



WILLIAM BLAKE

*The Urizen Books*

The First Book of Urizen

The Book of Ahania

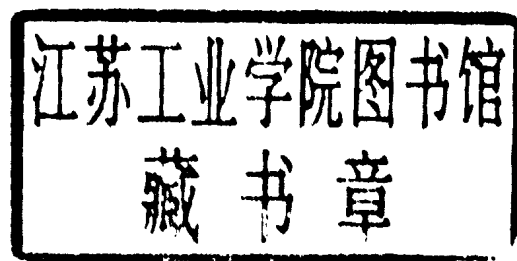
The Book of Los

Edited with Introductions and Notes by  
DAVID WORRALL

BLAKE'S ILLUMINATED BOOKS

Volume 6

General Editor DAVID BINDMAN



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WILLIAM BLAKE: *The Urizen Books*

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**WILLIAM BLAKE: THE URIZEN BOOKS**



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## *General Editor's Preface*

WITH THIS VOLUME on the Urizen Books, which are among the most powerful and challenging of Blake's works, the Blake Trust series of facsimile and scholarly editions of Blake's Illuminated Books comes to a conclusion. Those great works are now finally available in what we believe to be a respectable form. They are not perfect, and we have never claimed that they ever could be under normal commercial constraints. Even so we are satisfied that they are as good as commercial reproduction can make them, and they have been carefully and expertly scrutinised at every stage of their development from transparencies to final printing. Of course nothing can ever match the original books made by Blake in his own workroom; they have an incomparable aura of their own. Bibliophiles will also miss in the present volumes the hand-crafted individuality of the Blake Trust's own Trianon Press facsimiles, but the printing in this series is more accurate and more able to allow the reader/viewer to observe the 'minute particulars' as Blake intended. They have also been designed to be as useable as possible, so that one can move easily between facsimile, printed text and scholarly commentary. Blake, after all, saw his illuminated printing not as means of producing precious books for private collectors, but as 'a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one fourth of the expense'. With the apparatus and commentary the volumes should help to make Blake's illuminated works more approachable than they have ever been before.

This series can now with hindsight be seen to have progressed with remarkable speed for a relatively ambitious publishing project. The idea was first raised in the Blake Trust in 1988, the first volume, *Jerusalem*, appeared in 1991, and the two final volumes have appeared in 1995. This rapid timetable owes much to the unforeseen celerity of the authors, and to the calm authority of John Commander. The Blake Trust owes an overwhelming debt of gratitude to him for quietly and firmly guiding the volumes through every stage of the process. It is a magnificent achievement on his part and a tribute to his skill and patience. The authors have, despite busy lives, all made a generous commitment to the project from the beginning. It would be hard to imagine a more distinguished and challenging group of Blake scholars than Paley, Lincoln, Essick, Viscomi, Eaves, Dörrbecker and Worrall, and the Blake Trust is privileged to have had the benefit of their enthusiasm and energy.

It will be evident that the production of a series of volumes such as this collected edition is an expensive business. That it has proved possible to do it is because our close partners in the venture, Tate Gallery Publications, have met the bulk of production costs and have provided publishing skills and facilities which have ensured successful publication on a world-wide basis. The project has also benefited from the substantial application of Blake Trust funds and grants received from The Pilgrim Trust and the Getty Foundation. Without such support it is probable that the series would have remained an aspiration rather than an achievement.

DAVID BINDMAN

## Foreword

I AM VERY AWARE of the honour bestowed in being given the opportunity to edit three of Blake's extraordinary illuminated books. I am proud to be associated with a series which, for the first time, puts before readers faithful and affordable editions in the form in which Blake himself first conceived and presented them. Even so, no one would pretend that they are without their difficulties and obscurities. It has been my particular purpose to provide aids to the interpretation and understanding of these texts and images. However beguiling they are to us, I have sought to make sense of them remembering that Blake produced them to answer the needs of his times.

Inevitably, such a task is a vastly collaborative effort. I wish to thank the generosity, kindness and patience of David Bindman, John Commander and Detlef Dörrbecker who were ever at the core of my labours. My debts to the kind consideration and collegiate generosity of Joe Viscomi amount to creative plagiarism. I was lucky to have early access to part of the typescript of his *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (1993) and even more fortunate to have the benefit of Joe's prompt advice by fax and letter on all matters ranging from plate configurations to the logistics of library hopping. Jon Mee's *Dangerous Enthusiasm* (1992) re-opened a whole new debate for me about the Urizen books. My greatest Blakean spirits are David Erdman and E.P. Thompson. Lest we forget, theirs is the way to do it. The William Blake Trust generously funded the trip of a lifetime to libraries and collections I might otherwise never have seen: the Yale Centre for British Art and Beinecke Library, Yale University; Houghton Library, Harvard University; Library of Congress, Washington DC and the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The British Library and and British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings were no less hospitable. Amongst those who have suffered in the cause, I must include my fellow members of the Committee of the William Blake Society of Piccadilly whose tact and understanding were essential at several critical moments. Finally, the longest sufferer in all of this has been my very good partner, helpmate and handmaid, June. All errors are my own.

DAVID WORRALL

St. Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill  
October 1994



## *Citations and Abbreviations*

All references to the plate numbers of *The First Book of Urizen* make copy D reproduced here the copy text. The reasons for following this new master copy are given in my discussion of Variants and Notes and Tables on Variant Copies of *Urizen* (qv pp 146-7). Unlike the practice of Erdman (*E*) and Keynes (*K*), I have designated the frontispiece to *The Book of Ahania* as the true plate 1 of that work: followers of *E* and *K* should 'add one' when figuring out the plate numbers in their editions.

The works of reference basic to my text are abbreviated as follows:

- Butlin** Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981) 2 vols.
- E** *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman with commentary by Harold Bloom, (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday: 1982).
- George** Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press Press, 1938-42), vols. VI-VII.
- K** *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

The illuminated books reproduced in this volume are as follows:

*The First Book of Urizen*, copy D. British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings.

*The Book of Ahania*, copy A. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress D.C. and (frontispiece) Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

*The Book of Los*, copy A. British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings.

## Introduction

### BLAKE'S URIZEN BOOKS

WILLIAM BLAKE produced six illuminated books between 1793 and 1795 which have every appearance of having been intended to form a more or less co-ordinated project of poetic inquiry into the origins of man, religion and the development of political, sexual and social systems.<sup>1</sup> Three of the books present a mythical history based upon a 'continental' theme. These are *America* (1793), *Europe* (1794) and *The Song of Los* (1795) — the latter being sub-divided into sections called 'Africa' and 'Asia'. The other three, *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Los* (1795) and *The Book of Ahaniah* (1795) all concern themselves with myths of creation which develop more largely the characters of the autocratic Urizen and the rebellious Los who figured in the 'continental' books.<sup>2</sup> When combined, the six works go some way towards assembling themselves into a series of "prototypes-in-progress", shorter sketches or snapshots of the more extensively epic *Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Taken individually or together, these carefully produced books present a sustained (and generally consistent) mid-1790s exploration of politics, religion and history as worked out by Blake over quite a short period of time.

Religion and history have always been politicized in human culture and to realize this is to discover a matter-of-fact about Blake's times. To appreciate this truth, one only has to step a little way out of Blake's works and into the context of his times. Perhaps a crude single-sheet political propaganda broadside of 1792 best illustrates the point. If Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was not above quoting 'The voice of the Devil' (E 34, K 149) then this was because, in the see-saw contest for the manipulation of the contraries and ironies of the 1790s — of which the *Marriage* is but one example — loyalist propagandists also sought to capture the attention of their audience by offering them 'Intercepted Correspondence, From Satan to Citizen Paine'. One two-penny squib entitled '*Pain* [sic] *Sin and The Devil*' pictured a three-headed squatting dog with the faces of Tom Paine and Joseph Priestley, two radicals who were the favourite targets (with so much irony in their surnames) of English loyalist propaganda. The former spouts 'Rights of Man' and the other 'Sedition'. Satan's long letter to Paine employs principles of inversion similar to those employed in Blake's *Marriage*. Unlike Blake's laboriously produced illuminated books, *Pain Sin and The Devil* was available cheaply by the gross but both publications show no misgiving or discomfort in traversing huge and problematic territories of politics, history and religion. In the fight for their respective ideologies, both works fully utilize the referential registers of a common British tradition of a popular culture steeped in the Mosaic chronology of time and the epic poetry of John Milton. Despite the lower class audience at which such propaganda was aimed, the broadside's title depends for its point on an unequivocal allusion to *Paradise Lost*. Even more significant is *Pain Sin and The Devil*'s satirical sweep across history from 'the beginning' to the contemporary 1790s:

<sup>1</sup> I exclude from consideration here *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), works produced in these years but which, in the main, are not particularly part of the plan Blake followed in the continental and Urizen books.

<sup>2</sup> Blake usually called *Urizen*, *The First Book of Urizen* (as he did in copy D reproduced here). For details of the copies in which Blake contracted its title to *The Book of Urizen*, see the note on *Urizen* pls. 1 and 2 and *Variants*.

‘From the fascinating Covert of the Wily Snake, to the Threadbare Night Cap of French Liberty.— From the Fall of Man to the Fate of France’ [*George* 8152].

Taking in as it does ancient Eden’s Satanic snake and the contemporary *bonnet rouge* or Liberty cap of the French Jacobins, this broadside intervention into ideological warfare shares the same unabashed sweep of history as Blake’s illuminated books also written about the period from ‘the / Fall of Man to the Fate of France’.

It is little wonder that Blake’s contemplation of the origin of political and religious systems also involved him in a critical consideration of the nature of creation itself. To this end *Urizen*, *The Book of Los* and *Ahania* offer multiple, even parallel narratives of these origins. In *Urizen* there are two creations. The first creation concerns that of Urizen who is a pre-existent given of Blake’s story but one whose embodiment as consciousness brings him into the ontology of being. If the reader is apt to stumble at such philosophical complexities, then that is exactly Blake’s point. Amongst other things, Blake’s *Urizen* is asking when, why and how man’s ideas of God and religion came into existence. The book’s eponymous figure, Urizen, is both godhead and autocrat but one not without a contrary. It seems to be part of Blake’s own mythology of origins in these books that instability and revolution is inherent within the system of the universe. This instability is figured in the character Blake calls Los. At a time when the idea of ‘revolution’ was new, the word had not yet lost its etymological link with ‘revolving’ and it is this type of ‘revolution’ which so much characterizes the relationship between Los and Urizen in these books: first one is in control, then the other. *Urizen*’s second episode of creation involves the making of Los (although, admittedly, it is deliberately unclear which came first, Los or Urizen). Los is a mythological character later to be frequently associated in Blake’s work with imaginative creativity, but in *Urizen* Los’s relationship with Urizen is one of forced proximity or reluctant dependence. Situated in an abyss or void before the beginning of material creation, Los is ‘rent’ from Urizen’s side in a way analogous to Eve’s division from Adam. In a further confusion of parental relationships (is Urizen to Los as God is to Christ?), Los then subdivides into a female form (Enitharmon) who gives birth to their child Orc. Los’s begetting of Orc necessitates the creation of a habitable universe (Earth, or simply ‘Egypt’) but one which remains under the autocratic rule of Urizen.

If this is a lightning survey of *Urizen*’s history of creation, cosmology, politics, parenthood and religion, the reader may be comforted to know that *The Book of Los* is very much a parallel of *Urizen* but as a re-telling of the story from the perspective of Los with an emphasis on the creation of human beings as an organism ruled by Urizen through the agency of religion. *Ahania* recapitulates these themes again but from yet another perspective. In *Ahania* the creation has now become a myth told by Eno, a matriarchal bard whose fable contains only a portion of truth figured into Ahania’s song of lamentation at the end of the book.

As will probably be clear by now, to read *Urizen*, *The Book of Los* and *Ahania* is to involve oneself in a set of fundamentally disorientating readerly experiences. Blake’s mythological characters are abruptly introduced amidst time-settings which remain permanently obscure and remote. Such narratives as exist remain disrupted by many sudden and unexpected transitions. Unlike the prophecies which loosely denote a ‘continental myth’ [Bindman 1977] or which imply the existence of contrary transcendental dimen-

sions (innocence, experience, heaven, hell etc), the three Urizen books are distinct amongst Blake's works in their lack of temporal locations. They strongly contrast with *The Song of Los* (1795) which noticeably returns to a richly allusive terminology.

By contrast, the earlier *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* offers the referential solidity of Swedenborg, Shakespeare, Dante, 'Behmen', Paracelsus, Pilate, Aristotle, Milton, London, America, Rome and Africa. In the three Urizen books, however, there are precisely seven references to temporal locations: four of these are to Egypt, one to Asia, one to Africa while one more refers to 'Mount Sinai, in Arabia'.<sup>3</sup> That is all. There are no other Earthly places or personages mentioned. In every respect, the settings of these books have the appearance of being obscurely located in a 'void' or 'abyss' of time and space in which the reader is forced to attempt to orientate several sets of speakers amidst many perplexing dialogues and monologues.

Given these difficulties (and they are not problems which will go away), it is little wonder that critical reception has been varied. At one extreme of modern interpretation, the psychoanalytic literary critic Harold Bloom found that Blake's creation myths disclosed important theories of the poetic creative process which Bloom was himself interested in. *Ahania* was judged 'very beautiful' but they were thought to be sketches en route to Blake's 'larger picture of the psyche' found in *The Four Zoas* [E 907, Bloom 1963 p 184].

Even with 12 full page designs and 39 plates of frequently vividly illustrated text, the books reproduced here do not in themselves represent Blake's complete artistic output for the years 1793-5, not even of illuminated books. To the three Urizen books and three 'continental' works must be added *Visions of the Daughter of Albion* (1793), *For Children / The Gates of Paradise* (1793), *Songs of Experience* (1794), a range of commercial engravings, many *Notebook* emblems and poems as well as several separately issued plates of Blake's own invention. It is a prodigious output and one made all the more remarkable by his willingness to experiment with various engraving and colouring processes, venturing from the relatively simple line engravings of *For Children*, through the watercolour relief etchings shown in various copies of *America*, *Song of Los*, *Experience* and *Urizen* and on to the intaglio etched books of *Los* and *Ahania*. The three books reproduced here also reveal an improving mastery of the difficult and unique process of colour-printing, a process which ultimately resulted in the memorable large colour prints of c 1795-1805, of which *Newton* is probably the best known.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the final truths about the importance of Blake's cultural context, there can be little doubt that the main purpose of *Urizen* is to show how Blake's contemporary 'brethren' and 'Inhabitants of ... Cities' ('citizens', in the period's Jacobinical nomenclature), have become enslaved and 'weaken'd' by the 'Net of Reli- / -gion'. To show how this has come to pass, Blake transforms the Christian scriptures into a myth (the myth of Urizen) which lacks Christianity's political establishment and authority. By putting myths of Christianity and of Urizen alongside each other in the same works Blake can simultaneously condemn and redeem their truest parts. If the research and polemics of Robert Lowth, Alexander Geddes and Tom Paine (as will be described) had shown that the Bible had competing narratives and irreconcilable doctrines, Blake validates his own

<sup>3</sup> *Urizen* 26: 10, 22; *Ahania* 3: 45, 4: 46, 5: 41; *Book of Los* 4: 6.

<sup>4</sup> For full details of Blake's technical processes, see the description (pp 9-12) in Volume III of the William Blake Trust edition together with the accounts given in Viscomi 1993.

claim to prophetic vision by substituting a new myth in place of the compromised state religion. *The First Book of Urizen* is Blake's new version of Genesis which was the 'first' book of Moses. It is also the *First Book* of the 'Bible of Hell' to which *The Book of Los* and *The Book of Ahania* may be considered subsequent chapters. Uncompromisingly, and perhaps to the reader's initial dismay, Blake also sports with parody of the Biblical originals by embodying into his books exactly the same kinds of obscurities and narrative disjunctions which had been located in the scriptures by Lowth, Geddes and Paine.

If there is plenty of evidence of a tremendous surge in Blake's creativity in the early 1790s, for the present day reader trying to puzzle through their text and design, there remains the problem of trying to place them into some sort of contemporary context. What did Blake think he was trying to do in writing the Urizen books? If we cannot locate a sense for Blake's work in his own time, the past falls to the mercy of the present and Blake will be condemned to becoming a more and more remote figure, considered eccentric in his own time and in danger of isolation in ours. Nevertheless, piecing together the meaning of these three books is a formidable task. With thoughts so original, lyrics so musical and images so memorable, what did it mean in the 1790s to write such sumptuously illustrated and carefully worded picture books so concerned with the explosive issues of politics and religion?

Some general patterns are available to assist the reader's orientation: *America/America* presents the New World, the very model of an independent, post-colonial republic; *Europe/Europe* is the Old World, a strife-torn *ancien regime* which is the captive of its own history. Meanwhile, the books of *Urizen*, *Los* and *Ahania*, show man battling against the enslavements of religion and theology. All the books bear the unmistakable marks of Blake's immersion in the politics of his own time, a context which even the *Songs* betrays, commenting as they do on the absence of political innocence in an England where even the minds of children had been drafted into the latest round of ideological warfare. It is vital to understand the extreme circumstances of the political and social context within which Blake was working at that time.

Britain in the mid-1790s was characterized by political trauma because London was an imperial centre frightened by fears of invasion by France without and by reform within: these were the years described by contemporaries as 'Pitt's Terror'. 1792 closed with wild-fire alarms of an imminent popular insurrection in London while revolution threatened to transpose itself from France [Emsley 1978]. A twenty-two year war against the French began in 1793, eventually involving the whole population in enormous social and economic hardship. At home, Tom Paine's best-selling *Rights of Man* voiced the breadth (if not the depth) of popular antagonism against hereditary aristocracy and unreformed parliament. Abroad, the French revolutionary National Assembly guillotined its king while in Britain periodic rumours surfaced of dagger-carrying assassins bent on slaying Pitt or George III (see *Europe* pl. 3). In 1794, the first full year of war (as well of *Songs of Experience*, *Europe* and *Urizen*) the winter began with sensational treason trials which indicted radical activists drawn from the very London liberal intelligentsia which was on the edges of Blake's personal circle of acquaintance. All this was set against a background of government spying and dirty-tricks as well as, dominating all else, a desperate and inconclusive war. In 1795, the period of *The Song of Los*, *The Book of Los* and *Ahania*, England's wartime economy was stretched to breaking point by the unequivocal disaster of a failed harvest in the autumn. As if to repeat 1792, the year 1795 ended with individual freedoms further curtailed by repressive 'Gagging' legislation mocking the true-born

Englishman's birthright of freedom and liberty of expression. Many of these themes are present in the text or design of the books reproduced here.

There are two groups of people who help set the framework within which Blake worked. At one extreme of quiet fervour were the various dissenting religious sects which peopled the crafts and skilled trades of metropolitan London. These obscured and unrecovered men and women kept an inner vision, a witness of imagination frequently at variance with their fellows. At a different extreme were the more vocal and assertive radical activists who turned their hands to whatever means of publicity furthered their cause. Somewhere between the social levels of these two groups, but not quite a member of either, was the artisan poet-engraver William Blake.

As the historian E. P. Thompson discovered, many of Blake's apparently idiosyncratic religious preoccupations can be found both alive and well in the various English religious sects of the 1790s who traced their ancestry back to the turmoils of the English Civil War [Thompson 1993]. One such religious group were the Muggletonians, the loose and autonomous followers of the 17th-century dis-connected Ranters, Lodowick Muggleton and John Reeve. The Muggletonians, although they owned Muggleton the honorary title of 'Prophet', kept the independence of their faith into the 18th-century and beyond. They were great writers of verse, song and aphoristic creeds, a people perfectly prepared quietly to dispute and modify their persistent but peaceable faith. As Thompson has shown, Blake's mother, maiden name Catherine Harmitage, may have been the daughter of a leading London Muggletonian. Although the Muggletonians were never numerous, they had a dedicated following amongst workers in the artisan and craft trades of Blake's upbringing.

The idiom of Muggleton is the idiom of Blake. Although Blake is England's most famous autodidact, fondly imagined as an apprentice engraver avidly reading whatever book was in his master James Basire's workshop, it is probably nearer the truth that he imbibed a great deal of his religious culture with his mother's Muggletonian milk. While Blake was not a Muggletonian himself, he knew its ways. Some of the most visible characteristics of Blake's cultural inheritance appear to have come down to him through the domestic sphere. A parallel may be drawn with Blake's obscure materialist and sceptical bill-broker contemporary George Cullen whose Roman Catholic mother he recalled 'whipping my Arse, for only asking the Second time What God was'. In other words, Blake's radical culture was not short of these memorably influential females. If Catherine Blake (née Boucher) was William's handmaid at the printing press, Catherine Blake (née Harmitage) was William's formative influence. For Cullen, as for Blake, the importance of the role of these partially lost or unrecovered family backgrounds is fundamental to a knowledge of what they became in later life. Where Cullen became an atheist, annotating the margins of the books of the French *philosophes* with a Blakean fervour, Blake himself remained a Christian but one marked with a typically Muggletonian coolness for 18th-century rationalist passion.<sup>5</sup> Although he was not a Muggletonian, the idioms and preoccupations of 18th-century Muggletonian versifiers sound very much like Blake:

Your studeying of Natture it is Reasons worke  
Which here is got Loose and in you doth Lurke

With an eye for the well turned epigram (a great characteristic of Blake's *Notebook*), the Muggletonians declared reason to be in constant conflict with faith's simple innocence:

<sup>5</sup> Holbach, [Boulanger] (pseud) *Christianity Unveiled*, New York, 1795, BL 900 h. 24 (7) p 236.

I Never found reason so frankly free  
As to persuade to faiths simplisite

While simple faith was not enough for Blake, and though the Muggletonians lacked Blake's progressive concept of the exponentially creative contraries, Muggletonians believed Christ's humanity was God's spiritual form on earth ('All Spirituall Person from Eternitie') – something nothing to do with reason:

For Christ our Savior who was our Creator  
Did Cloth himselfe with a: [*sic*] mans Hum[an] Nature  
The Nature of Reason he took not at all<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps it is this Muggletonian capacity to be quietly disputatious within one's own writing or amongst a few like-minded friends which gave Blake the resources of intellectual stamina necessary to persist with the specialities of his illuminated books. Blake is not quite the voice in the wilderness he is sometimes imagined to be.

Not surprisingly, it is amongst that set of radicals most firmly dedicated to opposing Pitt's repressive unreformed government that Blake's truest compeer can be found. The fluidity and variability of form and structure encountered in the illuminated books, and which is seen at its most extreme in *The First Book of Urizen*, is also apparent in the supplementarity of Blake's repeated preludia, mottoes and visual disruptions. These things present a considerable challenge to the modern reader but their rationale lies in other types of contemporary radical discursivity. Blake's technology of the book deployed itself within a wider world of artisan print culture, one which shared a similar need to control its means of production. Deprived of money, deprived of co-operative publishers, deprived of the means of wider distribution, Blake's role as a printer-author of radical persuasion bears most similarity with his little-known contemporary Thomas Spence.

Like Blake, who found his *French Revolution* (1791) poem quietly dropped by the liberal publisher Joseph Johnson, the ultra-radical propagandist, bookseller and pamphleteer Thomas Spence entered the 1790s fully engaged in the pro-revolutionary cause of writing and selling pamphlets and songs from own premises. While Blake worked from Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, Spence sold his wares from various stalls in Holborn but visited Lambeth frequently enough to be known to the government for his part in organizing the pro-revolutionary Lambeth Loyal Association. Finally freed from six months of imprisonment under the Suspension of Habeas Corpus in December 1794, Spence turned his entrepreneurial hand to political token coinage in order to promote both revolution and his unique land plan. Token coins were die-cast copper imprints which carried simple texts and designs and were used by mines and manufacturers to pay workers because legal currency was in short supply. Although smaller than even Blake's tiny *All Religions are One*, Spence's token coin format of miniature combinations of text and design work in a more primitive but analogous way to Blake's fine illuminated books.<sup>7</sup>

Spence's compact but durable token coinage appealed to a far larger fraction of the population than bought Blake's illuminated books. By changing and juxtaposing different obverses and reverses, with vivid designs and simple maxims, Spence's revolutionary messages could be varied almost infinitely. Spence's token 'WHO KNOW THEIR RIGHTS AND KNOWING DARE MAINTAIN / 1795' quoted Sir Williams Jones's 'Ode in

<sup>6</sup> BL Add. Ms. 6018. fol. 19.

<sup>7</sup> On Spence see Chase 1988, McCalman 1988, Wood 1991 and Worrall 1992.

Imitation of Alcaeus' and pictured three armed men, the weapon-carrying citizenry Jones thought might defend the commonwealth and which Spence envisaged revolutionizing it. On the other side of the coin was 'TREE OF LIBERTY' which daringly depicted Pitt's head on a pole. Alternatively, 'TREE OF LIBERTY' could be bought showing a guillotine pictured on the token's other side. Spence's *New Coins* (c.1795) handbill offered customers forty such combinations.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Spence's tokencoins and William Blake's illuminated books share the same formula: text, design, satire, variable sequence, radical politics. Spence is merely a more extreme version of Blake.

An examination of the conjunction of Spence and Blake demystifies both writers. Both were politically radical anti-clericalists; both were bookseller-authors; both were marginal figures in their respective cultures; both conflated picture and text; both experienced poverty; both were indicted for sedition; both attracted a small band of dedicated followers in their later life. Their occupation of analogous producer-distributor roles on the margins of the London book trade establishes a common set of cultural parameters for their special types of discursivity. Blake's destabilized and formally disunited *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* parallels the excerpts of radical prose, anecdote and verse in Spence's journal *Pigs's Meat* produced between 1793-5 (occasionally even overlapping Blake's practices when Spence used crudely produced engravings). Spence in Holborn and Blake in Lambeth shared a common context, both refining and adapting previously existing reproductive technologies against a background of an authoritarian and repressive culture which was at variance with their own radical inclinations.

However much the three Urizen books reproduced here may seem to represent the private idiosyncracies of one man, it does a disservice to the 'myriads of Eternity', the lost voices of his contemporary radical culture, if we imagine that Blake's books are the semi-private indulgences of a gifted eccentric. Lots of other people, then as now, were on Blake's political and religious wavelength but none other had his genius for the wonderful combination of text and design.

<sup>8</sup> R. H. Thompson, 'The Dies of Thomas Spence (1750-1814)', *British Numismatic Journal*, XXXVIII, 1969-70, pp 126-67; Wood 1991.



