

William Blake

The Book of Urizen

London, ca. 1818

Transcription Note

This transcription of *The Book of Urizen* has been newly prepared by the editors of this Octavo Digital Edition as a tool to facilitate access to Blake's text. As such, it attempts to replicate the spelling and punctuation of the copy reproduced here literally, with a minimum of editorial interpretation.

A scrutiny of Blake's original printed pages will readily demonstrate that the artist routinely engraved punctuation marks in an ambiguous way: thus, even at high magnifications, it can be impossible to conclusively distinguish commas from periods, and semicolons from colons. This searchable transcription, designed as an access tool, makes no claims to authoritative resolution of such ambiguities, and the reader is encouraged to view Blake's plates—here accessible to all—as the ultimate authority and resource.

The Rosenwald copy of *The Book of Urizen* lacks one plate (present in only three of the eight known copies) that includes a significant portion of the original poem. The text of that plate has been inserted at the appropriate place in the transcription, in the interest of providing readers with the complete work as originally conceived. (An imperfect impression of this plate, printed for the Rosenwald copy but rejected by the artist, survives in a private collection.)

Both plates 10 and 12 of this copy identify their contents as chapter IV, verses 1–6; these have been distinguished as “[a]” and “[b]” in the Transcription and Book Contents.

THE
BOOK
of
URIZEN

LAMBETH. Printed by Will Blake 1794.

PRELUDIUM
TO
THE
BOOK OF
URIZEN

Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,
When Eternals spurnd back his religion:
And gave him a place in the north,
Obscure. shadowy. void. solitary.

Eternals I hear your call gladly,
Dictate swift winged words. & fear not
To unfold your dark visions of torment.

Chap: I

1. Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific?
Self-closd, all-repelling; what Demon
Hath form'd this abominable void
This soul-shudd'ring vacuum? Some
said
"It is Urizen". But unknown, abstracted
Brooding secret, the dark power hid.
2. Times on times he divided, & measur'd
Space by space in his ninefold darkness
Unseen, unknown: changes appeard
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation
3. For he strove in battles dire

PLATE 1

PLATE 2

PLATE 3

In unseen confictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness.
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark revolving in silent activity:
Unseen in tormenting passions;
An activity unknown and horrible;
A self-contemplating shadow,
In enormous labours occupied

5. But Eternals beheld his vast forests.
Age on ages he lay, clos'd, unknown,
Brooding shut in the deep; all avoid
The petrific abominable chaos

6. His cold horrors silent, dark Urizen
Prepar'd; his ten thousands of thunders
Rang'd in gloom'd array stretch out across
The dread world. & the rolling of wheels
As of swelling seas, sound in his clouds
In his hills of stor'd snows, in his mountains
Of hail & ice; voices of terror,
Are heard, like thunders of autumn,
When the cloud blazes over the harvests

Chap: II.

-tion

1. Earth was not: nor globes of attrac-
The will of the Immortal expanded
Or contracted his all flexible senses.
Death was not, but eternal life sprung

2. The sound of a trumpet the heavens
Awoke & vast clouds of blood roll'd
Round the dim rocks of Urizen, so nam'd
That solitary one in Immensity

Shrill the trumpet: & myriads of Eter
-nity

[The following transcription of a plate omitted from copy G of *The Book of Urizen* (Bentley-Erdman-Keynes plate 4) is included for textual completeness: see [Transcription Note](#) for details.]

I Urizen:C II.

Muster around the bleak desarts
Now fill'd with clouds darkness & waters
That roll'd perplex'd labring & utter'd
Words articulate, bursting in thunders
That roll'd on the tops of his mountains

4. From the depths of dark solitude,
From

The eternal abode in my holiness,
Hidden, set apart in my stern counsels
Reserv'd for the days of futurity.
I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals?
Why live in unquenchable burnings?

5 First I fought with the fire; consum'd
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild dark & deep
Where nothing was; Natures 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

6. Here alone I in books form'd of me-
-tals

Have written the secrets of wisdom
The secrets of dark contemplation
By fightings and conflicts dire.
With terrible monsters Sin-bred:

Which the bosoms of all inhabit;
Seven deadly Sins of the soul.

7. Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude.

8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity;
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each chuse one habitation;
His ancient infinite mansion;
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law.

Chap: III.

1. The voice ended, they saw his pale
visage
Emerge from the darkness; his hand
On the rock of eternity unclasping
The Book of brass. Rage siez'd the strong

2. Rage, fury, intense indignation
In cataracts of fire blood & gall
In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
And enormous forms of energy;
All the seven deadly sins of the soul

[Full-page illustration]

In living creations appear'd
In the flames of eternal fury.

3. Sund'ring. dark'ning. thund'ring!
Rent away with a terrible crash
Eternity roll'd wide apart
Wide asunder rolling
Mountainous all around
Departing; departing: departing;

PLATE 4

PLATE 5

Kept watch for Eternals to confine,
The obscure separation alone;
For Eternity stood wide apart,

[Full-page illustration]

1 Urizen C: III.

As the stars are apart from the earth

9. Los wept howling around the dark

Demon:

And cursing his lot for in anguish,
Urizen was rent from his side;
And a fathomless void for his feet;
And intense fires for his dwelling.

10. But Urizen laid in a stony sleep
Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity

11. The Eternals said: What is this? Death
Urizen is a clod of clay.

[Full-page illustration]

12: Los howld in a dismal stupor,
Groaning! gnashing! groaning!
Till the wrenching apart was healed

13: But the wrenching of Urizen
heal'd not
Cold, featureless, flesh or clay
Rifted with direful changes
He lay in a dreamless night

14: Till Los rouz'd his his fires
affrighted
At the formless unmeasurable
death.

PLATE 6

PLATE 7

PLATE 8

PLATE 9

Chap: IV: [a]

-ment

- 1: Los smitten with astonish-
Frightend at the hurtling bones
- 2: And at the surging sulphure-
-ous
Perturbed Immortal mad raging
- 3: In whirlwinds & pitch & nitre
Round the furious limbs of Los
- 4: And Los formed nets & gins
And threw the nets round about
- 5: He watch'd in shuddring fear
The dark changes & bound every
change
With rivets of iron & brass;
6. And these were the changes
of Urizen.

[Full-page illustration]

Chap: IV. [b]

1. Ages on ages roll'd over him!
In stony sleep ages roll'd over him!
Like a dark waste stretching chang'able
By earthquakes riv'n, belching sullen
fires
On ages roll'd ages in ghastly
Sick torment; around him in whirlwinds
Of darkness the eternal Prophet howl'd
Beating still on his rivets of iron
Pouring sodor of iron; dividing
The horrible night into watches.
2. And Urizen (so his eternal name)
His prolific delight obscurd more & more

PLATE IO

PLATE II

PLATE I2

In dark secrecy hiding in surgeing
Sulphureous fluid his phantasies
The Eternal Prophet heaved 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

3 The eternal mind bounded began to roll
Eddies of wrath ceaseless round & round
And the sulphureous foam surgeing thick
Settled, a lake, bright, & shining clear:
White as the snow on the mountains cold

4. Forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity!
In chains of the mind locked up,
Like fetters of ice shrinking together.
Disorganiz'd, rent from Eternity.
Los beat on his fetters of iron:
And heated his furnaces & pour'd
Iron odor and odor of brass

5. Restless turnd the immortal inchain'd
Heaving dolorous! anguish'd! unbearable
Till a roof shaggy wild inclos'd
In an orb, his fountain of thought.

6. In a horrible dreamful slumber;
Like the linked infernal chain;
A vast Spine writh'd in torment
Upon the winds; shooting pain'd
Ribs, like a bending cavern
And bones of solidness, froze
Over all his nerves of joy.
And a first Age passed over,
And a state of dismal woe.

1 Urizen. C:IV

7. From the caverns of his jointed Spine,
Down sunk with fright a red
Round globe hot burning deep
Deep down into the Abyss;
Panting: Conglobing, Trembling
Shooting out ten thousand branches
Around his solid bones.
And a second Age passed over,
And a state of dismal woe.

8. In harrowing fear rolling round;
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.

9. The pangs of hope began,
In heavy pain striving, struggling:
Two Ears in close volutions.
From beneath his orbs of vision
Shot spiring out, and petrified
As they grew. And a fourth Age pass[ed]
And a state of dismal woe.

10. In ghastly torment sick;
Hanging upon the wind;

[Full-page illustration]

Urizen C: V.

Two Nostrils bent down to the deep.
And a fifth Age passed over;
And a state of dismal woe.

PLATE 13

PLATE 14

PLATE 15

11. In ghastly torment sick;
Within his ribs bloated round,
A craving Hungry Cavern:
Thence arose his channel'd Throat.
And like a red flame a Tongue
Of thirst & of hunger appeard.
And a sixth Age passed over:
And a state of dismal woe.

12. Enraged & stifled with torment
He threw his right Arm to the north
His left Arm to the south
Shooting out in anguish deep,
And his Feet stamp'd the nether Abyss
In trembling & howling & dismay.
And a seventh Age passed over:
And a state of dismal woe.

Chap: V.

1. In terrors Los shrunk from his
task;
His great hammer fell from his hand:
His fires beheld, and sickening,
Hid their strong limbs in smoke.
For with noises ruinous loud:
With hurtlings & clashings & groans
The Immortal endur'd his chains,
Tho' bound in a deadly sleep.

2. 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.

3. And now his eternal life
Like a dream was obliterated

4. Shudd'ring, the Eternal Prophet smote
With a stroke, from his north to south
region

The bellows & hammer are silent now
A nerveless silence, his prophetic voice
Siez'd; a cold solitude & dark void
The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd

5. Ages on ages rolld over them
Cut off from life & light frozen
Into horrible forms of deformity
Los suffer'd his fires to decay
Then he look'd back with anxious desire
But the space undivided by existence
Struck horror into his soul.

6. Los wept obscur'd with mourning:
His bosom earthquak'd with sighs,
He saw Urizen deadly black,
In his chains bound, & Pity began.

7. In anguish dividing & dividing
For pity divides the soul
In pangs eternity on eternity
Life in cataracts pourd down his
cliffs
The void shrunk the lymph into Nerves
Wand'ring wide on the bosom of night
And left a round globe of blood
Trembling upon the Void

Urizen C:V.

Thus the Eternal Prophet was divided
Before the death-image of Urizen
For in changeable clouds and darkness
In a winterly night beneath,
The Abyss of Los stretch'd immense:
And now seen, now obscur'd to the eyes

PLATE 16

Of Eternals, the visions remote
Of the dark separation appear'd.
As glasses discover Worlds
In the endless Abyss of space,
So the expanding eyes of Immortals
Beheld the dark visions of Los,
And the globe of life blood trembling.

[Full-page illustration]

Urizen. C:V.

8. The globe of life blood trembled
Branching out into roots:
Fib'rous, writhing upon the winds:
Fibres of blood, milk and tears:
In pangs. eternity on eternity.
At length in tears & cries imbodyed
A female form trembling and pale
Waves before his deathly face

9. All Eternity shudderd at sight
Of the first female now separate
Pale as a cloud of snow
Waving before the face of Los

10. Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment,
Petrify the eternal myriads;
At the first female form now separate

They call'd her Pity, and fled

11. "Spread a Tent, with strong cur-
-tains around them
"Let cords & stakes bind in the Void
That Eternals may no more behold them"

12. They began to weave curtains of
darkness

PLATE 17

PLATE 18

PLATE 19

They erected large pillars round the Void
With golden hooks fastend in the pillars
With infinite labour the Eternals
A woof wove. and called it Science

Chap: VI.

1. 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

2. Eternity shudder'd when they saw,
Man begetting his likeness,
On his own divided image.

3. A time passed over, the Eternals
Began to erect the tent;
When Enitharmon sick,
Felt a Worm within her womb.

4. Yet helpless it lay like a Worm
In the trembling womb
To be moulded into existence

5. All day the worm lay on her bosom
All night within her womb
The worm lay till it grew to a ser-
-pent
With dolorous hissings & poisons
Round Enitharmons loins folding.

6. Coild within Enitharmons womb
The serpent grew casting its scales,
With sharp pangs the hissings began
To change to a grating cry.
Many sorrows and dismal throes,
Many forms of fish, bird & beast
Brought forth an Infant form
Where was a worm before.

7. The Eternals their tent finished
Alarm'd with these gloomy visions
When Enitharmon groaning
Produc'd a man Child to the light.

8. A shriek ran thro' Eternity:
And a paralytic stroke:
At the birth of the Human shadow.

9. Delving earth in his resistless
way:
Howling, the Child with fierce flames
Issu'd from Enitharmon.

10. The Eternals, closed the tent
They beat down the stakes the cords

Urizen C: VII

Stretch'd for a work of eternity:
No more Los beheld Eternity.

11. In his hands he siez'd the infant
He bathed him in springs of sorrow
He gave him to Enitharmon.

Chap.VII.

1. They named the child Orc, he grew
Fed with milk of Enitharmon

2. Los awoke her; O sorrow & pain!
A tight'ning girdle grew,
Around his bosom. In sobbings
He burst the girdle in twain,
But still another girdle
Opressd his bosom. In sobbings
Again he burst it. Again
Another girdle succeeds
The girdle was form'd by day;
By night was burst in twain.

PLATE 20

3. These falling down on the rock
Into an iron Chain
In each other link by link lock'd

4. They took Orc to the top of a
 mountain.
O how Enitharmon wept!
They chain'd his young limbs to the
 rock
With the Chain of Jealousy
Beneath Urizens deathful shadow

5. The dead heard the voice of the
 child
And began to awake from sleep
All things, heard the voice of the child
And began to awake to life.

6. And Urizen craving with hunger
Stung with the odours of Nature
Explor'd his dens around

7. He form'd a line & a plummet
To divide the Abyss beneath.
He form'd a dividing rule:

8. He formed scales to weigh;
He formed massy weights;
He formed a brazen quadrant;
He formed golden compasses
And began to explore the Abyss
And he planted a garden of fruits

9. But Los encircled Enitharmon
With fires of Prophecy
From the sight of Urizen & Orc.

10. And she bore an enormous race

Chap. VIII.

1. Urizen explor'd his dens
Mountain, moor, & wilderness,
With a globe of fire lighting his
 journey
A fearful journey, annoy'd
By cruel enormities: forms

[Full-page illustration]

1 Urizen.C.VIII.

Of life on his forsaken mountains

2. And his world teemd vast enormities
Frightning; faithless; fawning
Portions of life; similitudes
Of a foot, or a hand, or a head
Or a heart, or an eye, they swam mis
 -chevous
Dread terrors! delighting in blood

3. Most Urizen sicken'd to see
His eternal creations appear
Sons & daughters of sorrow on mountains
Weeping! wailing! first Thiriell appear'd
Astonish'd at his own existence
Like a man from a cloud born, & Utha
From the waters emerging, laments!
Grodna rent the deep earth howling
Amaz'd! his heavens immense cracks
Like the ground parch'd with heat; then
 Fuzon
Flam'd out! first begotten, last born.
All his eternal sons in like manner
His daughters from green herbs & cattle
From monsters, & worms of the pit.

PLATE 21

PLATE 22

4. He in darkness clos'd, view'd all his
race

And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd
Both sons & daughters: for he saw
That no flesh nor spirit could keep
His iron laws one moment.

5. For he saw that life liv'd upon
death

[Full-page illustration]

PLATE 23

[Full-page illustration]

PLATE 24

The Ox in the slaughter house moans
The Dog at the wintry door
And he wept, & he called it Pity
And his tears flowed down on the winds

PLATE 25

6. 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 spiders 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.

7. Till a Web dark & cold, throughout all
The tormented element stretch'd
From the sorrows of Urizens soul
And the Web is a Female in embryo
None could break the Web, no wings
of fire.

8. So twisted the cords, & so knotted
The meshes: twisted like to the
human brain

-gion

9. And all call'd it, The Net of Reli-

Chap: IX

1. Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow:
And hardening Bones began
In swift diseases and torments,
In throbbings & shootings & grindings
Thro' all the coasts; till weaken'd
The Senses inward rush'd shrinking,
Beneath the dark net of infection.

2. Till the shrunken eyes clouded over
Discern'd not the woven hypocrisy
But the streaky slime in their heavens
Brought together by narrowing perceptions
Appear'd transparent air; for their eyes
Grew small like the eyes of a man
And in reptile forms shrinking together
Of seven feet stature they remain'd

3. Six days they shrunk up from existence
And on the seventh day they rested
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick
hope:
And forgot their eternal life

4. 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

[Full-page illustration]

PLATE 26

Urizen.C:IX.

PLATE 27

They lived a period of years
Then left a noisom body
To the jaws of devouring darkness

5. And their children wept, & built
Tombs in the desolate places.
And form'd laws of prudence, and
 call'd them
The eternal laws of God

6. And the thirty cities remaind
Surrounded by salt floods, now call'd
Africa; its name was then Egypt.

7. 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.

8. So Fuzon call'd all together
The remaining children of Urizen:
And they left the pendulous earth:
They called it Egypt. & left it.

9. And the salt ocean rolled englob'd

The End of the
book of Urizen.