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by Colin Pedley

Blake's poem "The Tyger," though its dating has always been a little uncertain, is likely to have been completed by 10 October 1793, when Blake advertised the separate *Songs of Experience* in his prospectus.¹ This article discusses some of the discourses concerning the tiger which were available to Blake, concentrating primarily on the discourse of natural history.

A useful starting point, which serves as a focus for various elements in the discourse, is an incident widely reported in the newspapers: the announcement of the death of a son of Sir Hector Munro. On Wednesday, 3 July 1793, the *Times* carried a short paragraph:

A son of Sir Hector Munro has been killed on passage to India. He went ashore with a party at an island where they had put in to water; and reclining with his companions under some trees a tiger sprang from an adjoining thicket, and seizing him in his mouth, tore the unfortunate young man to pieces.

A more detailed report was published the next day in the *St. James's Chronicle* 2-4 July 1793, and again in the *Star* 5 July 1793, reproducing part of an eyewitness account in a letter written by one of Munro's companions, which had been published in the *Calcutta Gazette* 1 January 1793, and had now reached London on a ship from India. The event itself had taken place about 22 December 1792. The text of one of the letters from an eyewitness follows:

To describe the awful, horrid, and lamentable accident I have been an eyewitness of, is impossible. Yesterday morning Mr Downey, of the Company's troops, Lieut. Pyefinch, poor Mr Munro (son of Sir Hector) and myself, went on shore on Saugur Island to shoot deer. We saw innumerable tracks of tigers and deer, but still we were induced to pursue our sport, and did the whole day. About half past three we sat down on the edge of the

jungle, to eat some cold meat sent us from the ship, and had just commenced our meal, when Mr Pyefinch and a black servant told us there was a fine deer within six yards of us. Mr Downey and myself immediately jumped up to take our guns; mine was the nearest, and I had just laid hold of it when I heard a roar, like thunder, and saw an immense royal tiger spring on the unfortunate Munro, who was sitting down. In a moment his head was in the beast's mouth, and he rushed into the jungle with him, with as much ease as I could lift a kitten, tearing him through the thickest bushes and trees, every thing yielding to his monstrous strength.

The agonies of horror, regret, and, I must say, fear (for there were two tigers, male and female) rushed on me at once. The only effort I could make was to fire at him, though the poor youth was still in his mouth. I relied partly on Providence, partly on my own aim, and fired a musket. I saw the tiger stagger and agitated, and cried out so immediately. Mr Downey then fired two shots, and I one more. We retired from the jungle, and, a few minutes after, Mr Munro came up to us, all over blood, and fell. We took him on our backs to the boat, and got every medical assistance for him from the Valentine East India-man, which lay at anchor near the island, but in vain. He lived 24 hours in the extreme of torture; his head and skull were torn, and broke to pieces, and he was wounded by the claws all over his neck and shoulders; but it was better to take him away, though irrecoverable, than leave him to be devoured limb by limb. We have just read the funeral service over the body, and committed it to the deep. He was an amiable and promising youth. I must observe, there was a large fire blazing close to us, composed of ten or a dozen whole trees; I made it myself, on purpose to keep the tigers off, as I had always heard it would. There were eight or ten natives about us; many shots had been fired at the place, and much noise and laughing at the time; but this ferocious animal disregarded all. The human mind cannot form an idea of the scene; it turned my very soul within me. The beast was about four and a half feet high, and nine long. His head appeared as large as an ox's, his eyes darting fire, and his roar, when he first seized his prey, will

never be out of my recollection. We had scarcely pushed our boats from that cursed shore when the tigress made her appearance, raging mad almost, and remained on the sand as long as the distance would allow me to see her.²

The provincial newspapers repeated the story. For instance, the *York Herald* 6 July 1793 on one page reproduced the *Times's* brief account, though its final sentence (imitating the more sensational version in the *Oracle* 4 July 1793 and the *Whitehall Evening Post* 2-4 July 1793) replaced "tore the unfortunate young man to pieces" with "tore out the heart of the unfortunate young man"; and on a later page it reprinted the complete account from the *Calcutta Gazette*. The *Northampton Mercury* 6 July 1793 settled for reprinting the greater part of the letter in the *Calcutta Gazette*, while the *Reading Mercury* 8 July 1793 printed the whole of it. In contrast, the *Bath Chronicle* 11 July 1793 mixed extract and summary in an edited narration of what it called "this marvellous story."

The event was clearly felt to be newsworthy in 1793, since in addition to the newspapers, both London and provincial, it found a place in a number of other publications. It featured in the summary of the year's chief happenings in the *Annual Register* of both Dodsley, and Rivington, and in the *New Annual Register*, all three quoting extensively from the eyewitness letter.³ The extent of the widespread interest was demonstrated by the range of periodical publications that felt it worth reproducing for their readers. The *Universal Magazine*, the *European Magazine*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and the *Scots Magazine* among the established magazines all featured very similar accounts,⁴ all in their July issues which appeared about the be-

ginning of August 1793. The *Lady's Magazine* did not report the incident, but many less well known magazines did. The *Wonderful Magazine*, new in 1793,⁵ included it among its "Marvelous Chronicle of extraordinary productions, events, and occurrences, in Nature and Art."⁶ The *Thespian Magazine* (begun in 1792) in its August 1793 issue included it under its "Monthly chronicle—domestic occurrences."⁷ Another new magazine, the *Sporting Magazine* (begun in November 1792), went further in two respects, including extensive comment about tigers and their habits, and accompanying the text with a full page engraving of the tiger seizing Munro.⁸ The painting was by Richard Corbould, and the engraving by Thomas Cook (illus. 1). Engravings were intended as a selling point for the magazine, and featured prominently in the advertisement placed in the *Morning Chronicle* 1 August 1793, under the headline, DEATH OF MUNRO.⁹ The *Sporting Magazine* also included a second eyewitness letter from the *Calcutta Gazette*, which contributed to the authenticity of the account, but added nothing of substance. From these references we can conclude that, at least in London, news of the event had wide currency, and its description was widely available. Even outside London, the news was widely disseminated.

No doubt some of the interest shown in this gruesome event was due to the celebrity of Sir Hector Munro, the victim's father. He was a soldier whose reputation had been made in India. In October 1764 he had been in command of forces which routed the confederated princes of Hindostan at Buxar, in Bihar, and rendered the Nawabs of Bengal and Oudh powerless. This battle was ranked by some as among the most decisive ever fought, and brought enormous prize money to the victors. In 1778 he captured Pondicherry from the French. He was a member of Parliament, and had been a general from 1782. He became a Lieutenant-General in 1793, and died



1. "The Attack of Mr Munro," from *The Sporting Magazine* 2 (1793): 199, Vet.A5.e.875/2. Courtesy of The Bodleian Library.

in 1805.¹⁰ But the engraving in the *Sporting Magazine* supports the more obvious suggestion that the interest which editors exploited so completely was not so much in Munro, as in the tiger. And, indeed, a close examination of the article in the *Sporting Magazine* reveals much that is of interest in establishing current attitudes to and knowledge about the tiger which illuminates the discourse available to Blake.

The *Sporting Magazine* article introduced the letters from the companions of Munro by first presenting material describing the ferocious characteristics of the tiger and supplementing this with an account of commonly held beliefs about the supposed effect of fire on the animal. The opening paragraph stressed the tiger's ferocity:

The tiger is allowed to be the most rapacious and destructive of all carnivorous animals. Fierce without provocation, and cruel without necessity, his thirst for blood is insatiable: though glutted with slaughter, he continues his carnage. He fears neither the sight nor the opposition of man, whom he frequently makes his prey, and it is generally supposed that he prefers human flesh to that of any other animal. The tiger is, indeed, one of the few animals whose ferocity can never be subdued.¹¹

There is no acknowledgment, but this is taken, with only a few minor alterations, from *A General History of Quadrupeds* by Thomas Bewick, published in 1790. Some of Bewick's material was omitted immediately before the last sentence here quoted; since it stressed the animal's thirst for blood, it might have been judged inappropriate and insensitive when the victim described in the article was a human being. It read:

The strength of the animal is so great, that, when it has killed an animal, whether it be a Horse, a Buffalo, or a Deer, it carries it off with such ease, that it seems no impediment to its flight. If it be undisturbed, it plunges its head into the body of the animal up to its very eyes, as if to satiate itself with blood.¹²

Of the greatest interest in Bewick's book are his engravings, and that of the tiger, he notes, was taken from life, from a tiger exhibited in Newcastle in 1787 (illus. 2). His text was taken in much of its substance and even its phraseology¹³ from the English translation and abridgment by William Smellie of Buffon's *Natural History, General and Particular*, which first appeared in 1780. This is confirmed by Bewick in his autobiographical

Memoir,¹⁴ which also reveals that the text was compiled for the most part by Ralph Beilby, the engraver he had been apprenticed to in Newcastle. Indeed, one of the main reasons for beginning this exploration of tigers in the discourse of natural history with the accounts of the death of Munro is that their detailed examination reveals the layered intertextuality in the accounts and highlights the extensive ways by which that discourse was mediated. A discourse that originates in largely specialist publications is seen to have been diffused and to appear in outlets much less technical.

Buffon's work is of central importance in an examination of the discourse about tigers that we are investigating. Georges Le Clerc, Comte de Buffon (together with others) published his *Histoire naturelle* in forty-four volumes between 1749 and 1804 (though he himself died in 1788). The part of the work we are concerned with had been completed in fifteen volumes by 1767, with a supplement in seven volumes appearing between 1774 and 1789. I have used the seven volumes of the *History of Quadrupeds* dated 1775, with two volumes of additions dated 1777. There were a number of English translations, both of parts and selections. For our purposes, we can note that a translation by W. Kenrick came out in three volumes in 1775, as *Natural History of Animals, Vegetables and Minerals*, while W. Smellie's translation was published in 1780 by William Creech of Edinburgh, and in nine volumes by Strahan and Cadell in London in 1785. Kearsley published the *Natural History Abridged* in 1791 (the year of Smellie's third edition), while an alternative version appeared as *Barr's Buffon* in a translation by J. S. Barr in 1792. The popularity of Buffon's work is not in any doubt, if the continuing ventures of eager publishers are any indication. That this continued up to the year we are discussing, 1793, is shown by the advertisement in December 1793 of an abridged version

of Smellie's translation to be issued cheaply in thirty-four weekly numbers, each with four plates.¹⁵

Buffon's work was also the basis of another popular work, known to Bewick, and used by him as a source, Thomas Pennant's *History of Quadrupeds*. Indeed, Pennant's work, first issued as *Synopsis of Quadrupeds* (published by J. Monk, Chester) in 1771, had originally been intended "for private amusement, and as an Index, for the more ready turning to any particular animal in the voluminous history of quadrupeds by the late Comte de Buffon" (preface). His longer *History of Quadrupeds* was published by W. White in London in 1781, and had reached a third edition, in two volumes, in 1793.¹⁶ The close relationship between Pennant and Buffon (in Smellie's translation) can be seen if we compare the following passages. Pennant writes of tigers:

If they are undisturbed they plunge their head into the body of the animal up to their very eyes, as if it were to satiate themselves with blood, which they exhaust the corpse of before they tear it to pieces. There is a sort of cruelty in their devastations, unknown to the generous lion; as well as a poltrony in their sudden retreat on any disappointment.¹⁷

The opening part of this quotation is, as we have already seen, also the same in Bewick. Buffon's description of the tiger's hunting habits beside rivers used by other animals as drinking places is the source of material for both Bewick and Pennant. Smellie's translation reads:

Here they procure their prey, or rather multiply their massacres; for they often leave the creatures they have recently killed to devour others. They delight in blood, and glut themselves with it till they are intoxicated. They tear the body for no other purpose than to plunge their head into it, and to drink large draughts of blood, the sources of which are generally exhausted before their thirst is appeased.¹⁸

Buffon characterizes the tiger's lust for blood in terms of a perpetual rage, as can be seen in a number of examples.

The tiger . . . though satiated with carnage, seems to be perpetually thirsting for blood. His fury has no intervals, but during the time he is obliged to lie in ambush for prey at the sides of rivers. He seizes and tears to pieces a fresh animal with the same rage that he exerted in devouring the first.¹⁹

Or: "He has no instinct but perpetual rage, a blind and undistinguishing ferocity, which often impells him to devour his young, and to tear in pieces their mother, when she attempts to defend them."²⁰ Or again (in a passage from which Pennant, and Bewick [and the *Sporting Magazine*] have copied):

The tiger is perhaps the only animal whose violence cannot be subdued. Neither violence nor restraint have any effect in softening his temper. He is equally irritated with gentle or rough treatment. The mild influence of society makes no impression on the obduracy of his nature. Time, instead of mollifying the ferociousness of his humour, only exasperates his rage. With equal wrath he tears the hand which feeds him, as that which is lifted up to strike him. He roars at the sight of everything that lives. Every object appears to him as a fresh prey, which he devours before hand with the avidity of his eyes, menaces with frightful groans, and the grinding of his teeth, and often darts upon it, without regarding his chains which only restrain, but cannot calm his fury.²¹

Rage is the keyword, as shown in the repeated use of the word itself, together with "fury" and "wrath."

To the material which originated from Buffon, the writer of the article on the death of Munro in the *Sporting Magazine* for July 1793 added details about the general belief that a fire would be protection against a tiger. This had an immediate relevance since the hunting party with Munro had built such a fire "composed of ten or a dozen whole trees . . . —on purpose to keep the tigers off." The author continued:

We shall not give a decisive judgment either for or against the security which a fire may ensure to any persons who wander in Asiatic forests, against the depredations of ferocious animals; but I think I may venture to assert, that a fire *in the day-time* (when the youth in question became the prey of the tiger) can be of little use. Fire, or fireworks in broad daylight,

lose much of their effect, and in some instances are hardly visible; but in the night, when darkness and a blaze of light are strongly contrasted, it cannot be a matter of surprise that the fiercest of animals, unaccustomed to such an illumination, should flee from its tremendous aspect.²²

This was followed by the first letter with its eyewitness account, in which fire has become associated with the tiger itself rather than with any protection against it. The shocked observer wrote: "His head appeared as large as an ox's, his eyes darting fire, and his roar, when he first seized his prey, will never be out of my recollection."²³

There are many elements in the material described which are recognizable in Blake's poem "The Tyger." All the works discussed would have been readily available to him in 1793; and his professional interest in them might have been stimulated by the engravings which they contained. Without speculating as to whether Blake knew any of these accounts, they are evidence of the existence of a variety of discourses available for Blake to draw on. What we can be certain of is that between 1791 and 1793 Blake was engaged in engravings of illustrations, originally made by the author, for J. G. Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America; from the Year 1772 to 1777*, which was eventually published in 1796. Three of Blake's engravings are dated 1 December 1792, and the remainder 2 December 1793. Stedman refers to Buffon's assertion that there are "no tygers in America, but animals resembling them, which go by that name"²⁴ in his discussion of the jaguar. Goldsmith also spoke of jaguars as "tygers." Stedman's subsequent discussion highlights elements already headlined in the discourse about the tiger; the jaguar also kills for the sake of blood "with which this ferocious animal is never glutted."²⁵ Like the tiger "its savage nature and thirst after blood is such that it cannot be tamed: it will on

the contrary, bite the very hand that feeds it, and very often devours its own offspring."²⁶ Stedman also refers to fire as something "tygers" are afraid of.²⁷

The forms of discourse additionally in evidence here in a text we are certain Blake knew may well lead us to conclude that they are the same discursive practices we see him using and transforming as they interlock in his poem. This seems all the more likely when we consider the poem in its two early drafts. The first draft, in lines later deleted, echoes Buffon's stress on the animal's wanton cruelty. Blake was already considering "The cruel fire of thine eyes" as an alternative to "Burnt the fire of thine eyes" (Notebook 109),²⁸ while the wholly deleted lines contained, "In what clay and in what mould / Were thy eyes of fury roll'd," which made no reappearance later. Blake seems in the second draft to have attempted to retain the connection of the eyes with both fire and cruelty by transposing "Burnt" to line 5: "Burnt in distant deeps or skies / The cruel fire of thine eyes?" (Notebook 108). The tiger's rage, expressed by "thy eyes of fury" in the first draft, is associated in the deleted passage with a line, "In the well of sanguine woe," which may stress its bloodthirstiness, though it may refer instead to the tiger's being dipped in the temporal and finite, the fallen world of blood and woe.²⁹

There is even a glimmer of the restraining chains Buffon mentions in "Where the Chain?" in the first draft, which eventually became "What the chain?" in line 13 of the final version. The changes Blake made show him taking up the ideas of rage and cruelty and impatience of restraint in the discourse of natural history in contemporary works, and moving away from any kind of signification determined by this discourse alone, or at least minimizing it as the chief point of focus. Nurmi's explanation of the poem's evolution through its drafts in terms of the resolution by Blake of a dialectical

struggle to bring into a "fearful symmetry" its "deadly terrors" and its divinely created origin is subtle, but lays unnecessary stress on the historical events possibly reflected in the drafts as a means of establishing their date.³⁰ Allusive reference back is in any case an alternative explanation. Recognition of the existing discourses and their transformation releases the drafts from dependence on the date of their possible historical analogues.

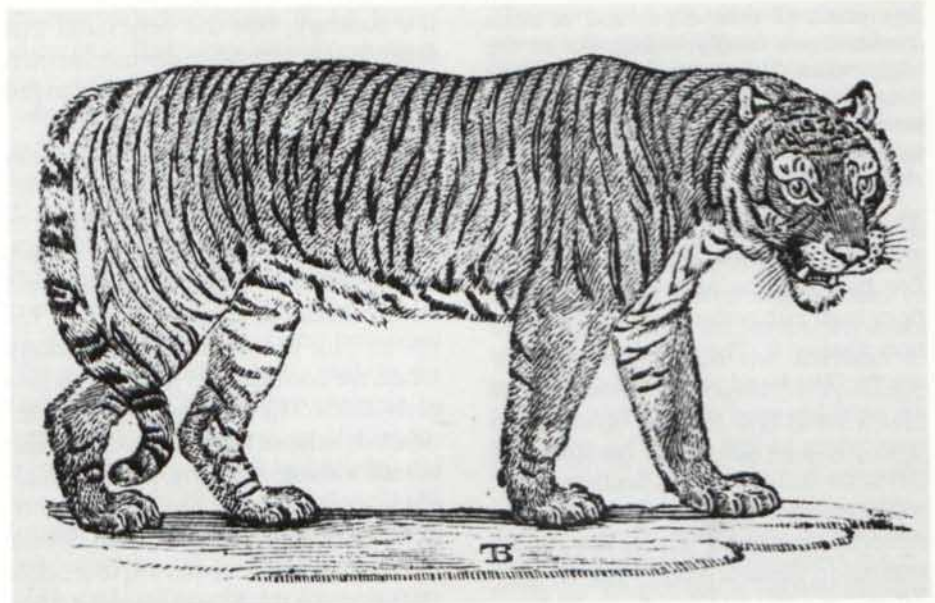
It may be that the intense journalistic exposure of the incident of the death of Munro acted as a catalyst to fuse elements in these discourses, even to provide, not the occasion of the poem, but an impulse in the process of its composition. The eyewitness accounts and the surrounding comment bring into focus traditions of the tiger and fire, and his springing from the dark forest. The contrast between fire and darkness is also explicit, but the fire now burns bright not only in the tiger's eyes ("Burnt the fire of thine eyes"), though they "dart fire" as when the tiger seized Munro, but in his whole wrathful demeanor.³¹ Perhaps even the foreignness of the tiger, known by most only in books of natural history or from journalistic accounts of accidents in distant and exotic places,³² is drawn on in the poem's first conception in the "distant deeps or skies," a phrase present from the earliest draft.

To the discourses we have been examining should be added those of the biblical tradition, and in particular its accounts of creation,³³ and those political discourses which were readily associating revolutionary France with the wrathful tiger.³⁴ These both contribute substantially to the force of Blake's poem, and are leading elements in determining how we should read it. The discourses of natural history are fused with elements from these other discursive practices. It is worth noting that Buffon's work, and not only aspects of the biblical tradition, bring lamb and tiger into close association, the sheep

and lamb seen as almost wholly dependent on man for survival and the most helpless of creatures, the tiger the least susceptible to his domination.³⁵

For Blake, as for Bewick in 1787, there would have been the occasional opportunity to see a live tiger in captivity. He is likely to have visited Pidcock's menagerie in the Strand, where Stubbs studied the rhinoceros in 1772 and from which source he reputedly obtained the tiger studied in his *Comparative Anatomical Exposition*.³⁶ In June 1798 three tiger cubs were born in the menagerie, the first reported birth of this kind in captivity in England (*Morning Chronicle* 20 July 1798). This was sufficiently remarkable to be reported in the French press (*Le Moniteur universel* 28 July 1798; 10 Thermidor). A tiger, in the possession of the Duke of Marlborough, died in the Tower, and might have been seen by Blake. It was painted by Stubbs; an engraving by John Dixon was made in 1772, and Stubbs's own engraving was issued in 1788. Stubbs's painting was exhibited in Somerset Street at the Society of Artists of Great Britain in 1769, in the building where Pars's drawing school was held; at that time, Blake was in his second year as a pupil.³⁷ It must be said, however, that Stubbs's painting shows a noble beast in repose, rather than one resembling the "fearful symmetry" of Blake's poem. Goldsmith commented that the tiger in the Tower "appears the most good natured and harmless creature in the world; its physiognomy is far from fierce and angry," yet despite its "gentle placid air," it was "fierce and savage beyond measure; neither correction can terrify it, nor indulgence can tame."³⁸ After Blake's poem was completed, Stubbs began work in 1795 on a *Comparative Anatomical Exposition of the Structure of the Human Body with That of a Tiger and a Common Fowl*. He completed 126 drawings, but published only 15 plates for this work before his death.³⁹

Other painters showed interest in the tiger, for instance, James North-



2. "The Tiger," from Bewick's *General History of Quadrupeds* (1790), Douce.B.756.P171. Courtesy of The Bodleian Library.

cote.⁴⁰ In pictures such as Northcote's, or the tiger hunt in India in 1788 painted by John Zoffany, which showed the hunting party on elephants surrounding a tiger wounded and at bay, the attraction seems to be the glimpse of sublimity in the revelation of the tiger's energy and power, and the sense of reassurance in dwelling on occasions when the tiger, the animal least capable of control by man, is shown at a moment of submission.⁴¹ Man is seen in control of his universe. Blake would also have had access to information about India from Thomas Banks, who exhibited Indian subjects at the Royal Academy in 1789, 1792, and 1800. India was frequently in the news, especially because of the trial of Warren Hastings, which lasted from 1788 to 1795. This in no way either explains or devalues Blake's poem, but does show what a great poet can make of those materials rendered available in the variety of interlocking discourses which make up any cultural ambience and out of which texts are constructed. The materials of the poem lay ready to hand, ready to be taken up and reshaped.

That Blake did reshape these materials is clear if we highlight those features in the discourse which he does not take up as a point of focus. Buffon emphasizes the tiger's lack of proportion, and makes this the basis of moral disparagement.

The too great length of the body of the tyger, and his disproportionately short limbs, his naked head, his haggard eyes and his blood-coloured tongue which always lolls out of his mouth, are marks of ignoble malice and insatiable cruelty.⁴²

(This point is not borne out by the engraving in Buffon's volume of 1775 [illus. 3], though Corbould's picture of the death of Munro [see illus. 1] shows the tiger's tongue lolling out of its mouth, and also has it facing left. There is, however, a similarity of pose between the tigers of Buffon and Bewick, and that of Blake, despite their facing the opposite way, which may relate to the conventions of anatomical display.) With a rhetorical flourish, Buffon hopes that the tiger's occasional practice of devouring its own young will eventually lead to the extinction of the species. ("May this excessive thirst for blood never be allayed, till he has

destroyed the whole race of monsters which he produces."⁴³) Comparison with the lion is always to the tiger's detriment. It is fierce and cruel without the lion's attendant "clemency and generosity."⁴⁴ Goldsmith, who confesses to using Buffon as an authority, is in this inconsistent, attributing the greatest beauty among quadrupeds to both the tiger and the horse.⁴⁵ He stresses the beauty of the tiger's coloring, and then speaks of "an extremely elegant form, much larger indeed than that of the leopard, but more slender, more delicate, and bespeaking the most extreme swiftness and agility."⁴⁶ But its beauty of form is matched with the mischievousness of the animal's disposition, "as if Providence was willing to shew the small value of beauty by bestowing it on the most noxious of quadrupeds."⁴⁷ The tiger is, within a page, both the most beautiful and the most noxious of quadrupeds.

Other features are highlighted to the tiger's discredit. Pennant speaks of the tiger's cowardice, and accuses him of "poltrony" in his "sudden retreat on any disappointment."⁴⁸ Buffon, followed by others, emphasizes the greed of the animal, and how it becomes drunk with blood, and suffers from blind rage. Indeed, we find incorporated into this discourse of natural history discursive practices more common in moral and theological contexts. Buffon uses the language of disapproval for those characteristics which show reason not in control. The tiger is the animal least subject to submission to man's rational superiority. Man stands at the center of Buffon's universe, and all creatures are seen in relation to man, with reason controlling the instinctual passions. Animals such as sheep, were they not useful to man and given his protection, would soon be annihilated. "Wherever man has not the dominion, the lion, the tiger, and the wolf reign by the laws of force and cruelty."⁴⁹ There are similarities here with the position of Bishop Butler.

There are several brute creatures of equal, and several of superior strength, to that of men; and possibly the sum of the whole strength of brutes may be greater than that of mankind: but reason gives us the advantage and superiority over them; and thus man is the acknowledged governing animal upon earth. Nor is this superiority considered by any as accidental; but as what reason has a tendency, in the nature of the thing, to obtain.⁵⁰

This tradition of natural theology is one Blake rejects, as he does the implications of much of Buffon's discourse. In contrast, he concentrates on the sublime power and ferocious energy of the tiger, on the tiger's untamable quality. Blake makes the tiger awesome without moral disparagement, giving value to energy and attributing it to the divine Creator. This is the true implication of his "fearful symmetry," in contrast to Buffon's attribution to the tiger of disproportion. For Blake the tiger is certainly fearful, but retains his symmetry.

In a whole variety of eighteenth century texts, "symmetry" is the mark of that orderliness and pattern that reflects the mind of the Creator. This is most obvious in texts of instruction designed for children. In 1793, Thomas Bewick provided designs and woodcuts for such a work, *The Blossoms of Morality*, translated by W. D. Cooper from the French of Armand Berquin. An early section of this, entitled "The Book of Nature," teaches how the Creator may be seen in his works; "we ought to study nature in every thing that presents itself to our view, and therein trace out the handy works of the great Creator."⁵¹ This is evident even in plants. "What appears to us mean and despicable, often affords wherewith to astonish the sublimest minds. Not a single leaf is neglected by Nature; order and symmetry are obvious in every part of it."⁵² The same sort of point is implied in Goldsmith, when he presents the horse as "the most perfectly formed" of quadrupeds; his perfection is exhibited in "the exact symmetry of his shape."⁵³

A poem of Henry Needler from 1728, which in its description of the creation of man uses the same kind of rhetorical questions that are a mark of Blake's poem, makes a similar point.

By what artful Hand
Was the nice Fabrick made? Who plac'd
the Bones
In such a well-knit Frame, and with such
skill
And Symmetry contriv'd?

The poem provides its own answer to the question; such symmetry is the work of "an Infinite Almighty God."⁵⁴

Akenside's *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) claims that the "charm of animated things" is a pledge of "The integrity and order of their frame,"⁵⁵ and he lists the "varied symmetry of parts" among the hierarchy of nature's charms.⁵⁶ The highest form of beauty is when it reveals "the high expression of a mind," leading us from the created object to the Creator:

By steps conducting our enraptur'd
search
To that eternal origin, whose power,
Through all the unbounded symmetry of
things,
Like rays effulging from the parent sun,
This endless mixture of her charms
diffus'd.⁵⁷

Symmetry is evidence of the Creative Mind.

Apart from "The Tyger," the only other occasion when Blake used the word "symmetry" was in the annotations to Reynolds, of about 1808. Commenting on Reynolds's remark in the Third Discourse that: "There is, likewise, a kind of symmetry, or proportion, which may properly be said to belong to deformity," Blake wrote: "The Symmetry of Deformity is a Pretty Foolery" (E 648). In the next annotation, he rejected any thought that symmetry might be an abstract idea, applicable to beauty and deformity alike, and to Reynolds's remark: "When the Artist has by diligent attention acquired a clear and distinct idea of

beauty and symmetry; when he has reduced the variety of nature to the abstract idea . . . ,” Blake snorted, “What Folly!” (E 649).

From all this we may conclude that the “fearful symmetry” of “The Tyger” is much more than the “natural symmetry of ferocity and beauty” which Nurmi suggests.⁵⁸ Symmetry is inherent in the idea of beauty, but to speak of “fearful symmetry” implies a creature which, despite its wrathful aspect, is no less an expression of the divine mind of the Creator. It is not just the symbol of an idea, but the realization in a particular beast and superficial form of the divine energy available only to the eye of the imagination. Awareness of the discourses which intersect in the poem forces consideration of more than its internal tensions. The text is to be interpreted in relation to those discourses.

The existence of such discourses may also contribute something to our understanding of the Proverb of Hell, “The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.”⁵⁹ Buffon treats the tiger as the animal least capable of being subdued; his nature resists all efforts at control. Buffon’s French text is more explicit here than Smellie’s translation: “Le tigre est peut-être le seul de tous les animaux dont on ne puisse fléchir le naturel; ni la force, ni la contrainte, ni la violence ne peuvent le dompter.”⁶⁰ Buffon presents the horse as the animal whose nature has been conquered by man, who has become docile: “il fléchit sous la main de celui qui le guide”;⁶¹ “C’est un créature qui renonce à son être pour n’exister que par la volonté d’un autre.”⁶²

A later sentence reads significantly: “C’est par la perte de sa liberté que commence son éducation, & par la contrainte qu’elle s’achève.”⁶³ Tiger and horse are contrasted in Buffon’s system as those animals who are least subject and most subject to the constraining will of man. Ready to hand in the available discourse about these animals are the significations that

Blake is to use and develop in terms of “the tygers of wrath” and “the horses of instruction.” The tiger impatient of constraint, not to be subdued, is aligned with energy and with freedom; the horse, docile, subdued, and responsive, is aligned with reason, and freedom’s constraint. Buffon concludes that “the manners of a horse originate entirely from his education,”⁶⁴ and the implication of an earlier comment, namely, that “in animated beings, liberty of movement constitutes the perfection of their existence,”⁶⁵ serves to confirm Blake’s attribution of greater “wisdom” to the creature whose nature is most unconstrained. The same point is borne out in Buffon’s earlier and more general discussion of domestic animals, where he points out that the naturalist needs to distinguish “those facts which depend solely on instinct, from those that originate from education,” and “never to confound the animal with the slave, the beast of burden with the creature of God.”⁶⁶

The transformation of “that noble beast the Tyger” in *An Island in the Moon*, in 1784, to “the tygers of wrath” by 1793 in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* seems to point to Blake’s awareness of the discourse made available by Smellie’s 1785 translation of Buffon. Whether or not Blake knew it, he certainly absorbed its substance,⁶⁷ which by 1793 underwent further transformation, possibly under the impulse of the account of the death of Munro.

¹ G. E. Bentley, Jr., ed. *William Blake’s Writings*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1978) 1: 682.

² The text of this letter is the same in *Sporting Magazine* 2 (July 1793): 200-01, and *Gentleman’s Magazine* 63 (July 1793): 671.

³ *Annual Register* (Dodsley) 35 (1793): 31-32 [not published till 1796]; *Annual Register* (Rivington) 35 (1793) [not published till 1806]; *New Annual Register* 14 (1793): 24-25.

⁴ *Universal Magazine* 93 (July 1793): 73-74; *European Magazine* 24 (July 1793): 72-73; *Gentleman’s Magazine* 63 (July

1793): 671; *Scots Magazine* 55 (July 1793): 360.

⁵ The *Wonderful Magazine* began in January 1793 as a monthly, but quickly became a weekly, and was completed in 60 numbers.

⁶ *Wonderful Magazine* 2 (1793): 116-17.

⁷ *Thespian Magazine* 2 (August 1793): 167.

⁸ *Sporting Magazine* 2 (July 1793): 199-202.

⁹ “This day is published, embellished with a most expressive Representation of the Unfortunate Death of Mr. Munro, Son of Sir Hector Munro, who was killed by a Royal Tyger, whilst on a Hunting Party on the Island of Sauger, in the East Indies. And a beautiful Portrait of a famous Running Horse, from a Drawing by SARTORIOUS, No. X of the *Sporting Magazine*.” The *St. James’s Chronicle* 3-5 September 1793, along with an advertisement for *Sporting Magazine*, number 11, listed back numbers and specified the plates they contained, including “Death of Munro,” as did the *Star* 6 September 1793.

¹⁰ Mildred Archer, *India and British Portraiture 1770-1825* (London and New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet Publications, 1979) 442n19, reports that a full-length portrait of Sir Hector Munro, ascribed to George Willison, and painted when he was in India c. 1780, is in the possession of his descendants (but is not reproduced in the book).

¹¹ *Sporting Magazine* 2 (July 1793): 199.

¹² Thomas Bewick, *A General History of Quadrupeds* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1790) 172.

¹³ For example, “Cruel without necessity” is taken from Smellie’s Buffon (William Smellie, trans., *Natural History, General and Particular*, 3rd edition [1793] 4: 153), while “He fears neither the sight nor the opposition of man” is an alternative translation of what Smellie renders as “the aspect nor the arms of man” (Smellie 5: 154).

¹⁴ *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick, Written by Himself* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne and London, 1862) 145. (“Such animals as I knew, I drew from memory on the wood; others which I did not know were copied from ‘Dr. Smellie’s Abridgement of Buffon,’ and other naturalists, and also from the animals which were from time to time exhibited in itinerant collections.”) Rodney M. Baine, with Mary R. Baine, *The Scattered Portions: William Blake’s Biological Symbolism* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1986) 5, points out that twenty-seven volumes of the illustrated *Histoire naturelle* (Paris, 1749-89) by Buffon and others, were in the Library of the Royal Academy where Blake could have seen them.

¹⁵ Advertisement in the *St. James's Chronicle* 7-10 December 1793. Millar's edition of "Buffon's Natural History, with additions and improvements from Dr. Goldsmith, Messrs. Pennant Linnaeus, Hill &c" was advertised for publication in 60 weekly parts, beginning on 25 February 1792, in the *York Herald* 18 February 1792.

¹⁶ It is advertised in the *St. James's Chronicle* 26-29 October, 1793.

¹⁷ Thomas Pennant, *History of Quadrupeds*, 2nd ed. (1781) 1: 258; 3rd ed. (1793) 1: 278-79.

¹⁸ Smellie 5: 156. The translation from the French is very close; only one section is worth noting in the original: "il semble qu'il cherche à goûter de leur sang, il le savoure, il s'en enivre" (Buffon, *Histoire des Animaux Quadrupèdes*, 44 vols. [Paris, 1775] 3: 243).

¹⁹ Smellie 5: 154. The translation here is rather halting. The French reads: "Sa fureur n'a d'autre intervalle que ceux du temps qu'il faut pour dresser des embûches" (Buffon 3: 240).

²⁰ Smellie 5: 155. Again Smellie's "a blind and undistinguishing ferocity" has done less than justice to Buffon's "une fureur aveugle, qui ne connoît, qui ne distingue rien"; Buffon stresses rage once more (Buffon 3: 241).

²¹ Smellie 5: 159-60. Smellie translates as "the obduracy of his nature" Buffon's "cette nature de fer." This is interesting in the light of Blake's imagery of the forge. Buffon also in "malgré les chaînes & les grilles" (Smellie has "without regarding his chains"), gives a stronger sense of an animal held in permanent captivity (Buffon 3: 248, 249). In adapting Buffon, Goldsmith seems closer than Smellie to the flavor of the French text; he has "their heart of iron," and "bars and chains" (*History of the Earth, and Animated Nature* [London, 1774] 3: 238).

²² *Sporting Magazine* 2 (July 1793): 200.

²³ *Sporting Magazine* 2 (July 1793): 201; cf. *St. James's Chronicle* 2-4 July 1793; *Star* 5 July 1793; *Wonderful Magazine* 2 (1793): 116-17; *Universal Magazine* 93 (July 1793): 73-74; *Scots Magazine* 55 (July 1793): 360; *European Magazine* 24 (July 1793): 72-73; *Gentleman's Magazine* 63 (July 1793): 671.

²⁴ Stedman 2: 48-49.

²⁵ Stedman 2: 50.

²⁶ Stedman 2: 50.

²⁷ Stedman 2: 51.

²⁸ Blake references are to *The Notebook of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, rev. ed. (Readex Books, 1977), or to *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, rev. ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles; U of California P, 1982).

²⁹ This would then be an anticipation of Yeats's line "The fury and the mire of human veins" ("Byzantium," line 8).

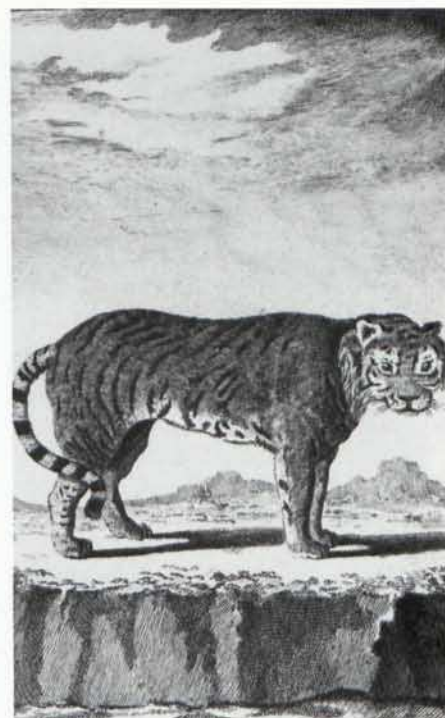
³⁰ Martin K. Nurmi, "Blake's Revisions of 'The Tyger,'" *PMLA* 71 (1956): 669-85. The point is well made in Rodney M. Baine "Blake's 'Tyger': The Nature of the Beast," *PQ* 46 (1967): 491n12. Rejecting Nurmi's explanation of the changes in the drafts as Blake changing his mind as the pattern of events unfolded in France, he commented: "There is no cogent evidence to show that Blake's revisions in 'The Tyger' were anything but the sensitive and perceptive strengthening of the poem as by selecting apter imagery and repressing adjectives and some details, the poet made his Tyger more shocking, more mysterious, more effective." I would not make the point in this way, preferring to stress Blake's movement away from certain elements in the available discourse, and espousal of others.

³¹ *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (E 51, pl. 8), also from 1793, speaks of "the glowing tiger."

³² The *Gentleman's Magazine* reported two other such incidents: one in the news from Calcutta from November 1789 when a tiger seized a man (*Gentleman's Magazine* 9 [May 1790]: 462); and again an incident in December 1794, when a native was killed by a tiger, which was then hunted by a group of men on elephants, and eventually pinned to the ground. Its ferocity was remarked: "Nor were they long in finding out the ferocious animal, who was weltering in gore when they came up with him" (*Gentleman's Magazine* 65 [August 1795]: 693). Pennant (1: 259) describes a similar incident: "Another party had not the same good fortune: a tiger darted among them while they were at dinner, seized on one gentleman, and carried him off, and he never was more heard of."

³³ See Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970) 30-60.

³⁴ I have commented on both in "Blake, France and the Tiger," *N&Q* 35 (1988): 303-05, and in the forthcoming "Blake's Tyger and Contemporary Journalism," *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*. Stewart Crehan, in "Blake's Tyger and the 'Tygerish Multitude,'" *Literature and History* 6 (1980): 155, and in *Blake in Context* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984) 128-29, points out that the *Times* 26 July 1793 said of the assassinated Marat: "His eyes resembled those of the tyger cat, and there was a kind of ferociousness in his looks that corresponded with the savage fierceness of that animal." This passage (which was repeated in the *Whitehall Evening Post* 25-27 July 1793) is also cited



3. "Le Tigre," from Buffon's *Oeuvres Complètes* (1775) 3: 258, pl. 7, RSL.CR.Q.34/3. Courtesy of The Bodleian Library.

in Ronald Paulson "Blake's Lamb-Tiger," *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1983) 97. This report follows within three weeks of the account of the death of Munro. To this we might add the earlier report printed in the *York Herald* and the *Northampton Mercury* 15 September 1792, which spoke of Madame de Lamballe, at the time of the September Massacres, being brought before "the tribunal of tigers," condemned, and butchered.

³⁵ Smellie 3: 462-63.

³⁶ Basil Taylor, *Stubbs* (London: Phaidon Press, 1971) 30; Judy Egerton, *George Stubbs 1724-1806* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1984) 183. Taylor reproduces Stubbs's picture of a recumbent tiger on plate 40.

³⁷ Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Bollingen Series 35, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968) 2: 4. Paul Miner, in "The Tyger: Genesis and Evolution in the Poetry of William Blake," *Criticism* 4 (1962): 61, lists some tigers exhibited in London in the late eighteenth century.

³⁸ In *An Island in the Moon* (E 465), Quid the Cynic tells a lady her face is "like that noble beast the Tyger"; Goldsmith 3: 234. Pennant (1: 283) reports a black leopard

also in the Tower brought to London from Bengal by Warren Hastings.

³⁹ Judy Egerton, *British Sporting and Animal Paintings 1655-1867* (London: Tate Gallery for Yale Centre for British Art, 1978) 65; also Egerton, *Stubbs* 183-216, plates 154-58 reproduce tiger studies from this work.

⁴⁰ Northcote's "Tiger and Crocodile" (painted 1797-99) was among his animal subjects engraved (Egerton, *Paintings* 139); Taylor reproduced a mezzotint of this by C. Turner in fig. 16 entitled, "Tiger Attacked by a Crocodile." He exhibited "Tiger Hunting" at the Royal Academy in 1804, and "A Tiger's Den" in 1817.

⁴¹ Zoffany's picture, "Tiger Hunting in the East Indies" was painted in 1795. An engraving of this by Earlom from 1802 is reproduced in Archer 169, plate 107.

⁴² Smellie 5: 155.

⁴³ Smellie 5: 155.

⁴⁴ Goldsmith 3: 235.

⁴⁵ Goldsmith 3: 233; 2: 342.

⁴⁶ Goldsmith 3: 233.

⁴⁷ Goldsmith 3: 233-34.

⁴⁸ Pennant 1: 258.

⁴⁹ Smellie 3: 463.

⁵⁰ Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736) 1: iii (London: George Bell & Son, 1897 ed., 122).

⁵¹ Berquin, *The Blossoms of Morality*, trans. W. D. Cooper, 2nd ed. (London, 1796) 24.

⁵² Berquin 24.

⁵³ Goldsmith 2: 342.

⁵⁴ Cited in F. M. J. Doherty, "Blake's 'The Tyger' and Henry Needler," *PQ* 46 (1967): 566-67.

⁵⁵ Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination*, book 1, lines 368, 370.

⁵⁶ Akenside, book 1, l. 453.

⁵⁷ Akenside, book 1, ll. 476-80.

⁵⁸ Nurmi 669; cf. Baine, "Tyger" 491.

⁵⁹ *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E 37, pl. 9).

⁶⁰ Buffon 3: 248; for English translation, see Smellie 5: 160.

⁶¹ Buffon 1: 9; Smellie's translation has repeated stress on repression; "repress," "groan," "check" are the verbs he uses, as against "natural vivacity, and fire" (Smellie 3: 306-07). The echo in the French text between tiger and horse is focused on the negation of the positive use of *fléchir*.

⁶² Buffon 1: 9; for English translation, see Smellie 3: 307.

⁶³ Buffon 1: 10; Smellie 3: 307.

⁶⁴ Smellie 3: 313.

⁶⁵ Smellie 3: 308.

⁶⁶ Smellie 3: 301-02.

⁶⁷ Coleman O. Parsons, "Tygers before Blake," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 8 (1968): 573-92, discusses some of the material examined here from natural history, showing that "Blake did not create in a void" (589). His conclusions about the significance of "fearful symmetry," and the implied answer to the poem's final ques-

tion, are, however, different from mine. He also underestimates the extent to which Goldsmith is heavily dependent on Buffon. It is worth pointing out, however, that the third edition of Goldsmith's work was advertised in 1793 (*York Herald* 4 May, 18 May, 3 August 1793). Goldsmith's indebtedness to Buffon is also not commented on by Baine, who concludes that virtually all Blake's "biological symbolism is traditional" (*Biological Symbolism* 169), and also points to the influence of Ripa *Iconologia*, especially in Richardson's translation of 1777-79, holding that "the natural historians . . . often accepted and perpetuated many of the traditional conventions concerning animals; and Richardson, in turn, seems sometimes to have paraphrased the contemporary naturalists in his *Iconology*" (10-11). Baine also claims that the left-facing pose of Blake's tiger has sinister implications relating to the iconographic tradition (19), but this does not explain the opposite pose in Buffon and Bewick. John E. Grant, in "This is Not Blake's 'The Tyger' (With Apologies to Rene Magritte)" *The Iowa Review* 19 (1989): 112-55, claims "that Blake provided a coordinated rather than a commensurate poem-with-picture" and that "all of Blake's versions of this picture declare, without apology: This is not the Tyger imagined in the poem" (113).