divide from the Eternals, Los's sentiments of sympathy divide him from Urizen. Hence, Blake begins to establish a concrete relationship between pity and division: "Los wept howling around the dark Demon: / And cursing his lot; for in anguish, / Urizen was rent from his side" (6.2-4).[12] Despite Los's lamentations, Urizen remains a formless mass that, divided from the Eternals and Los, is "Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity" (6.8). Nonetheless, the image or sight of an "unorganiz'd" Urizen only increases Los's pity. These lamentations eventually heal Los himself, although they fail to heal Urizen: "Los howld in a dismal stupor, / Groaning! gnashing! groaning! / Till the wrenching apart was healed. / But the wrenching of Urizen heal'd not" (7.1-4). Such a representational analysis of pity recalls what Blake sees as the self-serving, self-projecting forces of a Smithian conception of sympathy. In Blake's world, the consequences of sympathy result only in a self-mimetic, solipsistic form of materialization in which the sympathizer "forms" the other subject out of the substance of his own sentiment. As Urizen "heal[s] not" and Los's pity is again aroused, sympathy leads to the formation of Urizen's body, a binding of his previously formless senses. Such an ending to chapter 3 is not surprising, since Blake intends to reveal pity as a self-serving emotion that never succeeds in healing or helping the object of one's sympathy. Not only, therefore, do Los's sympathetic lamentations create division, but they also facilitate the fall of the Urizenic world into materiality.

14 Chapter 3 concludes with a petrific image of Los's horror at the sight of Urizen, a vision that forms the basis of the illustration on plate 7 (illus. 1),[13] which concludes with the lines "Till Los rouz'd his fires, affrighted / At the formless unmeasurable death" (7.8-9). Here Blake depicts Los surrounded by fire and in an enclosed, womb-like posture, with his circular mouth open. In this position, Los binds his own body, with his arms overlapped and intertwined in front of his chest. Chapter 4 then begins with the formation of Urizen's skeletal structure. Fittingly, the image on plate 8 of Urizen's new body (illus. 2) seems to mirror the image of Los on plate 7. Blake depicts the bones that Los shapes and binds into "nets & gins" (in order to embody Urizen) as a skeleton encircled in a fetal position, suggestive of rebirth but also of the womb-like position as a kind of enclosure. Even the words on plates 7 and 8 suggest a kind of bondage, with vines (or veins) circling the text of the poem like its own etched "nets & gins." Notably, Blake figures Los, the Eternal Prophet, as a craftsman whose creation acts as a mimesis of himself. Blake thus critiques the association of creation with imitation,[14] particularly in relation to the original Genesis myth, which highlights God's desire to create man in his own image. Most importantly, when Los creates, or forms, Urizen's body, he does so out of an act of pity. Thus Urizen's embodiment once again narrates a Smithian theory of sympathy as Los projects himself onto the object of his pity. Urizen becomes a supposedly new conception of thought, which is actually derived from a double (or division) of Los's own self. Here, the imagination as a creative faculty serves only to reproduce and mimic but never to create anew. Essentially, the formation of Urizen's body becomes a narrative of sensual bondage that critiques eighteenth-century theories of sympathy as they relate to new, philosophical conceptions of reason and its relationship to aesthetics.[15] The changes that Urizen experiences in the binding of his senses can be read as an eighteenth-century triumph of ideas over impressions (or a Kantian departure from empiricism)[16] in which the awakening of reason attempts to make up for the restriction of the senses. Urizen's embodiment indicates the anti-empirical formation of a new world conception of reason in which

11. Morton D. Paley argues in "Spectre and Emanation" that Los's endeavor to save Albion in *Jerusalem* is actually an endeavor "to reintegrate his … spectre with his emanation" (150). Again, we see a problematic between internality and externality in Blake. What represents external relations may also represent internal struggles and relations. Thus the nerves and fibers of the Urizenic origin create a world with very few boundaries, which through a solipsistic form of creation exists as a kind of universality, a connective tissue that unites and binds the individual to himself and to his surroundings.
12. Worrall argues that "Los is 'rent' from Urizen's side in a way analogous to Eve's division from Adam. … Los then subdivides into a female form (Enitharmon)" (10). See also note 19.
13. For a substantial analysis of the imagery of these plates, see Worrall's "Themes and Contexts" (32-34; pls. 6 and 7 in copy D, reproduced in Worrall).
14. Mann and David Simpson connect this mimetic process of regeneration and creation to the masturbatory language that abounds in *The Book of Urizen*. Christopher Hobson accounts for Blake's views on masturbation in conjunction with his views on narcissistic/mimetic reproduction as fitting with those of his time. Masturbation, Hobson argues, is condemned as a form of non-reproductive sexuality, as something that generates nothing, or at least nothing new (39).
15. When I use the term "aesthetic" here, I refer to its eighteenth-century use as a "feeling," sentiment, or "affect." See definition 1 in the *OED*, which associates the aesthetic with "sensuous perception."
16. See Kant's account of the sublime in the second book of the first part of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

1. *The Book of Urizen* copy G (c. 1818), pl. 7. Library of Congress. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive* <http://www.blakearchive.org>.

thought separates from sensory experience. Thus Blake emphasizes Urizen's "eternal name" as though this original name has been perverted somehow with the changes of "U*rizen*."

15 In the new world of Urizen, reason is now misinterpreted for Blake as something connected to pity and the laws of sympathy or affect:

> And Urizen (so his eternal name)
> His prolific delight obscurd more & more
> In dark secresy, hiding in surgeing
> Sulphureous fluid his phantasies.
> The Eternal Prophet heavd the dark bellows,
> And turn'd restless the tongs; and the hammer
> Incessant beat; forging chains new & new,
> Numb'ring with links, hours, days & years. (10.11-18)

Here, Urizen struggles against Los's desire to bind and embody him by continually attempting to hide his self, or his "phantasies," in "sulphureous fluid." The "sulphureous fluid" implies images both of masturbation and of the amniotic fluid of Urizen's rebirth, but it also emphasizes fluidity as indicative of formlessness. We recall the opening to *The Book of Urizen*, when Urizen as free-floating sensation is defined by his lack of form.

16 In this stanza we also see the creation of time, which Los fashions in the image of a chain. Thus temporality, like materiality, for Blake indicates a kind of bondage definitive of the earthly, human world. Los not only forges temporality

2. *The Book of Urizen* copy G (c. 1818), pl. 8. Library of Congress. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive* <http://www.blakearchive.org>.

by dividing it into the subdivisions of hours, days, and years, thereby associating creation with mimesis or division, but he also "numb'r[s]" the divisions like the links on a chain. Blake's use of the word "numb'ring," in which he elides the "e," creates a pun on the act of counting. The forging, or material bondage, of time not only indicates Los's attempt to number and divide, but also points to the numbing ("numb-ring") of sensory experience. Hence, Blake reiterates in Los's act of creative division a triumph of ratiocination over sensation, a war in which the logic of time overrides empirical being through a stifling of the senses.

17 Plates 11-13 continue to associate "numb-ring," or measuring, with the numbing of sensory experience. Here, time is measured out in the seven ages of "dismal woe" that all arise with the stages of Urizen's literal embodiment. Once again, his formation is figured as a binding of sensory perception. Perhaps the most significant age of sensory bondage is the third, which illustrates the material creation of Urizen's eyes:

> His nervous brain shot branches
> Round the branches of his heart
> On high into two little orbs
> And fixed in two little caves
> Hiding carefully from the wind,
> His Eyes beheld the deep,
> And a third Age passed over:
> And a state of dismal woe. (11.11-18)

Blake's depiction of the eyes recalls both the opening assertion of *Visions*, in which "the Eye sees more than the Heart

knows," and a Humean account of sympathy. In Blake's description, the branches of the brain strangle and bind the branches of the heart. Thus we encounter a Blakean critique of Hume's theories of affect and perception. Such eyes that "hid[e] carefully from the wind" are modeled after a notion of perception derived from reason's attempt to perform the work of the heart: hence Hume's conception of affect as an idea that mimics (so as to become) impression. As the senses attempt and yet fail to branch out, or break free, from Urizen's bodily bondage, the formation of ears, eyes, nostrils, a throat and tongue gives rise to new phases "of dismal woe"; thus the senses embodied become eras that indicate the triumph of "your reason" over sensual perception. The association of measurement and "numb-ring" with sensual bondage indicates that Urizen's fall into materiality becomes a fall from sensory perception into an idea-based type of perception, or, more specifically, a fall into judgment.

18 Smith chooses to associate judgment, a cognitive discernment of difference,[17] with sympathy, an affection that attempts to establish likeness.[18] Blake recognizes an association between measurement and judgment, aligning Urizen's embodiment with a critique of the sympathetic discourse. Consequently, he sees Urizen's fall into materiality and Los's fall into sympathy as incidents that create division as opposed to unity. In this case, the senses divide, or become separated from the external world. Therefore, Los's sympathy, his attempt to create likeness, divides Urizen from his surroundings, forcing him to perceive the world through difference (judgment) as opposed to unity, and thereby inhibiting his true ability to see clearly. Judgment and measurement for Blake thus become inadequate methods of perception that are linked more to our faculties of "reason" than to our sensory organs.

19 In separating him from the external world, Urizen's embodiment thus "narrow[s]" his "perceptions":

> All the myriads of Eternity:
> All the wisdom & joy of life:
> Roll like a sea around him,
> Except what his little orbs
> Of sight by degrees unfold. (13.28-32)

Again, Blake describes Urizen's eyes as little sensory windows into the world from which he is isolated, confined, and bounded by his corporeal prison. In a world dictated and created by sympathy, sight still remains necessary, particularly as a faculty that triggers sympathetic reactions. Urizen's "narrow[ed] perceptions" also invoke a Humean conception of perception, divided into impressions and ideas. If Urizen's eyes are the only part of him that can "by degrees" allow him to perceive (or sensually experience) the world, then he must rely on his faculties of thought, on his "ideas" (which mimic his few past impressions) in order to relate to the world that he has been divided from. Thus Urizen's sight, his vision of the world, depends upon a new kind of reason that restricts and narrows sensual perception and experience.

20 Urizen's embodiment, therefore, results from an act of sympathy and in turn makes him susceptible to sympathetic perception. The laws of sympathy thereby produce an inescapable cycle of sympathetic relations as Urizen's fall into materiality breeds further actions and reactions of pity. For example, once Los abandons his labors, he becomes bound to Urizen as a result of his sympathetic desire for unity: "The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd" (13.40). This state of bondage can be read as a direct result of the psychological process of sympathy. Falling prey to an endless cycle of mimetic reproduction, Los creates Urizen in his likeness (a result of sympathetic projection) and in turn becomes united to Urizen in sympathetic bondage. Upon experiencing the consequences of his sympathetic desires, Los looks back on an undivided eternity, only to feel the sublime image striking "horror into his soul" (13.47). Such sublimity, inspiring a desire for unity, thus prompts Los to further acts of pity and division:

> Los wept, obscur'd with mourning:
> His bosom earthquak'd with sighs;
> He saw Urizen deadly black,
> In his chains bound, & Pity began,
>
> In anguish dividing & dividing
> (For pity divides the soul). (13.48-53)

Once again, Blake makes a direct connection between pity and division when he maintains that "pity divides the soul." We can read this division as stemming from self-mimesis and from the eighteenth-century discourse of sympathy. Pity divides the soul by forcing us to reproduce our own past sensations in order to create unity where only division and distinction exist. Thus Los's persistent desire to create illusory union prompts him toward self-division and sympathetic bondage (in which he becomes tied to another by conceiving of that other in his own image). Here too Blake connects acts of sympathy with lamentation and mourning, suggesting that sympathy creates only loss, as opposed to real unity.

17. See *OED*, "judgment," definition 9b. See also Locke's definition of judgment in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (156).
18. See *OED*, "sympathy," definitions 1 and 2.

21 This sense of mourning permeates the allegorical representation of pity in the creation of Enitharmon. Not surprisingly, this act of generation and creation once again stems from Los's sympathetic impulses. As in the original Genesis myth, the first woman, Los's female counterpart, emerges from his own body.[19] Blake thus rereads the creation of Eve from Adam's rib in his parallel pairing of Los and Enitharmon as indicative of the philosophical structure of sympathy. In Blake's version of the myth, man in pity forms a mimetic double of himself by dividing his own form:[20]

> The globe of life blood trembled,
> Branching out into roots;
> Fibrous, writhing upon the winds:
> Fibres of blood, milk and tears:
> In pangs, eternity on eternity.
> At length in tears & cries imbodied,
> A female form trembling and pale
> Waves before his deathy face. (18.1-8)

Again, Blake portrays embodiment as a binding of the senses, which actively attempt to free themselves by branching outward. Nevertheless, the nerves and fibers become trapped beneath an embodied shell. Not only does Blake make a point of emphasizing the importance of nerves and fibers as sensual organs in terms of their relationship to sympathy and sensibility, but he also defines Pity, or Enitharmon, as "in tears & cries imbodied."[21] Thus pity becomes an expression not of fellow-feeling but rather of lamentation and loss.[22] Pity embodied appears as a horrific image, a sight that produces only further sentiments and an endless cycle of sympathy. Once Enitharmon receives her allegorical name from the Eternals, who flee from her in terror, Los pities his creation, embracing her. As the quintessential sympathetic spectator, Los ironically comes to pity Pity itself:

> All Eternity shudderd at sight
> Of the first female now separate,
> Pale as a cloud of snow
> Waving before the face of Los.
>
> Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,
> Petrify the eternal myriads;
> At the first female form now separate.
> They call'd her Pity, and fled.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But Los saw the Female & pitied.
> He embrac'd her, she wept, she refus'd;
> In perverse and cruel delight
> She fled from his arms, yet he followd.
>
> Eternity shudder'd when they saw
> Man begetting his likeness
> On his own divided image. (18.9-15, 19.1; 19.10-16)

Notably, it is the *vision* of Enitharmon that both defines her as, and gives rise to, pity. Once again, Blake connects sympathy with sight. Enitharmon's allegorical naming mirrors the initial act of naming in the poem with the figure of Urizen. The Eternals, who are revealed as the namers of Urizen, are likewise the namers of Enitharmon. In the case of Urizen before his fall, his original naming reveals his essential nature. Likewise, Enitharmon's essential nature, as she who stems from and inspires pity, is reflected by her eternal name.

22 Enitharmon's petrifying image both hinges upon the association between sympathy and sight and recalls the image of Sin in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[23] Los's attempt to "beget his likeness / On his own divided image" not only becomes a sexual allegory for the act of sympathy but also becomes

19. Enitharmon can be characterized as an "emanation" of Los, a classification that becomes important to the role of gender relations in Blake. Note here, in particular, Alicia Ostriker's definition of "emanation" in "Desire Gratified and Ungratified," where sexual division between the male and the female becomes a prototype for all forms of self-division (i.e., in relation to the self, the self and the other, and the self and God), as Ostriker analyzes Blake's emanations through the paradigm of the Jungian anima.

20. Irene Tayler, in "The Woman Scaly," equates the division of the sexes with other examples of division in Blake's poetry. She proclaims that sensual enjoyment leads to the movement outward from self-enclosure. Tayler also examines female "emanations" in Blake's work, describing women as derivatives of men, but also as divisions from the male counterpart. My reading of sympathy in *The Book of Urizen* largely depends upon the interplay between the genders in Blake's works as divisions rather than unifications (particularly in regard to Los and Enitharmon).

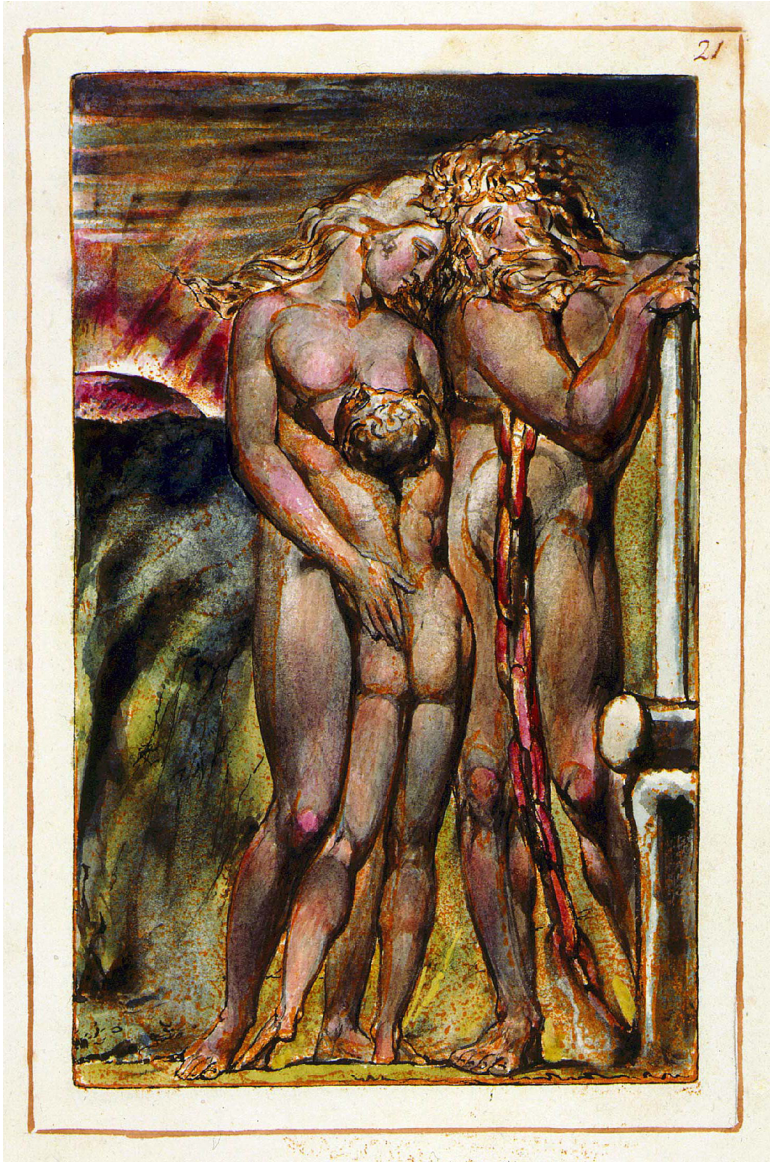
21. Enitharmon, argues Cox, becomes a satire of contemporaneous notions of sympathetic love, especially as it relates to forms of humanitarian pity. Blake's identification of pity with a woman creates a "parody" of the eighteenth-century belief that women possess "a greater sensibility than men" (54) (hence the association of nerves, or nervous disorders in the poem—often attributed to female ailments and tempers—with sympathetic sensibility). Moreover, Los here might be characterized as the sentimental lover, or the man of feeling.

22. Nelson Hilton analyzes the lamentation imagery in Blake, in particular his evocations of dew and tears, and states that Enitharmon's false tears in *The Four Zoas* indicate a type of weeping indicative of false mourning. Hilton attributes the falseness of these tears to Blake's attack on the self-dramatization of sentimentality, or more specifically on the eighteenth-century preoccupation with melancholy. Blake sees this focus on sentiment and melancholia, Hilton argues, as inhibiting "the true light of the imagination" and a truer, more ideal version of sympathy (49).

23. A number of critics have drawn parallels between Blake's *Urizen* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Susan Matthews, in *Blake, Sexuality, and Bourgeois Politeness*, connects stories of rape in Blake's work to incest (ch. 3, 56-81), considering the relationship among Satan, Sin, and Death in *Paradise Lost* (although she does not directly make a connection here to *Urizen*) (79-80). See also Worrall's analysis of *Urizen* (43).

associated with incest. The incestuous relationship between Milton's Satan and Sin signifies a narcissistic form of reproduction, for Sin spawns from Satan's own self. In springing from Satan's head, Sin emerges as a mimetic double of Satan derived from what could be read as Satan's mental faculties, his psychological projections or reifications. Thus Blake views the sexual relationship between Enitharmon and Los as something perverse in its underlying reliance on self-mimesis as incest. Moreover, the metaphor of incest for their relationship further highlights the perversity of sympathy itself, since both Los's creation of and desire for Enitharmon arise in the poem as part of a narrative representation of his own pity.

23 Out of Los and Enitharmon's sexual relations comes the birth of Orc. Once again, we see a parallel to *Paradise Lost*, with the implications of further incest when the triangular relationship among Los, Enitharmon, and Orc comes to mirror that of Satan, Sin, and Death. Many critics have argued that the chain that binds Los in plate 21 (illus. 3) represents the bondage of jealousy, and thus the illustration indicates a secondary incestuous relationship between Orc



3. *The Book of Urizen* copy G (c. 1818), pl. 21. Library of Congress. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive* <http://www.blakearchive.org>.

and Enitharmon.[24] Moreover, Orc's birth parallels both the horrific womb imagery of Urizen's embodiment and that of Sin, whose snake-like entrails become food for her own progeny. Orc as the child of Pity undergoes a birth similar to his mother's when his image produces a horrific response on the part of the Eternals, who then name him the "Human shadow." Again, Los responds by pitying his child and by bathing him in "springs of sorrow," an image of pity as a perverse baptism into a corrupt world centered upon sympathetic relations, as Orc grows "fed with milk of Enitharmon [Pity]" (20.7).

24 Moreover, Orc's eternal name recalls his association with Urizen, the original "shadow" in the poem. The persistent image of the shadow in *The Book of Urizen* serves as a symbol of imitation for which the object of sympathy acts as a mimesis of the sympathizer's self. Furthermore, the human shadow becomes connected to images of lamentation and wandering in *Urizen* when it foreshadows Urizen's pilgrimage of sympathetic wandering that concludes the poem. As Urizen is incorporated into a world of his own imaginative making, he thus becomes bound down to the human world and separate from Eternity in falling prey to the sights and seductions of sympathetic bondage.[25] Hence, his exile transforms into a sympathetic pilgrimage in which he laments creation at the expense of individual and sensual freedom:

> Cold he wander'd on high, over their cities
> In weeping & pain & woe!
> And where-ever he wanderd in sorrows
> Upon the aged heavens
> A cold shadow follow'd behind him
> Like a spider's web, moist, cold, & dim,
> Drawing out from his sorrowing soul
> The dungeon-like heaven, dividing
> Where ever the footsteps of Urizen
> Walk'd over the cities in sorrow.
>
> Till a Web dark & cold, throughout all
> The tormented element, stretch'd
> From the sorrows of Urizen's soul.
> And the Web is a Female in embrio.
> None could break the Web, no wings of fire,
> So twisted the cords, & so knotted
> The meshes: twisted like to the human brain.
>
> And all calld it, The Net of Religion. (25.5-22)

Here the image of the wanderer, as in the typical romantic prototype, connotes mourning and lamentation.[26] We can, of course, read Urizen's inclination to wander as psychological as well as literal. Thus his exile serves as an attempt to repair his self-loss according to a Freudian conception of mourning.[27] The "cold shadow" points to a double of Urizen's self, his lost essence. Returning to a Humean model of sympathy and subjectivity, we might read the shadow as an outward projection of Urizen's identity, which both doubles and divides him through sympathetic sentiment. Urizen's pity, the cold shadow that divides his soul, becomes an infectious web that branches out like sympathetic fibers in an attempt to unite affectively to the objects of Urizen's perception, an attempt that of course results only in further division, for the "dungeon-like heaven" is divided. Blake, therefore, figures Urizen's shadow of sympathy as an identificatory loss that breeds further acts of mourning and lamentation, for it jeopardizes the selfhood of both Urizen (as sympathizer) and the objects of his pity. The hopeful icon of sympathy, the "heaven" in this new world of materiality, resembles more a "dungeon" than an Edenic paradise. Moreover, Blake highlights the mimetic properties of sympathy when he depicts this new world as an extension of Urizen's "sorrowing soul." The web, described as "Female in embrio," not only reiterates the notion of materiality and sympathetic bondage as womb-like (a perverse conception of creation that does not generate so much as it imprisons), but also points to the woman "Pity," Enitharmon's eternal name, as the seed of this perverse cycle of sympathetic bondage. Blake likens the "twisted … cords" and knots to symbols of binding that, like the image of corporeal veins, encircle the brain, a new-world icon of rationality and "your reason" that replaces the former one of the formless senses. For Blake, this new world's revised conception of reason hinges upon a philosophical and religious discourse of sensual and sympathetic bondage. Hence, he reveals the true nature of religion by naming Urizen's cold, shadowy web the "Net of Religion."[28]

24. Cox reads pl. 21, a kind of family portrait in which Orc clings to his mother, as suggestive of incest (155). Notably, he argues, Orc hangs upon his mother's breasts and genitals; thus he reads Los's chain as a chain of jealousy.
25. Cox likens Urizen's pity to that of Los in that they both highlight a certain inefficacy of pity: "pity fails to redeem situations which are regarded as pitiable" (157). In part this has to do, as I have stated above, with pity's reliance on narcissism and mimesis.
26. Hilton discusses acts of wandering as characteristic of romantic melancholy in his analysis of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Lamentation, "almost by definition," he suggests, is a state of purposelessness that leads to wandering (29).
27. Hilton relates Blakean lamentation to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia": "the melancholic mourns narcissistically for him or herself, for the passing of some earlier fixation is seen as a death or loss of the precious self: the intellectualized version of this self-indulgence hides itself as 'contemplation,' and thought becomes the precipitation of mourning" (50).
28. Worrall states that Blake's "Net of Religion" is a "symbol of feminized sensibility" and an "effect of [the] 'shrinking' senses" (22). For more on the topic of religion in *Urizen*, see Worrall's "Themes and Contexts" section (19-27) and his introduction (9, 11, 12).

25 *The Book of Urizen* closes, both literally and figuratively, with another image of circularity and womb-like bondage, as "the salt ocean roll[s] englob'd" (28.23). Blake concludes the poem by reiterating that in this new world of sympathetic bondage, Urizen's "net" of pity stifles and binds the senses, the most important of which is still sight:

> And their thirty cities divided
> In form of a human heart
> No more could they rise at will
> In the infinite void, but bound down
> To earth by their narrowing perceptions,
> They lived a period of years
> Then left a noisom body
> To the jaws of devouring darkness.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The remaining sons of Urizen
> Beheld their brethren shrink together
> Beneath the Net of Urizen.
> Perswasion was in vain;
> For the ears of the inhabitants
> Were wither'd & deafen'd & cold.
> And their eyes could not discern
> Their brethren of other cities. (25.43-47, 28.1-3; 28.11-18)

Here Blake emphasizes the bleak relationship of vision to a world dependent upon sympathy. Whenever sight inspires feelings of pity, it leads only to sympathetic or sensual bondage and thus to blindness. Humanity in its corporeal form becomes "bound down / To earth by [its] narrowing perceptions." Thus the "englob'd" earth resembles the prison of the human body, and the "narrow perceptions" recall Blake's former image of eyes as "little orbs / Of sight" that can perceive only "by degrees." Sympathy not only divides, as opposed to uniting, humanity, but under the guise of "a human heart," it blinds the human race.

26 We attempt to see, unite, and relate to the objects of our pity, argues Blake, but are bound to an "idea" so remote from our actual selves that sympathy, by valuing thought over "impression" and by robbing impression of its immediacy through mimesis, deprives us of sensual experience and, most importantly, of visionary perception. The mimetic concept of the imagination that stems from a Smithian or Humean discourse on sympathy becomes, for Blake, a way of obscuring our sight so that our "eyes [cannot] discern / [our own] brethren." Thus sympathy, the creator and perpetuator of the Urizenic landscape, which illustrates a world that has fallen into material bondage, divides us from our surroundings through a mask of unity and fellow-feeling. Moreover, pity perverts our vision, our ability to perceive and thus create, for the sympathetic eye is one that mimics without seeing or creating anew. Thus the freedom of the self, the senses, and the imagination all fall with the fall of Urizen, giving rise to the tragedy of a perverse new order that, for Blake, centers around the laws of sympathy.

27 The "human heart" that blinds and binds humanity becomes an ironic symbol of perverse sympathy that also recalls the sensual bondage of the circulatory system and brain, as seen in Urizen's embodiment. Hence, Blake's dark vision of the En*light*enment emerges from a concept of blindness that links back to *Visions*. In the world of *Urizen*, sympathy is an agent of blindness, a corrupt sentiment that narrows our perceptions. Thus the critique of sympathy in Blake's anti-Genesis myth emphasizes his desire to reawaken our sight, to cleanse "the doors of [our] perception"[29] through a method of illumination, or illuminated printing, reminding us all the while of Blake's cautionary motto that "the Eye sees more than the Heart knows."

29. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake describes his method of printing as a way of "illuminating" the aesthetic object by revealing its inner essence: "The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell. … This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment. But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do, by 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. If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite" (*Marriage* 14). Hence, Blake's method of printing becomes a way of cleansing our eyes, or "doors of perception." In this manner, it elevates creation over a mimetic form of reproduction and meanwhile combats blindness while giving rise to individual and sensual freedom.

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