

The Voice of the Child: Language and Desire in Blake's Songs and The Book of Urizen

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The Voice of the Child: Language and Desire
in Blake's *Songs* and *The Book of Urizen*

This study intends to explore the significance and dynamics of the mythology of “Giant forms” as they emerge in *The Book of Urizen*. It argues that Blake’s myth-making is his way of articulating a fundamental human problem: that of the gap ‘within the self,’ between language and the reality of desire that cannot be symbolised. Blake, as a matter of fact, addresses the problem as early as the *Songs* by bringing into play the vicissitudes of his mythic Child: from the *Infans* of *Innocence* whose naked, non-signifying voice declines what we may call, in Lacanian terms, the Name-of-the-Father, to the new-born Child of *Experience* able to inscribe the fulfilment of his desire in the very language that speaks of his “Sorrow.” The problem is further explored in the myth of Urizen, the subject alienated in the “place in the north”—the symbolic site, the order of language—, repressing unnameable desire that returns in uncanny “voices of terror”; until those voices are finally recognized and perceived as the “voice of the Child,” a flamboyant “it speaks” interfering within the Urizenic “I speak” in a creative transgression which is none other than the poetic. The Blakean myth thus constructs in the very “place in the north” that paradoxical locus—exemplified by the “Book” itself—where signifying forms can turn into inscriptions of unsignifiable desire.

Cette étude voudrait explorer la signification et la dynamique de la mythologie des « Figures géantes » telles qu’elles émergent dans The Book of Urizen. Elle montre que l’élaboration mythique est pour Blake le moyen d’articuler un problème fondamental: la béance qui s’instaure, au cœur du sujet, entre le langage et la réalité non-symbolisable du désir. Blake, à vrai dire, affronte déjà le problème dans les Chants en mettant en jeu les vicissitudes de son Enfant mythique: de l’Infans d’Innocence dont la voix nue, non-signifiante, refuse le Nom-du-Père, au sens lacanien du terme, au nouveau-né d’Expérience capable d’inscrire l’accomplissement de son désir dans le langage même qui parle de son « chagrin ». La problématique s’approfondit à travers le mythe d’Urizen, le sujet aliéné dans le « lieu du nord » — le lieu du symbolique, l’ordre du langage —, refoulant l’innommable désir qui fait retour, comme du dehors, en « voix terrifiantes »; jusqu’à ce que ces voix perdues soient reconnues et perçues comme « voix de l’Enfant », flamboyant « ça parle » interférant dans le « je parle » urizénique en une transgression créatrice qui n’est autre que le poétique. Le mythe blakien construit ainsi, au cœur du « lieu du nord », cet espace paradoxal — exemplifié par le « Livre » même — où les formes signifiantes se font inscriptions de l’insignifiable désir.

The Infant and his vicissitudes

Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, set as they are in the flickering interaction of poem and design, invite an infinite variety of readings. But if one wishes to measure the organic continuity that connects them to the contemporaneous and later prophecies and more particularly to realize how pregnant they are, so to speak, with the "Giant forms" that emerge in *The Book of Urizen*, one should approach them as an exploration of the status and of the destiny of desire. Thus approached, the *Songs* read in a large measure like dramas that bring into play the problematic relationship between desire and language in human experience.

It is not by sheer chance that this crucial relation is the issue at stake in the two "contrary" poems of the *Songs* that deal with the question of origin, "Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow." "Infant Joy," the Nativity poem of Innocence (plate 25), opens on the extraordinary assertion of a being that defies naming, thereby evading its insertion into the world of language:

"I have no name
I am but two days old."—
"What shall I call thee?"
"I happy am
Joy is my name,—"
"Sweet Joy befall thee!"

In the poem's rich ambiguity "Infant Joy," the voice that speaks, is both "the Joy of the *Infans*—literally the non-speaking being, still unconnected to the symbolic order—and "Joy in its infancy," at its very origin, as it exists in its truth, before it becomes submitted to the law and the restrictions of language, in other words *jouissance*—the deeper meaning of "Joy" in Blake's poetic vocabulary. Infant Joy refuses the name that would translate him into a signifier and introduce him into the linguistic circuit of exchange by entrapping him in the "thee" (3), the personal pronoun the adult speakers (the mother or the Gabriel-like messenger represented in the design) offer him in their tentative questioning. He will not turn into a subject of language because "*jouissance* is forbidden to him who speaks as such [and] can only be said between the lines for whoever is subject of the Law, since the Law is grounded in this very prohibition" (Lacan 1977, 319). Should it accept the Law of language, the Joy would mediate itself into a speakable joy and thus lose its truth: the reality of a *jouissance* which the poem as language cannot articulate and projects on its margins in the design which is the poem's silent reverse, the fantasy that cannot be spoken. In the light of Erdman's comment which describes the red rose-bud in the right margin of the verse as a "phallic bud" (Erdman 66) and of Keyne's view which interprets the sphere-shaped flower on the upper part of the plate as a matrix wherein the infant is dwelling—"the impregnated womb with the newly conceived infant" (Keyne 25)—, we may read the design

as the dream-like fulfilment of the child's primal desire; the desire to be the object of the mother's desire, to be the phallus which she lacks and reintegrates in the form of the unnameable phallic child. This authentic Joy generated by the fulfilment of unlimited desire is preserved by the Infant's refusal to enter the order of the symbol and his keeping in the Real of *jouissance*. "I happy am" (4), echoing as it does the biblical "I am what I am," is no symbolic translation that would alienate the Joy, but a pure equation within the sheer field of the Real, positing the thorough identity of being and of Joy in the god-like plenitude of an unspeakable experience.

This dream of an asymbolic world immune from the limitations of the Law underlies the world of Innocence. It projects itself in a recurrent scene, that of childish figures playing in settings which are sonorous spaces generated by their "voices"—"the voices of children" ("Nurse's Song"), "the voice of joy" ("Laughing Song"). "Voice," a key-word of Innocence, fundamentally distinguished from "speech" with its discrete signs, is a sheer sound: an "infant noise" ("Spring") arising continuous and unmediated from the body, a sheer manifestation of Joy modulating into the "Ha, Ha, He" that flows straight from the girls' "sweet round mouths" of "Laughing Song". Producing no signification, undistinguishable from the calls of mating birds and inseparable from the motions of dancing bodies, the "voices" are nevertheless pregnant with sense: they make audible the fullness of *jouissance* and secure its permanency by engendering endless resonances of themselves. Every *Song*—and not only the poem of this title—is an "Ecchoing Green," a world saturated with "voice," a replete sound-space that leaves no room for a sign of articulate language to inscribe a gap or a limitation to desire. And even when, in "Holy Thursday" (plate 19), the dream image of the Ecchoing Green is dissolved by the harsh reality of a London scene—that of the charity children "walking two and two" (2) in St Paul's Cathedral, led by the rods of the beadles, it recreates itself in the sheer sound-space of the children's voices: "the voice of song" that rises "like a mighty wind" (9) or "like harmonious thunderings" (10), a sublime and inarticulate—sublime because inarticulate—flow, something very much like that utopian "language" without meaning Roland Barthes fantasizes, that "bruissement de la langue" which would be, he says, "un immense tissu sonore dans lequel l'appareil sémantique se trouverait déréalisé; le signifiant phonique, métrique, vocal se déploierait dans toute sa somptuosité, sans que jamais un signe s'en détache, vienne naturaliser cette pure nappe de jouissance" (Barthes 801).

Innocence is thus a fatherless world: a world, that is, which leaves no room for the symbolic father whose speech would insert the Infant into the order of language, thus submitting his desire to the "Name-of-the-Father" (Lacan 1977, 67, 217) and thereby enforcing the repression of his primal Joy. Such father is naturally absent, more often than not, from the plenitude of the Ecchoing Green. And whenever he makes his appearance, his figure is dissolved by a latent irony in poems that cast him in the role of a Father-God existing only in the misconception of a child (like little Tom

Dacre in “The Chimney Sweeper” or the child speaking in “The Little Black Boy”) whose mind has been conditioned by the teaching of the established Church. Or, better still, the father is positively conjured off as a threat to be excluded from the dream world. Such conjuring ritual is after all the true object of “The Little Boy Lost” and “The Little Boy Found” (plates 13-14); for beyond its manifest theme—the denunciation of the belief in a transcendent God whose unreality the child is made to realize—, the first poem of the diptych inscribes a deeper desire which is, literally, that “no father [is] there” (5): an erasure of the Name-of-the-Father which in the second poem enables the fulfilment of desire in the movement where the Boy is finally “to his mother brought” (7). The child, the poem says, is brought back to the mother by the intervention of a loving rescuer who “Appeared like his father in white” (4): a phrase which the design of plate 14, by representing the rescuer as “ostensibly female” (Keyne 14), invites us to read ironically as the *blank space* left by the erasure of the father figure from the picture. What really reunites the Boy to the mother is his freedom from the language which he spoke in the first poem and which was, inevitably, a language that spoke about loss. The anxiety-ridden soliloquy of the first poem thus turns in the second into a sheer narrative which describes the Boy absorbed in the silence of recovered Joy.

Yet the body of the diptych-shaped poem casts a shadow on its own happy ending. For *jouissance* is here no longer an “Infant Joy”; it has not the prestige nor the legitimacy of origin: it is reached through regression, in a backward move from speech, however laden with anxiety, to a speechlessness where the subject of enunciation is lost. Is not after all then, ironically, the little Boy “Lost” as a human subject in the moment when the mother is “Found”? With this implicit questioning—which the poem’s structure generates as an alternative reading—the dream of Innocence tends to deconstruct itself in its very self-celebration, inscribing a loss in the fullness which it sings, admitting dehumanization as the seamy side of Joy. A similar deconstruction is at work in the other diptych of the *Songs* (which Blake eventually transferred into *The Songs of Experience* but which was originally part of *The Songs of Innocence*), that of “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” (plates 34-36): for the Girl, after departing from the world of the parental Law and encountering, in the form of wild beasts rising “from caverns deep” (“Girl Lost” 35), the hitherto alienated reality of her desire, remains, in the final vision we have of her, “sleeping . . ./ Among tygers wild” (“Girl Found” 48), fixated to a dehumanized world of “howl” and “growl” (51-52), the poem’s final rhyme, its ultimate—and now disturbing—echoing.

The Echoing Green, then, is a dream-space to be outgrown. This is probably what Blake implied by the phrase he wrote on the manuscript of *The Four Zoas*, a few years after engraving the *Songs of Innocence*, “Unorganized Innocence: An Impossibility.” There can be no human world without the Name-of-the-Father. This recognition underlies the *Songs of Experience* whose function is thus a reintroduction of the symbolic father,

but a sad, lucid reintegration that forgets nothing of the pain, frustration and alienation which had motivated his exclusion from the world of Innocence.

With the massive return of the father—in the multiform guise of master, teacher and priest—the *Songs* are now peopled with figures of starved infants and oppressed children: oppressed by an unfeeling society, that of late 18th century England, but victimized as well, more internally, by a linguistic Law which prohibits the unspeakable dimension of desire. Returning to the “Garden of Love” (plate 44) he had enjoyed when living in the asymbolic world of Innocence, the Boy discovers a waste land covered with graves, haunted by priests “binding with briars [his] joys and desires” (12), with in its middle a chapel that says “Thou shalt not” (6). The inscription echoes of course God’s Commandments to Moses in *Exodus*, with their prohibitions in which a system of morals is grounded. But more fundamentally, we may read the inscription, as reintroduced by Blake into his myth, in the light of Lacan’s analysis of the ten Commandments which shows that they are indeed “the Commandments of speech”: they have a common basic significance, namely their establishing the necessity for the human being as such to give pre-eminence to the three-dimensional register of the symbolic, which interposes the mediation of language between self and other, over the imaginary (exemplified in the second Commandment by the prohibited “graven image”), a register reduced to a mere dual relation in which self and other—ultimately infant and mother—tend to merge (Lacan 1992, 68-69, 80-84). The protagonist of “The Garden of Love” thus discovers in despair the human necessity of the Name-of-the-Father, realizing that it inevitably “regulates the distance between the subject and *das Ding* [the primal object of desire], in so far as that distance is precisely the condition of speech” (Lacan 1992, 69).

In Experience, then, the imperative of naming desire destroys its truth: Infant Joy is murdered by the symbol, like the lifeless infant lying at the foot of a leafless tree under his mother’s eyes in the emblematic design of the “Holy Thursday” of the *Songs of Experience* (plate 33). Yet, does not the persistent presence of the Child—little Vagabond, School-Boy, little Boy Lost—, and above all does not the resilience of his “voice,” were it only his “cry,” betoken the immortality of desire? In the midst of woe, the Bard of Experience can hear “the infant’s cry of fear” (“London”); he catches the “weep, weep” of the chimney sweeper and even, at times, the sound of his “singing” and “dancing”—a significant reminder of the Ecchoing Green—; and in “The Nurse’s Song” (plate 38) the very nurse, a female avatar of the symbolic father, must admit that she hears the “voices of children” (1), although she insists on turning them into unlawful “whispers” (2). The *Songs of Experience* thus put us in the position of a peculiar listening: listening in the field of speech which excludes the unspeakable to a “voice” that enunciates the unspeakable. The unnamed “Infant Joy” thus returns, still unnamed and yet, somehow, audible if we know how to listen, in “Infant Sorrow” (plate 48):

My mother groaned! my father wept.
 Into the dangerous world I leapt:
 Helpless, naked, piping loud:
 Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands:
 Striving against my swadling bands:
 Bound and weary I thought best
 To sulk upon my mother's breast.

Contrary to the unnamed and unrestricted Infant Joy, Infant Sorrow finds himself "Bound" by the swaddles that wrap him tightly, but more essentially by the subtler "bands" (6) of the Name-of-the-Father in which he is helplessly caught. For ironically, while expressing his revolt and describing his struggle to free himself from his father's "hands" (5), he shows himself bound by his father's tongue, since he names himself "a fiend" (4), thus in terms of the parental language which he has internalized and which is part and parcel of himself. "Infant Sorrow" is the compelling image of a drive pent up in the painful limits of a symbolic order which the poem mimics in the confined space of its two quatrains redoubled by the repeated closure of its clenched couplets.

Yet something, of the nature of desire, works its way into the narrow room, first heard in the strange, transgressive beat of the purely trochaic third line (which breaks into the iambic norm), then weaving a counter-scenario as the text transforms itself in its passage from one stanza to the other. In its "mother . . . father" symmetry, the opening line projects the image of a "primal scene" (that of the parents' intercourse watched or fantasized by the child) from which the childish "I" of the second line is excluded: the first stanza thus establishes the Œdipal triangle which founds the Law, turns the infant into a subject and denies his primal desire as unconceivable. The triangle is repeated in the second stanza, but thoroughly reshaped by desire: for the two figures of the primal scene are now dissociated in the stanzaic space, the "father's hands" (initial line) that bind desire now distanced from the "mother's breast," positioned in the final line. The "fearful symmetry" of the primal scene is thus deconstructed and reworked into another scene—actually the Other Scene (Freud 536), the dream-scene—in which "I" and "mother" are syntactically united within the final clause (7-8) in a sheer dual relation that fulfils the subject's desire as it deepens into the thorough mergence to be heard in the final effect of the rhyme-scheme where the Infant's "best" (his "thought") is phonemically included within the mother's "breast."

"Infant Sorrow" thus transcends "Infant Joy": for the voice of desire, that was in the Innocence poem projected out of the field of speech into the silent fantasy of the marginal design, is here inscribed in the poetic signifier, audible in the letter of the very text that states the sorrow of the alienated self. The poem thus establishes an ambivalent relation of the subject of language to desire, epitomizing this ambivalence within the syntagma of its

title: in this “Sorrow,” the subject alienated from desire by the Law of the symbolic order and yet coalescent with the asymbolic “Infant,” we witness the emergence of a paradoxical subject, a subject able to articulate desire that cannot be symbolized through a creative subversion of the very order on which his existence is founded.

Cruel enormities

This potentiality of a twofold relation of the subject to desire, thus adumbrated in “Infant Sorrow,” is precisely the deeper issue explored by *The Book of Urizen* through the dynamic interplay of its “Giant forms.”

Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
 In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific?
 Self-closed, all-repelling: what Demon
 Hath form'd this abominable void
 This soul-shudd'ring vacuum?—Some said
 “It is Urizen.” (plate 3.1-6)

Such is the inaugural action of the myth, a catastrophic creation whereby a figure “rises” (the initial verb of the mythic narrative), springs into existence as a “you.” The “risen” of the first line recurs in the sixth in the protagonist’s very name in which we can hear (anaphorically, by contextual echo) “you-risen”: a folded, compact sentence that states, if we unfold it, that a subject is formed through his insertion in a personal pronoun, the “you” that Infant Joy had declined and to which you-risen/Urizen thoroughly identifies, thus constituting himself as a subject of language in the barren “place in the north” to which he withdraws (as the Preludium has just told us) when separating from the “Eternals.” This “place in the north” (plate 2.3) is none other, then, than the order of language—the “place of the Other” in Lacanian terms, namely “the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears” (Lacan 1977, 141)—, a world therefore in which the Urizenic self will be no more than a “you” or an “I” in the linguistic circuit, a signifier in relation to other signifiers, thus a mere phantom of himself—a “soul-shudd’ring vacuum” (5)—in his relation to other phantoms. Urizen’s existence, the Blakean text tells us, is a sheer effect of language. He exists only in so far as he is named by the others: “Some said ‘It is Urizen’” (5-6); or in so far as he names himself. If we read his utterance in the 25th line of plate 4 as it stands in the topographic lay-out of the verse where the second syllable of the last word, “metals,” is rejected onto the next line (Erdman 186), we hear: “Here alone I in books formd of me-”, a diminutive “mirror stage” process (“I...me”) by which the being encloses and alienates himself in a fictional self-image which constitutes his ego.

In the “place in the north,” the symbolic site where he now has his existence, Urizen excludes desire as the unsymbolizable. He denies it, although it keeps on living, unuttered but indestructible, and returns in

the Real, as if from outside, haunting Urizen in the guise of “Shapes / Bred from his forsaken wilderness” (plate 3.14-15). Creating himself as a subject, Urizen creates as well an otherness, his own otherness that will “rise” in an uncanny chaos and make his experience a nightmare. This twofold creation which engenders a fundamental division in the self is epitomized in two key-phrases of the text which our reading connects and articulates into a virtual sentence: “you risen [=] forsaken wilderness,” the myth’s nuclear statement which could be practically reformulated in Lacanian terms as “the subject constructs himself in the loss whence he sprang forth as an unconscious” (Lacan 1966, my translation).

This predicament of the Urizenic subject is featured through superb effects of irony in the passages that describe his seemingly sovereign acts of speech (which are as well, of course, parodies of *Genesis*):

“First I fought with the fire; consum’d
Inwards, into a deep world within:
...
I alone, even I! the winds merciless
Bound; but condensing, in torrents
They fall and fall. Strong, I repell’d
The vast waves, and arose on the waters
A wide world of solid obstruction.” (plate 4.14-23)

Urizen’s God-like assertions are actually acts of repression (“consum’d/ Inwards,” “Bound,” “repell’d,” “obstruction”) that increase the power of the repressed. The stridency of the speech acts do nothing but generate “cruel enormities” (plate 20.50) and release the “voices of terror” (plate 3.33) that keep on accompanying the God-like discourse. It thus produces, we might say, the “terror” and the “delightful horror” of the Burkean “sublime” (Burke 53-54, 67) which Blake ironically exemplifies in his description of Urizen’s experience: offering as it were the most brilliant exercise in “applied sublimity” while exposing the mechanism of its production.

The Child with fierce flames

The essential work of the myth, after Urizen’s catastrophic creation, will be precisely to reintegrate the lost “voices” and the “cruel enormities” by turning them back into what they really are, namely manifestations of misrecognized desire, and by inserting them, somehow, in a linguistic construction which is the “Book” itself. It does this basically—beyond the spectacular entrance and vicissitudes of the “Giant forms” following Urizen’s emergence—by repeating its nuclear sentence, “you risen [=] forsaken wilderness,” and by recasting it through the introduction of an alternative subject: “Los” instead of “you risen/Urizen.” The substitution is literally visible in the fade-in effect of the chiasmus-shaped line “And Los round the dark globe of Urizen” (plate 5.38) in which one name glides into the other

through the spherical image common to the semantic content of “round” and of “globe,” the two intermediate signifiers in the utterance.

Los, the new subject, further defined as “the eternal prophet” (plate 10.7), enters the stage somewhat like a frontier-figure between the “place in the north” and the lost Infant world of the “Eternals,” and thus as a potential go-between. Although, like Urizen, he undergoes the rending experience of the primal division in which the subject originates, “Groaning! gnashing! groaning! / Till the wrenching apart was healed” (plate 7.2-3), he is not utterly foreign to the unnameable, since “around [Urizen], in whirlwind / Of darkness, the eternal prophet howled” (plate 10.67): one should not miss the promise of the oxymoronic phrase that coalesces “Prophet,” literally the “speaker,” and “howling,” the sound of a voice beyond or below language, a sound issuing from the forsaken wildernesses. Los is thus brought into play in the mythic narrative as a figure whose function is to assume the Real in the position so far occupied by a signifier, to reload the “abstracted” figure (plate 3.6) of the Urizenic subject with the weight and energy of a living body.

The fascinating narrative of Los’s exertion to create that body in the central plates of the Book (11 to 13) is thus far from being a mere act of constriction (as has often been said) that would narrow Urizen’s faculties to the imprisoning limits of a bodily frame. It is a richly ambiguous narrative that conflates nightmare and creation. Los’s construction of that body, it is true, is at many removes from the almighty gesture of the biblical God—a contrast which is still part of the poem’s parodic dimension. It is the gory and painstaking assembling, limb after limb, organ after organ, of a creature of flesh in a scenario that strangely recalls, or more exactly strangely foreshadows, the assembling labour of a famous Doctor engaged in a similarly adventurous creation which inspires him, once completed, with a comparable anxiety. On reading that Los, contemplating the object of his work, “In terrors ... shook from his task” (plate 13.20), we may have the uncanny feeling that we are overhearing some early draft of the passage of Mary Shelley’s novel describing the instant when her hero gazes in “breathless horror” at the object of his similarly transgressive and violent act of creation.

But precisely the very violence of Los’s gestures in the act, the materiality as it were palpable of the flesh he grapples with, literally in-carnate a subject, Urizen, who had foreclosed the body and thus denied the reality of instinctual life and desire. (“Energy is the only life and is from the Body,” the “Voice of the Devil” had said in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.) As he “howl[s],/ Beating still on his rivets of iron” (plate 10.7-8), Los inserts the Real and the energy of instinctual life into the symbolic. He reconnects the signifier to desire, as suggested by his final operation through which he endows Urizen with a “Tongue,” but a “Tongue” which is now no longer the linguistic system in which the subject is caught, but the bodily centre of orality, the Infant’s primal organ of need and of *jouissance* which will survive in the speaking “tongue” as a potential power to articulate desire:

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 and of hunger appeared. (plate 13.6-11)

Los, the new subject, thus creates in the very “place in the north” a new locus of enunciation whence something of the Real will be able to speak. From now on, therefore, Urizen’s speech will be broken through by interferences of a voice, “the voice of the child” (plate 20.27), an “it speaks” intermittently erupting, insisting in the field of the Urizenic “I speak.” This “voice” is (spectacularly, on the level of the mythological events) that of Orc, the Infant born of the union of Los and Enitharmon; but it is also implicitly, and more essentially, a new dimension of the text from now on brought into play: the self’s primal desires and anxieties, so far unutterable in Urizen’s “book of metals” (plate 4.24) and projected outside as “cruel enormities,” now enter the poetic narrative and are released in the form of mythic events which are indeed the living inscriptions of what today’s psychoanalysis would define as “primal fantasies.” In the narrative of events preceding the birth of Orc and of the birth itself (plates 18-19) the text registers the primal traumatic experience in which the mother is lost, an experience therefore which is at the origin of the future ways and avatars of desire whose aim will be the (impossible) recovery of the lost object. The trauma is twice played out in the narrative, as if the writing had to master the anxiety through its repeated utterance: first in the gory parturition whence Enitharmon, the first female being—the Eve of the Blakean *Genesis*—is rent out of Los’s body (plates 15-18), then again in the still more violent delivery of Orc, as “Howling, the Child with fierce flames / Issued from Enitharmon” (plate 19.45-46). The repeated traumatic scene is interwoven in the narrative with another fantasy—the same in fact, in an intenser mode, as that played out in “Infant Sorrow”—, that of a primal scene with its three protagonists. The parental couple, as Los and Enitharmon unite, is watched by a fascinated and recoiling infantile gaze, that of the (still unborn) Infant which the narrative assigns therefore to the “Eternals” (now back in the mythic field from which they had been so far excluded by the Urizenic rule): “Eternity shuddered when they saw / Man begetting his likeness / On his own divided image” (plate 19.14-16). Again as in “Infant Sorrow,” the primal scene is rehandled in the extraordinary narrative which describes the gestation of the Infant as a “worm” in the maternal body: an intra-uterine life fantasy in which desire reworks the primal scene, since the Infant, the excluded third “shuddering “ in the preceding version, is now the phallic Child that reintegrates the mother’s body in full Joy:

A time passed over; ...
 When Enitharmon, sick,
 Felt a Worm within her womb.

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

All day the worm lay on her bosom;
 All night within her womb
 The worm lay ... (plate 19. 18-26)

In the insistent paronomasia that merges “worm” and “womb,” in the alliterative *legato* that causes one signifier to glide into the other, is the articulation of desire: a desire thus caught in the nets of the letter, to be heard, as we listen, in the phonemic effect that plays within the field of speech.

This unutterable and yet audible desire is the true “voice of the child.” The “voice” is, in one sense, the return of “Infant Joy”; but whereas “Infant Joy,” nameless, could only be heard, intermingled with birds’ calls, in the Echoing Green of Innocence, the “voice of the child” that arises in *The Book of Urizen* makes itself heard in the signifying forms of speech, within the set limits of a code that would exclude it. After his birth, the parents “named the child Orc” (plate 20.6), thus inserting him by the very “name” in the symbolic order while excluding his true nature as *Orcus*, or “infernal”—the Urizenic qualification of desire. The double process of symbolization and of repression is repeated in the spectacular Promethean binding of Orc when Los and Enitharmon “took [him] to the top of a mountain” and “chain’d his young limbs to the rock Beneath Urizen’s deathful shadow” (plate 20. 21-25). It is when the child is “bound,” therefore, fettered in the “swaddling” bonds of language, in the very “place in the north”—which is after all the locus of man—that the “voice” makes itself heard.

As such, the “voice of the child” is none other indeed than the poetic: the transgressive utterance of an unspeakable Real, the intrusion of the reality of desire into the field of the symbolic that forecloses it. Orc’s flamboyant voice is this creative transgression. There is thus after all, in the Blakean myth, a latent connivance between Urizen and Orc, between the linguistic Law and the desire-created forms that pervert it or violate its limits. Los, the maker of ever new forms, the poet whose “hammer / Incessant beat; forging chains new and new” (plate 10. 16-17) knows it well. He knows—as Lacan will say in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (83-84)—that “the dialectical relationship between desire and the Law causes our desire to flare up only in relation to the Law.” Blake the poet knows that it is only “Beneath Urizen’s deathful shadow” that we can hear the voice of “the Child with fierce flames.”

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