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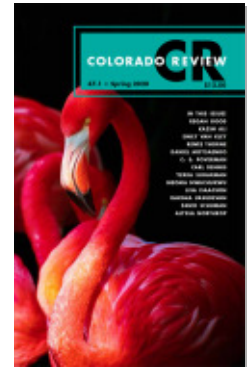
## His Baptism, and: The Origin of Panic

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## HIS BAPTISM

*... there is no other  
God than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity.*  
—William Blake

Off Piccadilly and into St. James  
Church, where pianist Yuanwei Ping  
is playing Sergei Prokofiev's "Piano  
Sonata No. 7," to sit in a pew,  
for the first time in years, just before  
the "Precipitato," a toccata finale,  
and, after applause, find,  
while the audience trickles out, the baptismal font  
Blake was baptized in  
258 years, to the day, before  
my twin daughters were born.

The white marble font, made 71 years  
before Blake's birth, seems,  
at first, to suit his memory  
oddly well. At the root-bulging base  
stand Adam and Eve on either side of the font's stem,  
which has been carved as the trunk of the Tree  
of Knowledge, around which the serpent  
wraps himself, and the trunk  
leads into apple-bearing boughs about the bowl,  
which shows three low-relief scenes—  
center, John the Baptist christening  
Jesus; above Eve on the right, a dove  
flying with an olive branch in its beak  
back to Noah's ark; and above Adam  
on the left, St. Philip baptizing  
the Ethiopian Eunuch, the two  
horses turning their heads  
out of the carving, on the brink  
of leaving the scene and stepping  
out into the church.

Children are refutations  
of their own births. What's thrust

upon them—names, plans, ideas,  
genders, life itself—if they don't claim, they  
reject, replace, disprove,  
as with the clergy baptizing Blake,  
for whom Adam and Eve were initiators  
of the great fall, but for Blake,  
as he matured, the fall was  
god's fault—as with *God Judging Adam*,  
in the watercolored etching, god is  
Urizen (from *horizon*), as is Adam (*the limit  
of Contraction*), upon whom god's law is inflicted,  
making him into god's own  
Urizenic image, Urizen the demiurge,  
the creator who imprisoned  
spirit in flesh—*Divine  
Weeping in weak & mortal clay*—as in *Elohim  
Creating Adam*, god  
pulls him out of the earth  
while pressing his head to the dirt,  
a worm wrapping around  
Adam's outstretched left leg  
—for Blake, humanity's fall  
was its making—

When the baptist poured cold water  
over Blake's head, his hair  
not fully covering his scalp, his  
fontanelles still soft, the font's  
first couple stood motionless, fixed  
in their cold marble forms,  
but from that day, more and more,  
Blake would come to see in them  
a divine spark, a trace of the eternal  
hidden in everyone—  
*the Worship of God, is honouring his gifts  
In other[s] & loving the greatest . . . best, each according  
To [their] Genius*—this,  
the solution to the fall,  
to the body's trap, to space, to time—  
behind the veil of appearances  
a flood of light, inside the wick  
the flame that will burn all down its length.

## THE ORIGIN OF PANIC

*Originally and chiefly . . . attributed by the ancient Greeks to the influence of the god Pan.*

—Oxford English Dictionary

In my chest, the atrioventricular equine  
paces, corralled,  
ignorable thin-blazed, sorrel thoroughbred,  
four-beat plodding along  
the north wall over again  
over again, until Pan  
spooks her with a rustling cedar bough, and she bolts  
out of the gate galloping full tilt so that  
the rider, who wasn't even there until now, gets  
jostled off into a dirt contrail while the horse  
tears across the field, shooting toward the horizon,  
over mountains, down canyons, across vast plains,  
straight to the sea where she  
gallops atop the surface, so fast is her clip, blurred  
hooves burning deserts where lush forests had been,  
thunder rolling round and around the globe, until  
slowly slowing and slowing and slowing  
down in just enough time to skid  
back into the corral and continue  
her plod along the same wall  
until she's ignorable again, but  
now she keeps  
an eye on the cedar bough,  
which needn't even rustle  
for her to start.