READING BLAKE'S LYRICS: "THE TYGER"

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THE IMMENSELY COMPLICATED PATTERN of symbolism in Blake's prophetic books has been called a "system." To do so is inaccurate, for "system" suggests the possibility of effective reduction of meaning and tends to ally it with occultist systems of correspondences. Unfortunately no other word is quite adequate; therefore in the following discussion I shall adopt the word and qualify its use. What I shall call the "system" is expressible only as a poetically coherent cluster of metaphor—coherent, that is, within itself, and also in relation to traditions or conventions of symbolic correspondence which lie beyond the pattern as it is expressed by Blake. The system itself has only an ideal existence. "Expressions" of it are really only strivings toward it. My purpose is to argue that a striving toward expression of this system (a view of the world as metaphor, as Wallace Stevens might have put it) is the basis of all Blake's work, the early lyrics and the late prophecies. Such a view, though in practice it has been held by many commentators on Blake, has never, I believe, been defended in theory against the popular view of the good poem as a comparatively independent entity. If one is to hold my theory, it ceases to be surprising that very few commentaries on single poems by Blake (those outside of books on the whole body of Blake's work) have been successful in expressing what is felt about the greatness of individual poems. It is furthermore no surprise that the best essays on Blake's lyrics seem constantly in danger of expanding in the direction of book-length statements. The true Blakean feels that to explain a single line of Blake he must somehow explain all of him, and in at least one sense he is correct.

The view I hold—that in effect Blake's early poems strive to express the same system that the later prophetic books approach—seems to violate our sense of temporal order. Many scholars would prefer to argue that it is folly to seek out Blake's "sublime allegory" in poems written presumably before that allegory was fully expressed. I do not wish to deny Joseph Wicksteed's contention that Blake's later work must be applied to the earlier with the greatest of care.[1] To push such an argument to the extreme, however, is to assume that Blake's symbolism is more private than it really is and that it is the product of slow development. From Blake's point of view the latter is at least a dubious assumption.

[1] *Blake's Innocence and Experience* (London, Toronto, and New York, 1928), p. 26.

I believe that Blake would have held the system to be traditional, or, as he would have thought of it, timelessly existing—an ideal toward the expression of which every poem strives. The existence of the system, as Blake expressed his understanding of it in the later prophecies, provides an ideal against which poems may be judged. Blake's prophetic books were meant as a mythic corpus of language in which the symbolic conventions proper to the system were properly set down. The important difference between Blake's corpus and "grammars" of poetic myth, such as Robert Grave's *White Goddess,* is this: Blake's is a body of metaphor while Grave's is a reductive explanation of it. Swinburne's belief that Blake's prophecies were a "drugged and adulterated compound" of several myths is only a quarter-truth based upon a misunderstanding of why Blake drew upon widely separated mythologies in expressing the system.

My argument, then, though William of Occam might not have found it properly honed, is to hold that the system lies deep in the substratum of the early poems, or, to put it another way, that each early poem strives to become part of the timeless system that Blake would have called simply "vision"—the ultimate philosophy. I hold also that the system is quite naturally more difficult to apprehend in the early poems because it is sometimes expressed in fragments and sometimes, when the poems are most successful, in microcosm—in greatly compressed form.

It is clear, I think, from examining Blake's comments on other poets and his illustrations to the works of others that he evaluated all other poets on the basis of their ability to approach complete expression of the system. Blake's illustrations are often, perhaps always, attempts to correct certain "failures" of symbolic treatment in the works of poets he admired. Blake shows Dante's hell, for example, to be a delusory state from which man *may* be redeemed. Sometimes the illustrations correct a popular but, to Blake, partially misguided interpretation. Such is the case with the Job illustrations. In any case, Blake always seems to reveal the meaning of these works in terms of his own mythic corpus. As far as I can determine, Blake did not, except for purely mercenary reasons, illustrate works which seemed to him totally misguided.

To suppose that Blake's own mythic corpus as it is later expressed in the prophecies will help to reveal the deepest symbolic content of his earlier lyrics is not only logically deducible from the view that one attempt at expression of a "system" will help explain another; it is also solidly supported by Blake's own theory of art. From his attack on Locke's denial of innate ideas to his formulation of the principle of the archetype in poetry, his theory enforces it at every point. For example,

in his marginal comments on Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* Blake attacked Reynolds for holding the Lockean view: "Reynolds Thinks that Man Learns all that he knows. I say on the Contrary that Man Brings All that he has or can have Into the World with him. Man is Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown. This World is too poor to produce one Seed."[2] Blake's attitude toward the nature of reality would deny not only our conventional views of time but also the possibility that something can be created from nothing.

The symbols of poetry, according to Blake, come from the *real* world, the permanent timeless world of eternity: "There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature."[3] The real world is a world of spirits, but, says Blake, "A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce."[4] For Blake, the greatest art is the minutely articulated vision of the real world, which if clearly seen would reveal itself as the vision of an apocalyptic resolution of all things. This real world he thought any man capable of perceiving if he were to look *through* instead of *with* the eyes: "I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it."[5] Northrop Frye has remarked that no matter how many eyes we have we still have only a single mind and that for Blake the eye is a lens and perception a mental act.[6] Furthermore, each minute perception *through* the eye is a vortex of experience which carries with it, in microcosm, the totality of experience. Imagination requires minute discrimination: "He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all."[7]

Implicit in Blake's theory of art is the idea that there is a final and perfect form which all art seeks to approximate. The duty of the artist is to recreate out of the materials of the fallen world a work of art

[2] *The Complete Writings of William Blake* (Geoffrey Keynes, editor; London and New York, 1957), p. 471. With the exception of the transcription of "The Tyger," all quotations from Blake's works in this essay are from this edition, hereafter referred to as *K*.

[3] "A Vision of the Last Judgment," *K*605.

[4] "A Descriptive Catalogue," *K*576.

[5] "A Vision of the Last Judgment," *K*617. Also:

> "We are led to Believe a Lie
> When we see not Thro' the Eye."
> —"Auguries of Innocence," *K*433.

Elsewhere Blake distinguishes between the "inward" and "outward" eye (*K*817).

[6] *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton, 1947), p. 19.

[7] "A Descriptive Catalogue," *K*576.

embodying the "central form" of the real world. This is the reason for Blake's assumption that there is a universal system. A work of art may be judged by the extent to which it has succeeded in recreating this reality in terms which man may comprehend *through* the senses, in terms not debased by the veil of material delusion.

Objects seen *through* the eye form the "minute particulars" of this system. They are vortexes, points of experience which expand back through the mind to infinity. Or, more exactly, they are infinite eternity (spatially and temporally free) contracted to minute particulars in the act of perception: "the world in a grain of sand." The delusion we call the material world is a congeries of multiple images broken from an essential unity where all things are infinitely expanded and therefore one:

> My Eyes more & more
> Like a Sea without shore
> Continue Expanding,
> The Heavens commanding,
> Till the Jewels of Light,
> Heavenly Men beaming bright,
> Appear'd as One Man.[8]

In eternity the lion lies down with the lamb: we *see* them particular but *know* them *unified*. Many of the "Proverbs of Hell" in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* illustrate this point. For example: "Let man wear the fell of the lion, woman the fleece of the sheep."[9] Men and women, in Cabalistic and in Blakean thought, are fragments of an eternal unity. All things are aspects of God himself, or eternity:

> The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.
> The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.
> The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.[10]

Man, also, is a microcosm of God and, therefore, God himself or a reflection of God in particular terms. What Blake calls the "human form divine" is man's eternal form—or God. Man, if he knows how to interpret his perceptions, is capable of seeing *sub specie aeternitatis* by practicing the observation of "minute particulars." Blake denies dualism as a necessary condition of human experience, particularly the dualism of universality-concretion.

Taken together, the ideas that there is a single timeless reality, that time is itself an illusion at least insofar as we think we know it, and that

[8] Letter to Butts, *K*805. [9] *K*151.
[10] *K*151.

man has innate ideas when he enters the fallen world suggest that Blake, looking back on his early shorter poems, would not have been surprised at his genius. Instead he would have held that failure to anticipate the "system" would have been failure as a poet. He would have held that by definition any true poem is a creation *pars pro toto* of the single system which it is the business of art constantly to recreate. He would have judged his early poems on their power to discriminate particularly aspects of eternity.

Readers have generally assumed that "The Tyger" is one of Blake's two or three greatest lyrics. For this reason, it is interesting to see that "The Tyger" most fully and particularly assimilates the whole of Blake's great system.[11] If we take as our criterion Blake's own view of what a poem should be, we discover that we have not overrated it. This leads us to suspect two things: that Blake's own standard is a reasonable one, at least insofar as the kind of poetry he wrote is concerned; and that an interpretation of Blake's shorter poems in the light of other and usually later expressions of the system is not only allowable but also perhaps imperative, if we are to understand what these poems really are. The meaning of "The Tyger" has remained a source of endless speculation; commentaries upon it have been general, fragmentary, or specialized. The excellent general approach to Blake of Frye, for example, puts us in a position to understand the poem but does not treat it in any detail. The interesting commentary of David V. Erdman, on the other hand, is limited by his special concern with Blake's politics.[12]

Here it is in the form which perhaps satisfied its author—the form in which Blake engraved it:[13]

[11] In the last chapter of his recent book, *The Piper and the Bard* (Detroit, 1959), pp. 277–287, published after this essay was completed, Robert F. Gleckner discusses parallels between "The Tyger" and *The Four Zoas*. He reaches some conclusions similar to my own, but he approaches them from an opposite direction, being interested primarily in how "The Tyger" as a song of experience throws light upon the later poem. My own discussion is a considerable development of some ideas originally presented in *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision* (Ithaca, 1955), pp. 236–240.

[12] *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton, 1954), particularly pp. 178–181.

[13] Blake's punctuation was inconsistent, particularly in his use of commas and periods, colons and semicolons. This inconsistency is made even more confusing (if that is possible) by his tendency to write commas that look like periods and semicolons that look like colons. This problem is well illustrated by the plate from *Songs of Experience* on which "The School Boy" is engraved (reproduced in Northrop Frye's Modern Library selection of Blake). In the word "nip'd" of line one, stanza five, the apostrophe looks like a period, though in "strip'd" of line three it is clearly an apostrophe. I have chosen to reproduce Blake's punctuation as best I can without being swayed by a desire for consistency. Possible alternative readings appear in the brackets. No two Blake scholars have agreed on the

Tyger Tyger. burning bright, [.]
In the forests of the night: [;]
What immortal hand or eye. [,]
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp, [.]
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

And when the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears: [;]
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night; [:]
What immortal hand or eye, [.]
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

"The Tyger" is a poem of rather simple form, clearly and cleanly proportioned, all of its statements contributing to a single, sustained, dramatic gesture. Read aloud, it is powerful enough to move many listeners (small children, for example) without their having much understanding of the poem beyond its literal expression of a dramatic situation. But Blake warns us that there is a great gulf between simplicity and insipidity. The total force of the poem comes not only from its immediate rhetorical power but also from its symbolical structure.

Blake's images, at first sensuous, are to continued inspection symbolic. Things which burn, even tigers perhaps, are either purifying something or being purified. In the dark of night, in a forest, a tiger's eyes would seem to burn. The tiger's stripes, the color of flame, suggest against the black this same conflagration. In any case, Blake is trying to establish a kind of brilliance about his image, a brilliance which he associates not

correct transcription; it is clear that subtleties of interpretation cannot often be based upon Blake's punctuation.

surprisingly with the apocalyptic figure of his minor prophecies, Orc:

> But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,
> Shot from the heights of Enitharmon,
> And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light
> of his fury.[14]

There are many examples of the same imagery throughout the prophecies. Another visual image which Blake may be suggesting here is consistent with what we shall see in the nature of the tiger itself. In many religious paintings (and in Blake's own work, the popularly mistitled "Glad Day,"[15] for example) the central figure seems to be emerging from or surrounded by a vast light: figuratively he "burns." Visually the fire image suggests immediate violence; traditionally it suggests some sort of purgatorial revelation.

The forests of the poem represent those famous mythological areas inhabited by blatant beasts, lost knights, and various spiritual wanderers and travellers. These forests *belong to* the night: Blake clearly invites us to read his line symbolically. For Blake, night suggests the delusion of material substance and the absence of the kind of light which surrounds revelation. There is a violent contrast between light and darkness, between the tiger and its surroundings, and the reader recognizes that the forest and the night are to be thought of in a derogatory way. The tiger, on the other hand, is presented ambiguously. In spite of its natural viciousness, it seems to suggest also clarity and energy. If the reader has had prolonged experience with poetry and mythology, other associations will sharpen these ideas. He will perhaps associate the "forests of the night" with the traditional dark night or dark journey of the soul through the dens of demons and beasts. The tiger's brightness may suggest the force which the sun so often symbolizes in mythology. If the reader has read Dante, he may associate the forests with Dante's descent from the dark wood into the underworld; if he has read Goethe, he may notice a striking symbolic relationship between Blake's imagery and the imagery of enclosure—the forest, the study, the cave, the circle—in *Faust*. Finally, if he has read Blake's own body of work, he will know that since the Fall of Man was a fall into a material world, he may associate the night with matter. In forests in the darkness men are trapped in an enclosure similar to Plato's cave, hobbled by the growing rubbish of materialism, blocked off from light by material substance. Men stand in forests surrounded by webs of leaves, limbs, vines, and bracken (Blake's illustrations provide ample evidence for such a symbolic inter-

[14] "Europe," *K*244–245.

[15] See Erdman, p. 6, for an explanation of how it came to be so titled.

pretation of fallen life). Blake's prophecies work toward a similar expression of this idea in expanded form. In *The Book of Urizen,* Urizen, the arch-materialist of Blake's myth, traps himself in webbed enclosures similar to jungles. In *The Four Zoas* he sits in his "web of deceitful religion." The forest is also a symbol of the natural cycle of growth and decay in the fallen, natural world. It therefore represents not only spatial but also temporal enclosure. In his later prophecies Blake refers to the fallen world in its material, spatial form as the "mundane shell." Its opacity prevents man from seeing through to eternity. The time-form of the fallen world Blake calls the "circle of destiny," the world falsely seen in the spirit of materialistic determinism. The stars, which enter our poem in stanza five, are a part of the concave surface of the mundane shell where man is trapped, and their movements represent the delusory, mechanical aspects of time. This shell is also a kind of egg, holding an embryo capable eventually of breaking the shell and leaping into real life free of the cycles of time and the enclosures of space.

In *The Four Zoas*, night symbolizes the history of the fallen world—its time-form, the circle of destiny. The archetypal man of Blake's prophetic books, Albion, a primordial giant symbolizing the human world, succumbs to sleep at the time of the fall and awakens only at the last judgment. In an early scheme for *The Four Zoas* Blake divided the history of the fallen world into nine "nights," each a historical cycle; and he subtitled his poem "The Death and Judgment of the Ancient Man, A Dream in Nine Nights." The fallen world is therefore a nightmare in the mind of Albion, who is afflicted by materialist delusions: for the materialist, the tiger appears out of darkness, a nightmarish figure, bright and violent, perhaps the vehicle of that terrible judgment he has been taught to believe in. What the tiger is to the visionary, the poem is about to tell us, but in a subtler way.

Now all of the symbolic relationships that I have suggested may not be apparent to a cursory reading *in vacuo*. As the reader acquaints himself with, first, the poem's clearly symbolic diction, the symbolical and allegorical tradition in western poetry, and finally Blake's own symbolical world, the poem gathers force. It is true that the reader is, to a certain degree, reading back and away from the poem into the world from which it has come, but even this is consistent with Blake's own view of the world: Man creates the world by the process of imagination; reading back and away from the poem is also reading back and *into* one's own mind. In one sense, at least, Blake wrote poems which the reader himself creates.

A reading of Blake's early drafts of "The Tyger" in the Rossetti MS reveals a rather important metamorphosis of the attitude of the speaker

of the poem. Certain phrases from these drafts, later deleted, suggest that the speaker's attitude as Blake first conceived it was more clearly one of failure to understand and consequent fear of the tiger.[16] For example:

> What dread hand and what dread feet?
> Could fetch it from the furnace deep
> And in thy horrid ribs dare steep
> In the well of sanguine woe.

The hellish imagery of these lines (Blake contended, after all, that hell was a kind of delusion), the reference to horrid ribs and deadly terrors, both of which strongly suggest that the tiger is a product of a *real* hell and a *real* deathliness—several of these images are eliminated from the poem so that the balance between fear and admiration is made less precarious. It is still possible to read the final draft and find overtones which suggest that the speaker *might* be a figure living in the fallen world and deluded into thinking that his world is the real world—someone like Urizen as he appears in *The Four Zoas,* particularly in Night Seven (a), where he meets Orc:

> But Urizen silent descended to the Caves of Orc & saw
> A Cavern'd Universe of flaming fire.[17]

There is still in the final draft the assertion that the tiger may come from "distant deeps." To such a person the tiger is horrific. It does not conform to established law, fails to fit into the established world picture, and is therefore evil. It is the corporeal eye of such a person that is described in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man."[18]

But I think it is clear that there is also another speaker of the poem who presents us with an alternative reading, a speaker whose attitude casts an ironic perspective upon the words as they are spoken by our Urizenic questioner. This speaker knows the answers to his questions and is really forming them rhetorically. This means ultimately that the speaker is a visionary, a "mental traveller" who sees the world in its proper perspective. Careful examination shows that the questions he

[16] The interpretive conclusions of Martin K. Nurmi's "Blake's Revisions of 'The Tyger'," *PMLA,* LXXI, 4 (September 1956), pp. 669–685, are not, I think, inconsistent with the view expressed here, though they differ in emphasis. He writes: "Blake [can portray] the tiger's symmetry as containing a really fearful component because he can see clearly and fully at this point the place of the tiger in the divine plan." From my point of view it would be better to say that Blake can portray the tiger's symmetry as having visionary beauty for this reason.

[17] "The Four Zoas," *K*320. [18] *K*151.

asks imply certain answers, and that from them we learn not only what the tiger is but also who his maker is.

The question of stanza one involves the speaker's assumption that the "hand or eye" forms the tiger. The hand is the shaping force of the blacksmith. The "eye" image, which as we have seen occurs elsewhere in Blake in the same sense, suggests the shaping spirit of imagination. If we take the maker of the tiger to be God (provisionally, for this is not the whole story), the appearance of "eye" in this context means that God's method of creation is supernatural and that what He creates is not material. For Blake there is a clear distinction between the material, lidded or "outward" eye (an image like that of the "mundane shell") and the immortal, visionary eye which the artist sees *through* instead of *with*. The one raises a wall against true perception. The other opens a door: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."[19] Erdman has pointed out that the eye appears as a visionary image in Blake's illustrations and drawings.[20] In *Jerusalem,* Albion sleeps through history with eyes closed; his moments of vision and assertions of new life occur when he opens his real eyes and creates thereby the real world, not the nightmarish apparent one:

> Upon the Rock, he open'd his eyelids in pain,
> in pain he mov'd
> His stony members, he saw England. Ah!
> shall the Dead live again?[21]

"Eye" suggests also the cycles of history named by God in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. In those prophecies, history is divided into seven periods or "eyes of God," as Blake calls them. Each of these is a wheel containing within it the microcosm of all history, each wheel the same play with different players; or perhaps better, each the same group of players acting a slightly different but archetypal drama: "as one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same . . . Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change nor decay."[22] Thus each "eye of God" is an intuition of the full scope of the historic process, and the eighth eye will act as the culmination of this process. This view of history and reality is consistent with Blake's argument that reality lies within "minute particulars," if only each particular is observed *through* the eye. Thus each eye of God is figuratively the "world in a grain of sand," or better, the grain of sand in which the world exists. The tiger as a creation of the imaginative eye of God and

[19] "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," *K*154.
[20] "A Descriptive Catalogue," *K*567.
[21] P. 313. The source is Ezekiel.
[22] "A Descriptive Catalogue," *K*567.

a symbol of that imaginative power is microcosmically implicit in each cycle, immanent and imminent. To the tiger's more complex relation to the culmination of history or the "eighth eye of God," I shall return shortly.

The tiger-maker is, as I have already suggested, not God simply defined. He is a false god or true God depending upon the speaker's perspective. Urizen would consider the maker of the tiger a false god, a devil—that is why Blake often sides with "the devil's party," as he seems to do in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* showing that "angels" are representatives of passive reason and thus lieutenants of Urizen to be associated with the stars, while "devils" are truly creative: "Active Evil is better than Passive Good."[23] Urizen's god is really the false god. Therefore, if the questions of the poem are taken as spoken by the materialist they imply that the creator of the tiger is some kind of interloper, a breaker of order. Icarus and Prometheus, the mythological personages of whom there are definite overtones in stanza two, were both interlopers. Both defied the order of things (the material order, Blake would say) and both were punished for it. Icarus aspired to the sun and was flung down into the sea. Prometheus stole fire (the persistent image of Blake's poem) from the Gods, brought it to man, and was chained to a rock for his transgression.[24] There is a parallel to this in Blake's own work, where Orc, Blake's first major apocalyptic figure, is also chained to a rock so that he too may be punished and controlled. According to Urizen, then, the creator of the tiger, a threatening figure like Orc, or perhaps Blake's ultimate hero Los, must be some lawbreaker sent by the forces of the devil himself. Part of Orc's serpent nature is that imposed upon him by the deluded imaginations of Urizen.

But the visionary, asking the same questions rhetorically, sees these same interlopers not as evil creatures but as heroes. They have embarked on the inevitable journey any hero must make in order to meet the forces of materialism and to do battle with them. Icarus' ascent on wings attached to him by wax suggests a terrible misjudgment of the consequences of approach to the fire of heaven, but Prometheus' descent sets the stage for the more important final battle to come, the loss of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Unbound* being an irony of history. Prometheus' gift of fire to man symbolizes hope of eventual apocalypse, a cleansing of all material things in purgatorial flame. His act is therefore related closely to the image Blake draws of a burning tiger threatening to consume the forests with fire. The "seizing" of fire is also the typical act of a black-

[23] Annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms, K*77.

[24] Robert O. Bowen, *Explicator* VII, 8 (June, 1949), Item 62, first mentioned these overtones.

smith preparing to forge some object. In stanzas three and four, furthermore, the speaker assumes that the creator of the tiger is a blacksmith or at least someone who has done a blacksmith's job. This particular smith is not only the strongest of creatures but also the greatest of artists. He is not only a Prometheus but also a Hephaestus; and we recall that the blacksmith Hephaestus was also hurled from heaven by Zeus, that he was the Greek god of fire, and that his name was used by Greek and Roman poets as a synonym for "fire."

From the perspective of Urizen again, the questions of stanzas three and four imply that the blacksmith is some devil-maker. If we take the blacksmith as an archetype of the artist, then we see that from this perspective the artist is a creator of illusions and that the poet, in Sir Philip Sidney's terms, "lyeth," but for evil reasons, not for greater good. Urizen would ban him from the republic for reasons somewhat different from Plato's—because he is a fabricator and a dangerous revolutionary who pretends to see a world other than the material one. In his annotations to Bacon's *Essays,* Blake objects to the idea of the poet's lying in order to give pleasure. Only someone who sees *with* the corporeal eye would for a moment be so naïve as to say that the poet lies: "What Bacon calls Lies is Truth itself."[25] Blake's blacksmith-artist Los works steadily with anvil and forge, hand and eye; the wonders of his labors are his creations of form out of miasma. His actions illustrate the principle of *outline* in Blake's aesthetic. According to Blake, when error is given proper outline it ceases to be error, for in its true form it has lost the power to delude. If, then, we begin to suspect that the creator of the tiger is, in Blake's terms, Urizen's nemesis Los, we shall not be far wrong.

But this is not the whole story either. Stanza five is perhaps the most difficult in the poem. No interpretation of it that I have seen seems adequate. The most elaborate recent one is by Kathleen Raine in an essay which proposes to find the answer to the poem's question (Who made the tiger?) in Blake's alchemical and occult reading.[26] She points to a quotation from Reuchlin's *de Art Cabbalistica,* which is mentioned twice by Robert Fludd in his *Mosaicall Philosophy* and once by Thomas Vaughn in his *Lumen de Lumine,* "both books well-known to Blake." The quotation is: "There is not an herb here below but he hath a star in heaven above; the star strikes him with her beams and says to him: Grow." Miss Raine construes the action of the stars in throwing down their "spears" (beams) as making possible the creation or "growth" of the tiger and the fallen world. By a somewhat devious process of reasoning, Miss Raine concludes that the Elohim (whom she associates

[25] *K*397.

[26] "Who Made the Tyger?", *Encounter* II, 6 (June, 1954), pp. 43–50.

with Urizen), as distinct from God, created the tiger, because in Blake's sources the Elohim created the fallen world. Therefore, she argues, "the answer is beyond all possible doubt, No"; God, who created the lamb, did not create the tiger.

I can only say that I totally disagree with the conclusion and the method used to arrive at it. Miss Raine has perhaps discovered a valuable source for Blake's star imagery, but she has completely ignored what Blake has done with the imagery in assimilating it to the poem. In the first place, if we accept the source, Blake has substituted "spears" for "beams," and it is difficult to assume that he did this merely to find a rime for "tears." "Spears" brings a suggestion of war into the poem. "Stars" in Blake's symbolism are always associated with Urizen and materialism. As warriors they seem to represent his own legions, who have lost the battle against the creator of the tiger and in the course of this loss have actually helped to create what they most feared—the wrath of righteousness. I believe that further examination of Blake's imagery here will sustain this view. In Blake's symbolism the stars represent the movement of a delusory scientific time and the concave, inner surface of the mundane egg which is the fallen world. The image is particularly apt because the stars are ineffectual in daylight; they are apparent only at night or during fallen history. To Urizen the act of the stars in throwing down their spears would suggest that creation of the material world—the end of the "wars of Eden" leading to the fall. Stars are traditionally angelic intelligences, but Blake uses both angels and stars ironically as forces of reaction. The action of the stars here represents a fall in the war in heaven during which the "demonic" orders, represented by the tiger, were created. An important analogy to this act occurs in the Preludium to *Europe* where the earth female characterizes herself as an upside-down tree, the inverted delusory fallen Sephirotic tree of the Cabala, and the stars that appear to be rising are in fact the fallen angels and false gods, while the falling stars are the rising gods. This topsy-turviness is typical of Blake's fallen world and accounts for Urizen's loss of direction in *The Four Zoas*.

Several commentators upon this poem (most recently F. W. Bateson)[27] have pointed out that the stars also throw down their spears in Night V of *The Four Zoas*. In this passage Urizen is speaking of past events:

> "I well remember, for I heard the mild & holy voice
> "Saying, 'O light, spring up & shine,' & I sprang up
> from the deep.

[27] *Selected Poems of William Blake* (New York, 1957), pp. 117–119.

"He gave to me a silver scepter, & crown'd me with a
golden crown,
"& said, 'Go forth & guide my Son who wanders on the
ocean.'
"I went not forth: I hid myself in black clouds of my
wrath;
"I call'd the stars around my feet in the night of
councils dark;
"The stars threw down their spears & fled naked away.
"We fell. I seiz'd thee, dark Urthona."[28]

This passage tells of a fall (obviously based on Milton's account of the Fall of the Angels, says Bateson) similar to that in *The Book of Urizen,* but here it is told not objectively but from Urizen's point of view. Here, too, we have a rather different Urizen, with more self-awareness than formerly. He seems at least partially aware of the reasons for and the pathos of his fall. The stars are, in any case, the legions of Urizen now fallen into the upside-down material world of his own mental construction, a world created when Albion fell asleep:

But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the
mighty limbs of Albion.[29]

They now compose the "starry floor" or the limit of the fall referred to in "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience.* Urizen's error is to think that they are rising points of light while the energetic light of the demonic orders seems to him destined for some awful abyss. The stars are trapped, then, in the world delusion which Urizen next proposes to explore:

"I will arise, Explore these dens, & find that deep pulsation
"That shakes my cavern with strong shudders; perhaps this is
the night
"Of Prophecy, & Luvah hath burst his way from Enitharmon.[30]

Urizen's song ends with his proposing to organize his domain—the materialist world. It is unlikely that in the stubbornness of his own revolt Urizen (if we may conjecture) would fully understand the weeping of the stars. He might consider it an expression of pity for those hurt in the havoc wrought by what to him was a necessary war in behalf of progress. But it is more likely that the tears are really tears of chagrin and fear reminiscent of the allegory in Blake's *America,* in which the soldiers of the king of England, also associated with Urizen, throw down their arms to flee the vision of revolt, Orc.[31] Urizen would

[28] *K*310–311. [29] "Milton," *K*486. [30] *K*311.
[31] See Erdman, pp. 178–179; also Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics*

not understand the chagrin of the stars at their woeful upside-down enclosure in the "starry floor" of circular zodiacal movement—for him this would constitute the brilliant new order:

> In sevens & tens & fifties, hundreds, thousands, number'd all
> According to their various powers, subordinate to Urizen
> And to his sons in their degrees & to his beauteous daughters,
> Travelling in silent majesty along their order'd ways
> In right lined paths outmeasur'd by proportions of number, weight,
> And measure, mathematic motion wondrous along the deep.[32]

These lines are from a section of *The Four Zoas* in which we see Urizen's ordered world as Urizen may first have seen it in the flush of creative pride.

From the point of view of the visionary the action of the stars is something more profound. Erdman makes a suggestion worthy of mention: "The climax of the forging of stanza four of 'The Tyger' is a mighty hammering which drives out the impurities in a shower of sparks, like the falling stars children call angels' tears. At this point in 'The Tyger' Blake employs the symbols which in his political writing signify the day of repentance when the king's 'starry hosts' shall 'throw down . . . sword and musket.' "[33] For the visionary the image of these lines is visual and particular, leading toward an intuition of apocalypse when, with the tiger formed, the sparks hurled, and heaven itself cleansed by pity and (perhaps, ironically) by fear, total resolution can be foreseen. The imagery of the stanza, rather than deriving its meaning from a single source, seems to me to describe an ambiguous event. If Miss Raine's hint is useful, it is to suggest that the hurling down of the spears of light at the time of the creation of the tiger is one of those typically ambiguous Blakean acts in which progression comes out of its own opposite. Thus the capitulation of the stars, in contributing to the "growth" of the fallen world, helps to bring about its apocalyptic destruction, just as Los's "hand or eye" brings form out of miasma and completes a divine plan which seems to have begun in total degradation.

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of Vision (New York, 1946), p. 251: "When the stars throw down their spears and weep, they are soldiers abandoning their arms in contrition and readiness for peace."

[32] "The Four Zoas," *K*287.

[33] Erdman, p. 180. Ralph D. Eberly, *Explicator* VIII, 2 (November, 1949), p. 12, has also associated the spears with a shower of sparks from the forge of a heavenly smithy.

The visionary understands the paradox of progress and therefore is able to "keep the divine vision in time of trouble."

There is a further qualification to be made. For Blake, there are true and false tears, true and false pity. For someone like Los, the true pity is to hold in check any immediate or sentimental expression of that emotion, just as Orc in Book VII of *The Four Zoas* "contemns" the pity of Urizen.[34] If Los were to pity Urizen before he had given him his true form, he would harm the whole of creation in the long run. Los, as artist, must purge himself even of apparent pity in order to be capable of its higher form. The violent tiger itself is Blake's symbol for the denial of false pity. Urizen was fooled by the stars; they pitied themselves. The kind of pity of which Urizen is capable in his fallen state is itself error.

In the fallen world even the apocalypse seems to have an ambiguous form. In total resolution the purgation by flame which is the tiger and the baptism by tears which is the weeping of the stars lead out of the fallen world into the new in the traditional rituals of rebirth. The perfect balance of eternity is achieved, and the tiger lies down with the lamb, an image to which Blake turns in other lyrics.

If by now we do not have a fairly clear idea of who created the tiger and what the tiger is, the prophetic books can tell us more. Early in the poem the word "dare" is dramatically substituted for the word "could" of stanza one. Physical strength to create the tiger is evidently not the only necessity—there must be *will*; the figurative journey is both physically and spiritually difficult. In the prophecies the tenacious spirit is Los, who wipes "the sweat from his red brow" and confronts those miasmal, hovering, indefinite creatures to whom he must give a form. It is Los, then, who howls in anguish, bestows no false pity, and holds to his task:

> I know that Albion has divided me, and that thou,
> O my Spectre
> Hast just cause to be irritated; but look stedfastly
> upon me;
> Comfort thyself in my strength; the time will arrive
> When all Albion's injuries shall cease.[35]

If we return for a moment to a point already made about Blake's theory of vision, we recall that he found the visionary at least latent in every man. Every man is a *Los* or at least has a *Los*. When in *Milton* Blake finds his own prophetic inspiration, it is Los who appears to him as a burning spiritual form:

[34] *K*322. [35] "Jerusalem," *K*626.

> . . . Los descended to me:
> And Los behind me stood, a terrible flaming Sun,
> just close
> Behind my back. I turned round in terror, and behold!
> Los stood in that fierce glowing fire, & he also stoop'd
> down
> And bound my sandals on in Udan-Adan; trembling I stood
> Exceedingly with fear & terror, standing in the Vale
> Of Lambeth; but he kissed me and wish'd me health,
> And I became One Man with him arising in my strength.
> 'Twas too late now to recede. Los had enter'd into
> my soul:
> His terrors now possess'd me whole! I arose in fury &
> strength.[36]

Since the power of vision is the power of artistic creation in a non-material world, the power of God is the power of man, and each man is a kind of artist. It is no surprise to see that Blake takes the next step and asserts that man is a microcosm of God, God is the spiritual body of communal man.

In *Jerusalem*, when the seven eyes of God are named, it is said that "they nam'd the Eighth: he came not, he hid in Albion's Forests."[37] For fallen man, such a creature is truly horrendous, hidden gleaming like an eye—like a tiger—in darkness, an image of the judgment he fears. Fallen man sees with "a little narrow orb clos'd up & dark / Scarcely beholding the great light."[38] Such an eye Blake implies cannot "judge of the stars" and can therefore certainly not "measure the sunny rays."[39] For such an eye, tigers and lions are not human forms but those "dishumaniz'd men"[40] seen by Urizen in his travels. Their spiritual reality is covered over by a material excrescence:

> . . . A Rock, a Cloud, a Mountain,
> Were not now Vocal as in Climes of happy Eternity
> Where the lamb replies to the infant voice, & the lion
> to the man of years
> Giving them sweet instructions; where the Cloud, the
> River, & the Field
> Talk with the husbandman and shepherd.[41]

[36] *K*505. [37] *K*686. [38] "Milton," *K*484.

[39] *K*485. Compare the angel in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* whose fear makes him see Hell in the form of a gigantic serpent with a forehead colored like that of a tiger, while Blake finds himself sitting beside a bank listening to a harpist. For the political implications of the passage see Erdman, p. 165.

[40] "The Four Zoas," *K*314.

[41] "The Four Zoas," *K*315.

But for the visionary, the tiger illuminated is the tiger creating out of the forest the light of day in one vast apocalyptic conflagration similar to the awakening of Albion in *Jerusalem:*

> . . . Albion rose
> In anger, the wrath of God breaking, bright flaming
> on all sides around
> His awful limbs; into the Heavens he walked, clothed
> in flames.[42]

The leap of the tiger in the forest, inevitable to the eye of the visionary, is equivalent to the purgative fire which sweeps all before it, the eighth eye of God rending the veil of materialism. The tiger is thus an image of man's own hopes—the God in man, but also something created by the artist in man on the anvil of inspiration. It is a "fearful" image because, in the "forests of the night," false pity is misdirected. The artist who chooses to capture the miasmal mist of error and from it create significant form must not succumb to the temptations of right reason: "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."[43] To do so would be suddenly to succumb to the Urizenic view of what the tiger represents. Blake, himself, knew the temptation to treat the tiger as an obsessive, evil demon:

> I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily & Nightly; but the nature of such things is not, as some suppose, without trouble or care. Temptations are on the right hand & left; behind, the sea of time & space roars & follows swiftly: he who keeps not right onward is lost, & if our footsteps slide in clay, how can we do otherwise than fear & tremble.[44]

And even Los is capable of momentary delusion during which the negative hatred of the spectre appears similar to the tiger's wrath:

> While Los spoke the terrible Spectre fell shudd'ring before
> him,
> Watching his time with glowing eyes to leap upon his prey.[45]

But in certain visionary circumstances wrath and pity merge in a single imaginative act. The totality of the man of imagination, expressed in the image of the four Zoas and their eyes is combined with the seven lamps, the seven spirits, and the seven seals of *Revelation* in Blake's description of his pictorial Vision of the Last Judgment: "The whole upper part of the Design is a view of Heaven opened: around the Throne of Christ [in a cloud which rolls away are the] Four Living

[42] *K*742. [43] "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," *K*152.
[44] Letter to Butts, *K*812–813. [45] "Jerusalem," *K*627.

Creatures filled with Eyes, attended by Seven Angels with the Seven Vials of the wrath of God."[46] Blake clearly associates these seven angels and vials with his own seven historical cycles culminating in the total eighth.

The eighth eye or total man is the "Four Living Creatures." Even in his fallen state the prophetic power in this man is capable of being raised above his own sleeping form so that he may see God's wrath and its sevenfold cyclical expression in history as a form of spiritual recreation and therefore proper pity. This is the case with Milton:

> The Seven Angels of the Presence wept over
> Milton's Shadow.
> As when a man dreams he reflects not that his
> body sleeps,
> Else he would wake, so seem'd he entering his
> Shadow: but
> With him the Spirits of the Seven Angels of
> the Presence
> Entering, they gave him still perceptions of
> his Sleeping Body
> Which now arose and walk'd with them in Eden,
> as an Eighth
> Image Divine tho' darken'd and tho' walking
> as one walks
> In sleep, and the Seven comforted and supported
> him.[47]

To "dare frame" the tiger's "fearful symmetry" is to "keep right onward," to hold the visionary attitude. It is also to confront the tiger with assurance. To be tempted and to succumb is to become the materialist and to find oneself staring, as it were, into a mirror at one's own spectre, without realizing that one sees there the reflection of a brute self. Nature's "vegetable glass" shows Urizen only his own image. Not knowing that he sees himself, he chases that image through the world, failing ever to subdue it. The "wild beast" which Blake calls the "spectre" in "My Spectre around me . . ." is an intimation of the divided state of fallen man. If it is horrific, its existence, like that of the tiger, indicates man's condition if he cares to or can read the sign. In the conclusion of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion,* Oothoon, a free spirit condemned as a harlot by the man she has loved, lists a "glowing tyger" as one of the creatures of the night which can be blotted out by the "mild beams" of the sun—beams which bring expansion to the

[46] "A Vision of the Last Judgment," *K*444.
[47] "Milton," *K*496.

"eye of pity."[48] Having come this far, Oothoon needs only to see a little farther through the eye and into the tiger's fire to understand that the blotting out of the horrific glowing tiger in the greater light of the sun is similar to the disappearance of the sun in the light of the glory of God, which is described to us in *Revelation.* In the apocalypse the tiger's fire returns to the light of which it is a fallen intimation. To the visionary, the tiger symbolizes the primal spiritual energy which may bring form out of chaos and unite man with that part of his own being which he has allowed somehow to sleepwalk into the dreadful forests of material darkness. In *Europe,* Blake speaks of materialist "thought" as the cause of such a retreat from reality:

> Thought chang'd the infinite to a serpent, that
> which pitieth
> To a devouring flame; and man fled from its face and hid
> in forests of night.[49]

The tiger is formed on the anvil of inspiration which is the eye of man and God, but it is also a symbol of the very same eye which created it, for Blake believed that men are what they behold, that the outer and inner worlds are really one: "To the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a Man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers."[50] Several times in the prophetic books Blake announces that a character has "become what he beheld." The manner in which one beholds the tiger is all important to its and one's own spiritual nature. Man has the power to create his world, for that world is really himself, caught in the vortex where the spirit takes on perceivable form.

"The Tyger" is concerned with both the unprolific or distorting and the truly creative process in spiritual life. The latter is a process equivalent to the process of creation in art. Creation in art is for Blake the renewal of religious truth. From the point of view of the visionary, the tiger, fearful as he may be, is created form, error solidified and metamorphosed into a vision of the last judgment. He is, therefore, a creature to be confronted and contemplated not with undiluted fear but with that strange gaiety suggested by the visionary intensity of the poem itself—a gaiety which can find a place in the divine plan for both the tears and spears of the stars, for both Los and Urizen, and for both the tiger and the lamb.

[48] *K*195. [49] *K*241. [50] Letter to Trusler, *K*793.

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